

FREDERIK MEIJER HONORS COLLEGE

ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2023



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Growth in Honors

This year, we partnered with GVSU Admissions to expand and simplify the Honors recruitment and admissions process. We wanted to eliminate barriers that we understand can prevent some first-generation and minority students from applying to Honors. We were also motivated by what we've learned from our colleagues around the country about "expanding the circle" of Honors—a movement best captured in an article published last November in *Inside Higher Ed*. The authors, Richard Baudenhausen and James Buss, recommend advertising the benefits of Honors to all students rather than a select few, developing holistic admissions practices that are test-optional or test-blind, and eliminating minimum entrance requirements. They cite the author of an earlier blog post from *Inside Higher Ed*: "We must demand that all students, not just the most privileged, have access to the kinds of enticing perks too often reserved for honors students."

We believe more GVSU students deserve to experience the "perks" of the Meijer Honors College: a topical and interdisciplinary approach to general education; a discussion- and project-based approach to learning; a tightly knit community of peers and faculty; a high degree of campus and community engagement; and plenty of opportunities for undergraduate research and national and international travel. We believe that interest and motivation, along with a promising record of success in school, are the best indicators

of potential success. Simply put, we welcome students who like school—who enjoy learning and learning with others. If students are eager and open-minded, and looking to grow and change, we believe they belong in the Honors College. We also believe that the approach we take in Honors—both inside and outside the classroom—can inspire any motivated student to rise to their greatest potential. As one of our faculty colleagues once put it, "Send them to me!" Our faculty are eager to guide students along their path to discovery and enrichment.

We'd already been moving in this more inclusive direction. With the rest of the university, we moved to test-optional admissions in Fall 2020, which pushed our admissions process to a more holistic approach. This year, we focused on expanding the circle. The key change was university-wide, when GVSU joined a thousand other colleges and universities in using Common App, which allows prospective students to send a single application to multiple schools simultaneously. This, along with other Admissions efforts of course, led to a 50% increase in first-year applications at the university compared to the 2021-22 cycle. Admitted students with strong high school records were then invited to complete a secondary application to Honors, and we worked with Admissions to simplify that application. We also worked with Admissions to host revamped versions of the "Signature Saturdays" we piloted in 2021-22. This time, we offered two well-attended (as opposed to



Honors peer mentor Gabriella Capanda (far right) with first-year students during Welcome Week 2022.

five sparsely attended) sessions, one in November and one in February, for prospective Honors students and their families. Each session featured a university welcome, an Honors student panel, a catered lunch, tours of the Niemeyer Learning & Living Center, and student-led sessions on Honors student life, undergraduate research opportunities, and study abroad experiences. In addition to all this, we continued to participate in Laker Open Houses and Admitted Student Days.

The result: Honors applications jumped by the same 50% experienced by the full university, and as of mid-July, we'd registered some 428 first-year students for Fall 2023—our second-largest entering class ever. It's also our most diverse entering class, with at least 70 entering students identifying as racial or ethnic minorities.

To accommodate the surge, we've added three new first-year interdisciplinary sequences to our offerings. (See below for more on the sequences.) Our Honors Student Council is ready to welcome the new students to campus on August 22 for move-in and three scheduled "Welcome Days," during which over 50 Honors peer mentors will introduce the students to campus, involve them in small- and large-group activities, help them get to know other Honors students in their majors, and even introduce them to their first-year Honors instructors. It's the first step in welcoming these new students into the Meijer Honors College community, a community that we hope will change them—and be changed by them.

There's no question that the "profile" of the typical Honors student is changing. Five years ago, when a 28 ACT and 1300 SAT were listed as expectations (if not requirements) in the Honors application, nearly 70% of our first-year students scored at or above one of those numbers. As we've shifted to a more holistic approach, that percentage has dropped every year since, and this year it will be just 25%. However, the average high school GPA this year is 3.86, compared to 3.90 five years ago, which indicates that our students have performed very well indeed in high school. Educational researchers (e.g., Bowen, et al., in *Crossing the Finish Line*, Princeton University Press, 2009) have found that while standardized tests are solid predictors of academic skills, high school grades are better predictors of *graduation rates* because they best measure qualities like motivation, perseverance, and consistency. This year's entering Honors students have done very well in school, and they have demonstrated interest and motivation in their applications—so we are very optimistic. We look forward to a great year.

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

Our Evolving Curriculum

Last year we reported on the progress of three new parts of our curriculum: the revised Live. Learn. Lead. course (HNR 201), the project-based learning courses (HNR 250/251), and the campus and community engagement requirement (HNR 300). This year we'd like to offer a look at how our first-year interdisciplinary sequences have evolved since 2017, when we continued the effort initiated by the faculty and previous director, Dr. Jeff Chamberlain, to diversify the offerings beyond what had been a rather western-oriented and humanities-oriented first-year experience for our students.

As you see below, six of the 15 sequences offered in 2017 are no longer offered, largely because of faculty retirements. Five of those 15 sequences are still being offered in more or less the same form, and the last four of the 2017 sequences have been significantly revised and refocused leading up to 2023. Finally, we have seven newly developed sequences, two of which—Power and Freedom, and Earth Matters—are being offered for the first time in 2023.

2017 Offerings	Change	2023 Offerings
Big History	Retired	
History of Science	Retired	
Making of Europe	Retired	
Medieval Cultures	Retired	
National Security	Retired	
Theory & Practice of Rights	Retired	
Design Thinking for Social Product Innovation	Updated	Design Thinking for Social Product Innovation
East Asia and the World	Updated	East Asia and the World
Food for Thought	Updated	Food for Thought
Middle East Beyond the Headlines	Updated	Middle East Beyond the Headlines
Worlds of Greece and Rome	Updated	Worlds of Greece and Rome
The African Experience	Revised	Africa Seen Through African Eyes
American Civilization	Revised	American Voices & Visions
Europe: The Center and the Margins	Revised	Dangerous Ideas
The Making of Latin America	Revised	Latin America and West Michigan
	New in 2018	Culture, Power, & Inequality
	New in 2023	Earth Matters
	New in 2022	The Making of Meaning
	New in 2023	Power and Freedom
	New in 2022	The Powers That Divide Us
	New in 2021	The Sound of Ethics
	New in 2019	Water in a Changing World

All 16 sequences on the 2023-24 schedule approach course content through the lenses of inquiry, integrity, inclusion, interdisciplinarity, innovation, and internationalization, and feature active learning methods, including outside-the-classroom experiences. In terms of faculty, there's been what we think is a healthy rotation, with just 8 of the 27 faculty from 2017 teaching in 2023, along with 21 faculty who were *not* teaching an Honors sequence in 2017.

Learning Beyond the Classroom

We're proud of the learning that goes on within the first-year sequences and all our Honors courses, but we also embrace the opportunity to extend learning beyond the classroom. As ever, this past year the Honors College sponsored more than a handful of exciting public events, Honors-specific activities, and one unique "study away" opportunity for our students.

Meijer Lectures. This year, the Meijer Lecture Series joined forces with the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies and its "Wheelhouse Talks" series to offer two outstanding lectures, one in fall and one in winter. The Meijer Lecture Series welcomes regional and national business leaders to speak on issues of leadership, innovation, and entrepreneurship.



Luis Avila, a partner at Varnum Law, spoke with students, faculty, and staff on Friday, December 2, in the Kirkhof Center's Grand River Room in Allendale.

Avila focuses his practice on labor and employment issues while serving as an advocate in the West Michigan community through board membership. He has been recognized as a five-time *40 Under 40* recipient by the *Grand Rapids Business Journal*.

Drawing from his experience growing up in both Mexico and the US, and moving back and forth between the two countries, as well as his position as chair of Varnum's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, Avila shared stories of exclusion, assimilation, inclusion, and belonging—and challenged the audience to see every intercultural space as an opportunity to reach out to others and grow.



Dara Richardson-Heron, a former Fortune 100 corporate executive, current board director, physician, and executive mentor/coach with more than 25 years of leadership experience in health care and the corporate, government, and nonprofit sectors, delivered a talk on Friday, January 27, in the Eberhard Center in downtown Grand Rapids.

Proclaiming herself "a physician by trade and an advocate by choice," Richardson-Heron related her own story of experiencing the health system as a cancer patient and how that influenced her subsequent work as Chief Patient Officer at Pfizer during the pandemic.

Richardson-Heron currently serves on a number of boards of directors, pushing organizations to embrace the 3 P's of patience, perspective, and perseverance.

Fireside Chats. Again this year, Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss, serving in her fourth and final year as Meijer Endowed Chair in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, hosted informal “chats” with prominent West Michigan community leaders. The well-attended Monday night events were held fireside in the Chamberlain Multipurpose Room. This year’s guests:

- October 31, 2022: [Jen Schottke](#), President of the West Michigan Construction Institute, a comprehensive construction educational institute
- November 21, 2022: [Keith Brophy](#), Chief Operating Officer at ADHD Online, a leading mental telehealth provider
- February 20, 2023: [Mike Verhulst](#), Executive Vice President of Strategic Growth for Acrisure Benefits Group
- March 13, 2023: [Anita Hitchcock](#), Grand Rapids City Attorney



HNR 201 Events. Last year we shared some of the events our students experienced through the “Live. Learn. Lead” course—an events-based course that asks students to *prepare* for campus and community events through research and discussion, *participate* in events actively and mindfully, and *process* the events through discussion and written reflection. The events change every year, which is what keeps the course alive and helps to create a shared cohort experience for the second-year students who take the course. An important side benefit of the course is that it sends interested and well-prepared Honors students to events around campus, thus enlivening those events and helping to make the events successful. Here are the events HNR 201 students attended last year:

Fall 2022:

- Lecture by Terence Miller, human rights attorney and policy analyst
- Musical performance by Yamma and Heart of Afghanistan
- Art “opening” (for Honors students) of “Beauty and the Body in Contemporary Art”
- Jazz concert by the Rodriguez Martinez Duo
- Student production of Shakespeare’s “The Merry Wives of Windsor”
- Elections Panel sponsored by the Hauenstein Center and Political Science department
- Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) event
- Lecture by Julian Levinson, associate director of UM’s Frankel Center for Judaic Studies
- “Democracy 101” panel on election security

- Performance by the South Chicago Dance Theatre
- Civil Discourse lecture by John Noltner, founder of A Peace of My Mind
- Fireside Chat with Keith Brophy, COO of ADHD Online
- Lecture by Elizabeth Welch of the Michigan State Supreme Court
- Meijer Lecture by Luis Avila, partner at Varnum Law

Winter 2023:

- MLK Lecture by Jerry Wallace, President of Danville Community College
- Meijer Lecture by Dara Richardson-Heron, formerly of Pfizer, Inc.
- Student concert by Wind Symphony, Symphony Orchestra, and Concert Band
- Lecture by Deborah Amos of National Public Radio
- Lecture by Courtney Freer, Visiting Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Emory University
- Lecture by Valarie Kaur, civil rights activist and faith leader
- Lecture by Suzanne DiMaggio of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- Student concert by the Jazz Ensemble
- Fireside Chat with Anita Hitchcock, Grand Rapids City Attorney
- Art “opening” (for Honors students) of “Convergence: Cracks in the Glass Ceiling”
- Student production of Oscar Wilde’s “The Importance of Being Earnest”
- “Building Trust Across America” event, sponsored by Kaufman Interfaith Institute
- Lecture by Joseph Teran, Fellow at the American Mathematical Society
- Poetry reading by Juan Felipe Herrera, former US Poet Laureate



HNR 201 teaching assistant Logyn Miller with fellow students at the “Building Trust Across America” event.

Water in the West. This May and June, 24 GVSU students, including 21 Honors students, traveled to Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico and spent a month learning about a variety of topics that involved water, including acid mine drainage, river discharge and water quality, dams and landscape weathering and erosion, to name a few. With financial support from the Honors College to limit the cost to students, the trip was led by Honors professor Peter Wampler and his colleague, Geology professor Peter Riemersma.



*Professor Wampler prepares students for departure.
(photo by Kendra Stanley-Mills)*

By all accounts it was a successful, rewarding, and transformative experience for the students and the professors. They traveled over 6,000 miles, hiked, kayaked, explored, and discussed water issues in the west. Some hikes and elevation changes were challenging for the students, but as one student shared when reflecting on the experience, “Life begins at the edge of your comfort zone.” In addition to the knowledge they gained, they learned about themselves and made close friends. Another student wrote, “The relationships that I have formed on this trip, and the different perspectives that I was able to learn, were truly life changing.”



Honors students Grace Cairy and Molly DiCosola take in the views at The Narrows in Zion National Park. (photo by Kendra Stanley-Mills)



Professor Riemersma and students take water samples at Zion National Park. (photo by Kendra Stanley-Mills)

Student Achievements

One thing we say to prospective students is that while students can and do accomplish great things outside of Honors, surrounding yourself with other ambitious, high-achieving students can help increase your chances of achieving great things at Grand Valley. Living in Honors housing, attending Honors events, taking Honors classes, and working with Honors faculty—all of this puts you into contact with inspired and inspirational peers and role models. The 1,500 or so students in Honors make up just 7% or 8% of GVSU's undergraduate population, but their impact around campus and beyond suggests much greater numbers.

University Awards. This year two undergraduates, both Honors students, were honored with the university's top annual award, 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. The Niemeyer Award went to **Yasmin Alemayehu**, an Elementary Education major, and **Natalie VeCasey**, a Nursing major.

In addition, each department in the university names one “Excellence-in-a-Discipline” awardee, and again this year many Honors students were honored:

Yasmin Alemayehu, Elementary Education

Shane Armstrong, Physics

Ella Beringer, Social Work

Stephanie Bueche, Music



Natalie VeCasey



Yasmin Alemayehu

Autumn Chorney, Honors College

Anna Compton, Theatre

Douglas Tucker Corey, Anthropology

Ian Curtis, Statistics

Calle Faerber, Special Education

Evan Ezra Hodson, Geography and Sustainable Planning

Isabelle Hoffman, French

Jacquelyn Molloseau, Biology

Bradley Monarch, Mathematics

MacKenzie Payton, Psychology

Aaron Rusch, Political Science

Evan Ray Sidebotham, Biomedical Sciences

Madison Smith, Biochemistry

Claire Ureste, Environmental and Sustainability Studies

Gillian Vendittelli, Entrepreneurship

Julia Wintermantel, Communication Sciences and Disorders

Natalie Marie Woodland, Cell and Molecular Biology



Ian Curtis, Statistics award winner

Honors Awards. At our April 2023 senior recognition ceremony, the Honors faculty were pleased to present Honors-specific awards to two outstanding graduates. **Autumn Chorney**, a Psychology

major with a minor in Sociology, was named Outstanding Senior—the Honors College “Excellence-in-a-Discipline” awardee. During her time at Grand Valley, Autumn served as a research assistant to both Dr. Kristy Dean in Psychology and Dr. Joel Stillerman in Honors/Sociology. She completed an internship abroad, in Australia, in Winter 2023, where she researched the correlation between trait anger and conspiracy beliefs. She also earned a Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholar Award.



Autumn Chorney

The 2023 award for Outstanding Leadership and Service in Honors went to **Sierra Gulli**, a Biomedical Sciences major. Sierra served as an Honors mentor and member of the Honors Student Council. She also served as president of the Arab Culture Club and founder and president of the GVSU chapter of Mu Epsilon Delta, the pre-med fraternity. She belonged to the Pre-PA Club and the Red Cross Club. She also served as a GVSU Transitions leader. In 2022, Sierra studied abroad in Costa Rica, focusing on comparing the US and Costa Rican healthcare systems. After graduating in just three years in April, Sierra immediately enrolled in MPA program at Butler University.



Sierra Gulli, far right, winner of the Honors Outstanding Leadership and Service Award, with other members of the Honors Student Council in Cleveland for the 2022 Mideast Honors Association conference.

Honors Scholarships. Nearly all first-year Honors students earn 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 Arend D. and Nancy Lubbers University Honors College Scholarship, the Zukaitis Honors Scholarship, the Ruth Chamberlain Global Issues Scholarship, the Jonathan and Marcia White Honors College Scholarship, and our newest—the Jeff “Dr. J” Chamberlain Honors Scholarship. Here’s what three of this year’s students accomplished with the support of these scholarships:



Zoe Schultz

Zoe Schultz, a Psychology and Criminal Justice double-major with a Spanish minor, earned the Lubbers University Honors

College Scholarship as an entering student in Fall 2020. Besides serving as an Honors peer mentor and as a member of the programming board of the Honors Student Council, Zoe has served as membership officer of Psi Chi (the Psychology honor society) and vice president of Alpha Phi Sigma (the Criminal Justice honor society). In 2022, Zoe received a Recreation Leadership Scholarship and was named an “I Am Grand Valley” recipient. That year, Zoe also presented “Understanding Trauma and Practicing Resilience” at the GVSU Teach-In with Psychology professor Gwenden Dueker. In Winter 2023, Zoe studied Psychology, Sociology, and Spanish at the Universidad del País Vasco in Bilbao, Spain.



Zoe Ziegler

Zoe Ziegler, a double-major in Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences, earned the Lubbers University Honors College Scholarship as an entering student in Fall 2021. A second-year member of the GVSU women’s lacrosse team, Zoe was the recipient of the Elite 90 Award during the NCAA Division II Women’s Lacrosse Championships in Indianapolis in May 2023. The Elite 90 Award is presented to the student-athlete with the highest cumulative grade-point average participating in the finals for each of NCAA’s championships. Halfway through her undergraduate career, Zoe has earned a perfect 4.0 GPA.

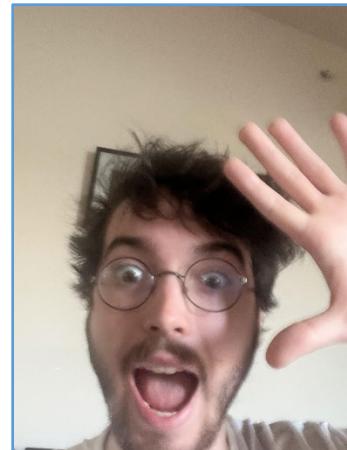


Rebecca Hanson

Rebecca Hanson, a Music major studying piano, earned the Zukaitis Honors Scholarship as an entering student in Fall 2019. In 2022, Becca attended the Academy of Fortepiano Performance in Hunter, NY, and that summer, as part of the Summer Scholars Program, she worked with Music professor Sookkyung Cho to conduct a research project focusing on historical piano performance practices. She presented her research at both the Summer Scholars Showcase in 2022 and Student Scholars Day in 2023.

The Young PI Summer Science Camp. Pretty often, our Honors students delight us with their passion and commitment. A great example: During the winter semester, rising seniors **Jonathan McCabe** and **Pranav Nalam** approached us about supporting an idea they had to offer a weeklong science camp for high school students. They wanted to call it “Young PIs,” as in young principal investigators, and they offered to do all the considerable work to make it happen: sending invitations to local high schools, staffing a table at the Science Olympiad, persuading faculty from Biomedical Sciences, Cell and Molecular Biology, Chemistry, and Physics to offer half-day labs for the students, finding a handful of current GVSU students to serve as mentors, arranging visits to GVSU’s College of Health Professions and MSU’s College of Human Medicine, and gathering sponsors to pay for and present information at lunch each day, and dozens of smaller things, like buying lab goggles for the students, designing a logo and making tee-shirts, and reserving rooms for poster-making and the final poster presentations at the end of the week.

In the end, with support from Admissions, the Cook Leadership Academy, the Ford Leadership Forum, and the Meijer Honors College, as well as the work of student mentors **Jaysen Holly** and **Rylee Webb** and faculty members **Dan Bergman**, **Dawn Hart**, **Sofia Karampagia**, and **Frank Sylvester**, the inaugural Young PI science camp attracted ten eager students from across Michigan. The week culminated Friday night in a closing ceremony in the Niemeyer MPR, when the students and their families enjoyed a pizza dinner with the mentors, and the students shared their research posters. Special congratulations go to Jonathan McCabe, a double-major in Biomedical Sciences and Philosophy, who earned HNR 300 credit for taking on most of the legwork and planning for the week. After the final poster presentations, everyone agreed that this should not be the last Young PI program, so we look forward to giving it another go next year.



Jonathan McCabe



Working Toward Greater Diversity

Last year we announced the creation of the Professional Society for Minorities in Honors (PSMH), our local chapter of the National Society for Minorities in Honors. The group is led by Electrical Engineering major **Elora Ferrie** and Allied Health Sciences major **Abigail Palmeter**, and the faculty advisor is Professor **Melba Vélez Ortiz**. Here's a brief recap of the group's 2022-23 highlights:

In October, PSMH sponsored a karaoke night for Honors students and faculty. The group decorated the Multipurpose Room and hired a local DJ, and just about everyone who attended shared their vocal (and dancing) talents at some point. The students especially enjoyed seeing Brooks College Dean **Mark Schaub** sing Captain and Tenille's "Muskrat Love," Honors College Director **Roger Gilles** sing Tom Petty's "Runnin' Down a Dream," Honors faculty chair **Coeli Fitzpatrick** and Professor **Maria Cimitile** sing the Elton John/Kiki Dee duet "Don't Go Breaking My Heart," and Professor **Barry Kanpol** energetically sing and dance his way through "If I Were a Rich Man" from *Fiddler on the Roof*. Many students and several other faculty sang as well.



Professor Melba Vélez Ortiz got Karaoke Night started—in a bee costume.



Honors students Maria Rocha, Patrick Chinoski, Lily Nykamp, and Reyna Lopez let loose during Karaoke Night '22.

Also in October, PSMH leaders **Elora Ferrie** and **Abigail Palmeter** joined faculty advisor **Melba Vélez Ortiz** and Director **Roger Gilles** in making GVSU's first appearance at the annual meeting of the National Society for Minorities in Honors, held on the campus of Northern Kentucky University. The theme of the conference was "Breaking Down Boundaries: Disrupting Honors and the Future of Honors Education." The group heard and discussed ideas from a rich array of presenters from Alcorn State University, Appalachian State University, University of Arkansas, Augusta University, Ball State University, Bowling Green State University, Eastern Kentucky University, Emory & Henry College, Ivy Tech Community College, University of Kentucky, University of Louisiana-Monroe, Northern Kentucky University, Oregon Tech University, Thomas Jefferson University, University of West Florida, and University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

During March and April, PSMH repurposed the first-floor lounge area near the entrance to the East wing of the Niemeyer Learning & Living Center. It's now called the Multicultural Room, and it features thematic art, a colorful new rug, four comfortable bean bag chairs, and a cozy fireplace. The group is working on establishing a collection of books and other reading materials for the room. In addition, PSMH and the Honors College are planning a series of listening sessions in Fall 2023 with Michigan artist **Hugo Claudin**, who will take what he learns from the students to create a painting to be hung opposite the Multicultural Room. Our hope is that all students use the room as a place for relaxing, studying, talking, and thinking.



Honors student Sadman Sakib relaxing in the new PSMH Multicultural Room..