Greetings from the Honors College. Some of you may have noticed that this past summer, President Kustra and Provost Schimpf changed my title from “director” to “dean.” The new title brings the Honors College in line with the other academic colleges. In addition, we’ve added a degree program to Honors. We now house the Interdisciplinary Studies major (formerly from the College of Arts & Sciences).

I am thankful for the acknowledgement and our new program but they both reflect not on me so much as they do upon the dedicated Honors staff: Annal, Chris, Peggy, Emily, and Kate. And then there are the students. Much of my job consists in getting out of the way of their tremendous energy for life and learning. These excellent staff and students have pushed the Honors College to new heights.

This fall I have had the pleasure of getting out of the way of more than 150 new students—our largest class ever. They come from all over the state of Idaho, the United States, and the world.

As this issue demonstrates, these new students join a community of learners bonded by a shared passion for inquiry about the world and their place in it.
The Honors College and its programs have come to be a major part of my undergrad identity during my time at Boise State. Often engineering majors like myself get focused solely on our technical degrees. In that environment, Honors seems outside the scope of our interests. I’ve heard people ask: “Why should I have to do this extra stuff? I have enough on my plate as it is!” I can empathize with this viewpoint, but at the same time it’s a shame they’re missing out on so many great things. My Honors involvement has opened the way to an abundance of new opportunities, mindsets and social interactions I wouldn’t otherwise have had.

The opportunities afforded by the Honors program are many in number and diverse in character, ranging from face-to-face lectures with world-renowned thinkers, to trips to Greece and England, to classes channeling volcanoes and Reinhold Niebuhr. In addition to those prospects, the Honors College offers a level of staff interaction that students don’t commonly encounter until years into their respective courses. If you so desire, you can join Dr. Finstuen for his weekly free time, analyze ancient authors with Annal, or go whitewater rafting with Chris. My interactions with all three have been a joy, and are oftentimes a breath of fresh air in my engineering-filled days. They’ve managed to instill a mindset in me that I have found to be uncommon in my chosen field of study.

From my experience, students involved in technical majors tend to take issue with taking courses that aren’t necessary to their degree track, which is probably why they seem to form the majority of the aforementioned Honors expats. Being of a similar practical mindset for the bulk of my freshman year, my views didn’t really begin to shift until I actually tried to get involved. Beginning with Summer Reading under Annal’s instruction, I found that my extra circular Honors involvement (now including HSA and peer mentoring) struck a nice chord with what I was doing over in the engineering department. The constant stream of technical knowledge, people, and events relating to engineering balanced nicely with the social events, humanities, and people in Honors. Going between the two worlds wasn’t an exercise in tedium like I thought it’d be, but was and continues to be a refreshing experience that prevents me from growing complacent in either program.

To conclude this reflection on the lovely things Honors involvement has brought me to experience, feel, think, and such, I’d like to put a special emphasis on the best aspect of Honors involvement that never fails to put a smile on my face: the people! It’s difficult for me to convey in words the amount of satisfaction I take out of my interactions with the Honors community. So if you’re considering getting more involved with Honors, do it. You may find that it’s the people who float your boat, or the new life outlooks, or the incredible opportunities; in any case, you’re sure to have a wonderful experience.
Having a course that walks the line between academia and reality is invaluable for the understanding it lends about both worlds. The Colloquium Medicine and Magic in the Ancient Mediterranean was particularly adept in balancing these worlds, seamlessly melding not only the science of medicine with its theory but also transcending time and linking medicinal expertise from the ancient past with the practices of the present.

This spring, ten students flew to Greece for two weeks to apply the knowledge they gained through ten weeks of intensive study of primary and secondary texts revolving around health. There they were able to walk in the footsteps of the ancients in places like Ephesus, Delphi, Eleusis, and Epidaurus. They analyzed firsthand the artifacts, archaeological sites, and customs about which they had studied and obtained a better understanding of how the Ancient Mediterranean world influenced our modern medical approach to the human body.

The desire to achieve and maintain good health is not a new concern for humanity; it has persisted since ancient times. Visiting Greece allowed students to discern traces of ancient beliefs and practices in the ways we frame and approach medicinal practice today. During their visit to the archaeological site of Ephesus, students were able to tour a remarkably well-preserved and excavated city that was once an important center for trade and the location of one of the seven wonders of the world, the Temple of Artemis. Less glamorous but of more interest to students of medicine was the opportunity to observe how the ancients dealt with issues of sanitation and hygiene in what was at that time a massive city of people living in close proximity.

In addition to examining ancient plumbing, students traveled to Delphi and Epidaurus to gain insight into the role of the divine in ancient healing methods. Citizens of the Ancient Mediterranean frequently sought divine intervention with their various ailments, particularly from the god Asclepius, patron god of health, medicine, and physicians.

It is one thing to read the works of ancient physicians and scholars like Galen and Herodotus and quite another to experience the ancient polytheistic culture that influenced their beliefs. The gods live on in Greece as in no other country and the opportunity these students had to immerse themselves in the culture allowed them to gain a greater understanding of the classroom material and the pertinence of questioning just where our approach to medicine and magic stem from and what we can learn from history.
Last fall, I won the 2014 Barry Goldwater National Scholarship, which recognizes students in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. One of several major awards like the Rhodes, Truman, and Fulbright, it draws in applicants from around the United States.

Winning was the last thing I expected to happen when I applied for the Goldwater, but I did win. I want to highlight not the fact that I won, but rather the knowledge I gained through the process. Put simply, it helped prepare me for professional life as a scientist. The Goldwater application required me to write a technical essay about the research that I am conducting at Boise State concerning the creation of cutting-edge diagnostic tools for diseases such as cancer. Having written very little in the technical style required of grant-writing, I found this part of the application to be incredibly difficult, and I relied on the direction of many faculty in the Chemistry department. Their input was important for many different reasons. It helped me learn how to approach writing scientifically, conveying my message in a concise and understandable manner for other scientists who may have no experience in the field that I research in. This is a technique I will be utilizing all throughout my professional career, and having a jump-start on writing scientifically will give me an edge when applying to graduate school or finding a first job.

Aside from the practice with writing within my discipline, the Goldwater application also alerted me to holes in my resume. When applying for any competitive national scholarship, the application asks for everything, and when I say everything, I mean it. Apart from general information, I supplied information about all of the classes I would take, and any extra classes I was planning to take outside of my major. I had to fill out what my hopes and dreams were for my career in two sentences. They wanted to know what I wanted my future education to be, where I wanted to work, and so much more all in the space of a paragraph. I had to say what organizations I was a part of and how much of a leader I was in each one. When I finished and my application was completely filled out, I saw where it needed work. I saw where I needed to volunteer more, where I needed to think about taking extra classes, and that I also needed to have a concrete plan for my career as a scientist. Thankfully, I still have two years of college to fill these holes before I start applying to graduate school, and I never would have known what I needed to do if I hadn’t applied for the Goldwater.

As a student studying in Idaho, at a non-ivy league university, the last thing I anticipated was being named a Goldwater Scholar. It has since given me a confidence in my work and my accomplishments at Boise State that I didn’t have before, but there are many different reasons why the application process for a national scholarship is beneficial. It helps build relationships with faculty, helps improve writing skills, alerts you to weak parts of your resume, and becomes a condensed resource for every important accomplishments to date. Not to mention the obvious reason for applying: you could be named a winner.
Three years ago, my freshman self heard Dr. Finstuen, the head of the Honors College, advertise the community as a place that builds “life-long learners.” I caught the phrase both as a quality I wanted and as a sales-pitch of questionable validity. Could a program that is centered on a few additional classes and some extra-curricular activities really help develop my character in such a way? And were my fellow students and I really interested in achieving this goal together?

Those doubts have faded as I have found students and classes to extend beyond the grade and the semester. This past summer, about to start my senior year, I found myself sitting in a shaded corner of Julia Davis Park with three other students and Dr. Finstuen, discussing Kafka, Steinbeck, Ecclesiastes, Camus, or whatever else we decided to explore over the last week. Our meetings were not motivated by college credit or a grade. This was not a class or some other compulsory commitment. We met because we found a patch of free time and questions we all ask and cannot answer. They were questions about the meaning of life, our purpose, our nature, our truths and our lies. We asked what it means to be human today and what it has always meant.

This group formed in reaction to Dr. Finstuen’s course, “Life, Death, and Meaning in the 20th Century,” taught for the second time in the Spring of 2014. Usually, several of us would linger for a while after class ended to continue our animated discussions for just a few more minutes. By the end of the sixteen weeks, a lot of ground was yet to be covered, and we were unwilling to let it go uncharted. Students saw summer as an opportunity to discuss things that they wanted to talk about outside of the curriculum but still related to the topic. We expressed this desire to our professor, and thus our summer reading group was formed.

With the break from a formal class setting, the environment for discussion relaxed, as did the attendance policy. At one meeting there were seven of us, another time we were just three. But this informality also permitted us to talk and think freely. The format was simple. Each week one member suggested a text, everyone read it, and we came together to give voice to our reactions. Criticisms would be expressed, points of agreement were shared, modifications to rash claims were made. We listened, discussed, and learned without the shackles of assignments and the pressure of grades, driven by a desire to grow as people and as students.

It turns out even my experienced, straight-A high school student self had things to learn. The meetings we had this summer provided a valuable lesson for me by teaching the power of an exceptional class and the impact a community of scholars can have on its members. They reminded me why people have come together on college campuses for centuries. The reasons vary, of course, but in moments like this, we are here because we want to seek answers; we want to learn, with or without a standardized accreditation. It appears we are here because we are becoming life-long learners.
In the spring of 2011, two Honors students, seeking to expand intellectual conversation on campus, founded the Friday Forum. The point of the Forum was decidedly straightforward—provide a weekly opportunity for students to engage in wide-ranging conversations on intellectual and cultural questions and issues.

The inaugural meeting, held in the Student Union Building on a cold Friday in January, was, appropriately enough, on the topic of education. Fifteen or twenty curious students gathered in a circle, some listening intently, others avidly offering their opinions, and participated in a discussion on the theme of education that twisted and meandered through the rich contours of policy and philosophy. The diffuse and informal discussion proved to be a model for future Forums.

Nearly four years later, the Friday Forum continues to be a staple of many students’ Friday afternoons. As with the first meeting in 2011, the Forum attracts a diverse group of students, representing a number of departments across campus, brought together by an insatiable intellectual curiosity. Although the Forum is sponsored by the Honors College, it is open to all students, non-students, and faculty—everyone is welcome!

A compelling characteristic of the Friday Forum is that it is entirely student-led. The Friday Forum Planning Committee, on which sit four students, organizes and promotes each week’s event, and welcomes feedback from Forum attendees. In fact, students with an interest in or knowledge of a particular subject are highly encouraged to introduce a topic themselves.

Throughout its nearly four year history, the Friday Forum has tackled numerous pressing and vexing questions. During the Arab Spring in early 2011, for example, when the Middle-East was ablaze in uprisings and protests, a student with a knowledge of the region introduced the topic by providing historical context and detailed information on the turmoil taking place in various countries. What followed was a lively discussion on the merits of U.S. intervention, the possibilities for meaningful reform, and the upsides and downsides of revolution. In addition to student led discussions, the Friday Forum sometimes plays host to professors and distinguished members of the Treasure Valley community, such as university President Bob Kustra and Mayor Bieter.

Ultimately, the Friday Forum is just that—a forum for students which takes place on Friday afternoons, where lively conversations on various issues are had. Mark Twain once famously wrote that, “I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.” We like to believe that, far from interfering with schooling, the education obtained through the Friday Forum supports and enhances the learning that takes place in traditional classrooms. Students get practice articulating their thoughts in a public setting, and those who lead forums get valuable experience condensing multifaceted topics into brief, informative introductions. Most importantly, everyone in attendance, be it the eager interlocutor or the pensive listener, partakes in the edifying experience of hearing new perspectives on, to borrow a phrase from Douglas Adams’s The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, “life, the universe, and everything.”
Last spring, one year after I graduated from Boise State, I made a donation to the Honors College. Why did I give so soon after graduation? A year after my graduation, I returned to Boise State to watch the graduating class of 2014 receive their diplomas. While watching graduates accept their degree, I reflected on my time as a Bronco. Memories of friends, professors, classes and extracurricular activities flooded back. As the nostalgia began to slow and the final graduates received their new credentials, I realized there was one common theme linking almost all of my Boise State memories - the community I found in the Honors College.

Finding this community was especially important to me. In 2010, I transferred to Boise State from a small, private school in Maryland. I instantly felt lost among a sea of undergraduates. I spent my first year trying to find my grounding and niche. During this time, I took my first Honors colloquium course and applied to be an Honors College Peer Mentor. Suddenly, I found myself immersed in a community of likeminded individuals who welcomed and challenged me.

The Honors College became my home at Boise State and the foundation for my success. As an undergraduate, I was given numerous opportunities that I could not have received without the Honors College’s generosity. The financial support of donors and moral support of the Honors College enabled me to present at conferences in Boston and Chicago, cut down my hours at work, allowing greater focus on academics, and gave me the opportunity to study at Oxford University. My Honors College scholarship allowed me to engage with the Boise State community and enabled me to exchange ideas on a national and international scale.

The importance of the Honors College’s support has grown more salient as I have moved out of Boise and into the work force. As a research and sales coordinator for a Sports Marketing firm that handles the Utah Jazz and many other sports and entertainment properties in Utah, I am continuously reminded of how the Honors College had on their academic pursuits, development of character and creation of community and they too will feel compelled to support the Honors College.
Featured Honors Events

Last Lectures: May 2015
In anticipation of the May 9 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. Most lectures will be presented in the Driscoll Lounge; alternate locations will be announced later in the semester.

Distinguished Lecture Series: April 8, 7:00 p.m., Morrison Center
The Honors College will welcome Margaret Atwood for the spring Distinguished Lecture Series. Atwood is the author of more than forty volumes of poetry, children’s literature, fiction, and non-fiction, but is best known for her novels. She is also a current Vice-President of PEN International.

Honors Week: April 2015
Come celebrate all things Honors! The Honors College and HSA will be hosting a week of social, educational, and service opportunities ranging from guest lectures and campus beautification to many food-centric gatherings.

For more information on Honors 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 Kate Huebschmann, Administrative Assistant, at 208-426-1122 or honorscollege@boisestate.edu.