

Sierra “Rain” Horner
Honors Reflection 2025
Associate of Arts

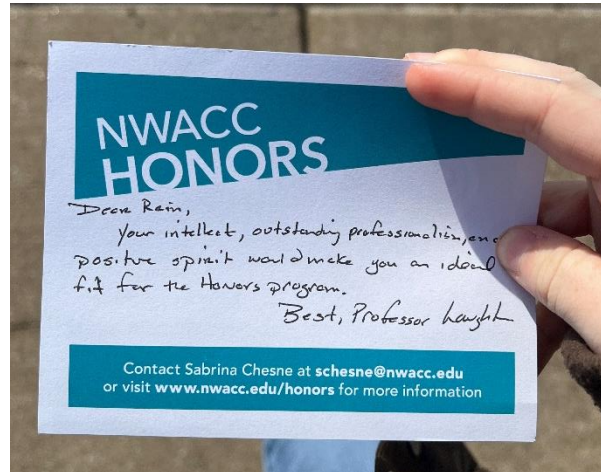


Honors Courses
Honors Composition I
Honors Composition II
Honors Intro to Gender Studies
Honors Sociology

Section I; Demonstrate Engagement, Cultivate Curiosity, and Explore Perspectives

I used to think that being quiet meant I didn't have anything to say, when that couldn't have been farther than the truth. I was the kind of student who kept my head down, just trying to make it through the day. When you grow up focused on survival instead of being heard, it's easy to start believing your voice doesn't matter. But that changed when I joined the Honors Program. It gave me a space to grow, and more importantly the courage to take up any space at all.

Although I had been taking Honors courses since my freshman year, I officially joined the Honors Program or HSA in the Fall of my Sophomore year. That shift happened after a conversation with Sabrina Chesne, my Honors Composition II professor, who encouraged me to apply for the program. I was first referred to the Honors Program in my Honors Composition I class by Professor Laughton, a professor that even to this day has had a lasting impact on my confidence as a writer and student. Once I joined the program, everything changed for me. I found people who genuinely cared about learning, about each other, about doing something that matters in the community. The Honors Program gave me something I had never really had in a school setting before: belonging.



Professor Laughton's recommendation into the Honors program.



My feathered child, Jasper, who continues to keep me company.

Since the beginning of this Spring semester, I've attended nearly every Honors event this semester and plan on finishing strong by attending the rest of them in my final semester here at NWACC. From cleaning up J St. in Bentonville through the Adopt-A-Street program, visiting a featured artist in Crystal Bridges Art Museum, and making all the meetings and awards ceremonies, I have been all in. I've become active in HSA, and for the first time, I've had real opportunities to engage with others in ways I never imagined possible. I used to think I was an introverted person and couldn't make any friends, and my green cheek conure Jasper kept me company most days. Now I realize I was simply waiting for a safe space to open up. Honors gave me that. It brought me out of my shell and helped me realize I had something worth contributing, not just in class, but in my community as well.

Academically, my Honors courses opened countless new paths of curiosity and helped me explore questions that had genuine meaning. One of my first big projects was in Honors Composition I with Professor Laughton, where we explored the use of AI in academics and collaboratively created an informational page as a class using Microsoft Sway. Many of these conversations in class led me to think more critically about the education system, access to education, and the ways our systems are, or aren't, adapting to the world our students live in. In the same course, I also researched U.S. drug policy and the consequences of criminalization, which planted a seed that carried on into my later work.



Me (left) working on a poster in Professor Chesne's Honors Composition II class with my group partners last semester.

In Honors Sociology, I focused more on child advocacy and the effects of addiction and incarceration on families, issues I've witnessed and lived through myself. Having grown up entangled in systems that didn't always protect or empower me, these topics weren't just academic to me. They were reflections of my reality. Through my research and writing, I began piecing together what I had lived through and how I could use that knowledge to make things better, for myself and others. That's really when it began to come together for me: I want to become an educator. The kind of adult that I needed when I was younger. Someone who sees, supports, and believes in kids. Especially the quiet ones. Especially the ones going through it.

Section II; Preparation for the Future

Before I found my place in the Honors Program, the future felt uncertain. I had goals. I knew I wanted to make a difference, especially for kids that grew up like I did, but I wasn't sure how to get there. I was carrying a lot, personally and academically, and sometimes it felt like I was just trying to stay afloat to keep myself from drowning. Honors became the place where things started to become clearer to me. The structure of the classes, the outstanding community of students and professors, and a space to explore what really mattered to me: all of this helped me to see a clearer path forward into my future.

The work I did in my Honors courses challenged me in the best possible ways. I had the chance to explore real issues that I care deeply about, from the use of AI in academics to drug policy and the long-term effects of incarceration on families. Researching these topics helped me build a strong foundation in academic writing and critical thinking, while also helping me process my own experiences and turn them into something useful, something with purpose. I learned how to take what I've lived through and use it to fuel what I want to change.

I've also grown in some ways that are a lot harder to measure and went beyond academics. Being part of Honors gave me the confidence to speak up, collaborate, and to trust that I had something valuable to contribute. I began stepping into conversations that once intimidated me, learning that I didn't need to have all the answers to be part of a dialogue. I started reaching out to my peers, asking questions, showing up, and showing myself that I was capable.

Managing deadlines, balancing commitments, and still staying engaged when things are tough are skills that will carry with me. They've helped me prepare not just for school, but for life.

All these experiences have helped me realize that my calling is in education. I want to be an elementary teacher who creates a safe, consistent, and encouraging environment for kids who need it the most. The Honors Program gave me the space to grow as a student as well as a person with a sense of direction. Now, when I think about my future, I see something solid. I see a path I'm proud of, and I feel more than ready to take the next steps toward it.

Section 3; A Meaningful Experience

There wasn't one big, cinematic moment that changed everything for me. What I had was something much quieter. The first time I truly felt like belonged was during one of our game nights early this semester. I hadn't known many people yet outside of the program, so I walked in feeling a little bit out of place and walked out knowing I had found a community. There was laughter, snacks, and games scattered around the tables in the room. I knew I could belong as myself there.

And while that evening was my introduction to the social side of Honors, what really stuck with me has been the support and connection I've had in my courses. Every single professor I had in my Honors classes—Professor Chesne, Professor Laughton, Professor Woodring, and Professor Craig—all fostered a space where I felt safe to explore and question and ultimately grow as a student and thinker. The classes have been relatively small, the discussions thoughtful, and the feedback I received from peers and professors alike has made me feel like my voice had a place in the world. It wasn't all about writing better essays and learning to do stronger research: it was about learning to think more deeply and how to trust myself as a student with something to offer.

Even though I had only formally joined the program this past semester, I can already tell that my experiences here will carry with me far beyond the walls of these classrooms. These classes, the professors, and these small moments all have



HSA meeting from this semester.

helped shape who I am becoming. I used to think I was on the outside looking in, but now, I know I was meant to be here all along.

Section 4; Advice for New Members

If you're thinking about joining the Honors Program at NWACC, or even if you already have and aren't sure where you fit, I want to tell you something I wish I had known sooner: you do belong. Even if you feel out of place at first, even if you're late to join like I was, even if you've been through things that make you feel like your story doesn't quite fit the mold. Especially then.

Give yourself permission to show up. Talk to your professors. Show up to an event, even if it's just for the snacks. Let yourself be curious, even if you don't have all the answers to your questions yet. I didn't join Honors until halfway through my time at NWACC, and I still found connection, confidence, and clarity about who I am and where I'm headed. The Honors Program is what you make of it, but it's made of people that truly care. Let them in.

And more importantly than anything, let yourself grow in ways you may not expect. Sometimes the smallest moments that seem the quietest can open doors you didn't even know were there.