

Honors Program Newsletter

STUDENT TO TEACHER • MODEL UN • ARTS INTEGRATION • BOOK CLUB • FOOD & CONFLICT • GREAT PLAINS • GALA



Celebrating the Arts

From classrooms to community to Kansas City, Honors students and faculty are using art to connect with others. This issue highlights how the process of creating empowers people and promotes equity. Community is one of the core values of the Honors Program, and this edition of the newsletter celebrates and examines how art has been integrated into classes and lives.

FROM STUDENT TO TEACHER: Tabitha Darrah (pictured above) talks about her journey from NWACC student to NWACC professor.

When did you graduate from NWACC?

I graduated NWACC in 2012, I believe during the fall semester.

How was your experience transferring to University of Arkansas?

The overall transfer experience to U of A was pretty seamless as far as registering and all of that. Physically attending the larger campus was a big shift - having to take a bus to travel between classes was new! Luckily, I'd completed all my core classes at NWACC, so I didn't have to swap between too many different buildings.

Model UN Hits The Big Apple

NWACC students Melany Chavez (Honors Program student), Angela Deneke (Honors Program student), Ghita Jeroundi, Lindsey Lawrence (Honors Program student), Mandy Lopez (Honors Program student), Nori Nguyen, Ghazal Sadiq Oghlo, Ali Mahdi Shirzad, and Ropafadzo Zhangazha represented Mongolia on the General Assembly first committee, second committee, third committee; UN Environmental Assembly;

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How did you get interested in art/ceramics?

I have always been interested in art since I was little. That sounds like such a cliché statement, but I'm afraid it's still true. I had a long stretch of time between graduating high school and starting college. I filled that time with every art thing I could get my hands on. When I finally started college, I knew I wanted to pursue art, but I wasn't sure where I wanted to focus. Even when I graduated from NWACC, I still wasn't sure which direction I wanted to go. I had a very brief introduction to the wheel when I was in high school, but it wasn't until my Wheel Throwing class at U of A that I really got a chance to sit down and try it out. When I looked up five hours later, I knew I'd found what spoke to me. The more I learned about the technical aspects of ceramics, the firmer that decision became. I could have science and art all in one. I was sold.

What's it like teaching at NWACC?

Teaching is this wonderful thing I never expected. I hadn't intended to teach after school; I was going to go create. Then I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to teach, and I realized how amazing it is. Students think of questions I've never considered before - you know you never learn so much as when you are teaching someone else. Seeing people progress from their first attempts to something they're genuinely proud to share with others is so incredibly fulfilling. Then having students come and share their excitement with me because they've sold a piece? Or got a booth at a fair? Or took a workshop over the summer? Or found a new glaze/claybody/surface technique/form they want to try? It's amazing. It really is.

What is your favorite memory from the Honors Program?

It would have to be my Honors World Literature classes. I found people I could have a discussion with - I could offer an opinion and get another opinion back. I just remember so many good conversations from those classes.

What did the Honors Program offer you?

The Honors Program here at NWACC helped in multiple different ways, but honestly the best thing it did for me was give me space to spread my wings a little. The courses gave me a place to have conversations where people had different opinions, but every opinion was welcome and respected - if not agreed with. I also had some incredible Service Learning opportunities that included heading out to Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Those experiences were all unlocked for me because I was part of the Honors Program. At the time, I was just glad I didn't have to do grammar worksheets, but looking back, I see such incredible gains I wasn't even aware of until years later.

Model UN Cont.

and Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference at the National Model UN conference in New York from April 5-10, 2026. They attended the conference as part of an Intro to UN Honors class. For its first time in the college's history at this conference, the team won awards -- an Honorable Mention award for the entire Mongolia delegation, and Deneke and Jeroundi won an Outstanding Delegate award for their work on the UNEA committee. The team got to connect with nearly 2000 student delegates from schools in the US, Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. The week started with an opening ceremony in Midtown Manhattan...

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What do you wish people knew about Honors courses or the Honors Program?

I want people to know that the Honors courses are so much more than writing a longer paper or having some vague idea about doing more work. It's the experiences you have, the opportunities, the conversations - these aspects are what makes it worthwhile to be a part of the Honors Program. Yes, you'll learn dates and read and have discussions about how to better structure your sentences, but the Program gives you so much more on top of that. •



A LOVE FOR GARDENING: Logan Lerch ('26) reflects on the Honors Program and how Arts Integration benefits multiple disciplines.

What got you interested in flowers/gardens?

What got me interested in flowers was the novelty of not growing them when I was younger and gardening with my family and in gardening clubs at school. I grew up in areas surrounded by farms, and growing vegetables was something my family did so we

could eat. I wanted to try something new with gardening, so I tried flowers, and I love growing them so much. I've noticed they make people smile more than getting vegetables as a gift.

What prompted you to look at the symbolism behind them?

I was interested in the symbolism of flowers mostly because of my love for reading. Every book I've read that impacted me has layers of symbolism within the story. Individual flowers holding meaning reminded me of the depth that simple things in life hold. Diving into that depth helped me enhance the storytelling.

What do you think of arts integration in classes?

Arts Integration in classes is a fun way to connect with the materials. I really think working with concepts and exploring them in an artistic fashion or more personalized activities strengthens understanding and encourages further exploration.

Model UN Cont.

that included a speech by Mike Waltz, the US Permanent Representative to the UN and ended in the UN General Assembly Hall with a keynote address from Melissa Fleming, Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications, United Nations.

Jacob Baker, Tatum Buchanan, Lizeth Cervantes, Melany Chavez (Honors Program student), Mollie Kilgore, Lorena Galan Lopez, Ghita Jeroundi, Lindsey Lawrence (Honors Program student), Mandy Lopez (Honors Program student), Gaby Mora, AJ Morales, and Kayla Spitzer (Honors student) participated in Midwest Model UN from Feb. 18-21 in St. Louis. We represented Bangladesh, Mexico, and Turkey on General Assembly second committee, General Assembly fourth committee, United Nations Environmental Assembly, and United Nations Committee on Trade and Development. Lopez won an outstanding delegate award for representing Mexico on GA4, as well as a position paper award.

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What other class that you took would benefit from Arts Integration?

Other classes that I think would benefit from Arts Integration are STEM classes. Science classes specifically because there are so many concepts and processes that can get confusing or difficult to understand. I remember in 6th grade when I was learning about precipitation and the water cycle. My teacher had a game where we pretended to be a water drop and rolled a dice to see where we were in the cycle. We would go to the table with our step in the cycle. I remember being a water drop in the ocean for so long before I evaporated into a cloud. This really helped me connect how much water stays in the ocean, and how vast the ocean is. At one point it felt like the entire class was in the ocean. Being a part of the processes of life like photosynthesis helps to understand what goes on for photosynthesis. If you want to understand what a chloroplast does, why not be the chloroplast and act out its functions?

Tell us about the project you did for the humanities class and about your attendance at the Great Plains.

The project I did for Exploring the Humanities was writing a book about why I love to garden and grow flowers. The project was asking us to connect an aspect of our lives to a part of the Humanities. My story is an origin story of why I love gardening. I used pressed and dried flowers from my garden and a few that were gifted to me for the art. Going to the Great Plains Honors Council Conference to share this work with peers who took genuine interest in what I created was a fun way to share what Arts Integration is about, and the product of my passion. •

Model UN Cont.

Lawrence won an honorable mention award for representing Bangladesh on UNEA. In total, 33 colleges and universities from across the US participated in this conference. •

**ARTS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Dana Doughty ('22) talks about her non-linear college experience and what she's been doing post graduation.****When did you graduate from NWACC?**

I graduated summa cum laude from NWACC in 2022 with an Associate of Science in Liberal Arts and Sciences. I was also recognized with the Cooper Award for Outstanding Work in Honors Arts, Communication, Music, or Theater, as well as an Academic Achievement Award. My time at NWACC included work as a staff writer for *The Eagle View* and continued involvement in Honors and campus life beyond graduation.

How was your experience transferring to UA?

My path has never been linear, so I do not experience education as a simple ladder from one institution to the next. I attended university when I was younger, stepped away for many years, and lived a very full life in between, including raising children, teaching, farming, running businesses, and living in alternative and off-grid communities.

Returning to school at NWACC in my thirties was part of that larger journey.

After NWACC, I studied philosophy, theater, and organizational leadership through the University of Arkansas in both Fayetteville and Fort Smith, while also earning multiple workforce development certificates and regularly

engaging in online and in-person seminars and workshops. NWACC was not simply a stepping stone for me; it was a place I actively chose and deeply valued. I love the community college model and the ways it can be rigorous, accessible, relational, and grounded in real community. As a nontraditional student, I found that NWACC offered both strong academic engagement and a setting where a more complex life path could be understood rather than treated as unusual.

How did you get interested in arts-integrated community engagement and history museum work?

I have long been drawn to creative, accessible ways for people to connect more deeply to place, to one another, and to the stories that shape us. For me, building resilient communities begins with relationship: to the land, to local history and shared cultural life, and to each other.

Since graduating from NWACC, my work has continued to unfold across art, education, community engagement, and public history. I taught Fashion Design and Sewing Arts at the Arkansas Arts Academy, served as a Benton County community liaison for Weave: The Social Fabric Project, an Aspen Institute initiative, and continued working as an artist through costuming, production, performance, and collaborative projects across Northwest Arkansas, including residencies at Crystal Bridges, the Momentary, and the Medium. I have also managed the Bentonville History Museum for the past two years, where these threads come together through public history, exhibit development, community-centered programming, storytelling, and local partnerships. Across all of this work, I remain most interested in helping people feel more connected, more curious, and more alive.

What is your favorite memory from the Honors Program?

One of my favorite memories was in Sevin Gallo's World Civilizations course, which she taught beautifully through the lens of food culture. We had the opportunity to visit Brightwater and participate in a live cooking demonstration with local chef Judy Tatio, who was opening a Marshallese restaurant in Springdale at the time. We learned about the Marshall Islands and experienced some of the culinary traditions firsthand. It was such a vivid example of learning that was immersive, relational, and rooted in real culture and community.

Favorite class or instructor?

It is hard to choose just one, because several courses and instructors had a lasting impact on me. Matt Evans' American National Government and International Comparative Politics courses were integral to my



Honors Brit Lit II Class Hosts February Book Club

In February, the NWACC Book Club joined Professor Jim Laughton's Honors British Lit II class to discuss *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan, a novella exploring compassion, conscience, and courage in a small Irish town.

The conversation was brought to life through student Emily Safcsak's thoughtful diorama (above), highlighting the history of the Magdalene Laundries and deepening our understanding of the novel's real-world context. Student groups focused on different facets of the novel.

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Book Club Cont.

One group addressed biography and literary legacy, one historical and economic connections, and another key themes and style. Each group did research and created handouts used during the presentation.

“Claire Keegan asserts that ‘the reader is the other half of the writer,’” says Professor Laughton. “Brit Lit II Honors students took that challenge seriously, bringing their research, their questions, and their own lives to the table, and finishing what Keegan started on the page.” •

development as an engaged citizen and helped shape my personal political and social philosophy. Sabrina Chesne’s Honors Composition courses expanded my appreciation for diverse writing styles and challenged me to further develop my own voice as a writer. And Sevin Gallo’s World Civilizations course was, as I mentioned, thoughtful, creative, and deeply memorable.

What did the Honors Program offer you?

The Honors Program offered me a place where my multidimensional, cross-disciplinary way of learning was not only accommodated, but genuinely celebrated. As a nontraditional student, that mattered deeply. It gave me an engaged academic community, meaningful intellectual challenge, and relationships with professors who have remained friends, mentors, and community collaborators. The Program made space for curiosity, complexity, and real dialogue, and that environment has had a lasting impact on me.

What do you wish people knew about honors courses or the Honors Program?

I wish people knew that Honors courses are not just “harder” classes and that the Honors Program is not only for one type of student. In my experience, Honors courses are often more thoughtful, more discussion-based, more creative, and more personally meaningful. They invite deeper engagement and interdisciplinary understanding rather than simply more work. I think a lot more students would see themselves in the Honors Program if they understood that it can be a place for curiosity, connection, and genuinely rich learning. •

HUMANITIES AND ARTS INTEGRATION: *Cindy King, Instructor of English Composition, French, and Humanities, discusses how her teaching techniques and philosophy have evolved since her involvement for the last three years in the ARTeacher Fellowship.*

When and why did you get interested in Arts Integration?

I’ve always been interested in experiential learning, whether that involves a field trip to Crystal Bridges Museum or Theatre Squared, guest speakers (thanks to Curtis Harrell and his wonderful class banjo sessions), or hands-on projects. As the daughter of musicians, my family and I lived and breathed the arts (I still do). I graduated from of the U of A’s Creative Writing Masters Program in Poetry and have been teaching a range of courses at NWACC ever since. These days, it’s mostly English Composition, French, and Humanities.



I was in need of a change in my approach to teaching after the pandemic. I had a friend who was participating in the ARTeacher Fellowship, a professional development program run by the U of A Center for Children and Youth in collaboration with Crystal Bridges and the Walton Arts Center. My application was delayed for a year or two due to the pandemic, but the desire to get some formal training in Arts Integration never left me. Most ARTeacher Fellows teach K-12, but the Center Director Hung Pham kindly took a chance on me.

What exactly is Arts Integration?

I generally go back to the Kennedy Center's definition:

Arts Integration is an approach to teaching, in which students construct and demonstrate understanding, through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving objectives in both.

What does that look like in the classroom?

After we Fellows receive training in a specific strategy, each of us heads back to the classroom to develop a specific project that fits our curriculum and students. Our cohort meets every couple of months to work with a local or national specialist in a particular area, such as Experiential Theatre, Mixed Media, or Zines. This past February, we spent a day at Crystal Bridges exploring Conceptual Art, closely examining examples in the museum collections, supported by discussion of relevant art history and pedagogy, as well as brainstorming applications in the classroom.

What about in your Exploring the Humanities course?

This semester, the Semiquincentennial Celebration is a central theme in my face-to-face humanities class. I want students to reflect on the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. What does the document and all it symbolizes mean to them in 2026? Does the current divisiveness in this country (and world) affect their view of the United States, as well as their own identity? For inspiration, we took a class trip to Crystal Bridges' exhibit *America 250: Common Threads*, which includes many wonderful pieces, especially of folk art crafted by commoners, that reflect on this nation and its complex history. And as for the Conceptual Art Project, we are each making a flag that embodies a theme or narrative of our choice that we associate with the Semiquin. In addition to original artwork, students write an Artist's Statement about the process of creating the flag and present their work to the rest of the class in connection with final reflections on the course. •

Honors World Civ Since 1500 Studies Conflict Resolution



Professor Sevin Gallo had students present world conflicts and prepare a meal explaining the history of the conflict. Students presented the meal in class along with an explanation of each course and how it tells this history of the conflict. Students learned to make regionally significant dishes, such as falafel for Israel-Palestine and arepas for Venezuela. Honors students Audrey Cusick (left) and Israel Martinez (right) made scallion pancakes from Taiwan with Brightwater Chef Instructor Aria Kagan (middle) consulting. Throughout the semester, students have class on campus but also at Brightwater, NWACC's Center for the Study of Food, and local restaurants (like Yeyos, Saiwok, and Tropical Havana) to experience flavors that reveal the history of the human experience first hand in preparation for their own food history culinary experience.

Another Year, Another GPHCC!



Eleven NWACC Honors students traveled in March 2026 to the Great Plains Honors Council Annual Conference at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, KS. This year's theme, "KC Disrupted: Wicked Problems and Creative Solutions," set the stage for a weekend of learning, networking, and sharing research with peers from across six states.

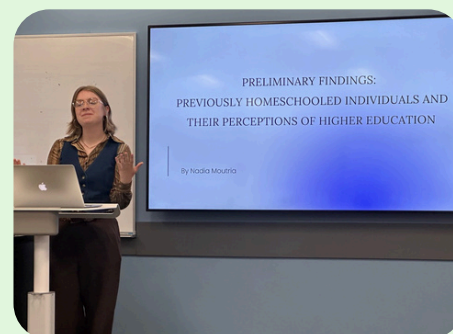
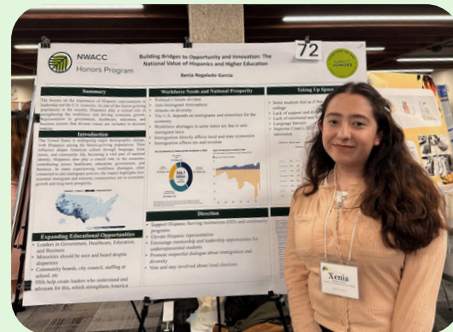
Seven students presented (below), and they were joined by fellow honors students Brittany Jones, Alyssa Spitzer, and Faren Williams, who attended presentations and engaged with students and faculty from other colleges.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

- **Chris Bailey:** Direct Trade Certifications For Tea Farmers
- **Xenia Regalado García:** Value of Hispanics in Higher Education
- **Raphael Spiros:** Neocolonialism from the Swiss Financial Oligarchy

PANEL PRESENTATIONS

- **Logan Lerch:** Arts Integration: A Story of Flowers
- **Nadia Moutria:** Homeschool and Perceptions of Higher Education
- **Nadia Moutria and José Rivas Gálvez:** Beowulf: Literature's Ability to Evolve
- **Charista Paine:** Boudinot and The Border Between Races
 - *Alex Paine played the Native American flute*



9th Annual Honors Awards Gala

On April 29, 2026, the Honors Program hosted its annual Honors Gala, a celebration of students, graduates, and faculty, and the many achievements of the year. The evening featured dinner, community, and recognition of 19 Honors Program graduates, including 10 graduates with Distinction, along with awards in honors disciplines and events.



HONORS MEDALLIONS

HONORS PROGRAM GRADUATES

TATUM BALDWIN

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM)

MARIAN HENDRICKS

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM)

LIAM JOHNSON

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Science (Non-STEM)

LOGAN LERCH

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM);

Associate of Arts

TAYLOR MACKIE

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)

JOSHUA McCASLIN

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)

JOSÉ RIVAS GÁLVEZ

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)

ANGEL PIANALTO

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)

ANTHONY SUVIAZ

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)

HONORS PROGRAM GRADUATES WITH DISTINCTION

MICHAEL BOYD

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Science (STEM)

SAMANTHA HANSEN

Associate of Arts

LINDSEY LAWRENCE

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM)

MIRANDA “MANDY” LOPEZ

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM)

NADIA MOUTRIA

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM)

LE NGUYEN

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)

CHARISTA PAINE

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)

XENIA REGALADO GARCÍA

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (STEM)

PRESLI SICKELS

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM)

PAIGE TITSWORTH

Associate of Science, Liberal Arts and Sciences (Non-STEM)



HONORS GLASS AWARDS**BROWN CHESNE HONORS AWARD***For dedication to Community, Curiosity, and Diversity***Nadia Moutria****OLIVIA AND BENJAMIN SCHAAP HONORS AWARD***For outstanding dedication to Honors scholarship***Mandy Lopez****Charista Paine****FOX LOONEY LAUGHTON HONORS AWARD***For outstanding work in Honors English, Literature, or Humanities***Jonathan Barrett****Paige Titsworth****TURNER HONORS AWARD***For outstanding work in Honors Life or Physical Sciences***Rebekah Hearne****Precious Kelson****Piper Reinhardt****COOPER HONORS AWARD***For outstanding work in Honors Arts, Communication, Music, or Theatre***Abigail Kaneaster****HONORS PYOTR KROPOTKIN AWARD FOR MUTUAL AID***For outstanding commitment to community service and collective action***Lindsey Lawrence****Emily Safcsak****GPHCC MEDALLIONS****Nadia Moutria****Xenia Regalado García****Raphael Spiros****Alex Paine****Charista Paine****José Rivas Gálvez****HONORS STUDENT ASSOCIATION PAPERWEIGHTS****Angela Deneke***HSA Secretary, 2024-25; President, 2025-26***Nadia Moutria***HSA Secretary 2025-26***Brittany Jones***HSA Vice President, 2025-26***Israel Martinez***HSA Treasurer, 2025-26***SUNBURST AWARD***Outstanding HSA Members, 2024-2025***Logan Lerch****Nadia Moutria****JADE AWARD***For outstanding dedication to Honors students***Gene Vinzant**