

VENERATIO

The Honors College Newsletter



In Hindsight: the 2020-2021 School Year

by Eliza West | Pictured above: the front of College Hall, taken by Kabin Magar

After an entire year of the Honors College meeting only online, both students and faculty are certainly anxious to return to an in-person format. However, these challenging times have provided unique opportunities for growth among the staff and student body. This article explores reflections from Honors students and staff as to their experiences in the HC during the pandemic and their hopes for transitioning back into a traditional, in-person format.

Nick Laudermilk, an HC Lead Advocate, is an integral and unforgettable student leader. One of the biggest challenges he's faced as an Advocate has been adapting activities to an online format. He writes that "The online transition changed the way I've been able to interact with the HC and the rest of campus... Classes for me moved totally online, with a lot of events planned prior being outright canceled. For the advocate position, most of the changes came with adapting the normal events we would host into a virtual format... We put a lot of work adapting these, with one of the major changes being the creation of the HC Discord opened for all students, as well as the logistics for running it."

IN THIS ISSUE

**IN HINDSIGHT: THE
2020-2021 SCHOOL
YEAR**

**STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:
MY LAI**

**RESEARCH IN THE TIME
OF COVID: HONORS
COLLEGE SENIOR
PROJECTS**

**STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:
ANDRES PLASCENCIA**



Pictured above: UT Arlington campus. Photo Credit: Kabin Magar

The HC Discord, or virtual CAB, one of the biggest developments of this past year, has served to replace the physical Caroline A. Barros Reading Room (CAB) in the HC building where Honors students typically study and hang out. Not having a physical space to meet has been difficult, but the virtual CAB has been a fantastic space for Honors Students to ask questions and get connected. Many staff and students have even expressed their wishes for the virtual CAB to continue functioning even as the HC transitions back into in-person.

Bree Baum, the Recruitment and Outreach Coordinator for the Honors College, began her job not long before the pandemic hit. While still adjusting to her new position, the online transition certainly didn't make things any easier. She writes:

"I feel like the wind got knocked out of me a bit when I saw everything had been canceled, [and] for the first few months it was a really hard adjustment ... The thing that made it easier was that our office was so swift to transition our services online, and it was reassuring that we took it so seriously and were equipped and fully supported to work from home. I made the best of it by having to get creative to reach our students and figure out ways for us to connect with our incoming students ... My joke this whole past year with the advocates was that our theme was "resilience," and we were just going to see what happens and continuously reminded them that it was perfectly fine to not be fine - I think that really helped show that everyone had something in common in all of this."

SPECIAL THANKS TO

KABIN MAGAR, MEHREEN MALIK, ELIZA WEST, AND THE HONORS COLLEGE STAFF.

Despite the difficulties of figuring out online activities and the hardships of not seeing other staff and students in person, Bree and the rest of the HC have grown considerably in their own character, adaptability, and relationships with peers.

Louis Vuppula, a future HC Advocate for the fall 2021 semester, shares a valuable lesson she has learned during the pandemic:

"Initially, transitioning online had a negative impact not only on my education but also on my mental health. Making friends in classes and getting to know your professor did not seem like an option. I viewed the online medium as a barrier to achieve those relationships. Eventually, I learned that all my peers and I are going through similar challenges and my professors are actually here for me and genuinely would want to see me flourish. All I needed to do was ask for help or be the first one to reach out to people. By doing so I ended up making great connections with my peers as well as the faculty. I learned that networking can be done through various mediums and that you will receive help as long as you take the courage to ask for it."

Connecting with peers, professors, and faculty is incredibly important. It is a valuable thing to remember that the HC staff genuinely care for students and want to see them succeed. Despite all the challenges of the past year, the HC has grown all the stronger for it.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: MY LAI

by Mehreen Malik

Senior My Lai was the Honors College Council public relations officer for the past two years. During her time in the position, she had to adapt to many new opportunities and challenges facing the Honors College. The following is a look into her role and her experience as an HCC officer during the pandemic.

Answers are edited for either clarity or brevity.

So just start by telling me a little bit about yourself.

I am a junior attending UTA. I joined Honors College when I was a freshman. I'm a pre-medical student applying to graduate school. Some of the hobbies I have is I play piano and I have started acrylic painting which is really exciting.

What is the work you do for HCC? What are some of the main roles?

I have been the public relations officer for HCC for two years. I served my sophomore year and my junior year. Your main role is to create flyers or do publications for HCC. You're going to go attend events that they organize to raise awareness of HCC to Honors students. Just to talk to them about the resources provided and share your experience.

I think it's really interesting that you were there for these last two years. You were present when the job was a little more normal and then you had to adapt during COVID. How did you guys transition to a new format?

For the Fall term we had a normal semester with HCC meetings every two weeks and every week the officers would sit down and talk to each other about what events do they want to see. It's kind of hard to bring students to connect with others, especially when it's online, but our program was tailored to target what students found interesting.

How did you feel students were engaging in this new setting, versus previously?

So previously, when it was in a big room with people attending, a couple of students would speak up but a lot of them were shy. This was a big downfall of having a large portion of students there. Going online, on Teams, allowed students to send private emails, which happened a lot. We really encouraged them to send us questions and connect with us.



Pictured above: Junior Honors College student My Lai.

Was there a specific event that you found better online or that you could see becoming remote more in the future?

A lot of our volunteer events were just Mission Arlington and sometimes we would collaborate with the Big Event. However, these both required you to be on campus. We might incorporate more volunteer opportunities online for students as for some it's really hard for them to participate otherwise.

How do you feel like going back in-person will affect the turnout of events?

I would expect the turn out to be similar or more than before COVID because I know that we're accepting a lot of freshmen coming into the program—at least from last year—so there will be a lot of events and meetings for them to attend.

Any new plans for next year?

I haven't really talked to the new officers yet as elections are happening, but I am just really excited to see how they will attract the students from last year who didn't get to experience events in-person. It's not just about academic excellence but also a place to make friends, and maybe do some artistic development.

Research in the Time of Covid: Honors College Senior Projects

by Mehreen Malik | Pictured across: seniors Patricia Moriel and Dominique Lange

The unpredictability of this past academic year demanded many modifications to the Honors program; none were so affected as those pursuing their final achievement: the Capstone project. In compliance with social distancing and COVID regulations, many students were forced to either alter their plans or, in some cases, undertake entirely new presentations. Nonetheless, the success of the Honors symposium illustrated that students not only were determined to display their knowledge but had overcome the hardships of the pandemic to showcase the incredible talent of the college.

Architecture major, Patricia Moriel, was one of the many affected seniors who had to complete her project during the lockdown. Her research on the lack of sustainable construction in Arlington delved into a comparison of the city against the innovative ideas of Europe and illustrated the opportunities to improve places like the up-and-coming entertainment district or the trails of Crystal Canyon. While COVID did not directly impact her project, she did mention the “motivation for research was hard” as being stuck inside was not conducive to creativity and made time management difficult to achieve. Patricia finds the pandemic’s effect on architecture to be humanizing though, as now COVID strategies are being incorporated into floor plans and creating a positive change on how we think about space.

Another senior, INTS major Dominique Lange, performed an in-depth study on female African American voters involved in sororities, investigating their political affiliation and reasons for such alignment. This was a slight deviation from the more hands-on service-learning project she was to originally pursue. Her research displayed black women had strong ties to religion, some of them even holding conservative morals. However, their identity played a large part in pushing them to lean democratic even though they did not all hold similar values. The insight illustrated the complexity of black female voters, a population usually grouped as uniformly liberal. Dominique found this to be the major takeaway from her presentation and hopes it inspires people to vote in the future.



Lastly, Michelle Bland completed not one but two capstone projects during quarantine, one for biology and one for psychology. Both were heavily adapted due to COVID and had to change from plans she had put in place as a Junior. Nonetheless, she found both presentations eye-opening experiences. In the fall semester, her project was the only one to discuss the pandemic’s effects on society and lament on the isolating freedom that was occurring globally. The second presentation was a fibromyalgia model in rats, a far diversion from the human study she had wanted to conduct. Still, the research led to an interesting look on anxiety and chronic fatigue that Michelle enjoyed examining. She is grateful the transition for both her projects were eased by the opportunities given through her research.

Overall, many alterations had to be made for this unusual year of university but through the constant struggle was a display of true perseverance from the seniors of the Honors College.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: ANDRES PLASCENCIA

by Eliza West



Pictured above: the UT Arlington Campus. Pictured left: Andres Plascencia. Photo courtesy of Andres Plascencia.

Andres Plascencia will be a sophomore majoring in architecture this 2021 fall semester.

Moving forward into the transition back into an in-person format, Andres has been hired as an Honors Advocate for the 2021-2022 season. Looking forward to the opportunities that come with this position, he writes: "I have yet to begin any real training, but I am excited to take on the position."

COVID-19 has presented great challenges for new students during the 2020-2021 academic year to get connected at the university. Andres, however, has overcome many of these challenges by seizing every opportunity to get involved. He writes: "I have thoroughly enjoyed my tenure within the Honors College so far even with COVID restrictions. I have been able to challenge myself and maintain a level of academic rigor I enjoy. However, I have found it more difficult to make connections within both UTA and the Honors College."

Despite these challenges, Andres has gone above and beyond to meet and serve other students and faculty around him as both an Orientation Leader and a future Honors Advocate.

Andres, like many of us, has high hopes for the approaching fall semester: "In the fall '21 semester, I hope to build on the connections I was able to make. I think transitioning back to a traditional classroom may be rough, but I don't doubt I will enjoy returning to UTA in person this fall."