

FREDERIK MEIJER HONORS COLLEGE

ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2021



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Surviving the Pandemic

“We survived!” is not a typical theme for an annual report, but like most people around the world, we in the Honors College are just happy to have made it to 2021. We certainly learned a lot this past year, and much of what we learned—about meeting virtually, making videos, working from home—will surely be useful as we forge the new normal. Above all, we learned to adapt, and to extend grace to others as they struggled to adapt to the unknown and untried. In the end, like Grand Valley as a whole, the Honors College not only survived, but also found new ways to do what we do best: make connections, build community, and lead the way into the future.

Our faculty chair, **Coeli Fitzpatrick**, asked all Honors faculty to focus on just two things this year: delivering quality classes and paying close attention to students’ mental health.

Brooks College faculty were also asked to set aside their scholarly plans and take on an extra class each term. So it was all about the students. We knew that our first-year students, in particular, had already suffered a disrupted end to their high school careers, so we wanted to provide as many opportunities as possible for them to connect and engage here at Grand Valley. In a year of online

courses across the country, we are proud to say that well more than half (56%) of Honors sections had a face-to-face component in 2020-21, including 12 of 15 first-year sequences in the fall and 9 of 15 in the winter. We connected in many other ways as well. In August, our student mentors adapted the Welcome Days schedule for social distancing but still welcomed in the new class and helped them acclimate to campus. Once classes began, there were sessions in outdoor tents. There were socially distanced cookouts and other shared meals. The Honors Student Council offered a full slate of community-building events and activities. The Honors staff posted videos on cooking simple meals on a budget, making natural hair and body care products, and establishing stress-reducing yoga routines. Roommates sheltering together reacted on video to classic rock and pop tunes chosen by the Honors director. Along with other programs around the university, we hosted virtual events, including our first-ever virtual [Meijer Lecture](#) in March 2021. And in April 2020, December 2020, and April 2021, the Honors College held its first-ever virtual [Senior Recognition Ceremonies](#) for the roughly 600 students who graduated during the pandemic. It wasn’t a normal year, by any stretch, and we had our share of lonely and frustrating times, but we are proud of the effort and resilience shown by our students, staff, and faculty. It was, in the end, a rewarding year.

We are eager to get started on the 2021-22 academic year. And as always, we are grateful for the endorsement and support of the Meijer Foundation, whose continuing partnership makes so much of what we do possible.



Roger Gilles, Director



Professor Jeremiah Cataldo teaching in a hybrid format

Achieving Beyond Our Numbers

Despite all the challenges of the pandemic, Honors students and faculty continued to do amazing things this year. Our 1,548 students in Fall 2020 represented about 7.5% of GVSU's undergraduate population, but you wouldn't guess that given all they accomplished.

University Awards. The university's Awards Convocation was again held virtually this year, and we're proud to say that no fewer than 40 undergraduate and graduate Honors students were recognized by the provost's office for their outstanding achievements. Taylor Slais (B.S. Economics, '19, now in the M.S. program in Accounting) was the graduate student winner of the prestigious Glenn A. Niemeyer Award, which recognizes well-rounded students who demonstrate excellence in both the classroom and extra-curricular activities that enrich their lives and the lives of others. Lilly Radke (Nursing) was one of five seniors receiving the Thomas M. Seykora Award for Outstanding Contribution, given each year to those who make significant and outstanding contributions to the campus community. In addition, each department in the university names one "Excellence-in-a-Discipline" awardee, and fully one-third of the award winners were Honors students:

G Angel, Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Stephen Arnold, Business Economics

Alyssa Bargabus, Special Education

Capriana Calvachi, Anthropology

Rya Greene, Dance

James Groelsma, Music

Emily Hermann, Meijer Honors College

Marissa Karadsheh, Allied Health Sciences

Shania Mason, French



G Angel, WGS award winner



Hannah Rojas, NUR award winner

Colin McHugh, Biochemistry

Trevor McMahon, Entrepreneurship

Mary Meyer, Social Studies

Elizabeth Mitchell, Information Systems

Nick Moran, Multimedia Journalism

Meghan O'Neill, Classics

Logan Owen, Physics

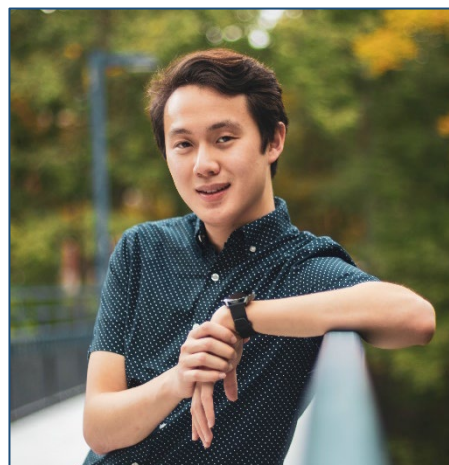
Lilah Parker, Studio Art

Amanda Pszczolkowski, Writing

Erin Reasoner, Behavioral Neuroscience

Hannah Rojas, Nursing

Brock Rubin, Finance
 Matthew Shan, Computer Science
 Megan Shaw, Chemistry
 Jordan Skutar, Film & Video
 Heather Stoliker, Human Resource Management
 Anna Stover, Mathematics
 Samantha Super, Biology
 Hanna Szydlowski, Geology-Chemistry
 Zachary Tenney, Philosophy
 Joshua Trierweiler, Global Studies and Social Impact



Matthew Shan, CIS award winner

In Print and On Stage. Here are just a representative few of our students' other outstanding achievements this year, some of which we highlighted on our [Spotlights](#) page on the Honors website.

Noah Holkeboer is double-majoring in Cell and Molecular Biology and Biology with an emphasis in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. Noah is an undergrad research assistant here at Grand Valley, working primarily with Honors Professor **Gary Greer**, and he gave a poster presentation at the Van Andel Institute's West Michigan Regional Undergraduate Science Research Conference in November 2020. Noah compared the Ginkgo biloba's task optimization versus that of two native tree species.

Nick Moran, a Communications Studies and Multimedia Journalism double-major, completed a two-year stint as editor-in-chief of the Grand Valley *Lanthorn*.

Reilly Olson, a Biomedical Sciences major, was the lead author of a scientific paper, "Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 Lockdown on US College Students: Results of a Photoelicitation Project," published in the *Journal of American College Health*. Reilly conducted the research with Professor



Annalise Trout

Babasola Fateye of the Biomedical Sciences department.

Matthew Shan, pictured above, a Computer Science major with minors in Data Science and Mathematics, was lead author of a research paper, "MorphWorld: A State Transition Simulator," published in *ALIFE 2020* by the International Society for Artificial Life.

Annelise Trout, an Information Technology major with an Information Systems minor, was the lead author of a paper, "Tradeoff and Solutions of Data Storage in Edge Computing," published by IEEE's Annual Computing and Communication Workshop and Conference. The paper, co-authored with Professor **Xiang Cao** of the School of Computing & Information Systems, also won "best paper" in the Cloud Computing and Data Center Systems category at the conference. Among her other

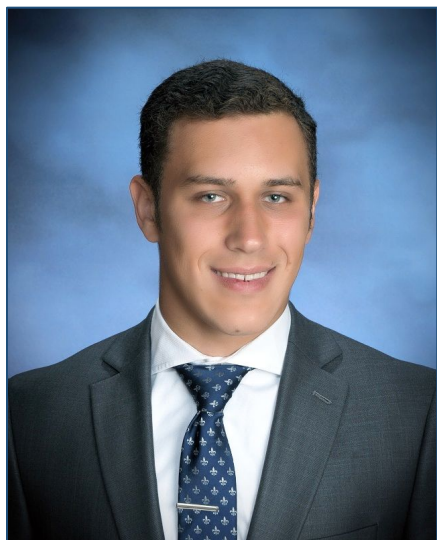
achievements, Annalise also worked with GVSU's Virus Action Team as a data analyst during the 2020-21 school year.

Pit Vollmers, an Engineering major with a minor in Mathematics, co-authored a research paper, "A Low-Cost sEMG Development Platform for Hand-Joint Angle Acquisition," in IEEE's Annual Information Technology, Electronics, and Mobile Communication Conference. The effort also won "best paper" at the conference. Engineering Professor **Nabeeh Kandalaft** guided the project.

Riley Wells, who graduated in April 2021 with a Music major, was one of ten singers to make it to Opera Grand Rapids' highly-competitive National Collegiate Competition Final Round. Additionally, Riley placed first in the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) Midwest Regional Voice Competition. Riley was selected to perform for Opera Grand Rapids' masterclass technician, Arlene Shrout, and successfully auditioned for a highly-desired soloist position at a foremost parish in Grand Rapids.



Riley Wells



Jacob Gunn

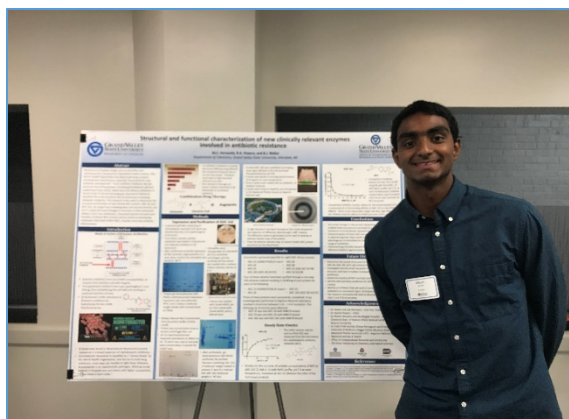
Honors Awards. At our April 2021 senior recognition ceremony, the Honors faculty were pleased to present awards to our two outstanding graduates. **Emily Hermann**, a Biology major with Political Science and Environmental Studies minors, was named Outstanding Senior. Emily was named top student of Organic Chemistry in 2019 before being so honored this year in the Honors College. During her time at GVSU, she worked in the human anatomy laboratory of Professor **Cynthia Thompson** of the Biomedical Sciences department. She also served for two years as president of ANCHOR, the Honors student organization. Emily also maintained a perfect GPA throughout her career, and before graduation she accepted a position as an Environmental Monitoring Analyst at Pfizer. **Jacob Gunn**, a Biomedical Sciences major with a Psychology minor, won the award for Outstanding Leadership and Service. Jake served as president of the Honors College Mentor Council in 2020-21, not only leading the effort to consolidate all

Honors student governance into a single Honors Student Council, but also guiding student leadership through the many challenges of the pandemic. The Council organized both virtual and in-person events on an almost weekly basis the entire year, helping to maintain the strong sense of community for which Honors is justly proud. Jake has gained admission to the Einstein College of Medicine in New York City, starting in Fall 2021.

Scholarships and Fellowships. Many Honors students earn scholarships to attend Grand Valley. All entering students who meet the GPA and ACT/SAT thresholds and who participate in a scholarship competition are eligible for either the Laker Scholarship, the Award for Excellence

Scholarship, the Faculty Scholarship, or the Presidential Scholarship—as well as other more narrowly defined scholarships. In addition, we have a handful of Honors-specific scholarships: the Frederik Meijer First Generation Honors College Student Scholarship, the Donna K. Brooks Presidential Scholarship, the Ruth Chamberlain Global Issues Scholarship, the Arend D. and Nancy Lubbers University Honors College Scholarship, and the Jonathan and Marcia White Honors College Scholarship. Here's what two of these scholarship recipients who graduated this year accomplished with the support of the scholarships:

- **Olivia Prusinowski**, an Art & Design major with a Business minor, earned the Meijer First Generation Honors College Student Scholarship as an entering student in Fall 2017. She served as a graphic design intern at Kensington Church and a marketing and design intern with GVSU's Human Resources Office. For her Graphic Design thesis, Olivia designed an app to educate users on the stock market and developed a marketing campaign to support the app. For her Honors Senior Project, she created a new branding identity for La Dolce Vita, a well-known Italian restaurant in Cleveland, Ohio.
- **Heather Stoliker**, a Human Resources Management major, earned the Lubbers University Honors College Scholarship as an entering student in Fall 2017. Her Honors Senior Project analyzed the influences on the gender wage gap and suggested potential alleviation strategies. After graduating in December 2020, Heather accepted a position in the HR department of Yanfeng Automotive Interiors, where she's working as part of the HR eXelerated Rotational Program at the Novi office and Highland Park manufacturing plant.



Micah Fernando

In addition, the Frederik Meijer Office of Fellowships typically helps dozens of Honors students every year gain access to research and travel opportunities. This year, of course, the pandemic made most travel impossible, so most students had to decline their awards. Still, we can report that **Micah Fernando**, a Biochemistry major, was awarded the competitive Goldwater Scholarship. The Goldwater Scholarship is a national award that supports undergraduates who want to pursue research careers in STEM fields. Micah has spent the past two years working with chemistry professors **Rachel Powers** and **Brad Wallar**, assisting with projects on bacterial resistance to antibiotics. Micah

is spending Summer 2021 working with the Mayo Clinic as a research intern at their campus in Jacksonville, Florida. In the future, Micah would like to pursue a career in research involving drug design and discovery and is on his way to enrolling in a top graduate school.

And **Allison Romanski**, a Biochemistry major with a Spanish minor, who just completed her first year at Grand Valley, was awarded a NASA Space Grant Fellowship for Summer 2021. The grant grew out of her work in the Water for a Changing World first-year Honors sequence with Professor **Peter Wampler**. Allison and Dr. Wampler are surveying different areas of the Grand River for water quality. They are classifying the quality based on the measured nutrients and biological indicators under conditions such as flow rates, season, temperature, and weather. They are also partnering with three different wastewater treatment plants to analyze the samples they collect.

Working Toward Greater Diversity

As we reported last year, our work toward greater diversity in the Honors College centers on our ongoing effort to build connections across campus and in the larger community. Much of this work was put on hold during the 2020 shutdown, when face-to-face interactions were rare or impossible. Nonetheless, we can point to three areas in which we made tangible progress:

Curriculum Rollout. As we reported last year, our revised curriculum features more course titles that center traditionally marginalized populations, and it also promotes more active learning—long a strength of the Honors College—with its new project-based learning requirement. With the debut of the curriculum in Fall 2020, we asked our faculty to make “inclusion” both a topic and a practice in all Honors courses. Now that we’re back to fully face-to-face classes in 2021-22, we look forward to a kind of “restart” of the curriculum, and our Honors Curriculum and Development Committee (HCDC) plans to resume its assessment of the new curriculum as last year’s entering students make their way through the courses.

Student Activism. While many of us simply tried to “get by” during the pandemic, some of our students and alumni turned their attention to helping the broader community. The nation had only been shut down for a week or two before we heard about the work of 2018 Honors alumnus **Nate Gillespie**, who organized the Coronavirus Civilian Corps—a name echoing President Roosevelt’s Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s. Nate’s group helped local organizations, small businesses, and those individuals most vulnerable and at risk during the pandemic.

In summer of 2020, a controversy erupted in Allendale over a statue in the Community Park that depicts Union and Confederate soldiers standing side-by-side over a Black child holding a tablet marking the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. The controversy prompted several Honors students to become involved. **Phoebe Risk**, a Global Studies & Social Impact major with minors in Political Science and Statistics, helped to start a Facebook group devoted to the issue, and she also produced a 30-minute podcast, “Blood, Sweat, and Tears,” about the history of the statue and the emerging controversy. **Katherine Parker**, a Public and Nonprofit Administration major, helped to organize protests in Allendale and then decided to run for office. On November 3, she earned just over 10% of the votes as a write-in candidate for the Allendale Charter Township Board. And finally, **Tumaini Sango**, a Music major with a Political Science minor who is also a graduate of Allendale High School, served on a citizens advisory committee formed by the Township Board. In May 2021, the committee recommended to remove and replace the statue with one depicting three Union soldiers, including one African American.

We’ll mention just two other students whose work on campus on behalf of vulnerable populations made us proud. In June 2021, *GVNext* celebrated the many contributions of Honors student **Waverly Eubank**, a former Political Science major now in the graduate program in the Public Administration. As a first-year student, Waverly got involved in Colors of Pride, and she later became a Resident Assistant on campus, helping hundreds of students acclimate to campus life and the challenges of college



Waverly Eubank

academics. And last year, she presented at the Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Asexual College Conference. In both her scholarship and her work on campus, Waverly is making a difference.

And finally, **Alex Hicks**, a Student Senate representative who also served on the Honors Curriculum and Development Committee during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, chose for her Honors Senior Project to challenge the university's call to "inclusiveness" by conducting a case study on menstrual hygiene product accessibility on campus—and how it affects campus climate. Alex's final project, supervised by Political Science Professor **Laura Schneider**, was named an honorable mention in this year's Senior Project Awards.

New Faculty Member. The Honors faculty welcomed the opportunity this year to conduct an internal search for a new full-time member of the Honors Faculty Council, or HFC—the full-time faculty of the Honors College. Led by chair Coeli Fitzpatrick, the HFC reviewed some stellar letters of interest from across campus and, with the help of a dozen or so students, interviewed several finalists before offering the new position to **Dr. Melba Vélez Ortiz**, Professor in the School of Communications here at GVSU. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, Dr. Vélez Ortiz earned bachelor's and master's degrees at Purdue University and her Ph.D. at the University of Illinois. She joined the faculty at Grand Valley in 2009. Her scholarship focuses on communication ethics and global environmental communication. Her work examines ways in which the long-term success of conservation efforts depend on fundamental shifts in cultural values, in aesthetic and moral communication, and in shared understandings of how the individual fits into social and ecological communities. In addition, Dr. Vélez Ortiz has researched and published in the area of Latin American/Caribbean/Latina/o philosophy and intellectual history. She has published numerous articles and book chapters, and in 2020 her book, *Maatian Ethics in a Communication Context*, was published by Routledge Press.



Melba Vélez Ortiz and Chad

Dr. Vélez Ortiz brings to Honors an outstanding record of teaching here at the university. She won the 2019 Top Teaching Award in Communication Ethics from the National Communication Association. Here at GVSU, she's won teaching and mentoring awards from the Graduate Student Association, the GVSU TRIO Programs, and eLearning and Emerging Technologies. Early in her teaching career, Dr. Vélez Ortiz was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative eye disease that causes severe and progressive vision impairment. This condition has led her to focus much of her teaching on listening skills, and in 2021-22 she will co-teach a new first-year interdisciplinary sequence for Honors that will focus on hearing (a physical function) and listening (a skill and ethic, and a key leadership competency). Also joining the Honors College will be Professor Chad, a graduate of Guide Dogs for the Blind, the largest and most prestigious dog school in the US.

Making Waves

Thanks to Honors Professor **Peter Wampler**, the university-wide Making Waves Initiative has found a permanent home here in the Honors College, beginning this summer. Making Waves aims to forge collaborations across campus among students, faculty, and staff, as well as the larger community, to explore and investigate the many ways that water touches our lives. This year, Professor Wampler and the Making Waves team:

- Hired Honors student **Ariel Henson**, a Biology major with a Natural Resources Management minor, as the first joint intern shared by Making Waves and LGROW—the Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds
- Provided kayaking and speaker events for the GVSU campus community
- Developed long term project goals for Making Waves which will be planned and implemented by student/faculty teams
 - Campus-to-Campus Fall Float (2-day float from GR to Allendale)
 - Kayak purchase for event use
 - Development of K-12 collaborations to provide hands-on water activities for schools (May-June each year)
- Created a [Social Justice and Water](#) page for the [Making Waves website](#) designed to be a resource for learning about the issues pertaining to water that affect disadvantaged communities locally and abroad.

To start the 2021-22 school year, Making Waves will sponsor a day of kayaking for Honors students at the Grand Ravines North County Park on Friday, September 10.

Other Faculty Making Waves in 2020-21. With the faculty focused almost exclusively on teaching and supporting students, and with most scholarly projects put on hold and academic conferences canceled or postponed, we have less news to share than usual. So we'll be brief:

- **Craig Benjamin** retired after 18 years at Grand Valley and 13 years in Honors, where he mainly taught in the Big History and East Asia first-year sequences. The Honors College hosted a very well-attended Zoom celebration for Professor B and his wife, Pamela, on April 15. The pair have returned to Australia to be with family.
- **Rosalynn Bliss**, our Meijer Endowed Chair in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, hosted the Winter 2021 [Meijer Lecture](#) originally scheduled for March 2020. **Meredith Bronk**, President and CEO of Open Systems Technologies (OST), spoke, via Zoom, on the question, "If Not You, Then Who?"
- **Jeremiah Cataldo** published "Lamenting Loss: A New Understanding of Trauma in Lam 1," in *The Scandinavian Journal of Theology*, and "Postcolonial Readings of the Minor Prophets," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Minor Prophets*.
- **Kurt Ellenberger** continued publishing regularly in *All About Jazz*, including a five-part series of articles called "Ghosts in the Machine: Jazz Musicians and Popular Music," that ran in February 2021.
- **Roger Gilles** appeared in *Trailblazers*, a documentary celebrating the 130-year history of women's bicycle racing. The film was hosted by cyclist Jenny Graham and released by the Global Cycling Network.
- **Joel Stillerman** was named Associate Editor for Sociology at *Latin American Research Review*.

Looking Ahead: A Seventh I?

Our revised curriculum, detailed in last year's report and described in detail on our [website](#), builds on core values represented by six "I" words: Inquiry, Integrity, Inclusion, Interdisciplinarity, Innovation, and Internationalization. These values embody the "Live, Learn, Lead" motto of the Honors College and capture the essential qualities of effective citizens and leaders. We ask the faculty of every Honors course to articulate how they incorporate these values—as content, skills, or both—into their course plans. At the risk of pushing the "I" conceit (not to mention the English language) too far, this year we might well add a seventh word to the list: *intergenerationality*.

During our curriculum revision process in 2018 and 2019, we heard time and again from students about a "sophomore slump" in Honors after the high-intensity experience of the first-year mentoring program and the year-long interdisciplinary sequences. So a key aim of the revised curriculum was to enhance the second-year Honors experience, and we did this in two ways: by creating HNR 200, a three-credit campus/community engagement requirement that asks students to propose a campus or community activity—leading a student organization, volunteering for a local agency, taking a community-based learning course, studying abroad—and reflecting on that activity for course credit; and by revamping HNR 201, Live.Learn.Lead, and moving it from a first-year to a second-year course. HNR 200 has intergenerational potential, but it's that HNR 201 course that we want to focus on here, as it very deliberately brings together students from all four years.

The revised HNR 201 course builds on our first-year mentoring program by bringing together upper-division TAs with second-year students in a course that encourages active participation in campus and community events—including Honors events that will also be open to first-year students in the sequences. This fall and winter, we have 285 second-year students enrolled in the course and 74 third- and fourth-year students registered as TAs—a roughly 1:4 ratio that will allow for interaction not only among the second-year students (who missed so much of that last year!), but also between the second-year students and the upperclassmen. Because students will be able to use the TA experience to earn HNR 200 campus/community engagement credit, we'll have a ready supply of TAs each year, ensuring an ongoing intergenerational experience. This builds on the first-year mentoring program already in place: this year, we have 67 second-, third-, and fourth-year mentors assigned to roughly 350 entering first-year students—a 1:5 ratio. What we envision, of course, is a program that encourages a continuously high level of connection and interaction between students across the whole four years, all while the students participate in campus and community activities that prepare them for an enriched life after graduation.

Among the scheduled activities this fall, HNR 201 students and their TAs (and faculty) will be kayaking together on the Grand River, making art in the Chamberlain Multipurpose Room, attending the Meijer Lecture in the Seidman Forum, taking a guided tour of ArtPrize in Grand Rapids, enjoying *Macbeth* in the Black Box Theatre, taking in the "Honest and Unrefined" art exhibition in the Art Gallery, attending and asking questions at a "Uses of History" panel in the Grand River Room, and participating in the Civil Discourse Symposium at the Eberhard Center. We also look forward to Mayor Bliss's "Fireside Chats" with local leaders, and perhaps a literary reading and musical performance or two. These activities—and the conversations they will surely prompt—will, we know, help us put the trials of 2020 behind us and usher in a promising 2021-22.