



ALUMNI
NEWSLETTER
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CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM



Creighton University Honors Program

Spring 2020 Alumni Newsletter

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Letter from the Director

Dr. Jeffrey Hause, Program Director

Great Alumni of Honor,

The 2019-20 academic year has been a year of both excitement and challenges. We sponsored a number of community-building activities, starting with a welcome breakfast for the new Honors freshmen. It's the last event their parents will take part in before leaving them in our care, and we want them to leave in an upbeat mood. We were therefore thrilled to have alumna Samantha Stoupa offer some inspiring remarks at the event. Of course, we also had our annual freshman retreat and 60-second lectures—this year on “This, That, and *The Other*.”

This year, we sponsored a few more unusual events. Fr. James Pribek, in association with his SAM on Prairie Literature, organized a trip to Dwight, Nebraska, so that students could visit former U.S. Poet Laureate Ted Kooser. They met with Ted—yes, he insisted they call him “Ted”—at his studio, and then they shared a Bohemian lunch with him at Cy's Café. We also co-sponsored a Homerathon—a marathon reading of Homer's *Odyssey*—together with Eta Sigma Phi, the classics honor society. Molly Carrig, our Vice President of Operations, just happened to be President of ESP, and so we joined forces. We even got one of our star basketball player, Mitch Ballock, to inaugurate the event (drawing a crowd of listeners at the unholy hour of 8:00 am).



Visit to Ted Kooser's studio. Photo courtesy of Fr. Don Doll, S.J.

The Honors values of community and personal interaction challenged us when we were forced to switch to distance learning at spring break. We had to cancel some of our events, including Quiz Bowl and the Consider! talks, which three of our alumni (Erin Triplet, Sofia Paz, and Lindsay Durand) had worked so hard to prepare. We also had to cancel our participation in the AJCU Honors Conference, scheduled at Loyola Marymount, where we were looking forward to connecting with alumna Jordan Freitas (Kellerstrass), now an Assistant Professor of Computer Science at LMU.

However, as you know, we were able to move Honors Day online. Thanks to Dr. Eric Haas, it was a great success. Not only did students present an amazing array of research projects of high quality, but our “foot traffic” exceeded any of our expectations. We will move our year-end convocation online as well so that we can honor our graduates individually. However, if you have been following us on social media, you'll see that Ayushi Kaul, who is a social media genius, has been offering celebratory posts of our seniors at regular intervals.

I am deeply blessed to be able to work with our students under normal circumstances. I feel blessed many times over to be able to work with students who, in times of challenge, rise to the occasion and keep the Honors community strong.

The First Virtual Honors Day Program

Eric J Haas, Ph.D., Interim Associate Director, Honors Program

Due to the unusual circumstances under which we are living now, Honors Day 2020 was held “virtually” for the first time in program history. Rather than printing posters and pinning them to boards, students made electronic posters that were displayed in a special group on Blueline. Thirty-five posters were presented along with nine oral presentations. Special video welcomes were also provided by Dr. Bridget Keegan, Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences; Dr. Thomas Murray, Provost of Creighton University; and Father Daniel Hendrickson, President of Creighton University.

As always, a wide range of subjects were covered by the presentations this year. Viewers could learn about the effects of sports betting on state and local tax revenues in Iowa, the role of Amazon in shaping modern labor rights, or discover a Biblical foundation for food security. One of the hallmarks that sets the Creighton Honors Program apart is the interdisciplinary focus that is encouraged and was visible in many projects this year. The project about Amazon and labor rights mentioned previously was conducted by a Sustainable Energy Science major. An English major presented the results of a study of bacteria levels in filtered and unfiltered water in the Dominican Republic, a place where acquiring potable water is still problematic. Meanwhile, a student majoring in Biochemistry and Spanish is investigating fungal riboswitches, a type of self-regulating RNA, as a potential new antifungal or antibiotic. These projects showcase the breadth and depth of knowledge of our Honors Students.

One of the most important aspects of Honors Day is the opportunity for students to interact with each other to comment and ask questions about research being presented. Without that face-to-face interaction, Honors Day wouldn't have been the same. In an effort to encourage interactions, students who did not present were required to post either a comment or a question to discussion boards for three different research presentations.

If statistics are an indicator, then this experiment in online hosting was a success. More than three hundred people participated in Virtual Honors Day. This was a mix of students, faculty, and alumni. There were more than 12,000 total views for the pages associated with the projects and over 750 questions or comments about the projects.

A surprise benefit of going online was the opportunity for Honors Program alumni who couldn't travel to Omaha to participate in the virtual program. It was such a sufficiently useful benefit that Dr. Hause, the Honors Program Director, has decided to continue posting at least a few projects online in future years to increase interactions between the program and alumni.

Special thanks go to Honors Program Coordinator Jolene Buckingham. All the Blueline pages on which student research was presented were created by her directly or under her supervision. She also constructed the discussion pages for each research project.

We all look forward to returning to a more traditional Honors Day program next year.

A President Farewell

Mark May, Student Advisory Board President 2019-20

Hello All!

My name is Mark May, I've had the privilege of serving as the President of the Honors Program Student Advisory Board for the 2019-20 academic year. What a year it has been! We began and ended with upheaval. To start the year, Dr. Erin Averett, capable second-in-command among Honors faculty, departed for a yearlong sabbatical, and Dr. Eric Haas of the Department of Chemistry was called upon to serve in her absence. Our three-year veteran Post-Doctoral Fellow, Dr. Dana Robinson, also departed at the end of last year. In her place, the program hired two new fellows, Drs. Brian Martens and Tricia Ross. Both Swanson 9 Resident Advisors of the 2018-19 year were seniors, so this year saw two new leaders of the Honors Floor. With so many changes in leadership, this was an important year for the program. I doubt I have to remind you of the upheaval that ended the year. In the midst of all this change, this year in the Honors Program has been defined by trials and triumphs.

The Honors Program faced many trials this year but has risen to each challenge with aplomb. For example, to help our new Post-Doctoral Fellows feel welcomed into the Honors community, we continued to hold monthly events hosted by the fellows, patterned after the "Dig in with Dana" events that were a staple of Dr. Robinson's tenure. Two that I particularly enjoyed were our annual gingerbread house-making event near the end of the fall semester, and the coffee and karaoke party on Swanson 9 we held just before Spring Break. Our greatest challenge has been keeping the Honors community going during the era of social distancing. With Honors students spread across the country, we have been forced to move key programs online and simply cancel others. Quiz Bowl and the Consideration Initiative were both cancelled. Meanwhile, Dr. Haas and Jolene Buckingham combined forces with the IT offices to move Honors Day completely online. We also welcomed a new crop of current Creighton freshmen to the program as sophomore admits, and Dr. Hause and I welcomed them and briefed them on the Program's values using Zoom.

Despite the many trials we have faced this year, this has also been a year of unparalleled triumph for the Creighton Honors Program. Our national standing has increased considerably this year, thanks to two of our outstanding seniors. Olivia Fuson served as one of this year's four student leaders of the National Collegiate Honors Council. That same Council selected Molly Carrig (also the Vice President of Operations on this year's Honors Board) as its National Student of the Year. Another outstanding senior, Ayushi Kaul, helped bring our social media to previously unseen heights, helping the wider world stay up to date on the exploits of our program and helping to spotlight all the wonderful things our program did this year.

Through everything, the strength of the Honors Program remains its community. Though the members of that community changed quite a lot this year, and though it was tested by the pandemic, the Honors community remains resolute. I will forever appreciate the effect that spending four years amongst a driven, motivated group of learners had on my college career. It has been my privilege to help lead this program this year.

Spotlight – Ayushi Kaul

Regan Lavallee, Honors Program Class of 2022

Ayushi Kaul

Hometown: Fort Collins, Colorado

Major: Neuroscience

Minor: Medical Anthropology

Ayushi Kaul served as the Vice President of Public Relations for the 2019-2020 school year. As VP of Public Relations on the student Honors Board, it was Kaul's responsibility to run the social media accounts for the Honors Program. While incorporating traditions from the past, Kaul also sought to make changes that would enhance the presence of the Honors community on the program's Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts.

Kaul's goal was to reveal features of the Honors community not as well-known to individuals both within and outside the community. Kaul shared, "I wanted people to realize that while we are an academic community, we also have such a diverse group of students that are passionate about so many [extracurricular] things that are equally as important [as academic] achievements." This motivated Kaul to find creative ways to recognize the various accomplishments of students.

This recognition extended beyond the current student members of the Honors community. Kaul sought to feature current faculty who continue to make a difference in the program by sharing their passions with students. Additionally, Kaul wanted to highlight various alumni who continue to dedicate their time and service in their fields of interest. Kaul was able to reveal a common connection; the Honors community is full of individuals with lots of passion and talent. This led Kaul to create spotlights to feature various community members.

In order to showcase and commend the many talents found within the community, Kaul incorporated spotlights throughout the year on the program's Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter pages: "I tried to focus on students, faculty, and alumni that are doing unique things they are passionate about." Showcasing these passions allowed for community engagement from individuals both inside and outside the Honors Program.

Aside from celebrating the Honors community, Kaul also wanted to engage individuals on social media, "I included tips [for how to] destress during finals or dead week," Kaul shared, "[I also made] posts where people can praise their friends." These digital interactions allowed the community to support one another in a new way.

Kaul also incorporated posts that drew attention to events happening in the world, "I wanted to increase our engagement in the world outside of just Creighton," Kaul posted information about social justice issues and celebrated national holidays such as Black History Month.

The result was an increase in student engagement. Kaul noticed growth in the amount of comments and likes on posts from when she first began running the account. She also received requests from current students to post interactive graphics on the social media accounts.

As her term comes to close, Kaul reflects on her accomplishments as VP of Public Relations, "My favorite part about running the accounts was the ability to make voices heard that might sometimes get lost in the crowd!" Kaul elaborated, "We have a huge community from faculty to students to alumni, it has been great to creatively engage with all of them."

To see Kaul's latest recognition efforts, please visit the Honors Program's Instagram account @creightonhonors as we celebrate our graduating seniors.

Creighton Honors Program National Profile

Charlotte Higgins, Honors Program Class of 2021

While this year has had its ups and downs and we are living in uncertain times, the Creighton Honors Program has still had some great achievements that should be recognized, several on the national scale. One incredible student achievement came from senior Molly Carrig. Molly, who was the Vice President of Operations for Honors Board this year, was named Honors Student of the Year by the National Collegiate Honors Council. The NCHC is an institution made up of about 900 colleges and universities -- so this is a huge honor and achievement. Furthermore, honors senior Olivia Fuson held a position on the NCHC Board of Directors. Olivia was one of just four students who has a position in the national leadership of the council.

Several of our graduating students will be heading to prestigious universities and programs including Harvard Dental School, Loyola University Chicago, and University of Minnesota Law School. We've also had ten honors students inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa society this year. Phi Beta Kappa is the nation's oldest and most prestigious honor society!

While we continue to adjust and find new ways to live in these trying times, the Creighton Honors Program has continued to be the amazing program it is and has been proving its worth on the national scale!

Molly Carrig – Natl Honors Student of year award



Postdoctoral Fellow Greeting

Brian Martens, Honors Program Postdoctoral Fellow, Alumni

Hello, fellow alumni!

I returned to Creighton this year to teach for Honors. I offered the first two courses in the introductory sequence, HRS 100 and 101, and two SAMs: a course on the adoption of the Egyptian gods into the Greco-Roman pantheon, and a diachronic course on the history and culture of Athens. I will return in the autumn to teach HRS 100 again, and a SAM on portraiture and the self-image in ancient and European art that will be taught on site at the Joslyn Art Museum. While this is a temporary post for me, I am grateful to be back at Creighton, where I can give back to a program that played such a formative role in my education and search for a vocation.

The coronavirus pandemic required us to migrate our courses online in the middle of spring term. This was challenging, and there were certainly ups and downs, but all in all, Honors students are resilient! Our online discussion forums were filled with thoughtful and engaging discussions, and optional Zoom sessions allowed us to maintain a sense of community even when several time zones removed. We found the opportunity to incorporate digital technologies, including final projects recorded as podcasts that ranged from a Jake Tapper-style interview with the prosecution and defense of the Byzantine emperor Justinian, to an analysis of the monuments of Athens as reconstructed in "Assassin's Creed Odyssey," to a formal critique of hidden Christian icons at the Monastery of St. Catherine's in the Sinai, Egypt. On all accounts, Honors students continue to be creative and focused young minds!

Best wishes and good health to you this summer.



A new president's prospective

Lindsey Theut, Honors Program Student Advisory Board incoming president

Hello all!

My name is Lindsey Theut and I am the incoming Honors Program Student Advisory Board President for the 2020-2021 school year! I am so excited to take on this role to give back a little to a community that has given me so much. A little bit about me: I am a rising senior studying Neuroscience and Biology from Phoenix, Arizona, and I hope to pursue medical school following graduation.

The Honors Program has really shaped my experience at Creighton, and I am so grateful to have found such a sense of support from my peers and faculty. A quote that has resonated with me a lot during my time in the Program has been one by Lilla Watson: "If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." I have been able to meet so many individuals who have accompanied me as equals through my time at Creighton and built me up in my failures. Moreover, we have been able to work towards common goals, together.

I have continued to feel this support during these last couple of months as we have transitioned to online coursework. My classmates have organized zoom calls, and my professors have been a constant resource. I still feel so connected to Creighton and the Honors Program in all of this, even as I miss walking and talking on the mall in between classes. It has given me a little idea of what it will be like after graduation, and it makes me happy to know the relationships that have formed will extend beyond Omaha.

I am so excited for and proud of our graduating seniors. They have certainly left big shoes to fill, in the best possible way. Selfishly, of course, I wish they could stay in Omaha, so I could see them for just a few more months, but I really cannot wait to see what is in store for them in the future. I am certainly thrilled for the incoming freshman class of 2024 to be able to experience living on Swanson 9 with next year's Resident Advisors: Evan Williams and Jaylin Tuman. It is sure to be a brilliant class of committed individuals, and I am anxious to be able to learn from them.

In the coming year, I am most looking forward to the conversations I get to have with members of the Program each day. Whether it be a short conversation in passing or listening to someone's interpretation of a text in class, I always come away with fresh, new ideas that I had not considered. It is in these conversations that novel concepts are discussed and growth is fostered, which ultimately further enriches the Program of which I am so proud to be a part.

I hope you all are staying safe and healthy. I feel humbled to be addressing a community of people that has left such a lasting legacy. Thank you for helping to make the Program what it is today, and for continuing to be such exceptional examples of commitment to lifelong learning.

The Honor Roll – Alumni Notes

Simone Hussussian ('17) has completed her Juris Doctor from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, and her Master's in Bioethics from the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine.

Ashley Weed ('17) earned her M.A. in Classics last spring from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and will be staying to finish her Ph.D. in Classical Philology (tentatively with a minor in museum studies).

Drew Weiner ('17) earned his M.S. in Psychological Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign last spring and is also staying to finish his Ph.D. in Social Psychology with a minor in Quantitative Psychology.

Nicholaus Johnson ('16) graduated last May from the Yale School of Public Health with his Masters in Public Health. His [thesis](#) evaluated the association between shale drilling activity and sexually transmitted infections in the U.S. He is currently an associate researcher in the Environmental Health Sciences Department at the school, assessing the association between hydraulic fracturing activity and various health outcomes in Pennsylvania and Ohio, including childhood cancers and adverse birth outcomes.

Molly Krebs ('16) graduated from Villanova Charles Widger School of Law with her Juris Doctor and Master of Public Administration. At graduation, she received the Herman Mitchell Schwartz Award, which is awarded to a graduating law student who, in the opinion of the faculty, has contributed the most to the achievement of equality of opportunity and treatment for women in the Law School, in the legal profession, and society at large. Having passed the Illinois Bar exam, she has begun her dream job in her hometown of Chicago as an Assistant State's Attorney for Cook County. She recently received the Detta and Joseph Tate Loan Repayment Assistance Program from Villanova's Public Interest Program, which is awarded to a recent Villanova Law graduate who demonstrates an unwavering commitment to public interest law.

Dominic Dongilli ('15), a PhD student in American Studies and Gender, Women & Sexuality studies at the University of Iowa, received the [Graduate Research Appointment](#) for Iowa's [Humanities for the Public Good](#) grant.

On April 23rd, **Damian Daszynski ('14)** defended his Ph.D. thesis ("Ocular, Neural, and Cellular Biodistribution of Multifunctional Antioxidants") in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences in the College of Pharmacy at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. He is currently in the process of re-locating to the San Francisco Bay Area with the goal of joining a venture capital firm.

Having defended his dissertation at Texas A&M in May 2019, **Jared Ruchensky ('14)** is nearing completion of his predoctoral internship at Harvard Medical School/Massachusetts General Hospital. He is on track to the Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program this August.

Brianna Byllesby ('13) received her master's and Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Ohio, Toledo, having focused on PTSD. After graduation, Bri put her expertise to use in the VA hospital system, where during the pandemic she continues to offer support and treatment to her veteran patients. She has recently accepted a teaching and research position at Western Carolina University.

Shweta Goswami ('13) is working as a third year neurology resident physician at University of Kansas Medical Center. She has been in the front lines taking care of patients suffering from neurological diseases. In December of last year, she gave birth to future Honors student Liam Amar Doher!

Timothy Foster ('12), Assistant Professor of Spanish, has been appointed Associate Director of the Center for the Study of the American West at West Texas A&M University.

Alumni and COVID-19

Rising 4th year medical student **Emma Schaffer ('17)**, forced into virtual rotations at the University of Minnesota Medical School, joined a course called "Covid-19 Innovation Lab." She started a project called Gopher Grocery Assistance Program (GGAP), which recruits volunteers to create "how to" flyers teaching seniors how to order groceries online. They will also be providing over-the-phone help to seniors who are struggling with ordering groceries online. These flyers and this service will soon be available on a webpage so seniors anywhere in the state and country can access easy-to-use directions to use these services.

For the past several months, **Augusta Herman ('15)** has been deployed to the COVID-19 pandemic response in her role as a Communications Specialist with Public Health - Seattle & King County. The team she serves with ensures the development of timely, accurate, and effective messaging for the public that both answers their questions and promotes behavior change in the form of social distancing and staying home. They've developed key messages and scripts for their call center and email inbox, guidance documents for schools and small businesses, and posters for grocery stores and long-term care facilities. Despite the hectic few months, Augusta is very proud of the team she works with and the content they have produced throughout this response.

You can view some of the work Augusta's team has produced by visiting kingcounty.gov/covid, [Facebook](#), and the [Public Health Insider blog](#).



After earning his M.D. from the University of Nebraska Medical Center in 2017, **Ryan Hafner ('13)** was elected chief resident of the Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation residency for 2020-21 at Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia, PA. They are currently treating COVID patients.

In January, **Cameron Kieffer ('13)** began a position as an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science and Technology Policy Fellow (STPF) at the Department of State. Working as a Science Advisor within the Office of Knowledge Management of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement affairs, Cameron focuses on drug demand reduction and supply reduction, including combating the opioid crisis. Recently, he has been tracking the effects of COVID-19 on individuals with substance use disorders and its effects on illicit drug supply chains.

Having completed her M.D./Ph.D. at the University of Michigan, **Nadia Sebastian Kettinger ('09)** has stayed on at the University of Michigan, where she is a senior resident in Internal Medicine. Nadia writes:



As an internal medicine resident physician at the University of Michigan, my co-residents and I have been faced with many challenges as healthcare changes in this COVID era. We are one of the groups primarily caring for COVID-infected patients in the hospital wards and intensive care units here. I certainly have fears for my own safety and that of my family including my toddler son and older parents, similar fears I have heard from fellow physicians and other hospital staff. I am inspired though to see our nurses, techs, and environmental service staff who often take on more risk than me to serve all our patients during this time - their selflessness gives me hope that we will get through this time.

That toddler son, by the way, is Sebastian Lee Kettinger, born in July 2018.



The editor would like to thank all the students who contributed to the creation of this newsletter.

As always, our gratitude and respect belong first and foremost to our Program Director Dr. Jeffrey Hause, Assistant Director Dr. Erin Averett, Interim Assistant Director Dr. Eric J Haas, Post-Doctoral Fellows Brian Martens and Tricia Ross. Thank you for everything you do.