



UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

Alumni Newsletter



Fall 2019



University of Idaho

University Honors Program

Greeting from the Director

There has never been a more exciting time to be part of our University Honors Program! Our diverse honors learning community offers new and current students a unique academic experience that includes honors courses, honors research grants, honors dorms, and honors co-curricular experiences. This fall we welcomed two new staff members to our program, Justin Smith, Honors Program Coordinator, and Cory Chambers, Honors Program Academic Advisor, who are actively supporting our students in their pursuit of academic excellence, creativity, and innovation.

Honors student Sam Myers, a senior from Mukilteo, WA, and a double-major in Physics and Mathematics, embodies academic excellence. This year, Sam won a prestigious **Barry Goldwater Scholarship**, which will pay for his graduate studies. Nominees for this nationally competitive scholarship came from an estimated pool of over 5,000 U.S. college sophomores and juniors. Sam is one of only 496 Goldwater Scholars recognized this year. You can read more about Sam's research and professional interests in Justin's interview with him further below in this edition's "Student Spotlight."



Sam Myers

Sam was able to leverage the undergraduate research opportunities and experiences he gained throughout his studies in the Barry Goldwater Scholarship competition.

Sam had successfully applied for a **University Honors Program Grant for Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship** in support of his cutting-edge research on exoplanets that earned him the Barry Goldwater Scholarship recognition. With the Honors research grant monies, Sam is now actively completing an **Honors thesis**, which he will be presenting at our bi-annual **University Honors Program Research and Creative Scholarship Forum**.

As busy as Sam is, he is actively involved in giving back to the University Honors Program community by becoming an **honors peer mentor**. As a peer mentor, Sam meets on a regular basis with honors students who just joined the Honors

Program and the University of Idaho to ensure that they have the best possible support right from the start of their academic careers. Sam understands from his own experience as an honors student how important student support is.

As a graduate of the University Honors Program, you understand the value of an honors education and the need to support its current students. The **Henberg Honors Endowment** and similar honors-specific endowments are our program's most powerful means for advancing honors students' professional prospects. Your donations support the valuable curricular and co-curricular experiences Sam and other honors students benefit from in the form of honors undergraduate research grants, merit- and needs-based honors scholarships, study abroad and internship experiences, and faculty-led travel to showcase student research at regional honors conferences.

Currently, the Henberg Honors Endowment is just \$7,000 shy of achieving the necessary level to generate annual funds to support our students' research and enrichment experiences. **I would like to challenge you, our honors alumni community, to add the necessary funds to the Henberg Honors Endowment by the end of this calendar year!** Give to the Henberg Honors Endowment by visiting our website here <https://www.uidaho.edu/academics/university-honors-program/giving>, click on the **Giving Form**, and in the **Designation** drop down, select the **Henberg Honors Endowment**. Thank you for your support of our University Honors Program students!

P.S. If you are looking for other honors-specific endowments, please choose the **Honors Program Scholarship Endowment**, **Honors Program Gifts**, the **Tom & Carrie Bitterwolf Renaissance Endowment**, or the **Bonnie Wallis Honors Scholarship Endowment** from the designation menu. Thank you very much!

With my warmest wishes for the holiday season!

Sincerely,



Sandra Reineke, Ph.D.

Director, University Honors Program



Sandra Reineke, Ph.D.

Recent University Honors Program News

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



Holly LaHann, Honors Program Coordinator and Distinguished Scholarships Program Coordinator.



Emily Hill, Honors Program Advisor and Student Engagement Coordinator.



Kendra Buell, Administrative Coordinator.

Welcome to Our New Staff

Hello Honors Alumni,

My name is Cory Chambers, and I am the University Honors Program Academic Advisor. I am proud to have the opportunity to work with our students. I came to the University of Idaho from Portland, Oregon. I have an M.S. in Educational Leadership and Policy. What I am most proud of is my advising and mentorship as a Teaching Fellow for the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program. Do not hesitate to drop me a line. I am always pleased to speak with our alumni and hear about where your goals and educational journey took you. Contact Cory at coryc@uidaho.edu.



Cory Chambers

Hello Honors Alumni,

I'm Justin, the new University Honors Program Coordinator. I am here to serve our students! I am a long time Vandal. Fourteen years ago I came to UI as a freshman. I have bachelor degrees in Political Science and History, as well as an M.A. in American History. My involvement with the University Honors Program includes all our events, the living-learning component, Honors Peer-Mentor Program, Honors Ambassador Program, and advising. We would love to have our alumni support at the University Honors Program Research and Creative Activities Forum. Hope to see you there!



Justin Smith

Research & Creative Activities

Our students are active in many aspects of research and creative activities. The University Honors Program is better preparing students for life by offering academic and experiential learning, coupled with co-curricular opportunities. Among the many opportunities are the University Honors Program Grant for Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship and honors theses.



Alice Cassel



Trevor Griffin



Natasha Herbenson



Caitlin Klaeui

Since Summer 2019, four honors students successfully applied for and received a **University Honors Program Grants for Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship**. Students may apply for up to \$1,000 of funding. The grants support our students as they endeavour to produce an original piece of research.

Among these outstanding students and scholars are: Alice Cassel, a senior in Microbiology and Biology; Trevor Griffin, a senior in Mathematics and Physics; Natasha Herbenson, a senior in Microbiology; and Caitlin Klaeui, a senior in Animal and Veterinary Sciences. We are so proud of our students, and look forward to seeing the fruits of their labor.



Ren Dimico



Alice Cassel

Two Honors Program students will present their honors theses at this semester's **University Honors Program Research and Creative Activities Forum** in December 2019.

Ren Dimico, a senior in Biology and Microbiology, College of Science, will present her honors thesis titled, “Enhancing Learning, Understanding and Retention in an iCure Laboratory.” Alice Cassel, a senior in Microbiology and Biology, College of Science will present her honors thesis titled, “Linking Micro and Macro: Exploring Patterns of Soil Microbiol Diversity in the Disjunctmesic Forest of the Pacific Northwest.”

GET ENGAGED

All are invited to attend the **University Honors Program Research and Creative Scholarship Forum** on December 4, 2019 in the IRIC Building, Step Auditorium. Ren Dimico is presenting, “Enhancing Learning Understanding and Retention in an iCURE Laboratory” from 5:00-6:00 p.m. Alice Cassel is presenting, “Linking Micro and Macro: Exploring Patterns of Soil Microbiol Diversity in the Disjunct Mesic Forests of the Pacific Northwest” at a date and time to be announced.

This is the culmination of years of hard work, research, and dedication, hope to see you there! For additional information or questions, please contact the University Honors Program at honors@uidaho.edu.

December 4, 2019

5:00-6:00 p.m.

IRIC Building, Step Auditorium

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 celebrations 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. We desire to stay in contact with all of our amazing alumni. Stay engaged. Stay connected. Continue our story together!

Student Spotlight

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

Sam Myers, a senior from Mukiteo, WA, is majoring in Mathematics and Physics. Sam is deeply involved in the University Honors Program and undergraduate research. He anticipates graduation in Spring 2020.

Recently, our University Honors Program staff member Justin conducted this in-person interview with Sam to find out more about his research and studies.



Sam Myers

Honors: *Why did you choose UI?*

Sam: I hadn't really heard of the U of I until I was already done applying for colleges. I was a National Merit Scholar and I received a mailer from U of I saying they offer full-ride scholarships to National Merit students. I knew I wanted to study physics and participate in undergraduate research, so I looked online and saw the University had a decent physics department and only required the Common App. I sent in my application and scheduled a visit to come and tour the campus. While I was here, I met with Dr. Jason Barnes from the physics department, and he assured me that I could start participating in research right away. As acceptances and offers started coming back in, the full ride scholarship, plus the research opportunity, and the Honors Program all contributed to my decision to attend the University of Idaho.

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

Sam: The best thing about the Honors Program is by far the classes. Having the opportunities to engage with smaller classes, in more thoughtful discussions, where the professor can pay more attention to each student as an individual is invaluable.

Honors: *What interest, research are you doing in your field?*

Sam: I have spent all of my time on campus doing planetary science research with Dr. Barnes from the physics department. The research that I conduct with him focuses on exoplanets, which are planets outside of our solar system. We use data from NASA's Kepler Space Telescope to characterize exoplanets. Essentially, we look at data measurements of planets that we already know exist, and we try and measure the shape of their orbits around their star. We can then use this information to learn about how those planets might have formed, which will help other planetary scientists to come up with comprehensive theories about how planets form and change over time. I've been able to present my work at numerous conferences, both at the University and around the country, and will have authored a paper by the time I graduate.

Honors: *What opportunities have you had due to the Honors Program?*

Sam: The Honors Program has been responsible for many of the opportunities I have had at U of I. The old director, Dr. Campbell, helped me get set up with Dr. Barnes' research. I made key connections and developed vital relationships with mentors, like Doc Bitterwolf, through Honors classes. A lot of my research has been funded through Honors Program grants. While Honors conferences have given me extra opportunities to present my research. I also met nearly all of my

current friend group through living in the honors dorms and it was through living in those dorms that I became involved in the Residence Hall Association.

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

Sam: My favorite honors class was by far Doc's honors chemistry sequence. The classes were entertaining, intellectually stimulating, and an opportunity to challenge myself. Additionally, talking to Doc was always a treat. I perpetually learned something new and came away with something new to think about. He was incredibly friendly and supportive and I miss him dearly.

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

Sam: I am going for the highest level of distinction, the Honors Scholars Award with Distinction, and plan to complete an honors thesis that will be about my current research on exoplanets.

Honors: *Are you involved in any clubs?*

Sam: Currently, I am a member of our University chapter of the Society of Physics Students, and a member of an interdisciplinary planetary science journal club. In my sophomore year, however, I spent one semester as the Vice President and one semester as the President of the University's Residence Hall Association (RHA). My biggest contribution to the RHA was starting an effort to overhaul the organization's constitution in order to enable it to become more effective at serving students in the residence halls. The committee I formed during my tenure produced a new constitution that is serving the organization well today.

Honors: *Have you been to any conferences or presented at any events?*

Sam: I have presented at the College of Science Research Expo (where I was awarded Outstanding Undergraduate Researcher), the Office of Undergraduate Research Symposium, the Western Regional Honors Consortium Conference, the Idaho Conference on Undergraduate Research, the Division of Planetary Sciences Annual Conference, and the American Astronomical Society Annual Conferences.

Alumni Profiles

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

Jana Gomez, Lewiston City Attorney in Lewiston, ID, '04.

Recently, University Honors Program staff member Justin conducted this email interview with Jana Gomez.

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

Jana: I looked forward to the challenge that I would get by participating in the Honors Program and the opportunity to set myself apart. The Honors Program also offered interesting classes that were only available to honors students.

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

Jana: I majored in International Studies and Spanish. After graduating high school, I lived in Chihuahua, Mexico, for a semester. Prior to that experience, I planned to pursue a career with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. But after experiencing life abroad and new cultures, I was set on learning more about the world. The International Studies program was a perfect fit.



Jana Gomez

I lived in the residence halls my entire time as an undergraduate. The first semester of my freshman year, I lived in Theophilus Tower. The second semester, I was hired as a Resident Assistant (RA) in Steele House. While living in Steele House, I came to know another resident, Rebeca, who was an exchange student from Monterrey, Mexico. She inspired me to get into long-distance running and became a lifelong friend.

My sophomore year, I returned to the Tower as an RA. There, on the 12th floor, I met the man who would eventually become my husband, Omar Gomez. He was a first-generation college student who had the opportunity to earn a degree through the CAMP program. The first semester of my junior year, I was an RA in Wallace. The second semester, I studied abroad in Monterrey, Mexico, where I reconnected with Rebeca. While in Mexico, I ran my first marathon with her and her dad. My senior year, I was an Area Assistant for Residence Life and lived in an apartment in Wallace. As a member of the Residence Life team, I was involved in many campus activities, including organizing Paint the Palouse.

I also participated in the CHANGE program hosted by Oxfam America, an organization dedicated to fighting hunger, poverty, and other social injustice issues. Students were selected throughout the United States, and we spent a week in Boston learning how to be effective advocates for change on our university campuses. One program, in particular, that I organized at UI was a fundraiser dinner in which each participant was given a card designating his or her social status. Some were seated at a nice table and served multiple-course meals, while others were given a more basic plate of food, and yet others did not have a seat at a table and were not given any food. The participants were left to eat dinner and figure out what was happening and what they were going to do, or not do, about it. The dinner was followed by an in-depth discussion about what the participants had just experienced, how it made them feel, and how the lessons learned could translate into action.

While dating Omar, I also participated in many activities hosted by CAMP. My favorite memory is dancing baile folklorico (traditional Mexican folklore dance) together on stage at one of CAMP's events. We spent many hours practicing at the racquetball courts in the Physical Education Building. The dance lessons often ended with us being frustrated with one another; we still laugh about it.

I was also inducted into many honor societies, including Golden Key International Honour Society, the National Society of Collegiate Scholars, Phi Kappa Phi, and Phi Beta Kappa.

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

Jana: My favorite memory occurred before I was officially a student. I was working for my family business, Lewiston Seafoods, loading trucks when I was notified that I had a call. I hopped off the forklift and went to take the call. Stephan Flores, then Director of the Honors Program, was calling to inform me that the University of Idaho Honors Program was offering me a full-tuition scholarship for the next four years. I was completely surprised. That call opened many doors and possibilities to me, not having to worry about being weighed down by student debt when I graduated; it changed my life. I also remember my senior year attending the Student Achievement Awards in Leadership and Service. Having been busy all day, I didn't have time to get ready for the program as I had planned. I wasn't worried, though, because, to my knowledge, I was not receiving an award. I ended up receiving three awards that night, including one of the University's most prestigious honors—the Donald R. and Cora E. Theophilus Award. The University surprised me once again.

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

Jana: When I graduated, Omar still had two years left of school. Wanting to stay close to him, I took a position as Coordinator of Residence Life at Lewis-Clark State College. Once he graduated, I decided to return to the University of Idaho, this time to attend law school. After graduating from the College of Law, I clerked in Boise for the Honorable Thomas G. Nelson, who was then a senior judge for the United States Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. I had the honor of being one of Judge Nelson's last law clerks. I then went to work for the Ada County Prosecuting Attorney's Office in the Civil Division. I couldn't have asked for a better place to start my career. I had the opportunity to work with a group of excellent attorneys who taught me the foundations of practicing law, modeled ethical behavior, and became my mentors.

After about five years in Boise, Omar and I were ready to return to northern Idaho and our Vandal family.

I was hired as the Civil Deputy prosecutor for Latah County and blessed to work with another incredible mentor, Bill Thompson. In 2015, I was selected as the Lewiston City Attorney. This job has been fantastic—I work with a great group of people, and I am always learning something new. I get to help solve problems every day and, most importantly, give back to my hometown. Looking back on the path I took to get to where I am today, I am reminded of the saying, “The harder you work, the luckier you get.” That has been true for me.

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

Jana: Fear of failure can propel you to success. Take challenging courses and push yourself just beyond your comfort limit—that is where you will grow and realize your potential. I have been scared for so long, but I now realize that my fear has been the foundation of my success. I feared joining the Honors Program because the classes might be too hard and I might not get good grades—I graduated with a 4.0. I was petrified of law school because everyone was so much smarter than me—I graduated top of my class. Was I really good enough to work for a federal judge reviewing, researching, and analyzing complicated legal issues, including playing a part in establishing new First Amendment jurisprudence? I learned I was. I was also nervous to apply for the City Attorney position and become legal counsel to a \$60 million corporation at age 34—but I did, and I have excelled. The fear of failure can be an effective motivator; embrace it.

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

Jana: I have had a pen-pal, Bec, in Australia since second grade. I remember going to the front of the class and drawing her name out of a hat. Our assignment was to write at least two letters to each other, and we were graded on spelling, punctuation, etc. After those two letters, we kept on writing one another. Eventually, in high school, she came and lived with me in Lewiston, and then I went to live with her in Adelaide. Since then, she has come back to visit me twice, and another time we met her and her husband in Las Vegas while they were traveling on their honeymoon. She keeps reminding me it’s my turn to visit her now! I’m hoping my daughter will be able to go on exchange in high school and live with her, and her sons will someday make a visit to Idaho to stay with us. I am also currently training to complete a full Ironman triathlon—again, motivated by the fear of failure! I like to push myself as hard physically as I do mentally. It provides a good balance.

Alumni Profiles

Carol (Bloomberg) Slaughterbeck, certified Project Management Professional and Executive Vice President, Herrera Environmental Consultants in Seattle, WA, '87.

Recently, University Honors Program staff member Justin conducted this email interview with Carol Slaughterbeck.

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

Carol: I was in the very first year of the program. I joined because I was intrigued by the idea of taking small class-size history and English classes with others who really wanted to learn. As an engineering major, I didn’t get many non-engineering courses so I wanted them to count. Also, they gave me a scholarship that covered tuition (only \$500 a semester back then).



Carol Slaughterbeck

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

Carol: I lived in Houston Hall, in Wallace Complex. By the time I was tired of the parties, I had plenty of studying to do for my engineering classes and the Honors Program. So, I didn’t participate much in formal organizations. I was active in a college group sponsored by the Presbyterian Church.

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

Carol: Getting to take an economics class taught by the University President Richard Gibb. Marv Henburg's history classes.

The summer reading programs—followed by a discussion class the next fall. The class on environmental issues included four books I had never heard of at the time, and changed the course of my career towards integrating ecology and environment with engineering, so that projects work for people as part of ecosystems and bioregions.

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

Carol: After graduation, I worked at a nuclear engineering company in Idaho Falls for nine months. Then I completed a Masters in Civil/Environmental Engineering at the University of Washington in Seattle. I've worked in consulting engineering ever since, including roles in pilot testing the first commercial yard waste composting facility in King County, analyzing tank waste issues at Hanford, modeling flooding on the Missouri River, and evaluating alternatives for redesigning stormwater and wastewater systems in Seattle. I'm currently the Executive Vice President at Herrera Environmental Consultants. I spend my time now managing the business side of the consulting company.

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

Carol: Take advantage of the opportunity to take a broad range of classes and approach life with an open mind.

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

Carol: I met my husband as a freshman, and we've now been married 33 years. In addition to my husband, Vandals in my family include my dad, mom, aunt, uncle, brother, sister, brother-in-law, two nieces, three nephews, and many cousins. Go Vandals!

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