2006-2007 Honors Student Awards

Each semester, Northern Arizona University recognizes seniors who have made outstanding contributions to the university in the areas of academic performance, service, and activities with the Gold Axe Award. The tradition of the Gold Axe Award dates back to 1933, a year after the student body adopted a copper axe as the symbol for NAU athletics. The following Honors students received this award in Spring 2006 and Fall 2006:

Fall 2006
- Lauren Beyer, public relations and electronic media and film
- Danielle Finney, exercise science
- Rachel Koch, English
- Anya Van Ness, health sciences

Spring 2007
- Robert Buscaglia, biochemistry and mathematics
- Whitney Carnicom, psychology
- Melanie Dodson, speech communication
- Alexis Keyser, international hospitality management
- Susan McClelland, chemistry
- Jacob Morin, civil engineering
- Jeffrey Muehlbauer, biology and chemistry
- Justin Saul, chemistry
- Nataly Vadasz, chemistry

Students selected for a Gold Axe Award are also eligible for the President’s Prize, considered the highest student recognition from the university. Anya Van Ness, Robert Buscaglia, and Whitney Carnicom were honored with this prestigious award for their exemplary leadership, academic excellence, and service to the NAU community.

A Message From the Director

Over time, many aspects of the Honors Program have changed. New faculty members teach new courses. The Program has had new structures and new requirements. Many students have launched their academic careers through the Program. Many individuals have had the privilege of leading the Program. Some of these changes we can measure: the number of courses, faculty, and students; average test scores; retention rates (they are phenomenal, by the way); and a listing of the different directors.

Through all of these changes, however, one aspect of the Program remains fixed: The dedication to provide a high quality academic experience for high achieving—and highly motivated—students.

This is the essence of the honors education. We can certainly discuss what “high quality” means, and we may never reach a fully shared definition of that term. But it certainly includes giving our best; it includes a desire to engage; it includes the willingness to take risks and to accept that failure comes along with taking risks; and it includes the ability to accept, and even embrace, ambiguity.

Sounds a lot like leadership and problem solving. So maybe what we want in an honors education is to help students become better creative problem solvers and to take the lead to actually solve problems, in the broadest possible sense of the term. We have many people who can (and do) cause problems and many who will complain about problems, but relatively few who have the skills, abilities, and willingness to actively engage in solving problems.

As part of the Honors community, we should, I believe, have the goal of creating the conditions that will foster the continuing development of Honors students as creative problem solvers and as active participants in the problem solving process.

To achieve such a goal requires an investment in Honors students. Investments in mentorships, scholarships, internships, visiting scholars, research activities, creative endeavors…the list goes on. The specifics of such investments and how to make them happen are topics for a later discussion, however.

For now I close with this thought: No matter how we may eventually define the “high quality” portion of an Honors education, no matter what investments we make in Honors students, let’s make sure that we always keep the “Honors” in our Honors education. If not, why bother?

Dr. Bruce Fox, Honors Program Director

Promoting academic excellence throughout the Northern Arizona University community
More than 100 new honors students took to the streets to study various parts of the city as part of the Flagstaff-as-Text project. This group documented its eastside journey with a group photo at the base of Mount Elden.

This group of new honors students enjoyed a cup of hot tea at the Corea House in downtown Flagstaff as part of their mapping exercise.

By Katie Eubanks

“Vote for Khalsa—Rhymes with Salsa!” When I saw this sign sticking out of the ground, I laughed. Were all local politicians as much fun as Khalsa? I’d never seen campaign slogans like this, at least not where I came from.

This was one of many surprises I would experience that afternoon. I had lived in Arkansas for 16 years, and now I was walking around Flagstaff with some fellow NAU students.

Our task was to observe our surroundings, “connect” with the town, and take good notes. We’d been divided into groups, and each group, armed with a map and an Honors upperclassman, took on a different part of town. My group explored east Flagstaff.

Our up-close-and-personal introduction to Flag was part of the new Flagstaff-as-Text unit at NAU Honors. Through Internet readings, this walking tour and an essay or two, our professors were gently prodding us into all sorts of connections with our new home.

I didn’t really mind. I wanted to get to know Flagstaff, and I enjoyed the scenery.

A cowboy’s face stared at me from above the door of the Redwood Saloon. But this “saloon” wasn’t an authentic, splintering relic. It was in a strip mall. I grinned—for the second time I saw that the people of Flagstaff didn’t take themselves quite as seriously as I’d expected.

Later, my group found a message painted in vibrant shades of green on the back of a low-roofed building: “R.I.P. Mayi,” it said. That wasn’t all it said, but we couldn’t decipher the rest. The entire graffiti was about four feet tall and six feet long.

The painting was recognized as art, just as the mural covering the front of the little pizza place down the road was art. Realizing that Flagstaff valued creativity so highly, I began to feel more than curious—I felt welcome.

Our professors were determined to get us to “connect” with Flagstaff, because if we don’t get to know this town now, then all our preparations for entering “the real world” will be in vain; when we graduate, we won’t know anything about Flagstaff, and Flagstaff won’t know what to do with us.

The phrase “college town” does not mean “a town near a college.” It means an intermingling of age groups, races, lifestyles and ideas.

The immediate function of our walk through Flagstaff was to tease us, to whet our appetites for more. If it worked, then we are ready to make Flagstaff our home and find our place in it; we are eager to find what Flag has for us as students, voters, artists, writers, teachers, tourists, and most importantly as members of a community; and when we graduate, we will not emerge timidly. We will come out confidently, with the ability to live as citizens of this or any other community.

It worked for me. After the walking tour, I wanted to see every inch of Flagstaff, and I’m eager for the opportunity to explore it to my heart’s content.

Despite all that I saw during my walk through Flag, the Khalsa/Salsa sign stands out the most to me, just because I found it amusing. But is the sign relevant? It told me a bit about one candidate for Coconino County Justice of the Peace (one who eventually lost), and it told me about some of the demographics he was trying to reach.

This doesn’t seem like much. But connection does not occur in mass quantities; it happens one person, one event, one thread at a time. The quality of each thread is what matters—not the number of threads we can weave together. I don’t have a tapestry of Flagstaff yet, but I have a few unique threads—including one which smells ever so slightly of salsa.

Katie Eubanks, a native of Arkansas, is a former freshman Honors student. She is pursuing a journalism degree and a minor in creative writing.
Faculty Focus: Anne Scott

Anne Scott received her B.A. (with honors) from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 1981 and her M.A. and Ph.D. from Brown University in 1985 and 1987, respectively. Anne specializes in European medieval literature (especially the literature of England, France, Germany, and Iceland) and is attracted to the medieval period primarily because of its interdisciplinary focus: understanding such literature also requires an understanding of medieval religion, philosophy, languages, and politics. In 1990, she received a MacArthur grant to study the literature of the Southwest, and since then, she has acquired another specialty in Native American literature, including creation myths and contemporary poetry. Prior to her appointment at NAU, Anne held a teaching position at Union College in upstate New York where she taught in a program similar to NAU’s Honors Program. She has held tenure in the English Department at NAU since 1997 and has been the Associate Director of the Honors Program since 2002. Anne’s tasks as Associate Director include mentoring faculty new to the first year program; coordinating the writing assignments and teaching materials across all sections of HON 190/191, the required Honors first year seminar; meeting with HON 190/191 faculty to discuss curricular, assessment, pedagogical, and personnel issues; working one-on-one with individual students concerning their written work; and acting as liaison between the Honors Program and instructors teaching cross-listed classes. With the help of the director and other first-year instructors and tutors, Anne is additionally responsible for putting together the annual spring Honors Symposia—events during which Honors students present their research projects, papers, and other work in a conference-like environment. She also teaches sections of HON 190/191 in addition to her classes offered through the English Department, which include medieval literature, the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Native American literature, courses in comparative and multi-ethnic literature, and, most recently, film studies courses (including a class on Alfred Hitchcock). Anne welcomes drop-ins and always looks forward to having hallway conversations with her students and colleagues. She has one son (Gavin, 11, a brown belt in Kung Fu), 2 dogs (Clyde and Flower, two bumbling labs), 1 feline (Momma Cat), 2 bikes (which she loves to ride), a passion for New Zealand, and an important membership to Netflix, which supplies her with the films for her ever-increasing cinematic habit.

Spring 2007 Honors Symposium

On November 1, 2003, the Honors Program staged the first “Fall Honors Symposium,” an interdisciplinary celebration of ideas where 22 upper-class Honors students presented a total of twenty-four papers to an audience of more than 100 faculty, administrators, family, friends, and fellow students. Topics ranged from “Morality in Antigone” and “Andalusian Culture in the High Middle Ages” to “Do Tightened Football Pads Decrease Pulmonary Function?” and research on diabetes.

Given the success of this event, we have continued it on an annual basis each Spring. Nearly 60 students presented papers and research at the Spring 2006 event. Freshmen through seniors presented excellent research on the stem cell controversy, Hurricane Katrina, film, wave energy, Modernism, literary favorites, and pop culture, among many other topics. There were also poetry readings, musical events, and Scottish dancing.

For every symposium, each presenter is assigned a first-year Honors student to serve as a presentation mentee and colleague. The mentees thus learn about the process of presenting papers in an academic setting by serving as audience members, critics, and peer reviewers for conference participants. Faculty, administrators, peers, and family members who have attended the symposia have all given them rave reviews. In addition, all symposium participants have an opportunity to have their revised presentations published through NAU’s Honors Program.

This year’s symposium will showcase more than 45 participants presenting on numerous topics, a few of which include “Quartz Crystal Inclusions from the Bradshaw Mountains, Arizona,” “High Heels and High Fashion: Heterai in the Hellenistic World,” “Between Foreign and Familiar: The History of kami Spirituality in Modernizing Japan,” and “Hollywood’s Response to the Red Scare: Depictions of Communism in Film.”

Honors Scholar Highlight: Emily Gibson

Emily Gibson is a junior History (and Art History) major from Phoenix, Ariz. Since beginning at NAU, Emily has become very involved on campus, particularly within the Honors Program. She has been involved in Phi Alpha Theta, the National History Honors Society, for the past two years and has served as the organization’s treasurer, secretary, and historian. Emily has also worked to recruit students to the Honors Program as an Honors Ambassador and has participated as an Honors mentor through the Honors GURUS—Guides to University Retention and Undergraduate Success—program, including serving on the organization’s steering committee. Finally, Emily attended the National Collegiate Honors Council conference in Philadelphia last fall and was elected to NCHC’s Board of Directors earlier this semester.

In her free time, Emily loves to read anything from science fiction to history to classic literature. Some of her favorite books include Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, Joseph Ellis’s American Sphinx, and Robert A. Heinlein’s The Moon is a Harsh Mistress. Emily is also a baseball fan—particularly an Arizona Diamondbacks and Oakland Athletics fan. Emily also loves to travel, and has been to 35 states and five countries.

After graduating from NAU, Emily plans to attend graduate school to earn her Ph.D in history. She has considered working as a curator in the American History branch of the Smithsonian, working at the National Archives, presiding over the Monticello Foundation, or working with the State Department.
WHAT’S HAPPENING IN HONORS

DEVELOPMENT

In December 2006, the Honors Program received a $50,000 gift from the Dorrance Family Foundation. Quite immodestly, the Foundation presented this gift to the Program in my name with the Director (that would be me!) having full discretion over the funds with the one stipulation: that we use the funds to assist students with demonstrated financial need. To meet the desires of the donors, we have created a student grant program with the mission of supporting international education, creative endeavors, and research activities of Honor students.

We are in the process of finalizing the format and selection criteria for proposals, but we will use part of the interest from the gift to fund micro-grants as seed or bridge funds that will allow Honors students the ability to study abroad or participate in other enhanced undergraduate academic activities.

This gift forms the core of what we hope will be an increasingly important part of the Program—an endowment. Such an endowment will allow us to further invest in our Honors students, from scholarships to travel funds and internship support to helping create service learning opportunities. To this end, we will use part of the interest to build the endowment.

PROGRAM REVIEW

We completed our program review this spring. The program review process is part of the on-going assessment activities across the university. All academic programs (i.e. departments, programs, professional schools, etc.) undergo some type of program review, either directly through university processes or through accreditation organizations. The 2006-2007 academic year was our turn. We completed our self study, and we had a visit by outside consultants in April and May. You should have already received a survey from us asking for your input in this process. If you have not had a chance to do so, PLEASE take a moment to complete and return this survey. The data you provided was immensely valuable during our self study and more feedback will increase our knowledge of the Program.

Although a considerable amount of work, our program review provides us with the opportunity to examine the Program, validate the positives, discover opportunities for improvement, and to map out a plan for improving the Program. An update on this process will be available soon.

OTHER HONORS UPDATES

• We offered nine sections of HON 190 last fall and welcomed two new faculty members: Kevin Ketchner from the Cline Library and our very own Senior Program Coordinator, Glenn Hansen. Great additions indeed.
• Shaun Krein has joined the Honors Program as our new Administrative Assistant.
• Anne Scott, Associate Director of Honors and Associate Professor of English, has returned from her well deserved sabbatical this past fall and has resumed teaching a section of HON 191: Film Analysis.
• Glenn Hansen, Senior Program Coordinator, was awarded the President’s Achievement Award in 2006.
• Katie Sheridan, Honors Program Academic Advisor, was appointed to the Diversity Committee of the National Collegiate Honors Council and continues to teach HON 190 and HON 191.
• Senior Lecturer Lynn Gardner’s Honors GURUS—Guides to University Retention and Undergraduate Success—program had its second operation in the Fall. She is also offering a new course this Spring: East Meets West.
• Lecturer Ellen Riek progresses toward completion of her doctorate degree, teaches HON 190 and HON 191, and served as the coordinator of HON 190 during Anne Scott’s sabbatical. She is teaching a new class this Spring: “Beyond the Bachelor’s” and was also appointed to serve on the Diversity Committee of the National Collegiate Honors Council.
• Emily Gibson, a junior Honors student, was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Collegiate Honors Council.
• Bruce Fox continues to serve as the director of the Honors Program and to teach HON 190 and 191. He was also elected to the Board of Directors of the National Collegiate Honors Council.
• We have a new course for Fall 2007: HON 100: Introduction to the Honors Program. This course will replace FYE 101H.
• We will be hosting the Western Regional Honors Conference in Spring 2008.