



# UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

## Alumni Newsletter



Fall 2020



University of Idaho  
University Honors Program

## Greeting from the Director

This fall semester, our Honors Program students, staff, and faculty returned to campus with a renewed outlook of care for one another and dedication to maintaining our program's distinctive qualities and values while adhering to the University's coronavirus health precautions. We kicked off the new academic year by welcoming our new incoming class to our program in August during Honors Welcome Week. This year, we also welcomed 22 National Merit Scholars to the University of Idaho and the Honors Program as part of our new incoming class!

A distinctive part of Honors Welcome Week is our first Honors Fireside Chat of the semester. As always, we co-host this event with Housing and Residence Life, which manages our honors residence experiences in McCoy Hall and Scholars Living and Learning Community. Due to the ongoing pandemic, we hosted this Honors Fireside Chat outside at the Shattuck Arboretum on the west side of campus. **Dr. Barry Bilderback**, Associate Professor of Music and Ethnomusicology in the Lionel Hampton School of Music, gave a presentation entitled "The Beat Goes On: An Overview of West Africa's Contribution to Contemporary Music" as the students listened and clapped to the accompanying percussion performance. As you know, Honors Fireside Chats offer students and faculty the opportunity to connect outside of the classroom through a shared academic experience. This unique interface was at the center of our second Honors Fireside Chat this semester, which featured a presentation by Honors Program senior **Beth Hoots** and faculty member **Professor Frank Wilhelm** on their collaborative research that will culminate in Beth's completion of an honors thesis later this semester. Their talk entitled "Honors Research—Taming Monsters All Around: Research Critters, Students, and



Sandra Reineke and Joe Vandal

Faculty, ” presented in person on campus and available simultaneously via Zoom, offered tips and tricks to fellow honors students about how to get involved in undergraduate research and how to successfully complete an honors thesis.

I truly enjoy each of our Honors Fireside Chats, but the highlight of my fall semesters is probably our annual Honors Program Student Achievement Awards Celebration when we recognize the outstanding accomplishments of our honors students in a variety of areas, including research, creative activities, leadership, and service. This November, we recognized over 100 students for their remarkable co-curricular achievements! Congratulations!

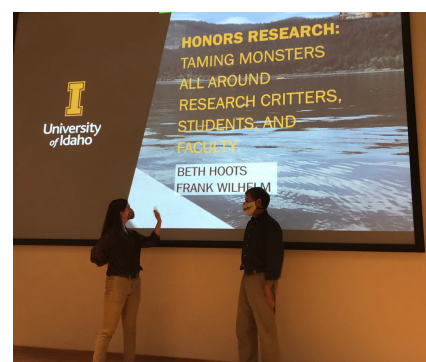
Also, in November, we recognized the contributions of our outstanding honors faculty to our students’ success at our second Honors Faculty Workshop. The faculty workshop offers opportunities for conversation and exchange among faculty. As you know first hand, for both, students and faculty, the Honors Program is more than a “program;” it is a space and an experience where academic community thrives, intellectual challenge is embraced, and students develop into scholars. Thus, part of our faculty workshop was to recognize the truly remarkable contributions of honors faculty to our program’s mission! Well done!

One such example of faculty’s contribution to students’ experiential learning outside the classroom is the service-learning opportunity through our program’s student magazine *The Looking Glass*. *The Looking Glass* is the academic and creative publication of the University Honors Program and it has been in existence for over 20 years. The magazine is produced entirely by honors students. It features original research, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, short stories, essay and photographs submitted each year by honors students who stay on the team for at least two semesters and earn honors credits for their work. In addition, being a student editor also earns the students valuable educational competencies: the production process includes soliciting submissions, typesetting, editing, designing pages and print proofing. All of these transferable skills, offer the student editors a unique laboratory experience. For the honors students whose work is accepted for publication in the magazine, it offers an opportunity to have their research and/or creative work publishes and circulated. Since 2018, the student editorial team works under the guidance of our program’s faculty, staff, and a graduate intern. The latest *Looking Glass* issue arrived in our office just off the press in spring of 2020, but due to the coronavirus pandemic, we are only now able to distribute the magazine to our students. We did so in conjunction with the student editors’ presentation at this semester's University Renfrew Colloquium on November 10. We held a *Looking Glass* Launch Party on campus immediately following the colloquium presentation where students and friends of the program could join us either in person or virtually.

Honors Program students’ interest to be engaged in transformative learning experiences is also expressed in their participation in education abroad opportunities. This year, two Honors Program alum won a renowned Fulbright student fellowship to further their language studies beyond college. **Annarose Qualls** and **Olivia Comstock** worked with our dedicated Faculty Fellow Distinguished Scholarships Program **Dr. Dilshani Sarathchandra** to complete their winning applications. But being an accomplished and outstanding faculty advisor for our Distinguished Scholarships Program is not all that Dr. Sarathchandra has accomplished this year. She also received the Early Career Award for Innovation in Teaching Sociology from the Pacific Sociology Association! Felicitations!



Honors Fireside Chat on  
August 27th



Honors Fireside Chat on  
October 27th



*The Looking Glass*  
student-editors



Dilshani Sarathchandra, Ph.D.

Are you interested in making a difference in the educational journey of honors students today? Giving to the Henberg Honors Endowment makes a big difference. Your gift goes to work for you to ensure that honors students have the support and services they need to succeed. Please consider making a gift [here](#). Thank you and be well in these unprecedented pandemic times.

With my best wishes for the holiday season,

Sincerely,



Sandra Reineke, Ph.D.  
Director, University Honors Program



Annarose Qualls



Sandra Reineke, Ph.D.



Olivia Comstock

# Recent University Honors Program News

We would like to say goodbye and best wishes to these staff members



Cory Chambers  
University Honors Program  
Academic Advisor



Katie Bechtel  
Administrative Assistant

## Welcome to our new Honors Student Advisory Board Officers

The Honors Student Advisory Board is the University Honors Program’s official ASUI student club. All Honor Program students are members of the club. The club's officers are elected by the general members, with the elected Board being comprised of five elected positions including, president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and member-at-large. The purpose of the Honors Student Advisory Board is to enrich the academic and social experience of Honors Program students and contribute to a sense of community by organizing extracurricular events under the auspices of the

University Honors Program staff. We are pleased to introduce the new Board members:



Gillian Glivar, president



Dakota Brown, vice president



Hailey Bowring, secretary



Megan Lolley, treasurer and  
member-at-large

On November 4, 2020, the Honors Student Advisory Board partnered with the University of Idaho Library for an Honors Virtual Game Night. The event is meant to build community and destress students, who will learn firsthand from a UI librarian about the many benefits of and games available in the library's board game and table top collection.

## Research & Creative Activities

### University Honors Program Research and Creative Activities Forum

In December 2020, **Elizabeth "Beth" Hoots**, a senior in Ecology and Conservation Biology, College of Natural Resources, is presenting her honors thesis titled, "Life History of a Benthic Caddisfly in Coeur d'Alene Lake." Beth will present at the fall 2020 **University Honors Program Research and Creative Activities Forum** which will be conducted virtually. The Forum is the culmination of years of research as each student completes their honors thesis.



Elizabeth (Beth) Hoots

### University Honors Program Grants for Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship

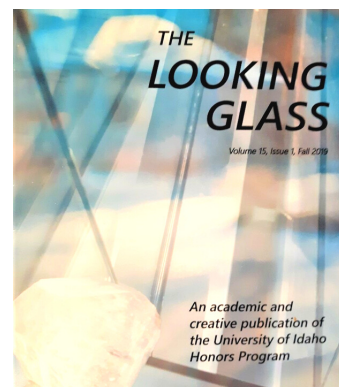
This academic year, **Laura Nutter** successfully applied for and received a **University Honors Program Grant for Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship**. Laura is a senior majoring in Microbiology in the College of Science. Congratulations!



Laura Nutter

## The Looking Glass Magazine

One such example of faculty's contribution to students' experiential learning outside the classroom is the service-learning opportunity through our program's student magazine The Looking Glass. The Looking Glass is the academic and creative publication of the University Honors Program and it has been in existence for over 20 years. The magazine is produced entirely by honors students. It features original research, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, short stories, essay and photographs submitted each year by honors students who stay on the team for at least two semesters and earn honors credits for their work. In addition, being a student editor also earns the students valuable educational competencies: the production process includes soliciting submissions, typesetting, editing, designing pages and print proofing. All of these transferable skills, offer the student editors a unique laboratory experience. For the honors students whose work is accepted for publication in the magazine, it offers an opportunity to have their research and/or creative work publishes and circulated. Since 2018, the student editorial team works under the guidance of our program's faculty, staff, and a graduate intern. The latest Looking Glass issue arrived in our office just off the press in spring of 2020, but due to the coronavirus pandemic, we are only now able to distribute the magazine to our students. We did so in conjunction with the student editors' presentation at this semester's University Renfrew Colloquium on November 10. We held a Looking Glass Launch Party on campus immediately following the colloquium presentation where students and friends of the program could join us either in person or virtually.



*The Looking Glass*  
volume 15 cover

## Distinguished Scholarships Program

We are excited to announce that Olivia Comstock (Philosophy, College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences) and Annarose Qualls (International Studies and Spanish, College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences) have been selected for the 2020-21 Fulbright U.S. Student Program. The Fulbright Program is sponsored by the U.S. government and is active in over 160 countries. Each recipient is selected for their leadership potential and impeccable academic achievements. **Olivia Comstock** will conduct her research on German art museums engagement with the public during her time abroad. While **Annarose Qualls** will serve in the Columbian classrooms teaching English and engaging in cultural exchange. We are wishing our alumni well in their journey!

We are also pleased to announce that **Addie White** (Biological Engineering, College of Engineering) received an Honorable Mention for the Udall Undergraduate Scholarship. The Udall Foundation awards the scholarship to sophomores and juniors engaged with issues relevant to Native Americans or the environment. Those selected for the scholarship or receiving an Honorable Mention have demonstrated their leadership abilities and commitment to public service.



Olivia Comstock



Annarose Qualls



Addie White

# STAY CONNECTED

## Like and follow the University Honors Program on social media



On our social media platforms you will find weekly updates that demonstrate our students in action, invitations, and flyers for University Honors Program events. See the results of our community building and celebration of our successes @uidahohonors.



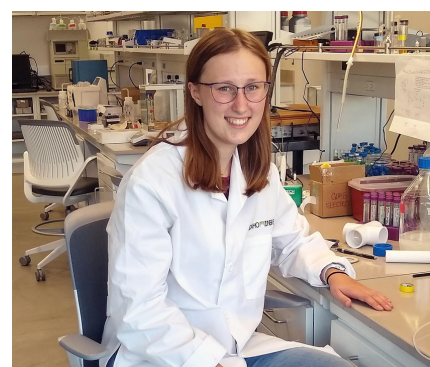
## Update your contact information

If you have a new email, physical address, or phone number please contact the University Honors Program and let us know by emailing [honors@uidaho.edu](mailto:honors@uidaho.edu). Stay engaged. Stay connected. Continue our story together!

## Student Spotlight

Our feature Student Spotlight highlights our students' engagement in undergraduate research, scholarship, creative activities, education abroad, internships, post-graduate, and leadership opportunities.

**Isabell Strawn**, a senior from Moscow, ID, is majoring in Biological Engineering, College of Engineering, and minoring in Mathematics, College of Science. Isabell has earned national recognition as a 2020 Goldwater Scholar and has completed education abroad. She anticipates graduation in Spring 2021.



Isabell Strawn

Recently, our University Honors Program staff member Justin Smith conducted this email interview with Beth to find out more about her research and studies.

**Honors:** *Why did you choose the University of Idaho?*

**Isabell:** I choose the University of Idaho because of their strong engineering program and opportunities to study abroad. I ended up studying abroad in Pécs, Hungary, in Spring 2019. I also chose the UI because I grew up in Moscow, and it is a wonderful place to live.

**Honors:** *What is your favorite thing about the University Honors Program?*

**Isabell:** One of my favorite things about the Honors Program is the honors classes. I really enjoyed taking a more in-depth look at the topics that I was learning in class. Beyond the advanced learning itself, however, I love the community of learners that participate in the classes, and I enjoy their curiosity and willingness to explore new topics with me.

**Honors:** *What research interests do you have? Have you conducted any fieldwork?*

**Isabell:** I've worked on many research projects throughout my college career. My most long-term project was under Dr. Moberly in the Department of Chemical Engineering.

In summer 2019, I worked on a research project that I designed under the mentorship of Dr. James Moberly and received funding from the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF). Bacteria used in the bioremediation of groundwater contaminants face harsh environments with toxic chemicals, changing pH levels, etc. The goal of my research is to develop a polymer hydrogel biobead that can protect the bacteria from their environment so that they can more efficiently degrade toxic chemicals. Specifically, I focused on assessing the viability of microorganisms in Polyvinyl Alcohol (PVA) and Sodium Alginate (SA) polymers. I continued my research in this lab through the 2019-2020 school year.

During the summer of 2020, I conducted foldamer research under Dr. Shirts through the Young Scholars Summer Research Program at the University of Colorado Boulder. A foldamer is any polymer with a tendency to adopt a specific compact secondary structure. The overall goal of this research is to understand the factors that affect the folding of foldamers into stable three-dimensional structures. By being able to predict structures in novel foldamers, we can assist in the development of materials that are more chemically resilient, more responsive, more adaptable, smart materials, etc. There is a need for computational backing to design these novel foldamers. To classify potential secondary structural elements in novel polymers, we must first identify backbone conformations and side chain arrangements that lead to stabilized secondary structures. My specific research objective was to investigate the effects of molecular side chains on the folding properties of polymers. I used PyRosetta to model the folding of foldamer models into minimum energy structures to investigate the effects of side chain size on structure formation.

In the summer of 2018, I worked at WSU under a USDA-funded program called Regional Approaches to Climate Change (REACCH). I worked with Dr. Shelley Pressley and Dr. Eric Russell to develop algorithms to evaluate snow cover on agricultural fields based on image analysis. The image analysis was done using Python script with parameters optimized from phenocam analysis. Snow cover is an important factor in winter wheat insulation, crop management decisions, and soil moisture. Quantifying conditions, such as snow cover, is important for sustainable agriculture development.

**Honors:** *What level of distinction are you going for?*

**Isabell:** I am aiming for the Honors Core Award.

**Honors:** *Have you attended any conferences or presented your work at an event? If so, can you describe your experience?*

**Isabell:** In February 2020, I presented my research on cell encapsulation in hydrogel biobeads at the 30th Annual Idaho Water Quality Conference. At the conference, I interacted with professionals in industry and listened to talks ranging in topic from algae blooms to phosphorous levels in water bodies in Idaho.

In July 2019, I presented my summer 2019 research on a poster at the Idaho Conference on Undergraduate Research in Boise, Idaho. I interacted with various professionals as well as my undergraduate peers who shared their research with me.

In January 2019, I attended the 18th Annual American Meteorological Society Student Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, to present my summer research that I conducted in the REACCH program. I attended various talks about monitoring lightning storms in Argentina, hurricane relief efforts, and how to improve my resume. I also presented my poster, collaborated and learned from my peers, and participated in the student poster competition.

**Honors:** *Tell us about a favorite honors class or experience with an honors professor?*

**Isabell:** My favorite honors classes were Chemistry 111 and Chemistry 112 with “Doc” (Dr. Thomas E. Bitterwolf). I loved the community and comradery of the classes and Doc’s passion and enthusiasm during the classes really made it a special experience. I received a subscription to Science magazine as a gift from Doc for being one of the top students in the Chemistry 112 class, and I still have many of the magazines that I received over the next year. I will never forget his kindness and the way that he encouraged me to explore my passions and live life to the fullest.

**Honors:** *Are you involved in any clubs?*

**Isabell:** As outreach chair for the Society of Women in Engineering (SWE), I organize and lead events such as the Women in Engineering (WIE) day in the fall and WIE Explore in the spring (both of these are outreach events to encourage high-school-age women to pursue engineering and STEM).

I have been an ambassador for the College of Engineering since my sophomore year (two and a half years). I conduct outreach for the college and organize and plan hands-on activities so that students can explore engineering.

I am the social media chair of the Grand Challenge Scholars Program, a program that I have been involved in since freshman year.

**Honors:** *What opportunities has the University Honors Program offered you?*

**Isabell:** The Honors Program has connected me with opportunities to take more advanced classes and challenge myself, as well as, to explore career options and search for scholarships (for example the Goldwater Scholarship which I received in 2020).

**Honors:** *What are your future plans after graduation?*

**Isabell:** After graduation I am going to pursue my Ph.D. in Biological Engineering and then I am going to conduct a career, researching and pushing the boundaries of knowledge in my field.

# Alumni Profiles

Our feature Alumni Profiles introduce program alumni to our larger community.

**Blas Pedro Uberuaga**, Scientist, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Los Alamos, New Mexico, '94

Recently, University Honors Program staff member Justin conducted this email interview with Blas Uberuaga.

**Honors:** *Why did you choose to join the University Honors Program, and why was it important to you?*

**Blas:** I originally joined the University Honors Program because it offered unique coursework that was of course interesting but also thought provoking. Those courses took a deeper look at history, philosophy, and literature and provided an avenue for looking at new ideas and points of views. The professors were very engaging and emphasized class participation, pulling the students into discussion and encouraging them to share their own perspectives. Coming from a small rural town, this was both eye-opening and mind-expanding for me. It really embodied the stereotypical university experience of expanding my horizons and making me think about things in a different way than I had been accustomed to.



Blas Uberuaga, '94

**Honors:** *Can you tell us about your academic program, where you lived and what kinds of organizations or activities in which you were involved?*

**Blas:** I was a physics major starting from my first day at Idaho. I lived in the dorms, in Graham Hall. I played trombone in one of the bands for a year or two. In the middle of my time at Idaho, I took a year off to attend the University of the Basque Country, where I tried to learn the Basque language and had a bit more success at learning Spanish. I also spent two summers doing Research for Undergraduate Experience programs, one at the University of Wyoming and one at Lehigh University the summer after I graduated. At Idaho, I participated in some of the GDI week activities.

**Honors:** *What are your favorite memories from your time as an honors student?*

**Blas:** I think my favorite memories really relate to my interactions with my professors, particularly Marv Henberg, and

the way they challenged me. They really forced me to think about things in a new way, to realize the box that I had placed myself in and to grow outside of that box.

**Honors:** *What did you do after graduating from the University of Idaho, and what are you doing now?*

**Blas:** After graduating from Idaho, I went to the University of Washington to pursue my PhD in physics. It was there that I found my passion for materials science – my dissertation focused on defects in semiconductors. After I graduated in 2000, I was hired as a postdoc at Los Alamos National Laboratory, where I became staff in 2004 in the Materials Science and Technology Division, where I've been ever since. My research has focused on computational materials science, with an emphasis on the effects of radiation on materials. I study materials at the atomic scale using computer simulations to understand how radiation disrupts those materials. I currently lead projects that are examining how radiation impacts corrosion in nuclear energy materials, how radiation changes the structure of ceramics and consequently mass transport, and how to more efficiently discover and optimize scintillators for imaging and detection applications. I was just elected as a fellow of the American Physical Society.

**Honors:** *What advice would you give an honors student today?*

**Blas:** The main benefit of the Honors Program, in my view, was to challenge my preconceived notions, to help me see the world from new perspectives, and to push me out of my comfort zone – really, just to think. The experience is unique. I would recommend that students really embrace the opportunity to engage their professors, to follow the encouragement of the professors to delve deep into the material, and to interact with their fellow students. It is a unique environment and opportunity that is rare, even in a university setting. Take advantage of all the program has to offer – the relationships, the coursework, the intellectual environment – to extract all you can.

**Honors:** *Are there any fun facts about you that you would like to share?*

**Blas:** My dad, and my mom's grandparents, were from the Basque Country. When I started graduate school, I created a website dedicated to the Basque people, their culture and history – buber.net – which just turned 25 years old. There is even a prize awarded in the Basque Country for the best Basque websites that was named after my site.

I currently live in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with my wife Lisa Van De Graaff and our daughter Rose, who have been immensely supportive of all of my endeavors.

## CONTACT US

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University Honors Program