A Note from the Director

I am pleased to announce that we have launched a new Honors College newsletter. It will feature stories from students, a calendar of events, and other points of interest related to our activities. For my part, I'll offer a little message in each edition, and in this first installment I want to express gratitude for the privilege of working with Honors students. They impress me every year with their enthusiasm, good humor, intellectual curiosity, talent, and just plain hard work. These are the students who browse my bookshelves for material to read during their school breaks, who lead as presidents and officers of campus clubs and student government, who account for more than 700 hours of community service each year, and who manage to earn an average cumulative GPA of 3.7. So, I'll say again: it is a privilege to work on behalf of Honors College students. After you read their words in the pages that follow, I am sure you will agree that I am indeed lucky to be a part of the Honors College at Boise State.
Anna Hunt (`14)
Honors College freshmen and prospective students ask a very common question: what is the difference between a regular class and an Honors class? I usually jump in with the immediate answers. The class size is much smaller (they are all capped at 25 students), which makes the discussions better. Plus, you’ll be in classes with other Honors students who share the same dedication to their academics. But to really sell them on the Honors College, I am always drawn back to the first Honors class I ever took: Honors Introduction to Theater. My professor constantly engaged us, and, being involved in theater himself, he gave valuable insight that a textbook just can’t provide. My class had only sixteen students, all from different disciplines, which allowed our discussions to be more than just plot synopses about the plays we read and watched. The key point I stress about what set this class apart from a regular class were the surprising projects. Instead of basing grades on basic tests and quizzes, our professor evaluated us on participation in class and on projects that required us to research thoroughly, think creatively, and present publicly. One such project involved Oedipus the King. In addition to discussing the play, students came up with their own adaptations, designing the works (lighting, staging, costumes, etc.) and presenting their ideas to the class. I’m pretty sure I spent more time working on that project than I did studying for a test, and I loved every minute of it. A project like that allows students to think like an actual theater worker. Being able to see from other viewpoints is a valuable skill that will help in the future when working with others. No matter what discipline, developing critical thinking skills will always be beneficial. That Honors theater class is a great example of what Honors classes have to offer: engaged professors, creative curriculums, and other Honors students who share their ideas and fuel those deep discussions. So when I get asked by students if they should join the Honors College, I know just what to say.

Ellie Matthews (`15)
The class I remember most was during my first semester in college. I was enrolled in a Biology 191 Honors Lab with Dr. Jim Munger. I learned about our bodies, cells, genetic makeup, and how the environment affects us. A favorite class memory was learning about how species adapt to their surroundings. Dr. Munger laid out different types of carpet, threw three different types of beans down, and handed us a fork, knife, or spoon. He directed us to pick up as many beans as we could in thirty seconds. This creative approach helped me understand that many times a species cannot function in certain environments. Only those that learn to adapt can survive. After that class, I was so excited to learn more in labs and apply the practical lab experience to the concepts taught in the lecture. It helped me realize that I like to engage in classes where I can explore more in depth and critically think, listen, and discuss issues with my peers and instructors. I enjoy the connections and relationships that continue to grow within the Honors College and my class experiences.
During the spring semester of 2013, a group of Boise State students began an intellectual journey exploring the themes of life, death, and the quest for meaning in an Honors colloquium taught by Dr. Andrew Finstuen. These powerful topics have not been limited by time or space in human history, but we focused on the development of Western thought during the tumultuous times of the twentieth century. We read a diverse group of major twentieth-century thinkers in the Western world who addressed questions about finding significance in human life and death within the context of modernity. We studied the perspectives of notable thinkers including, but not limited to, Sigmund Freud, Walter Lippmann, Paul Tillich, Viktor Frankl, and Ernest Becker. Dr. Finstuen challenged us to read the arguments carefully and critically, which helped to build thought-provoking discussions during class. The readings, conversations, and our own written analyses of these powerful human topics kept daunting questions of meaning at the forefront of our mind. But it wasn’t until we left the context of our daily lives for three weeks at Oxford University that we could reflect and converse about the meaning of life with a new kind of intensity.

After the semester ended and summer break was in full swing, our group of ten students and Dr. Finstuen arrived in Oxford, England. The University of Oxford is the oldest university in the English-speaking world, and it has been a forum for learning since the twelfth century. We travelled to Oxford on a quest for meaning, just like so many worldly scholars have been doing for over 800 years. When studying the quest for meaning in the twentieth century, we found that the context of modernity poses new challenges. America emerged from modernity as the “New World” of experimentation and discovery. So in addition to removing us from the context of our daily lives, our travels to England at least partly removed us from the context of modernity with remnants of the pre-modern quest for meaning. Through our time studying in Oxford and the experiences we had on weekend excursions, we came to understand how pertinent these themes are to every human being throughout history, regardless of historical context. The degree of acceptance when confronted with mystery in the search for meaning varies over time because of different circumstances and new ways of thinking. But the presence of the quest itself has remained constant.
We visited ancient symbols of mystery and meaning, like Stonehenge and the Roman Baths, which showed us how timeless this quest has been for all of human history. We experienced the mystery of Stonehenge in a rare private tour among the stones at sunset. The next day we visited England’s only natural hot spring where people of the ancient world sought meaning that was beyond the reach of man’s conquest. There in Bath, the Celts and even the powerful Romans seemed to recognize the limited power of man while in the presence of such a mysterious product of nature.

On another side trip, this one to Salisbury, we visited the Salisbury Cathedral, where the architecture and tombs date from as far back as the thirteenth century. The cathedral houses Europe’s oldest working clock built in the late fourteenth century, and it also holds the best preserved of the four original Magna Carta documents (1215). Our final excursion brought us to London, and we visited the famous Westminster Abbey, which is a symbolic example of the marriage between church and state with a worldly claim to the divine right of absolute authority. The ties between the church and the English royalty forced all subjects of the state to abide by the vows of an arranged marriage “to love, cherish, and obey till death do us part.” But, after reading so many texts, it is my view that human-based authority is bound to be questioned because humans are finite creatures who lack absolute certainty.

All humans are flawed, and it is impossible to hide this for long. Human flaws are being revealed at an accelerated rate through the processes of modernity. Now there is doubt in all human claims to power and knowledge, which leaves many of us rootless and skeptical. The forces of the modern world are not necessarily negative, but they do create new challenges for having faith in anything without having properly scrutinized data and observations.

Throughout human history, questions about the meaning of life and death have been constant, but in modern times everything is approached with questions and doubt in a way that reduces the authority of any answers from the past. This is both good and bad. We don’t want to be locked into an unchanging vision in a changing world. But, it’s also difficult to live in a world where there are more questions than concrete answers.

During the spring of 2013, a group of students in the Honors College gathered on the Boise State campus and began on a quest for meaning, a quest that was accelerated and intensified through our enlightening summer experience in Oxford. Along the way we have learned how to ask the big questions, how to challenge the answers we are given, and how to shape our own perspectives through a process of critical inquiry.
Each spring, students from the Honors College vote for an Honors Professor of the Year. The award is a chance for students to recognize an outstanding professor who has had a positive impact on their education and who goes beyond the call of duty. In her four years teaching for the Honors College, Carrie Seymour has won the award two times. Carrie’s commitment to students—from conducting writing workshops in her office to participating in student-run events—makes her a favorite among students and an excellent recipient for this award.

Carrie Seymour began teaching for the English Department at Boise State University in 2001 as she worked on her graduate degree. After earning her degree, Carrie taught as an adjunct professor while balancing the roles of professor, mother, and fruit orchard farmer. In 2007, she applied for and was given the position of lecturer. Since then, Carrie has taught a wide variety of classes from Composition to Russian Literature in Translation, and as she explains: “The focus of the lecturer is on teaching rather than research. I enjoy the position immensely as it allows me a lot of freedom to teach different types of classes.”

In the spring of 2009, Carrie began teaching for the Honors College in a course titled British Literature Survey. It was in this course that Carrie discovered what would later become her “mission” in the Honors College. During the first semester, Carrie admits that she was hard on the writers of that class because of her high expectations of Honors students, but she later discovered that most of them had never taken a college-level composition class. The next semester, Carrie asked to teach an Honors composition course, and after that, she remembers: “I made it my mission to tell anyone who would listen that ALL Honors students needed a composition class regardless of their test scores.” The Director of the Honors College, Dr. Finstuen, shared this vision, and so in the fall of 2012, a mandatory Honors composition course was implemented. Carrie is delighted by this outcome and comments: “I definitely feel that it is in the best advantage of students, even the strongest writers, to be made aware of the expectations of writing practices at the academy.”

Although students might tend to begrudge a professor who advocates for a mandatory course to the honors curriculum, it is quite different with Carrie. Honors students continue to hold her in high esteem for her efforts, and Carrie reciprocates the positive regard for her students. As she explains: “Though I generally really enjoy all of the classes I teach at Boise State, I enjoy Honors students for their dedication to their studies, their relentless pursuit of excellence, and their complex attitudes toward academics.”

With this type of understanding and commitment, it is no wonder that Carrie has been chosen twice for the Honors Professor of the Year award. She is the type of professor whose impact reaches far beyond lectures and office hours, and this does not escape the notice of Honors students. We appreciate Carrie’s dedication to students, and we are pleased to recognize her with this award for the second time.
Each year the Boise State Honors College students elect a president to represent them, a president eager to influence the program and benefit students and faculty. For the second year in a row, the Honors students elected senior Jamie Lundergreen to this position. Her passion for influencing student organizations and different activities shines as she develops a community with her friends, peers, and teachers.

Jamie says that the Honors College feels like her “home-away-from-home.” Jamie increasingly appreciates the Honors experience and Boise State University as a whole.

As she puts it, “The Honors College has been a great platform for me for intellectual engagement and campus connection. This has given me a solid foundation that has led me to other opportunities, particularly study abroad opportunities. The Honors College has also given me unique options to explore the world of academics, and the relationships that I’ve formed with faculty and students that have supported me and challenged me throughout my college career. As I approach the end of my last year, I think the Honors College has influenced my life because it has helped me to become a more competent and engaged citizen as I head towards the ‘real world.’”

Due to the wonderful opportunities presented to her, Jamie has cemented lifelong relationships. She has learned from attending presentations and lectures by prominent intellectual figures. She has studied in Alicante, Spain and at Oxford University. She has interacted with people in the local community, from government figures to refugees.

Alongside her travel and community involvement, Jamie is pursuing a double major in Psychology and Spanish. The appeal of each major grew with her different experiences. Since she studied abroad in Spain, her passion for the Spanish language flourished and became an intense focus. Her love for Spanish paired well with her interest in people's interactions, relationships, and connections, which spurred the major in Psychology. She mentioned they were both great academic fits for her, and she hopes to earn a Fulbright Scholarship to teach English in Spain after graduation.

Besides her academic interests, Jamie loves to soak up Boise culture. From Saturday markets to Boise State football games, Jamie keeps engaged. When she isn’t trying to prepare for the next Honors College event, she spends her time with friends and family, as well as keeps active by taking bike rides and practicing yoga.

Jamie is excited to be involved so closely with the Honors College as she prepares to finish her college career. Her enthusiasm and passion helps create a wonderful attitude of unity in the Honors College as well as among her peers. Her positive outlook that she’s gained throughout her life serves as a great representation for her peers and breeds anticipation for all the events and opportunities in 2014.
Being a freshman is new and exciting at best, new and terrifying at worst. Either way, freshmen naturally benefit from advice given by more seasoned students. For that reason, in 2010, the Honors College implemented the Peer Mentor Program to connect incoming Honors freshmen to sophomores, juniors, and seniors. I was a freshman that first year, and I’ve been a peer mentor each year since. In that time, I have personally seen the Peer Mentor Program grow and evolve, incorporating more components and becoming a program recognized on a national scale.

In its earliest stage, the program called for peer mentors to meet with ten freshmen students about once a month to see how they were doing. Yet this format didn’t really facilitate the important connections between mentors and freshmen and consequently limited the student involvement. Chris Hyer, the Honors College Activities Coordinator who oversees the program, recognized that a more structured setting could better build the student-mentor relationships.

Since then, Chris has asked pairs of peer mentors to facilitate a seminar class required for all freshmen Honors students. This ten-week class covers various topics meant to prepare Honors freshmen for college courses, especially those that focus on discussions. These topics range from discussing the campus read as a class to managing time and setting goals to communicating effectively. Each year, the material covered in the seminar classes is tweaked to best engage and educate the freshmen.

Another new addition to the program’s structure is a mandatory three-day retreat. Right before the fall semester starts, all incoming Honors freshmen attend a retreat in McCall, Idaho. This is the first opportunity the freshmen have to meet the Honors students they will be encountering in the classrooms and in the dorm. The retreat is a great opportunity not only to meet other Honors students, but to also learn more about the Honors College at Boise State and what is expected of Honors students. On the retreat, peer mentors lead their group of students through breakout sessions, team-building exercises, and a skit to be presented on the last day to recap what the students have learned. In between sessions, students are encouraged to take advantage of the extracurricular activities available. During their free time, students enjoy playing volleyball and basketball as well as going swimming in Payette Lake. Honors students are typically known for their academic achievements, but they also have an opportunity to share their lesser-known talents. The talent show features such acts as musical performances or, less commonly, juggling, ventriloquism, and poi spinning.

Although the Peer Mentor Program is fairly new, it has already been recognized at the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference in both Kansas City and Boston. The Peer Mentor Program is a great leadership and teaching opportunity for the mentors on top of providing a more personal resource for the freshmen. After the freshmen go through the seminar class, they too are given the opportunity to apply to be a peer mentor the following year.
Upcoming Honors Events

Honors at Night: March 17, 7:00 p.m., Driscoll Lounge
This spring’s Honors at Night features Dennis Fitzpatrick, founder, CEO, and chairman of D.B. Fitzpatrick, a Boise investment firm. Dr. Fitzpatrick received a Doctorate in Finance from the University of Colorado and an M.B.A in Finance from the University of Santa Clara. An extensive Q&A session will follow Dr. Fitzpatrick’s short presentation.

Distinguished Lecture Series: April 8, 7:00 p.m., Jordan Ballroom
The Honors College will welcome Dr. Richard Heinzl for the spring Distinguished Lecture Series. Dr. Heinzl is the founder of the first North American chapter of Doctors without Borders, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization that has inspired a movement among medical professionals to help the world’s most vulnerable populations.

Last Lectures: April 29, 3:00-5:00 p.m.; April 30, 9:00-11:00 a.m.; April 30, 4:00-6:00 p.m.; May 1, 12:00-2:00 p.m.
In anticipation of the May 17 commencement, graduating Honors College seniors will present lectures to fellow students, faculty, friends, and family members, highlighting what they most valued about their time at Boise State. All the lectures will be presented in the Driscoll Lounge.

For more information on Honors College events, visit www.honors.boisestate.edu.

Learn More About Honors

Whether you are a student, prospective student, alumnus, or community member, we encourage you to visit the Honors College. We are happy to give you a tour of Driscoll Hall, arrange for you to sit in on an Honors class, and answer any questions you might have about the Honors College experience. Please feel free to contact Peggy Lindley, Management Assistant, at 208-426-1122 or honorscollege@boisestate.edu.

The Honors Review

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