

# Honors College Focus on Faculty



2023 ANNUAL REPORT



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
**Honors College**

# Message from the Dean



In 1993, there were a total of 23 honors colleges in the United States. A decade later that number had grown to 69, including the Washington State University Honors College, which began as a program in 1960. Currently there are about 250 honors colleges, many in land-grant schools with missions very similar to ours.

In the introduction to his book, *Honors Colleges in the 21st*

*Century*, Richard Badenhausen, Dean of the Westminster University Honors College in Salt Lake City, identifies why honors education has grown and become an area of strength: “Honors programs and especially honors colleges have long embraced many of the solutions that higher education leaders have sought more recently in areas tied to student belonging, wellness support, innovative course design, student-centered pedagogies, and bridges between the curriculum and co-curriculum. Honors programs and honors colleges have enjoyed the flexibility and autonomy to innovate and, importantly, are not shackled with some of the institutional and disciplinary restrictions that can hamper other school-level units.”

I agree completely with this assessment. In many ways the WSU Honors College leads the way in classroom innovation, experiential learning, and student engagement. Our “flexibility and autonomy to innovate” benefits the college and the university as a whole. MESI, our popular Mindfulness-based Emotional and Social Intelligence certificate program, provides the model for an emerging university-wide program that will benefit the entire undergraduate body. The Honors and Business Innovation and Leadership Experience

(HABILE), a collaboration with the Carson College of Business since 2016, was recently approved by the Faculty Senate as a new certificate program. HABILE provides our students with knowledge, skills, connections, and real-world exposure preparing them for outstanding careers. Both these programs were established through generous donor support. Another way honors programs obtain flexibility and autonomy is through endowments. Innovative and engaging classes that populate our curriculum are possible because of the dedication and commitment of our faculty; outside support helps to fuel these visions.

A generous gift from alumna Elma Ryan-Bornander Anderson allowed us to establish the Bornander Honors Distinguished Chair. The endowment provides salary enhancement and research support for the recipient and funding for student assistantships. Appointments are made to WSU’s most respected faculty members with demonstrated records of excellence in teaching, research, and service.

Dr. Samantha Noll, whose innovative teaching is featured in this year’s report, is one example. Professor Noll, from the School of Politics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs, is finishing her first year as Bornander chair professor. Her new honors courses have encouraged students to apply important philosophical and ethical considerations to the fast-paced technological advancements and food related issues we face in modern society.

I’m delighted to acknowledge deserving faculty like Samantha with this endowment and to report that next year this fund will sustain two professorships. Endowments supporting faculty ensure that our students benefit from the brightest innovations in teaching. Thank you for all you do to support honors excellence.

Badenhausen, Richard, *Honors Colleges in the 21st Century* (2023) NCHC Monograph Series. 41. Free download at <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchcmmono/41>

## Eric McElroy Transforms Poetry to Music



Photo credit: David Fisher

Eric McElroy’s (’13 Music) debut album, *Tongues of Fire*, released by Somm Recordings last March, includes songs that draw connections to his student days at WSU. With financial support from the Honors College, McElroy studied abroad in Vienna before he graduated.

“That incredible experience was only meant to be a six-month adventure, but I’m still in Europe ten years later,” he said.

The album features him on piano for four connected song-cycles and a single song. Each song cycle explores a distinct

introspective theme inspired by modern day poets, including former US Poet Laureate W.S. Merwin, transforming ideas and meanings from the written word to music. Performing with McElroy is the celebrated English tenor, James Gilchrist.

The titular third song cycle is based on the works of poet Grevel Lindop. Honors English professor Robert Eddy first introduced McElroy to Lindop’s work. That experience, along with the education and encouragement he received from WSU music professor Gerald Berthiaume, influence his work as a performer, teacher, and researcher today.

“Simply put, none of my subsequent achievements would have been possible without the support of WSU,” McElroy said.

Read more about Eric’s debut album and enjoy a [podcast with editor Larry Clark](#) in *Washington State Magazine*.



# Bornander Chair Tackles Modern Ethical Dilemmas

Chat GPT, the AI program introduced late last fall, caused widespread concern among educators at all levels. Capable of scouring the Web and compiling information, it produces plausible essays even at the college level. When Samantha Noll's philosophy and technology students raised the issue of Chat GPT and academic cheating, she knew she had to address it. Associate professor in the School of Politics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs, Noll is the Elma Ryan Bornander Honors Distinguished Chair, which honors WSU faculty at the forefront of research, pedagogy, and scholarship. She will spend two years in residence at Honors developing courses and teaching and mentoring students. Her highly interdisciplinary research focuses on philosophy of food, environmental ethics, and emerging technologies. In response to the academic threat posed by Chat GPT, Noll had students ask the chatbot itself about the dangers it might pose; then they discussed the findings. "One of the things I love about teaching a class on technological innovations is that they're coming fast and furious and have huge impacts on what we do."

Noll designed her course around another technology with profound impact, the smartphone, using it to illustrate philosophical concerns about outsourcing mental capacity. "Socrates worried that if we used writing as a crutch to put down all of our stories, we would no longer have the capacity to create or remember them," she said. "Fast forward to today and we still confront the question of what capacities we want to outsource." Noll looks to Extended Mind Theory, posed by David Chalmers and Andy Clark, which argues that technologies like smartphones have essentially become extensions of our minds.



"Lose your phone, and your contacts, pictures, and navigation tools are gone," she said. "It's like you are literally unplugged from a part of your capacity." Noll is designing a new course on food and philosophy using the plate as her starting point. "Philosophy can be very abstract and even intimidating for students," she said. "Using something they are incredibly familiar with like their phones or the food on their plates provides a touchstone to begin thinking philosophically about our lives."

Noll's work has been published in peer reviewed journal articles and book chapters, and in two co-authored/edited books. Her next book "What should I eat?" will focus on the ethical omnivore movement. Based on a pluralist food ethic, it recognizes the importance of honoring thoughtful, diverse food choices. "This is about producing food in more sustainable, thoughtful ways that improve animal welfare, soil health, etc. without necessarily taking anything off the plate..."

The endowment also supports Honors College students working with the recipient. Noll plans a public-facing project with students called "Philosophy Eats," examining food-related issues from humanities perspectives. It will include a journal of short, publicly accessible articles on food-related issues and a podcast featuring guest speakers. "I want to use this as a platform to share the work we're doing with the public," she said. "Samantha is an exceptional scholar, teacher and author, and the Honors College is delighted to bring her into our classrooms and help support her research through this endowed chair," said M. Grant Norton, Honors College dean.

## Embracing a Vision | Gary Hyatt, Director of Development



As the new Director of Development for the Honors College, I am privileged to embark on a journey dedicated to empowering the future of our talented students. Generous support from accomplished alumni and friends helps unlock student potential, allowing them to pursue their dreams. Our mission is to create opportunities for students in and beyond the classroom. Faculty support is paramount to this endeavor as our educators guide and inspire the next generation. The

Bornander Honors Distinguished Chair is a notable example of how faculty endowments allow us to attract vital and innovative educators whose curricula and research programs inspire our students and ensure that they are prepared for future challenges. Internships, research opportunities, and global experiences also enrich honors education and broaden student

perspectives. Innovative learning opportunities provided by the MESI and Global Competencies program certificates provide unique partnerships with other colleges.

In November, the faculty senate approved a new certificate program based on the Honors and Business Innovation and Leadership Experience (HABILE). The HABILE certificate will increase the visibility of the exciting partnership between the Honors College and the Carson College of Business and will recognize students for the focused work they're completing. These collaborations are key to elevating the academic experience and to ensuring that students gain the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

I encourage you to give. No matter the scale, your generosity fuels the aspirations of budding scholars, enhances their experiences, fortifies our programs, and provides unwavering support to our dedicated faculty. With your help we can continue to enrich lives, influence communities, and shape a future that is a testament to the excellence and diversity that the Honors College fosters and represents.

# Alumni Reflections



**Marissa Chukwu**  
Zoology, Pre-Medicine ('18)

Enhancing my academic career through the Honors College opened up a world of academic and professional opportunities, curated my professional and social network, fueled my curiosity for learning, and made me a confident individual. I began my academic career with limited resources and support, unsure of how to navigate the struggles every student faces. The Honors College offered a robust program that refined my professional persona. I gained research experience, met professionals in my field, became an honors mentor and grew into a confident woman in STEM, graduating with a greater sense of pride as a WSU alumna. Today, as a Registered Nurse specializing in Cardiac Surgical ICU Nursing, I reflect upon my complex journey to becoming a healthcare professional and am forever grateful for the immense support, guidance, mentorship, and acceptance I received from Honors.



**Kelley Sowards**  
Mechanical Engineering ('93)

Like other honors alumni, my engineering education was enhanced through the liberal arts. The Honors College offered a community broader than my engineering cohort, and small, seminar-style classes where learning felt personal and meaningful. I've come to

see honors education as a nudge to transform curiosity into action. A nudge here to offer companionship or mentorship; a nudge there to create space in conference rooms for diverse opinions and ideas. A nudge to be open with my mistakes and learning process. I'm blown away by the innovative ideas and complex challenges new honors students embrace. I can't wait to see how they "pay it forward" through their passions and pursuits.



**Amanda Porter**  
Zoology, Spanish ('01)

I have no doubt that my honors college experience set me up for success. Small classes and encouragement to learn foreign languages and to study abroad, coupled with incredibly diverse fields of study at WSU created an incredibly fulfilling experience. That environment enabled me to pursue diverse interests

and figure out how I could apply them in the real world. My first experience studying abroad and working on my honors thesis prompted me to pursue a career in foreign affairs. Throughout my career as a foreign service officer, living and working in Africa, South America, and Europe, that solid and broad educational foundation enabled me to work on everything from combatting climate change to cybersecurity—often in a foreign language! I am forever grateful to the Honors College and to WSU for the opportunities that led me to pursue such an interesting, fulfilling, and important career.

## HSAC Corner



The Honors Student Advisory Council (pictured) is the registered student organization of the Honors College. Led by Katherine Preuschoff (President), Landon Carter (Vice President), Miles Boudinot (Treasurer), and Carina Ybaben (Secretary), HSAC comprises students from all academic and personal backgrounds. Our primary goals are to build community and engagement within the Honors College, represent Honors through service commitments, and offer opportunities for interactions between students and faculty outside of the classroom. A new event hosted during the fall semester was a game night with our University of Idaho peers, promoting community relations between our two schools. Yule Ball, our fall philanthropy event, is a favorite. In lieu of an admission ticket, attendees are asked to support a local food bank with a donated food item. Each semester we also host Dessert with the Deans to talk with and learn about the deans of the Honors College, building a stronger student-faculty bond.





ASWSU President **Luke Deschenes**, construction management senior, became interested in student government when he participated in “Coug Day at the Capitol,” lobbying on behalf of WSU students. Previously he served as ASWSU’s Director of Community Affairs, engaging with the City of Pullman

and the Pullman Chamber of Commerce to plan an Earth Day event, which led him to create a new ASWSU position, Director of Campus Sustainability, when he became president.

Luke’s agenda is based on making the changes that students want to see—improving campus parking, enhancing drug and alcohol awareness, and partnering with landscape architecture students on a park near student housing.

He also serves on the WSU Athletics Advisory Committee and has been on the WSU Honor Roll for the past three years. Luke will lead a construction team in Seattle after graduation.



Microbiology and Spanish major **Stevie Fawcett** believes taking a global approach to virology and immunology research makes good academic sense. As a student researcher in the Students Targeted toward Advanced Research Studies (STARS) program, his rotations have included work on West Nile virus and Hantavirus.

Last May, Stevie presented his West Nile virus research results, completed during his rotation in Dr. Alan Goodman’s lab, at the European Virology Conference in Gdańsk, Poland. He received a Fulbright-Mitacs Program Scholarship to the University of Toronto last summer, where he helped to optimize the way that T-cells upregulate a transcription factor that leads to the formation of immunity “memory cells” important to identifying and eliminating pathogens like cancer cells.

Stevie received the nationally competitive Goldwater Scholar award, chaired ASWSU’s Environmental Sustainability Alliance, and served as an HONORS 198 course facilitator. He graduates in Spring 2024 with minors in German and jazz studies.

## Success at a Glance



For 25 years, the WSU Honors College has partnered with the Martin Institute at the University of Idaho to offer unique student programs. Institute Director **Bill Smith** has been at the forefront of this effort since 2001. At the Institute, teaching,

research, and outreach examine the causes of war, the conditions necessary for peace, and the international system. This work dovetails with efforts to develop global competencies in honors education.

Since 2002, the Institute and Honors College have participated in the National Model United Nations Conference, held each spring in New York City. Bill prepares both sets of students – sometimes to represent the same countries, sometimes unique ones – and brings them together for shared travel and experiences. The WSU group often holds its pre-departure meetings at the Smith house where homemade soup is served with conversations about global issues. So far, more than 200 honors students have joined Bill for the trip.

“I treasure these experiences,” Bill says. “The opportunity to work with students from majors not traditionally associated with global policy discourse is rewarding, as are the relationships formed through shared preparation, travel, and experiences.”

### Mary Kay Patton

is an associate professor in Human Development and a founding member of the Center for Transformational Learning and Leadership. As a strong proponent of the Honors College MESI program, she supports students taking values-based committed action from a place of presence and mindfulness. Since 2021, she has taught several MESI courses and is collaborating with the University of Wisconsin-Madison to design a new MESI course in Spring 2024: The Art and Science of Human Flourishing. She teaches HD 205: Developing Effective Communication and Life Skills and HONORS 298: Approaches to Global Leadership.

“I have the best job at WSU,” Patton says. “I work with talented faculty and wonderful colleagues, and we challenge and support students to become more curious about themselves, and the world around them, including one another.” Her experiential learning classes empower students in novel ways through art, mindfulness practices, games, and service learning. “A better world, a kinder world, and a more wonderfully rich life start from within,” she says.

Teaching is a second career for Patton, who previously practiced law. In 2021 she received the Honors Outstanding Teaching Award and has served as a thesis evaluator.



# Celebrating Excellence

Thank You to our Commencement Speakers!



**Colin S. Campbell**  
(’95 Soil Science), PhD



**Michael Schultheis**  
(’90 Economics)

## Distinguished Scholarships

**Critical Language Scholarship**  
Claudia Jacobo (alternate)

**Fulbright Canada Mitacs Internship**  
Stevie Fawcett

**German Academic Exchange – Research Internship in Science and Engineering (DAAD/RISE)**  
Roslyn Sue Djang, Julia Jitkov

**Gilman Scholarship**  
Darya Maysam

**Goldwater Scholarship**  
Jacob Buursma, Stevie Fawcett

**Google Generation Scholarship**  
Ethan Villalovoz

**National Collegiate Honors Council Portz Award**  
Alicia Callahan

**NSF – Graduate Research Fellowship**  
Brianna Knode (’22), Jessica Sly (’22), Christi Webster (’22), Lydia Weddle (’22)

## Save the Date

Spring Commencement Ceremony – Friday, May 3

Fall Commencement Ceremony – Friday, December 6

Family Weekend – Friday-Sunday, April 5-7

#CougsGive ’24 – Wednesday, April 17

*Give Today*



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# Go Cougs!