

Fall 2021 Newsletter

University of Iowa



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This semester, we asked current students to reflect on their time in college. Here's what they had to say!

What's the most unexpected thing you've learned in college thus far?

"The biggest thing I've learned since moving is here is that you really have to be okay with "going with the flow." In high school, I was always a super structured person that stuck to a similar routine each and every day. It's different in college. Your class schedule changes each and every day, unexpected tasks may arise, and things aren't always going to go as planned. But that's okay! It's okay to live in the moment and just go along with what's happening. Once you accept that not everything will go as planned, a weight gets lifted off your shoulders and everything seems a lot easier."

-Meredith Monson, First-year

"How to allow myself other identities besides being a student. I have discovered so many hobbies and talents I didn't know that I had outside of school. Instead of having a very narrow perspective and only working toward my educational and career goals, I learned to let myself be a whole person with a multitude of interests, identities, and goals."

-Hayley Peters, Second-year

What advice would you give to your younger self as you entered college?

"Don't take yourself so seriously. School is important, but it isn't everything. Take the time to go out to eat, travel if you can, go on a hike, and watch a movie. Every waking moment is not meant to be spent studying. It's okay to do things you enjoy- you are still going to be successful!"

-Elly Vinton, Fourth-year

"I would tell my younger self that you likely won't find your close group of friends who genuinely care about you in the first few weeks of school, or even that first semester or year. It's okay if the friend group is in flux for a while. You will find your people, but it takes time. It takes more than you think for most people, and you're not alone. Social media isn't an accurate representation of how happy and fulfilled people are."

-Hannah Heindel, Third-year

An introduction to PSP faculty advisor Shaun Vecera

As many of you know, earlier this Fall semester I started as the Honors Program director, and I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I had an opportunity to meet some of the Presidential Scholars at a recent reception, and I'm looking forward to being the faculty advisor for the group.

My academic home is Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, where I have been a faculty member since 1998. I'm trained as a cognitive psychologist, the area that studies perception, attention, memory, and other forms of thinking. My research aims to understand visual attention and perception—how we find something we're looking for, such as a friend's face in a crowd, and how we perceive and recognize those things once we have found them. I am a first-generation college graduate, receiving my undergraduate degree from the University of Oregon and my Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon University. I have many of



the expected professional bona fides, including over 85 publications on my research, external funding from various granting agencies, and associate editorships for several journals in my field.

Most relevant for the Honors Program, I have been involved deeply with honors education and undergraduate student success for many years. I regularly teach Elementary Psychology and developed an honors contract "book club" option for interested students. One year, we read Michael Pollan's book *How to Change Your Mind*, which led to wide-ranging discussions about mushroom identification, psychological assessment, and neurotransmitters. As some of my students know, reading the book led me to learn to cultivate my own oyster mushrooms. I continue to teach an honors first-year seminar titled *How Psychology Can Save the Planet* and to participate in Honors Primetime. I am proud to have received the 2019 Honors Program Teaching Award for these classes and activities, in addition to receiving the President and Provost Award for Teaching Excellence in 2018.

The Honors Program encourages student reflection, so it seems appropriate for me to engage in some reflection, too. When I think about my experience as an undergraduate, I'm often surprised that I was able to navigate through my major and undergraduate research and on to graduate school. There were fewer formal academic advising structures when I was an undergraduate, but I was fortunate to work with two supportive faculty research advisors. Their reputations would have allowed them to focus exclusively on their research, graduate students, and postdoctoral scholars, but they actively supported undergraduate teaching, learning, and research. As I reflect on my academic path, I try to follow the example of the advisors who I have benefitted from, and I hope that I can be a positive influence for the students I work with.

We asked Presidential Scholar Alumni:

What was your favorite class?

Quest for Human Destiny

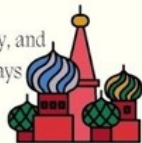
with Jay Holstein



"As an engineering student, it was one of the few liberal arts courses I took, and really made me feel like I was "at college" learning about the bigger issues in life."

All of my Russian classes

"The Russian department is small but mighty, and the courses made us think in new, critical ways about language, communication, culture, politics, and the lives of people who may (or may not) be different from us."



Honors Seminar in Public Scholarship

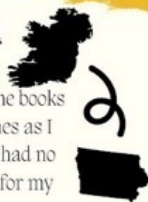
with John Nelson



"It was a class that took me out of my comfort zone and taught me to be familiar in public discourse, critical reasoning, and networking situations."

Iowa to Ireland: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

"I later lived in Ireland and thought about the books and discussions from this course many times as I navigated life as an Iowa living in Ireland. I had no idea when I took it how helpful it would be for my future self!"



Alumni Survey

For the Fall 2021 survey, we are asking alumni, "What was your favorite club or student organization you participated in at the University of Iowa?" Please take a few minutes to answer [HERE](#).

Catching up with...

Alumnus Michael Li Class of 2020

Executive Board member and
PSP President, 2019-20



In March 2020, I received the Peace Corps email I had been dreading: Due to the spread of COVID-19, your departure for Cameroon has been delayed. My plans to find purpose by throwing myself wildly out of my comfort zone and out of the country had been thwarted; however, ever the optimist, I settled in to cruise through graduation and wait for the pandemic to blow over so my life could quickly get back on track. We all know how that ended up. So, with the realization that things would not go back to normal, I sought an alternative experience that could shake things up the way that a two-year stint in Cameroon would have. This landed me on the Gulf Coast of Texas doing environmental conservation work.



The next 6 months were a blur of cold-stunned sea turtle rescues, hammerhead shark forensics, invasive species removal, and more. I met some lifelong friends and did things I never imagined I'd do. I wish I could also say that I found my purpose in life through those comatose sea turtles, but that epiphany never came. And that's ok. There probably won't be a

single crazy experience that sets up the rest of my life. Every adventure builds on another, and I can't wait to see what my next one will be.



Alumni Spotlight

Stephanie Kimball, Class of 2009 University of Iowa Dental School

What is your current professional role?

I am currently the Director of Climate Strategy at Conservation International located in Washington DC.

Why did you decide to make the switch from dentistry to your current profession?

I really got into dentistry because of my passion for helping people, but as I volunteered and worked with different groups focused on the environment, it made the climate crisis much more apparent to me. It was when I founded a 350.org chapter in Wisconsin that I was truly inspired to make the switch to my current career because I feel that I would be able to work with others towards the goal of helping the climate and as a collective our impact truly fulfilled my passion of helping others.



How do you feel the Presidential Scholars program influenced your undergraduate education?

It gave me the community of fellow scholars who wanted to pursue different interests, and I was continually talking to them about the various impacts their classes had on them. In my science courses for pre-dental, there were people who just stuck to science courses but I found that the Presidential Scholars have a much wider diversity of interests and that helped me gain an interdisciplinary approach to the course I took in undergrad, which helped laid a much stronger foundation for my ultimate career."

Were there any activities or experiences you had at the University of Iowa that were especially impactful or memorable?

I was involved in Dance Marathon and the Ten Thousand Hours show and that was helping to bring a lot of different volunteer opportunities to students and get them engaged in the local community in Iowa City. I felt that was really an exciting opportunity to use the University experience to step out of the University and connect with the community you're in and it was that community building that led to founding the 350.org chapter in Madison and showing that no matter your age you can still have an impact where you are right now.

If you could give any message to the current Presidential Scholars, what would you want to say?

Think outside the box about what your experiences are, both with your selection of courses and your extracurricular activities. I think staying on the single track prescribed by your major can be limiting when there are so many interesting things you can learn that may be outside of what might be useful in your career, because you never know what can happen and having that solid base of a liberal arts education was what really prepared me

From the Archives

Photo from University of Iowa Digital Library



"The Honors Program found a semi-permanent home in Shambaugh House, to which it moved in 1982. This house was built in 1901 (a year earlier than Schaeffer) as a home for scholar, naturalist, and suffragist Bertha Shambaugh, and her husband, political science professor Benjamin Franklin Shambaugh. As a home for Honors, the location introduced several new luxuries including a kitchen, a fireplace, and a porch for relaxation and Halloween trick-or-treating. Today Shambaugh is home to the International Writing Program (incidentally formerly chaired by Sandra Barkan, the former Honors executive director)."

- Honors Program History.pdf (uiowa.edu)

We had a great first semester!

Follow us!

<https://orgpsp.prod.drupal.uiowa.edu/>

Instagram: @pspuiowa



We look forward to keeping in contact! Be sure your contact information is up-to-date with the University of Iowa Center for Advancement. Click the link below to update your information: <https://www.foriowa.org/update-information/>



Top: Gingerbread house making

Bottom: Reception with President Wilson

"I love Z'Marik's, Bread Garden, Java/Heirloom, and especially Prairie Lights!"

-Hannah Franke, First-year

"My favorite coffee shops are

Prairie Lights, fix!, and Tru. White Rabbit is a great place to get cute clothes and little niche items. Take a walk in the historic college street neighborhood, there are some gorgeous old houses that are fun to look at."

-Emma, Andreasen, Second-year

Iowa City recommendations: by students, for students

"I love going to Record Collector downtown. It's the perfect way to spend any Saturday afternoon!"

-Meredith Sloat, First-year

"I loved going to Film-Scene to watch a movie! It was a really different experience from the theaters in my hometown."

-Abbie McLaren, First-year

"I like Basta, going to Artifacts, attending football and basketball games, and riding my bike on the trails."

-Sebastian Smith, First-year