

Cooper Callahan Chiddister

Courses Taken:

Introduction to International Relations

Introduction to Comparative Politics

Public Speaking

Introduction to United Nations

Date of Graduation: Spring 2025

Section 1: In what ways did the Program help you “demonstrate engagement,” “cultivate curiosity,” and “explore perspectives” (community, curiosity, and diversity)?



I joined the NWACC Honors Program in spring 2024, during my second semester at NWACC, and have been a part of it since. I served as treasurer from fall 2024 until I graduated from NWACC in spring 2025. I was unsure what to expect when I joined, but I was happy I did. I’ve met lots of people I wouldn’t have spoken to if it hadn’t been for it, and I am very glad I joined. Joining the Honors program made me more willing to do new things and be around people I didn’t know, which was a big change for me, as I am a very reclusive person and hadn’t been around people for around two years. Because of joining the NWACC Honors Program, I now have many friends. We even meet up for Dungeons and Dragons, something I initially put together as a fun game night outside of school. The Honors Program was the first Student Organization I had joined in my entire time in education, though it was initially for more selfish reasons, it quickly became something I was very invested in and wanted to contribute to, which led to my decision to run for treasurer.

I have been very engaged in all my honors courses, especially the ones that allow me to run my mouth about mundane things that interest me. For example, in my public speaking class, I gave four speeches. The first was an introductory speech. My second was about my favorite band, Slint. My third speech was a persuasive speech in which I attempted to persuade my classmates to join a cult. My final speech was about guitars and guitar guys, specifically how to avoid them and basic music theory. My humor peaked at making a cult and has been on a downward spiral ever since. The classes that I have been most engaged in were taught by Dr. Matthew Evans. He is a very interesting man, but he lets me manically ramble, so we get along well. I have enjoyed all of my classes with him and am sad about leaving NWACC but know that I have a mentor in him should I ever need him. He has helped me think about perspectives I usually would not. He has challenged me, which is something I hate but also what I need.

Dr. Evans is also the mastermind behind the NWACC Model UN team, an eclectic group with a revolving door of new members. Many believe it is a ploy by Dr. Evans to convert people into international relations majors. My time in Model UN started in an honors class taught by Dr. Evans, which acted as a replacement for the final project. It was the first time I traveled without family. I was also in a suit most of the time, which felt strange but made me look important. When we went out to eat, I felt like a Japanese salaryman, which made little sense as I am not Japanese but instead am half Vietnamese. Anyways, join Model UN, you might get to go to New York if you are good at it.

Section 2: How did this program prepare you for a university (or for a workplace, if you aren't transferring at this point)? What hard or soft skills will you take with you?

Being in Honors is always an enjoyable experience because, sadly, you will meet people who think differently from you, and many of them will make you very aware that they do. Fret not, you will also meet people who think like you do, but this is not always a positive thing; it is, unfortunately, a good thing to broaden your viewpoints and experience things you previously had not, thankfully, despite my social inadequacies and general abrasiveness most people were willing to watch me stumble around and not judge me for it I came to learn a lot the people in Honors were like me or had been at some point in their lifetime. Though you, my dear reader, are a measly prey animal making your way through an awkward and hostile environment, everyone else is also a similarly pathetic specimen; they are just as scared of you as you are of them.

One of the most important skills I learned from honors is how to converse with others my age without looking like an ant caught in a death spiral. You'd be surprised what two years in social isolation can do to a person with already poor social skills. You might not know this, but speaking exclusively about your interests in a frequency akin to a dog whistle is not an effective way of making people like you. It is instead important to allow people to take turns in person-to-person conversation, though your bowling ball-sized amygdala may tell you to assume the worst of every person you lay your eyes upon, most people are relatively normal and generally have their unique interests and desires.

Speaking of oversized amygdalas and a fear of strangers, I also learned how to be more open to people I do not know throughout most of my life I kept to myself not because I was a loner but because I was deeply afraid of most people around me the only cure for my crippling social anxiety that worked was being forced to interact with people I didn't know or have any interest in knowing but once I got to know them I would often realize I quite liked the person I had once considered not worth the effort. I also learned how to take more initiative than I had before. I am usually a very timid person who is very afraid of stepping on others' toes. I am now a little more confident in my abilities as a person, though I still prefer to be as respectful as possible and not get in anyone's way.

I matured a lot throughout my time in Honors, which I guess makes sense since I joined at sixteen and will now be leaving at seventeen. Many would be surprised at how much you change in two years. Sometimes, I look back at myself when I first started college, and my initial reaction is to look down upon myself at how immature or self-centered I was, but I still have no clue what I am doing. However, I try to think about all I have overcome. For instance, not only did I join the Honors Program, but I also joined Model UN, something I am super proud of. Younger me would not only have run for the hills but would have been shocked at all I had overcome in this short time. I can hold a meaningful conversation with other like-minded people. I can speak publicly! I can go on trips for school! Aside from going to camp locally twice, I had never traveled away from home without my family. During my time, I went to St. Louis, Oklahoma, and New York City for Model UN. I even flew for the first time.

Section 3: What is one experience you had while a member that you'd like to share?

There is nothing more sacred in Honors than the game night; it is one of the few times in which we congregate in one small classroom and play board games for a few hours. Every game night, I have attempted to force people into a game of Risk to various levels of success. The first game night I joined, I convinced people to play Risk with me and lost, though I learned how to take control of a situation I was not in control of. One game night, I played Go and failed spectacularly. Many have said watching me get angry at the dots on the board was fun, but I did not find the events very funny. On my final game night, I had convinced three of my fellow Honors students to play Risk. We ended up simulating a unipolar world in which no war occurred due to one of the players' complete monopoly over the board we spent most of the game night accruing troops and lining our borders trapped in an eternal cold war completely incapable of fighting back against the world hegemon eventually the game night ended and so did the cold war. No blood was shed during that risk game, except for the one player who was removed from the game. They did lose; no one else did, though. There is something to say about the real world and its relation to the risk game, but I don't feel like thinking critically.

Section 4: Considering all you have written for the above, what advice do you have for new members?

I don't have much advice for my fellow honors students; most of you are older than I was when I wrote this, but I can make some recommendations. You should attend as many game nights as possible because they are fun. Be willing to talk to others, even if you don't think you will like the person, because you might end up liking them. Also, take as many opportunities presented to you as you can; you might meet people who change your life or have experiences you never thought you would if it weren't for honors. I wouldn't have met many people I really like being around, and you might experience the same thing. Also, always be willing to listen to new perspectives and be curious, take classes you usually wouldn't, and have fun.