HONORABLY

FALL 2024

EAST CENTRAL UNIVERSITY
ECU
Honors Program

"This trip was my first time on a plane. . . My favorite food in Mexico was the tortas at the first taqueria we visited, and my favorite experience was the Teotihuacán pyramids and the Churabusco Monastery."

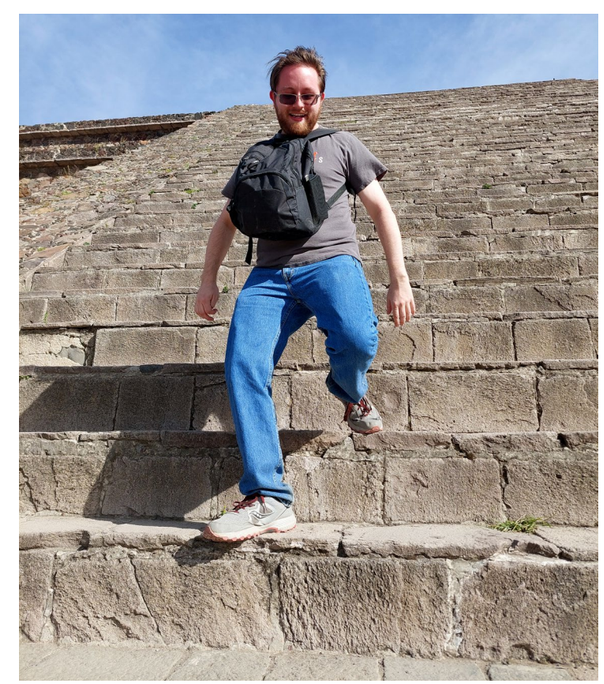
--Toby Pyle (Computer Science)

Mexico

Ten Honors seniors joined Dr. King and Dr. Benton on a trip to Mexico City, where we crowded onto packed city buses, saw smoking volcanos from the tarmac, found ourselves alone in the shadows of the largest pyramids in the Western Hemisphere, and learned that the cheapest places we ate were often the best. In 2020, the Honors Program's first trip abroad was canceled because of Covid, so our January 2024 flight to the largest city in the Western Hemisphere was a "dream deferred." In addition to the pyramids, other memorable highlights included Frida Kahlo's Casa Azul in Coyoacán, Diego Rivera's murals at the National Palace, and the house where Leon Trotsky was assassinated in 1940.

"This was my first time out of the States, my first time trying *mole* not made by my family, my first time spending pesos, my first time in a skyscraper, my first time seeing a pyramid, and my first time trying tongue tacos!"

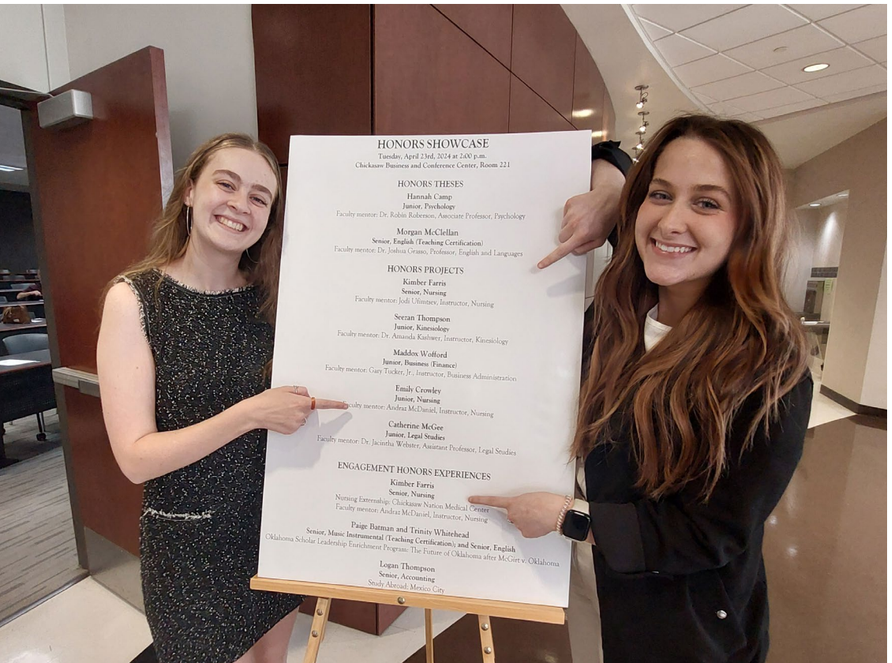
--Luke Woodward (Biology)



SHOWING UP

Spring presentations spotlighted 5 theses, 9 projects and 5 engagement experiences.

Junior Legal Studies major Allyson Teel went to prison to complete her Honors requirements. The 5-day seminar Allyson attended on “Restorative Justice and Peacemaking Ally” was hosted by the Oklahoma Scholar Leaders Enrichment Program (OSLEP), which gave Ally and other student visitors a chance to interact with inmates personally touched by the criminal legal system in Oklahoma. Other off-campus engagement experience reports presented at Showcase included a service-learning focused “Alternative Spring Break” experience in Hawaii, made possible by a Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institution grant; a nursing externship at the Chickasaw Nation; and an OSLEP seminar on “The Future of Oklahoma after McGirt.” Sophomore Biology major Eli Grasso gave the program’s diversity a thumbs up: "Logan Thompson’s presentation on Teotihuacán was very impressive and, as it was given by an Accounting major, really shows the interdisciplinary opportunities available in Honors."



“Showcase was probably the most valuable point-scoring event I went to this semester, mainly because of the motivation it gives me.”

--Maddox Wofford (Business)

Ada's generous Ramadan family invited us to a delicious Moroccan meal at the Grand Mosque of Oklahoma City.

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GLOBAL FAITHS

"If you had prejudices against these religions, then the trip will take those prejudices and set them ablaze. Never to be thought of again. That’s just how great of an impact this trip had on me.”

--Elliot Riden (Education)

In March, Honors students and faculty were welcomed to the Hindu Temple of Oklahoma by Dr. Vedala Srinivasacharya and to the Grand Mosque of Oklahoma City by Imam Saad Aborhama and Dr. Azeem Shakir. A wide majority of students identified this outside-of-class experience as the most valuable one of the spring. As music major Levi Ballard put it, “I feel as if my views and therefore my life has been changed by what I learned, in a good way.” "I was uncomfortable at first," Psychology major Adalyn Winters added, but “as the day went on, I got to essentially immerse myself in the culture, even though I don’t practice those beliefs. I also thoroughly enjoyed the bus rides to and from, getting to talk to people I don't normally get to talk to, and having a deep conversation with Dr. Felts on the way back.”

UNMASKED

In the fall of 2020, they arrived wearing Covid masks, and in the spring of 2024, they left draped in regalia: white Honors thesis hoods and stoles of gold (University Honors) and silver (Departmental Honors)

"It was almost a year before I saw their mouths," Honors Director Steve Benton remembered of the graduating Honors class of 2024, who wore masks throughout the first year on campus. "But," he added at the spring banquet, "From watching an outdoor performance of Macbeth in sub-freezing temperatures, to launching weekend student-led 'EQ5' seminars, to riding in crawdad skiffs alongside alligators in the Louisiana bayou, and climbing ancient pyramids in the Teotihuacan valley in Mexico, these graduating seniors squeezed every last drop out of their college experience."

CIVIL RIGHTS TRAIL

Before their May journey through the Mississippi Delta, Honors juniors met with Dr. Shirley Mixon, director of ECU's Interdisciplinary Studies program, who told them about her personal experience integrating an all-white high school in Louisiana in the 1960s. That talk provided a powerful backdrop for our visits to the Little Rock Central High National Historic Site and the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, site of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. Describing the museum, History major Cas Northcutt observed, "I liked that they have turned something that was so horrible into a way to perpetuate MLK's message of furthering the Civil Rights movement." A tour of the Chickasaw homelands near Tupelo, Mississippi with Chickasaw elder Bill Brekeen gave Cas another chance to reflect on national narratives of trauma and healing. "I always think of the homelands of many of the tribes that were removed as a past part of their history," Cas added, "but visiting the Chickasaw homelands reminded me that it doesn't have to be that way. Many tribes are attempting to reconnect with their homelands and repair the disconnect."

THE END IS NIGH

Winner of the Nigh Award as ECU's Top Graduating Senior, Megan Lewis looks back on 4 years in Honors

After my freshman year, I won the Honors First-Year Student Leadership Award. Originally, I didn't know such an award even existed, but it was one of my proudest accomplishments to date. I felt that my private devotion to the classroom and others was seen and acknowledged. Throughout my time in Honors, the professors and other students influenced me to strive for excellence. When starting at ECU, completion of my Honors Thesis seemed like such a daunting task, but my junior year I diligently worked on completing and defending it within two semesters. After my thesis was accepted "as is" by my committee, Dr. Benton asked me to mentor other thesis writers, offering encouragement, outlining successful steps for completing their theses, and lessening their anxieties. As soon as I was able, I had the great blessing of joining the Honors Student Association Leadership Team. My greatest recognition was my service as President of the Honors Student Association Leadership Team during my junior year. After my year-long term, I was recognized by Dr. Benton at the Honors Banquet for having a volunteer spirit and being one of the best presidents he has worked with. His praise exemplifies all that I wish to say about myself. To be seen by a faculty member as a servant of her community and peers for her impact on campus is a praise that I am beyond grateful to have received.

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