



Melody Lopez

Graduating Class of 2024

Associate of Science- Liberal Arts and Sciences

Honors Courses:

English Composition I

English Composition II

Introduction to Philosophy

Art Appreciation

History of the American People Since 1877

Section 1: Demonstrate Engagement, Cultivate Curiosity, and Explore Perspectives

Before being in the Honors Program, I wasn't too involved in the community. In high school, I only volunteered a few times because my friends were going to be there. I didn't believe I could make an effective contribution if I volunteered myself. However, going to NWACC where my closest friends weren't attending, I wanted to go out of my way to be involved in the community and the institution. Before attending NWACC, I joined the Honors Program solely to challenge myself in my coursework. I'd taken Advanced Placement classes in high school and wanted to continue having a stimulating education. However, the Honors Program is beneficial in many ways.



In the Fall 2023 semester, the Honors Program took a field trip to the University of Arkansas, to see the Honors College building and some of the campus. Our group toured the building and attended a presentation on the opportunities afforded to honors students attending the institution. The tour was important in making me a student engaged in my education because I could see myself continuing my

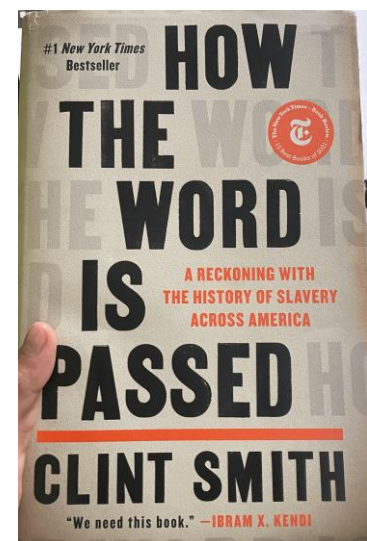
education at the University of Arkansas. Being a first-generation college student, I've previously felt overwhelmed by a big college campus like the University of Arkansas. I also believed I'd be left to navigate the transfer by myself because my family has no experience in pursuing higher education, but I learned that I have help available at the institution. Michelle King, from the Honors College, gave us a presentation on the Honors Program and even provided information about honors specific to some majors. Most important to me was her welcoming attitude because she reflected the Honor's College goal of helping students succeed. In addition to the assistance, I'll be able to receive at the University of Arkansas, simply walking around a part of the campus was empowering. I'd never been to the campus before but being with the other honors students and their similar plans to mine helped me understand that transfer students do have a place there.

In my English Composition II Honors course, I was able to delve into one of my curiosities through a project assigned by my professor, Dr. Victoria Moore. The project, lasting the semester, was to write an essay on a topic of our choosing and defend a proposal that we

created on that topic. Seeing this as an opportunity to learn more about my interest in the criminal justice system, I chose to write about prison labor. In a previous course, I learned about the origins and implications of prison labor. However, I became curious about how prison labor is incorporated into our lives currently. Through the assignments related to the project, I was able to dedicate time to understanding the complex, moral and economic issues surrounding prison labor today. Most importantly, having to come up with a proposal that could solve the issues with prison labor was intriguing. I was still curious to research other solutions that have been proposed before and their practicalities. The rigor of the course allowed me to continue my curiosity and, in the future, I'd like to continue looking into the dilemmas of prison inmates. Aside from majoring in criminology and my interest in the criminal justice system, understanding prison conditions are relevant to my plan of being a criminal defense attorney. Planning to be in a position responsible for the lives of individuals, I believe it's important to understand the issues with the criminal justice system that may affect them. I believe understanding those issues will drive me to better advocate for my clients.

Outside my courses, being around honors students when planning events or thinking up ideas has also cultivated my curiosity. Witnessing the discussions and decision-making has made me curious to be involved because the members care about the tasks they've been given, and it's made me want to help in any way possible. Seeing people passionate about a cause makes me even more curious to learn about the topic when I don't know much about it. For example, when the Honors Program focused on hunger and ways to tackle the issue on campus, other members and I were involved in the Service-Learning project. We overviewed the SNAP criteria and application, and the complexity of the documents made me aware of the accessibility issues of government programs. Because of that opportunity to look into SNAP, I became curious about the lack of assistance some families may get because of income ineligibility. Families that earn only slightly more than the required WIC incomes aren't eligible to those benefits, but they also don't earn enough to be able to completely provide for themselves. Similarly, in my job as a cashier, I'll often see families having to take items off not covered by WIC because they can only afford it with those benefits. Having a better understanding of the issues of government programs has made me more empathetic to those families.

Currently, in my honors History of the American People since 1877 course, the class was assigned to read *How the Word is Passed* by Clint Smith. The book explores how different monuments and landmarks in the United States approach slavery and its part in shaping the nation. The instructor of the course, Dr. Chris Huggard, explained that some conversations about slavery today attempt to forget about the tragedy of slavery and try to lessen the country's



responsibility in perpetuating that system. Dr. Huggard emphasizes the importance of exploring different perspectives to ensure an accurate opinion on slavery's role in modern America and therefore prevent repeating those tragedies. Reading the varying perspectives that Americans have on slavery has been an eye-opening experience. Enslaved people are humanized because their names and stories are told in their own voice. On the other hand, the book also delves into the perspective of Americans that have adopted a false narrative about the Confederacy. Smith also contrasts these opinions to point out the country's division. Division has allowed some people to rewrite history in a way that favors their lineage. I've learned that to lessen the divide in today's America, understanding and empathizing with people of opposing perspectives is crucial. If we don't attempt to understand each other, we continue to hold our society back. Thanks to Dr. Huggard and the demands of the honors course, I've come to understand the importance of exploring perspectives and will continue to use this lesson to guide my approach in dealing with the complexities of opinions. When we attempt to understand others, we begin to break down the polarization that keeps us firmly divided.



Section 2: Preparation for University

The Honors Program has improved skills that will be helpful at the institution I transfer to. In my English composition courses, I've improved my writing significantly. Specifically, Professor Sabrina Chesne in my English Composition I course emphasized MLA format and had the class prioritize formatting essays. Through the constant use of MLA, I can now utilize the format without constantly relying on MLA writing guides. This has continued to be extremely helpful in most of my other courses because I can dedicate more time to the contents of the essay than the format. Furthermore, in my English Composition II course, I spent time writing an annotated bibliography. Having to summarize and evaluate the sources I planned to use in my writing helped me

ensure that those sources are contributing to my writing, rather than taking up space. I've also become more intentional in my writing overall. Additionally, both professors in my English Composition courses, Professor Sabrina Chesne and Dr. Victoria Moore, have provided honest and helpful criticism. They've identified my weaknesses in my writing and helped me find ways to improve it myself, but also encouraged me through positive feedback. Previously, I believed I was incapable of improving my writing, so I was afraid to even attempt to challenge myself. Because of their dedication to supporting students, I'm confident in my ability to improve as

long as I open myself to constructive criticism without feeling hopeless. I've come to appreciate criticism from great professors like Professor Chesne and Dr. Moore. As I continue my education, my experiences in the English honors courses and with the professors will keep me striving to be a better writer.

Another skill the Honors Program challenged me to improve on was using my creativity for critical thinking. Specifically in my English Composition courses and Art Appreciation course, I've had assignments that required me to provide an analysis of text or an art piece. When it was difficult for me to understand the piece, or I couldn't immediately form an idea, I had to be creative. I needed to dedicate time to breaking it down and follow the path of any thought it inspired, regardless of its significance. I also learned to look at the piece from different perspectives, because I can limit myself sometimes.

While my improved skills will help me succeed in my future courses, the resources that improved those skills have also boosted my confidence in my intelligence and my passion for learning.

Section 3: A Valuable Memory

One of my favorite memories as an Honors student was my first J Street Cleanup in the Spring of 2023. Before the cleanup I expected it to be boring and serious but being with the other Honors students made it fun. I was in a group with Professor Sabrina Chesne and Yullyana Laguna, a fellow Honors student, tasked with cleaning up part of the street. Although I'm quite a reserved person, being around these welcoming individuals made me comfortable. While picking up trash, we laughed about the million cigarette butts, alcohol bottles, and toys. However, we were really hoping to come across dollar bills or expensive jewelry. At one point of the cleanup, the tornado siren was going off to test them and we happened to be very close to it. Although it was deafening, struggling to hear each other and attempting to ignore the siren made the cleanup entertaining. Cleaning up litter is important for the environment but having fun in the process makes it meaningful to me as well. I've continued to be at the following J Street Cleanups because I know I'll be able to destress.



Section 4: Advice for New Members

I completely believe you'll get out what you put into the Honors Program. In my courses, I was provided with plenty of resources that made me a better student. As a first-generation student, I've grown the confidence to believe that I'm capable of pursuing my dreams.

Outside of my classes, interacting with like-minded students has encouraged me to continue working hard. Most importantly, I've made friends that have made my time at NWACC enjoyable. If you want to apply yourself in school, being in the Honors Program is a great first step.

