

THE HONORS BEACON

Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato



LEADERSHIP

RESEARCH

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Honors Students Learn Valuable Lessons in Prison

by Grace Webb

When you think of high-performance university honors students, state prison isn't the first thing that comes to mind. Yet that is exactly where thirteen Minnesota State Mankato Honors Learning Community students found themselves in October 2010. The students, and professor Vicki Hunter, visited the Shakopee Women's Correctional Facility as part of their Honors sociology class.

Hunter, who has taken several classes to the prison and also teaches a class there, said she takes students to the facility to show them that convicts aren't the stereotypes people usually envision.

"When learning about crime and societal responses to crime, I think it's important for students to see firsthand how a prison and everyday life in prison is structured," Hunter said. "I think students also see people in prisons as being very different from themselves. Often they envision prisoners as dangerous, scary people. The opportunity to meet with and talk to women in prison helps students to recognize that most incarcerated people, like non-incarcerated people, love their families, are loved by their families, want to do good things with their lives, and want to feel valued by those around them."

...continued on page 6



December 2, 2011--Issue 1--University Honors Program



Director's Note--Dr. Christopher Corley

Three years ago, nine first-year students decided to join an honors learning community focused on developing intercultural communication skills. When they nominated Professor Rachel Droogsma (Communication Studies) for a university award just six weeks into that semester, I knew we had something special developing into what would become the redesigned Honors Program. With the guidance of Professors Tesdell, Engen, and Cole, the students developed into a true community of scholars intent on acquiring high-level leadership, research, and global citizenship skills.

Since then, our first-year students have become juniors, and nearly sixty of you have followed their lead. Although relatively small in number, you've all made a huge impact on the university in a very short time. You've delivered presentations to the Foundation Board, helped kick off the new campus campaign, volunteered as student ambassadors, provided special tours for alumni, welcomed national leaders to campus, organized local food drives for the needy, and accepted leadership positions in campus and community organizations. Moreover, you've taken your show on the road, having proudly represented Minnesota State Mankato through your presentations at regional and national conferences.

In your approach to your studies and in the ways you carry yourselves outside of the classroom, you symbolize what it means to strive for an honors education in the twenty-first century. In your first year, you jumped at the chance to speak with state leaders at the Capitol about the challenges of immigration in Minnesota. Many of you were deeply moved by your trip to the Shakopee Correctional Facility the following semester. This year, you visited the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, searching for evocations of authority in artifacts from the past. You are making a huge difference in the lives of our youth. Whether it is in preparing short interactive plays that allow teenage audiences to develop conversations about oppression, or in applying your research skills to dive into the problem of preparing children for learning by the time they reach kindergarten, you are using your unique skills and talents to the benefit of all Minnesotans.

I'm excited that this inaugural newsletter will encapsulate your energies and allow many more people to learn about how a group of students, staff and faculty with similar values and intellectual interests shape and mold the Honors Program at Minnesota State Mankato. Your enthusiasm has been infectious, and your dedication to learning has enriched all of our lives.

Editor's Note--Grace Webb

Hello, Honors readers! My name is Grace Webb and I'm the editor-in-chief of our Honors newsletter. This is our first-ever Honors newsletter, and we're very excited about it! I've had the privilege of working with a great newsletter crew, and, together, I feel we've created something that reflects Minnesota State University, Mankato's Honors Program and its commitment to leadership, research and global citizenship. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed creating it.

The Honors Beacon team

Editor-in-Chief

Grace Webb

Layout

Julian Hocker

Writers

Lisa Miller

Jose Barriga

Kurtis Malecha

Photo editor

Kurtis Malecha

Copyeditors

Kurtis Malecha

Anastasia

Humphers-Ginther

Table of Contents

Director's note...	2
Editor's note...	2
NCHC...	3
Germany trip...	4-5
Prison visit...	6-7
Student bios...	8
Class reflection...	9
"A semester in pictures"...	10-11
Crossword...	12
Honorable mentions....	12

Presenting at the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference

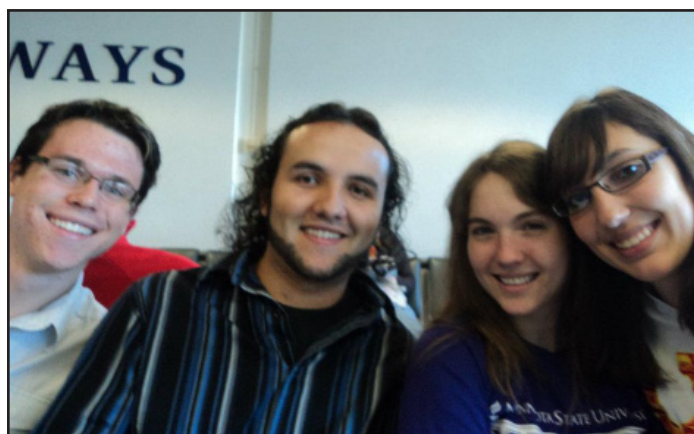
by Lisa Miller

The National Collegiate Honors Conference, held in Phoenix, Arizona on Oct. 19-22, was a wonderful opportunity for students from all over the country to come together to learn about how to improve the nation's Honors programs. I was excited to hear from other established Honors programs and to present our own take on reflective learning so that others could learn from our program.

Although we were nervous to present our reflective learning model, we were pleasantly surprised by how well-received our presentation was. I loved being able to share with people how our eFolios help us develop our core competencies and how they can prepare us for jobs

after graduation. It felt great to receive compliments from both faculty and students about how beneficial our eFolios are and how other programs were inspired to use our model for their own programs.

The best part of the conference was being able to attend a variety of sessions that have opened my eyes to new programs and teaching techniques that can improve the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I learned about community service programs, how to enhance in-class discussion, how to combat plagiarism and other behaviors that go against university policy, and a variety of other sessions. One of the most interesting sessions was a fishbowl discussion where students from a handful of universities, including one of our own students, discussed the benefits and disadvantages of their programs. I loved hearing about how the things we enjoy about our program are the same things that other programs enjoy. It was also interesting to hear the different challenges that students face in their more established programs. This has helped me brainstorm ways for our program to grow so that we will not face the same issues that the other programs have already faced.



We're waiting to board our flight to Phoenix!



Lisa Miller, Grace Webb, Kurtis Malecha and Dr. Christopher Corley

Overall, I had a wonderful time in Arizona. Not only did we learn a lot about Honors programs, but I was also able to explore the Phoenix region and compare our Minnesota culture to that of the culture in the Southwest region of the United States. The trip was a great opportunity for me to bond with some of our fellow Honors students and to bring back many ideas that can benefit our own program. I hope that many more of our students have the opportunity to attend the NCHC Conference. In my opinion, it is one of the best experiences an Honors student can have while studying here.

A Summer in Germany

by Kurtis Malecha



I was fortunate to be awarded a fellowship at Johannes Gutenberg Universität, Mainz in Germany for the Summer of 2011. This internship is one of 305 in Germany offered to undergraduates from Canada, the UK, and the United States by the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service). I worked with Nils Stöbener, a German doctoral student, on a project involving the speciation of Neptunium – 237 (Np) using Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS) coupled on-line to Capillary Electrophoresis (CE) for 8 weeks. Basically, we were maximizing the detection of Np to

extremely diluted concentrations – say one particle of Np per million or billion particles of water. Why would this be important? Neptunium is a nuclear waste product that we expect to have a half-life of 2 million years. If nuclear waste repository products were to leak into an aquifer, they would have these ultra-low concentrations. Thus, development of these methods can ultimately prove worthwhile for water testing of aquifers near nuclear waste repositories.

While there, I worked at the Institute for Nuclear Chemistry at the University, where the work was much more laid back than in the

United States. However, the time actually spent in lab was much more involved than work at home. Frequently, we worked for two hours, and then took a break for lunch or coffee.

One major cultural difference I observed was the issue of mistakes in the laboratory (which will always happen). Here the entire group working in the lab helped amend the problem, whereas at home, one is by him/herself. Also, we worked as a team on almost everything there, even though each person is working for his/her own PhD. Just to get the ICP-MS ready without the CE part takes at least

two people, and three is even better.

The friendships that I made in and out of the lab will not be forgotten. As I neared the end of my research, I began to feel like I had much more of a grasp on the German culture. Even though the German culture and Midwestern American cultures are similar, things like personal space values were easily detectable after only a few weeks.

I almost always felt like an equal in the lab. Perhaps the most interesting part of the research was the cultural debates around nuclear energy. I applied for this project in January, and then the Japanese nuclear disaster happened. Additionally, while I was in Germany, the country decided to shut off all nuclear energy by 2022. My project dealt with nuclear waste, so the entire project felt very kairoitic.

My days in Germany were always filled with unexpected events - both good and bad. Perhaps one major learning experience for me was that in the “real world” research, machines and experiments don’t always cooperate. On a typi-



Malecha at a tower in the city forest of Mainz, Germany



While on his internship, Malecha was also able to visit Prague.

cal day, I would awake at 7 a.m. and catch the bus to my institute, where we would start with coffee and socializing. This socializing frequently turned into debates - which can be very stereotypical for Germans. However, these debates were always friendly and never hostile. Then Nils and I would go down to the laboratory and begin setting up the ICP-MS and CE. The CE always took a half hour to clean itself, so we would be busy preparing the lab samples for the day. Then we would run a couple measurements and clean between, so that took us up to lunch hour - with the keyword “hour.” We made sure to allow ample time for breaks to ensure a clear head at all times while working in the lab. Afternoons would include more sample measurements and sometimes another coffee break. Since the person that oversaw a possible nuclear hazard left at 5:00 p.m., our work in the lab never went past this time.

But my life wasn’t just lab-

oratory work - I had the chance to visit some amazing museums (the Klimahaus and Auswanderhaus in Bremerhafen), befriend Germans, improve my German to a much more fluent level, and learn how research is truly done in another culture and country. It is something that has changed the way I look at the world, and I am really considering applying for a RISE project next year or doing Master’s/PhD. work in Germany.

Looking forward:

- The Minnesota Collegiate Honors Symposium is in March. Students can attend and/or present personal works and research to various other schools and scholars.
- The end of semester luncheon is in April. Students can invite their favorite teachers to the luncheon for special awards and recognitions.



Honors Students Learn Valuable Lessons in Prison

continued from page 1

Seeing Inside the Prison

The students first received a tour of the prison from Sandy Hand, the prison transition coordinator. She led them through the entire facility, showing areas such as the library, worship centers, offenders' rooms, the gym, and places where offenders worked. While students were able to see first-hand how offenders lived, they remained separated from the offenders overall, though some did exchange brief smiles or hellos.

Along the tour, Hand showed students both classrooms and workrooms. At Shakopee Prison, women have the opportunity to pursue higher education, such as their GEDs, or, if they would rather not work towards a degree, they are required to work. In fact, all offenders work, though offenders with GEDs receive higher wages, to encourage higher learning.

"[We] stress education because the more educated [offenders] are when they get out the less likely they'll be re-institutionalized," Hand said.

Offenders who do pursue their GEDs are also paid; it is considered their job. They work 15 hours going to class every week. In addition, women may work toward a 14-credit degree from Hennepin Technical College, which takes four to six months, or go to the prison's licensed beauty school. For these higher education degrees, however, the offenders must pay for their own tuition, which can be very difficult. Still, it is definitely worth it, said Andee Flohr, who is in charge of the entire Technical College program.

"Hopefully, it will assist women in getting their foot in the door with a potential employer," Flohr said.

Developing a New Perspective

But on Friday, it was Honors students' chance to learn. After touring the facility, they sat down with three offenders who were willing to tell their stories and answer students' questions. Students were able to see a glimpse into the lives of real women, not just cardboard cutouts from MTV.

"I feel that everyone there connected with the women that we talked to at the end of the tour," said Ashley Carlson, one of the students. "It was a memorable experience for everyone. Later that night, and the next day when I was at work, I could not stop thinking of them and their stories."

The three women who spoke with the students were hardly older than the students themselves. They had been charged with crimes such as murder and prostitution, but, as they shared their stories, it became clear that they were typical young women with hopes, fears and dreams.

"You have this stereotypical view of what prison is, what a criminal is, what a murderer is, and then you just get blown away," one of the offenders told the students. "It's not like that at all."

The women talked about what their lives were like before prison, focusing more on their backgrounds than their crimes. It was clear they didn't let their mistakes define them. One shared how she struggled with self-esteem

and had turned to men and drugs to fill the ache inside her. Another spoke of how she only saw her father when he came to throw money around, which was his version of saying he loved her. The third talked about how she lashed out as a girl to get attention and only learned humility in prison when she had to admit it was her fault she was in there.

“As part of the Social Problems class, we’ve read about and discussed the importance of examining popular conceptions of crime and criminals,” Hunter explained. “We’ve also been learning about the importance of considering the connections between social conditions, such as poverty or family disorder, and crime. I think the conversations that students had with the women at the prison helped them to understand how these experiences can contribute in complex ways to a person’s likelihood of being criminally involved.”

But though the women came from starkly different backgrounds, one thing united them: their love for their family. Two of the women had children, and the other had younger siblings whom she had raised mostly by herself.

“The most difficult part of being here is being away from my daughter,” one of the women said, tearing up. “I had to see her through glass [in the visiting room].”

“I have conformed my mom to prison,” another offender said, speaking about how her mother has visited so often, she knows all the rules and procedures. “She doesn’t deserve to know prison rules.” She also spoke of her son, saying how he was a beautiful gift she’d taken for granted. “There’s nothing I can do to give back the sixteen years I took from him,” she said.

Through all the fear and hardship, though, the women have not given up hope for a better life ahead. While some of them have many more years to serve, others hope to be released soon. They each share a commitment to doing better things with their lives, but they also share some worry about the future.

“[I’m nervous about] being a felon trying to look for a job—trying to adjust to everything [with] people judging you,” one woman said. “[But] I’ve been through so much that has prepared me for my release. I’m excited for that next challenge. I know if I can make it through this, I can make it through out there.”

“The unknown is the scariest thing for me,” another woman agreed. “Where will I go? What will I do? I paid my debt to society—I want it to be done. I want to go home.”

“I think it’s going to be a struggle, but I think we can do it,” one offender said then added more confidently, “I know we can do it! Because I’m not coming back.”

Listening to the women pour out such heart-felt messages had a clear effect on the Honors students. In fact, the whole trip had an effect on the students, which was just what Hunter and Honors Program Director Christopher Corley wanted.



The Minnesota Correctional Facility at Shakopee houses more than 650 female prisoners.

Gaining Leadership and Global Citizenship Skills

“The Social Problems course is designed to develop the students’ leadership and global citizenship skills,” Corley said. “The idea is that great leaders need to have an awareness of challenges our society faces, both for individuals and for society at large. The trip exemplifies what Honors is all about—developing leadership and global citizenship skills with an interesting class where students are exposed first-hand to experiential education linked to classroom theory and the professor’s research.”

continued on page 11...

A semester

The Honors haunted library exhibit in the CSU Haunted House was a scream!



Mmm--toasting s'mores at the first Honors Social of the year!



Honors professors, staff and Dr. Corley flex their muscles with MSU mascot Stomper





Honors students get cozy with Stomper at the annual fall cookout.

in pictures



Honors students contributed to the MSU homecoming festivities.



Honors student Emma Grumke is also on the MSU soccer team.

Student bios

by Jose Barriga

Brooklyn Vetter--Sociology, Class of 2014

Brooklyn Vetter comes from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. She is a second year student majoring in Sociology. In addition to being the President of the Honors Student Council, Brooklyn is also involved with the Newman Center and the Speech & Debate Team. Her satisfaction with the Honors Program comes from the opportunities she “would have never experienced if it were not for the program.” Brooklyn believes that the Honors Program gives her a chance to get the most out of her education and allows her to be more sensitive to social problems. She wishes to start her own Non-Profit Organization one day. The current Honors President expects to contribute more to the Program and motivate other students to be part of it “and get as much out of the program as they can.”



Abdikadir Mohamed--Chemistry, Class of 2015



Abdikadir Mohamed was born in Somalia, grew up in Kenya and now lives with his family in Mankato. Abdi, as his friends call him, is a first year student at Minnesota State University, Mankato majoring in Chemistry. He enjoys reading, watching documentaries, playing soccer and knowing what happens in the world. Abdi believes that “the Honors Program offers a unique way to experience college” with the different activities that are offered. He enjoys the “beyond-traditional-learning” classes and getting to know the members of the program. Abdi recommends students to be part of the Honors Program, saying, “If you are interested in critical thinking and applying classroom lessons to the real world, I would say this is the best place for you.”

Natsua Asai--Accounting, Class of 2013

Natsua Asai is currently in her third year in the Accounting major. She was born in Japan and is part of the International Student Association at Minnesota State University, Mankato. She enjoys travelling, walking and watching movies. Natsua believes that part of the excellence of the Honors Program is found in the “development of competitive skills for the future.” Natsua, like many other Honors students, has a full load of responsibilities and interests. Therefore, she believes it is great to have a variety of learning and interacting experiences with the community to which she would normally not be exposed to. Natsua trusts in the leading role of the Honors Program as she “learn[s] from every Honors event” in preparation for her professional career.



“SOC 150--Honors Social Problems” Class Reflection

by Kurtis Malecha

Rarely do students at MSU get the chance to go on a “field trip,” and even rarer is a field trip to a women’s prison. During fall 2010, our Honors Social Problems course with Dr. Hunter had the chance to do just this. This particular event was not just a random happening – we had been studying the concept of crime and punishment from a sociological framework for some weeks prior. To be able to apply these theories to a “real” setting made me feel like the learning process had come to life. For example, the sociological idea of dichotomization of society became apparent when we heard about how it is very difficult for many inmates to return to normal society after their term is finished.

Our exploration in the course was not limited to crime and punishment, but rather included two other topics: the politics of food and immigration. Cross disciplinary skills became even more apparent as we traversed through this course, especially when I used previous knowledge and research from my earlier English Intermediate Writing Course and basic chemistry properties in the food section. The research culmination that I reached in this course changed the way I look at food and ultimately the decisions I make when eating.

Frequent group discussion, the ability to critique ideas presented, and reflection were all major components of this course. A typical week of class would include reading the background framework from Joel Best’s *Social Problems* text and a lecture by Dr. Hunter during the first part of the week. Next we would read parts of the text of the section on which we were focusing. We could have a group discussion and critique the text in addition to learning some shocking facts in the middle to latter part of the week. This cycle would repeat for approximately five weeks, and then we would write a seven to ten page paper and take an exam. This paper forced us to combine the “problems” presented in this section of the course with our primary text (Best) in a novel way to create a cohesive argument.

When I first enrolled in the course, I had very little interest in actually learning about the ideas presented from a sociological standpoint – I thought the framework was not necessary for my knowledge as a chemist. Of course I was wrong. This course forced me out of my comfort zone on many occasions, especially when the notion of subjectivity versus objectivity presented itself. Being a natural science major makes one think *everything* in his/her field is objective. But through papers, discussions, and even disagreements, I soon learned to value the notion of subjectivity even in the realm of chemistry. Rather than thinking *how*, I must also think about *why* research proceeds the way it does, or, on a smaller scale, why I will use a particular chemical over another when both are sufficient for a particular experiment.

Through all the reasons I discussed here and more, I can attest to Social Problems being my favorite Honors course. I was not always happy with the material, but room for critiques, a new perspective on ideas I have already explored, frequent discussion (instead of lecture) and cross-disciplinary skills all made this course what a stellar honors course should be.

continued from page 7

“The trip went exceedingly well,” Hunter said afterwards. “This is a fantastic group of very motivated and open-minded students, and as a professor, there is no greater reward than having the opportunity to work with students who are so pumped about learning.”

Hunter said she used the prison trip to continue class discussion and tie in classroom concepts to the real world.

“During our next class day, I planned a half hour of class time to discuss students’ experiences on the tour,” she said. “We ended up taking the entire class period because students had so much to say about their experiences. I think the most important thing they learned was that... it is crucial to keep in mind that we are dealing with people, not animals, not monsters, not sub-human species.”

Carlson said that she learned both about women prisoners and her own preconceived ideas about convicts.

“During the interviews with the women, I looked over and [one girl] was crying because she was so touched by their stories,” Carlson said. “You think that [convicts] are such terrible people, but I couldn’t even think of them as criminals. I saw the humanity within them when they were telling their stores.”

Honors fun corner

Honors Word Search

created by Anastasia Humphers-Ginther

Clues:

The trip to the Shakopee prison was designed to develop Honors Students' _____ and global citizenship skills.

Three students were profiled in the article. What are their majors? (Hint: you're looking for three answers.)

What is the computer program called that allows Honors Students to "develop core competencies" and helps them get ahead in the job search for after college?

Students raised 982 pounds of food for what annual event?

While working in the science lab in Germany, Malecha learned more about the German _____.

(Answers to be revealed in next issue)

HONORABLE MENTIONS

This year's Honors Make-a-Difference event, our traditional food drive, raised 982 pounds of food!

A belated congratulations to the students who received research grants last year: Lina Wang (Biology), Cameron Hovey (Chemistry), Kurtis Malecha (Chemistry), Sadjine Ketika (Computer Engineering)

Congratulations to juniors José Barriga and Erika Koenig for winning \$500 Honors Research Awards! José will use his funds to conduct research in the Amazon this winter, and Erika will use her funds to participate in a study of undergraduate intercultural competency development.

W Q R E L A M W E F O L I O S

B G P V Y C A K N T R Y G G E

F X F J G E K D E M X J O N Y

W A O A S R E E Y W X I R R G

L C S I L E A D E R S H I P O

A C K N P G D U C P N J W I L

L O P I Y U I X G N J O J L O

V U R J R H F X C K V S I U I

M N C U T G F D G O V Y C T C

D T Q Q S Q E H A X Y U M J O

G I O J I D R V I Q L J C D S

Z N A K M F E M D T C E H B A

F G T W E U N Y U U W W J S O

I F V H H A C R H R A A R T E

A M W P C O E G P N I R T T R

A member of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System

Minnesota State University, Mankato is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity University.

This document is available in alternative format to individuals with disabilities by calling the Office of Disability Services at 507-389-2825 (V/TTD), 800-627-3529 or 711 (MRS/TTD)