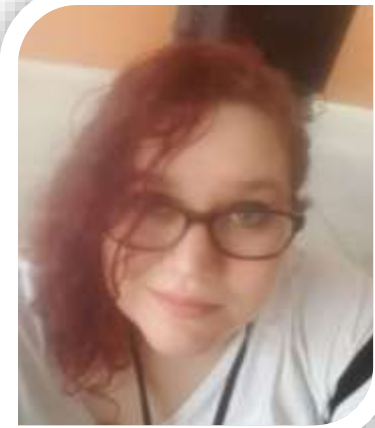


Ashley Thomas



Graduating Spring 2022 with an Associates of the Arts

Honors Classes-

- Survey of British Literature to Romanticism
- General Geology I
- Survey of World Literature to 1650
- World Civilizations from 1500

Section 1: “Engagement, Curiosity, Perspectives”

When I submitted my application for the Honors Program here at NWACC, nothing could have actually prepared me for the Honors Program during COVID-19. Looking back at past Honor members and their experiences with the program, I quickly realized that I was going to have to find a mostly new set of perks as I made my way through college. All of my classes were online through Zoom, so my only interaction with other students was during class time. There was no chance of running into them in the halls or hanging out in the Honors Lounge taking advantage of the coffee and free printing. I do not think it would be a stretch to say that my Honors Program perks boiled down to “demonstrate engagement, cultivate curiosity, and explore perspectives”. With no in person benefits to the program, I was left with what I saw in class amongst professors and peers and the occasional “Among Us” Honors game night.

I was never the most engaged student throughout high school and my first attempt at college. I did what I needed to do to pass my classes with high grades and did my best to keep my head down. I joined the Honors Program with the expectation that it was going to push me out of my comfort zone and allow me new experiences. I was



absolutely correct. Joining any of my Honors classes and realizing that there were only three to twelve students was one of the most intimidating moments I had ever experienced in school. Logging in to zoom for the first day of British Literature II and seeing only ten other camera squares on the screen was only the first step to my reluctant commitment to engaging more heavily at NWACC. Ms. Sharon Fox was a *listener* and for the first several weeks of class it was completely agonizing. If she wanted an answer to something she would just sit there and smile at us for minutes at a time until one of us came up with something. She loved to wait us out. Slowly, I started not just getting used to the idea of speaking up and sharing my ideas with the small class, but I started really enjoying it. Having your ideas confirmed and getting feedback on your opinions or views on books was so gratifying. Listening to others' ideas and getting to share your opinions, everybody coming together to form new ideas... I ended up loving the heavy participation in the discussion-based class.

Section 2: Preparation for University and Life

I joined the Honors Program for the extra push outside of my comfort zone, but I also joined for the chance to be a part of a community that had like-minded goals, to challenge myself academically and to *learn*. I did not just want to coast through classes and earn a degree without learning about my focus areas. The Honors Program definitely gave me that. After joining, I found myself asking more questions at work, wanting to know why things were what they were and whether something could be changed for the better. I was more engaged at work, willing to step up and volunteer for projects or tasks whereas before I would have only done what was

necessary. I started asking my students more open-ended questions and waiting quietly to give them a chance to respond instead of trying to fill the silence.

Work was not the only place I noticed a difference. My communication skills, written skills, and attention to detail have all increased in my two years as part of the program. My ability to speak up and ask questions actually exists. I have the motivation to go above and beyond for my classes instead of being pleased with “just enough”. I have found that I have a passion for learning beyond just the minimum required expectations. I am excited to take these things to UALR and apply them to the rest of my degree. The skills that the Honors Program has taught me will only continue to help me grow in everything that I apply myself to. I know that all of these things will help me in the coming years at University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Additionally, I believe that the Honors Program, specifically the Honors Program in a post COVID environment, has led me to be more prepared to participate in online courses. My degree at UALR is a fully online course load, which means that I will be needing to take the initiative I have learned through Zoom Honors courses to be a more active and participatory learner in my upcoming courses; it will help me to not just sit back as a blank screen and muted microphone while coasting through online classes.

Section 3: Shared Experiences

I have had so many experiences with the Honors Program that it is hard to pick just one. Right in the middle of COVID, I was taking Honors Geology and Professor Phillips gave us a field trip assignment to go hiking and look at rocks and minerals, as well as the environment around us. It was the first time that I had met in person with anybody from NWACC since enrolling, even if it was briefly and from a distance. It was so much fun to get to chat with the professor and even a couple of students that I had only ever seen over a screen. We got to bring our families out with us and just spend the day walking around and enjoying the



weather. It definitely helped that the day was beautiful and the hike at Tanyard Creek was so fun. I still have a ton of pictures on my phone from the day.



More

recently, my World Civilizations class met at Sushi House in Bentonville instead of in the classroom. We read an article about the globalization and industrialization of Sushi over the past several years as homework, and then we met up at Sushi House to discuss what we read and go more in depth about the history of Japan and how its' culture spread to the west. This was not the first restaurant we have met up at for class lectures. The class has also met up at Markham and Fitz and Crepes Paulette to give another layer to our class discussions. The World Civilization class looks at the past through the lens of food and how food has influenced and changed societies around the world. I had never realized just how connected food was to the development of different civilizations. Connecting the two subjects has helped me learn to look past just the surface level of subjects to find deeper connections.

Section 4: A Little Bit of Advice

Looking back at my experiences with the Honors Program, I think the best piece of advice I could offer would be to not be afraid to go after your dreams. Be the best person that you can be, and if you want to do something, then do not hesitate. Do not let your fears stop you from joining that one intimidating class or speaking up to voice your opinions. Join a volunteer project and give back to the community. The Honors Program is about an academic challenge,

yes, but it equally gives you a chance to find a community that you can feel safe and have fun in with like-minded peers.