

APRIL 2025

VENERATIO

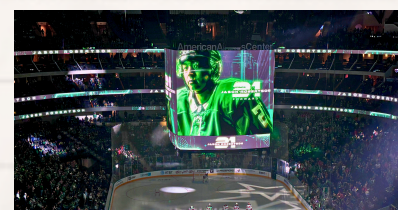
THE HONORS COLLEGE NEWSLETTER



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THE HISTORY OF THE HONORS COLLEGE

Author: Bhumigya Bajracharya
Editor: Acadia Clements

Late 1970s. In the heart of Arlington, Texas, a quiet revolution in higher education was brewing at this time. It began humbly—just a handful of students, a couple of dedicated professors, and a dream; a dream to create a space where academic curiosity could flourish beyond the traditional coursework. What started as a small experimental program in the College of Liberal Arts has today evolved into one of only six Honors Colleges in the entire state of Texas, a beacon of academic excellence within the University of Texas at Arlington. UTA's Honors College was not created overnight. It started out as a modest endeavor, providing a year-long American Studies sequence and a seminar on freshman topics. There were few courses available, and all of the students progressed academically in unison. However, the seed of something larger was planted in this small, close-knit community.

Mid-1990s. The program saw a significant expansion. Science core courses and advanced-level curriculum, making it more accessible to students beyond the liberal arts. This shift was crucial: data showed that STEM majors were steadily growing at UTA, and the need for a more interdisciplinary Honors experience was clear. In 1980, the college's enrollment surpassed 3,000 students, including 2,433 undergraduates, 522 masters students, and 54 doctoral students. Recognizing this momentum, UTA sought and received approval in 1998 to elevate the program to full-fledged college status. In 1999, the Honors College was officially born—the third of its kind in Texas.

August 2022. Growth was not always linear. The college operated in—uncertainty for years without a



Ransom Hall, snow on ground, University of Texas at Arlington (U. T. A.)

permanent dean. When Provost Tamara Brown took on the task of reviving leadership within UTA's academic programs in 2022, that changed. She was aware that the Honors College was unique and that it required a visionary leader to transform it into a place of academic distinction rather than another department.



The Shorthorn, Photo courtesy of Mark McClendon

February 2025. Enter Dean Sean Kelly. He brought with him a philosophy based on experiential learning from UT San Antonio. He underlines that students should study overseas and gain firsthand experience. His goal is to make the Honors College a nationally renowned institution where students flourish both academically and practically, not just in theory. His vision is not just about maintaining the Honors College—it is about transforming it into a nationally recognized powerhouse, where students can thrive. His goal is ambitious but clear: in a few years, he wants students across Texas to immediately associate UTA with its Honors College.

Today, the Honors College is more than just a set of demanding classes. It is a community. It serves as a platform for aspiring leaders. Students push boundaries, have in-depth conversations, and create careers that make an impact. Even though Honors began decades ago, its greatest chapters have not yet been written, and it is an ever-growing space for students to join.

THREE SPARKS, ONE MISSION: MEET CHERYL GRALISH, MAKENZIE WHITENER, AND EMILY SPAULDING

Author: Fatmi Khan

Editor: Jha Jaharvi

At the UTA Honors College, you're never just a number. Walk through College Hall and you'll quickly notice it—an atmosphere of warmth, energy, and a genuine sense of belonging. Behind much of that magic? The staff who do far more than just "work" here.

Some advise students. Others inspire them. And some build the very stage on which a community can thrive. Meet Cheryl Gralish, Dr. Makenzie Whitener, and Emily Spaulding—with offices just a few feet apart, the dynamic trio helping students thrive academically, socially, and creatively. Whether it is mapping out a research project, hosting an Honors mixer, or simply offering a kind ear, each brings something unique to the table.

Let's pull back the curtain and get to know them better—what drives them, what surprises them, and yes, even their favorite lunch spots. Welcome to a very special Q&A.



CHERYL
GRALISH



MAKENZIE
WHITENER



EMILY
SPAULDING



First Things First: What Do They Do?

Q: Could you tell us a bit more about your role in the Honors College?

Cheryl: I'm one of the advisors in the Honors College. I start working with new students and stick with them until they reach their Capstone year. I track their progress, send reminders, and serve as a constant resource—academic or otherwise.

Makenzie: I manage Honors contracts and work closely with students during their Capstone Projects. I also teach HONR 4000. My favorite part? Watching students grow into confident researchers.

Emily: I'm the Student Engagement Coordinator. I help create and boost the community within Honors by planning all 35+ events each semester, advising four of our five student organizations, managing our weekly Honors emails, and coordinating scholarships.

Each role is a puzzle piece—because of course, student success is a group project!

The Heart of the Job

Q: What's the most rewarding part of your work with students?

Emily: Watching students connect—like when they recognize someone from class at an event, sit down to paint or craft, and end up becoming friends. It's just the best!

Makenzie: Getting to watch students share their work with their peers, family, friends, and mentors! I absolutely love seeing students go from nervous to proud during the Honors Research Symposium. It's amazing how much growth can happen in just a few hours.

Cheryl: As an advisor, I don't often get to see the students' actual work. But at HRS, their intellect, drive, and excitement are on full display. It's incredible to listen to a polished poster presentation and think back to when that same student first came in as a freshman. The growth is just remarkable.

Hidden Talents? Oh, They've Got Those

Thought your resume's impressive?
Think again!

Q: Do you have any surprising talents students might not know?

Makenzie: I danced for 20 years—even though I'm hilariously clumsy in everyday life.

Emily: I'm a singer! I was in an a cappella choir in college, met my husband through it, and even have a song on Spotify. (Try finding it!)



Campus Favorites

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. What do theirs behold?

Q: Favorite campus spot?

Cheryl: Honestly, the entire outdoor campus! I walk the campus every day at lunch and feel very lucky to have such a nice, safe area to enjoy. The flowers in the spring, the colorful leaves in the fall, even the random frozen fountains in the winter, the entire campus is lovely. (You might notice I did leave out the summer!)

Makenzie: Since I am new to UTA, I don't yet have a favorite spot yet, any suggestions?

Emily: The Honors Deck! It is so nice, especially when the weather cooperates. It's shaded, peaceful, and a hidden gem of College Hall.

Foodies Unite: The Great Lunch Debate

Advising students? Easy. Picking one restaurant for the year? Now that's the real challenge.

Q: If you had to eat at just one restaurant near UTA for the rest of the year, which one would you choose?

Cheryl: Irish Nachos from J. Gilligan's!

Makenzie: Pimento Cheese Sandwich from The Hive!

Emily: Cane Rosso's pizzas

Quickfire Fun: Unique Questions for Each Spark

For Cheryl:

Q: As a UTA alum yourself, what's something you miss about being a student here?

Cheryl: When I was a student, they played outdoor movies on the wall behind what is now the MAC. Those events were a lot of fun. As a commuter student, I didn't partake in nearly enough activities! Now, I enjoy being part of a community in the Honors College that tries to make sure all students can enjoy on-campus involvement.



Q: If you could give one piece of advice to every first-semester Honors student, what would it be?

Cheryl: Ask us questions!! Don't be afraid to stop by and talk to us. A lot of first-year students feel intimidated at first, but once they come in, they realize we're here to help! We can be a great resource throughout your time at UTA, even if it's just offering a friendly face on a tough day.



Q: Dream Honors Course?

Cheryl: A case study on a historic building near campus—something I would've loved as a real estate major.

For Makenzie:



Q: With your background in CS, biology and genetics, how do you bring those experiences into advising Honors researchers?

Makenzie: My interdisciplinary background helps me spot connections across fields, which I bring into research advising. While I may have more examples for students in science or tech, I believe all research is interconnected—and I enjoy helping students find those links, no matter their major.

Q: If you had to conduct your own Capstone project today at UTA, what topic would you choose?

Makenzie: I would love to dive a little bit deeper into the world of experimental evolution. This involves using lots of generations of an organism (often one with a short generational cycle) to answer evolutionary questions. I would love to look at the chromosome evolution in newly formed polyploids.

For Emily:



Q: As someone who communicates frequently with students, what's your secret to crafting engaging messages that students actually read?

Emily: Students prefer images to text so we try our best to create engaging emails with lots of colorful images. I also have found that students read emails more when parts of the text are bolded or highlighted so when things are really important they will be bolded and underlined and in red! In general it's really a toss up if students will read their email, so if y'all have suggestions, let us know!



Q: If you could create any new event for the Honors College without limitations, what would it be?

Emily: If we had no limitations on events I would love to do a painting demonstration or turn the whole CAB into a giant splatter room!

The Honors Vibe, Summed Up

Q: Could you describe the Honors College in one sentence?

Cheryl: The Honors College is a caring community where students can grow intellectually and find encouragement, support and social engagement.

Makenzie: The College, especially its research environment, feels exciting, creative, and genuinely high-quality.

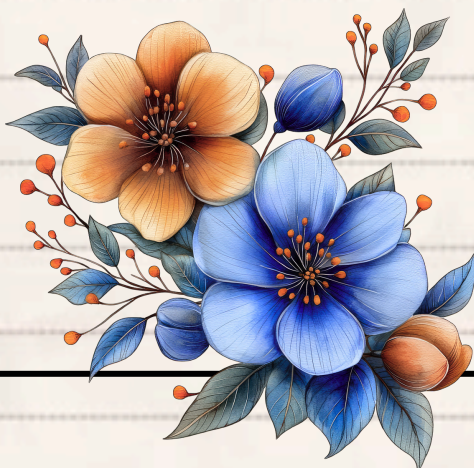
Q: What's something quirky about the Honors office culture?

Emily: The Honors College staff often eat breakfast together in the morning, which is very quirky, especially in comparison to other offices. We also love talking with one another and frequently have “hallway meetings” where we discuss our days in the middle of College Hall.



From scuba diving to science symposia, from Capstone pitches to craft nights—Cheryl, Makenzie, and Emily make up the heartbeat of the UTA Honors College. Their shared mission is simple: to help students feel seen, supported, and ready to grow.

Looking to find your place in Honors? You might just want to start by saying hi to one of these sparks!!



25 QUESTIONS WITH THE DEAN

Author: Jahnvi Jha

Q: First impression of UT Arlington's Honors College?

A: Beautiful building—vibrant, full of students. The incredible diversity blew me away. You see people of different races, religions, lifestyles, and languages. That's powerful.

Q: Best memory from your previous role at UTSA?

A: The year we got four Goldwater scholars. It proved that it's the quality of students' experiences—like internships and research—that matter most.

Q: Favorite book you recommend to students?

A: "Gravity and Grace" by Simone Weil and "The Brothers Karamazov" by Dostoevsky.

Q: Coffee or tea?

A: Coffee, for sure.

Q: What excites you most about joining UTA?

A: Its incredible trajectory and rich diversity. Being in a community where you constantly learn from

others' experiences and perspectives is amazing.

Q: Best piece of advice you received as a student?

A: "It's not what you read; it's how you read." Reading critically changes everything.

Q: Favorite place you've traveled to?

A: Prague, right after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The cultural shift was fascinating, plus that's when I pierced my ear!

Q: What motivated you to pursue academia?

A: Initially I planned to be a lawyer but fell in love with philosophy and literature. Academia allowed me to explore meaningful, deep questions about life and ethics.



DEAN SEAN KELLY

Q: If you weren't a dean, what would you be?

A: Either a lawyer focused on human rights or, surprisingly, a dog trainer. Dogs deserve more thoughtful relationships than traditional training offers.

Q: Describe your ideal weekend?

A: Spending time at home with my family, grilling in the backyard with my daughters. But my dream weekend? Watching the Buffalo

Bills finally win the Super Bowl!

Q: Your biggest inspirations?

A: Philosopher Simone Weil for her profound commitment to justice, and Supreme Court Justice John Roberts for his thoughtful approach to law and democracy.



Q: Favorite spot on UTA's campus so far?

A: The UC Mall—it's lively and has a real college atmosphere. But also, the CAB for quiet moments of reading.

Q: One surprising fact about yourself?

A: I played hockey into my 40s and became quite skilled at cooking Indian cuisine while living in Amarillo.

Q: Favorite Indian food?

A: Lamb Vindaloo—spicy and rich.

Q: One thing every Honors Student should experience before graduating?

A: Exceeding their own expectations multiple times—those moments truly shape your future.

Q: Fun fact about you?

A: Despite my literary background, I absolutely love American blockbuster movies—my favorite being "Armageddon."

Q: Favorite thing about having dogs?

A: The companionship and safety they provide. My dogs have truly become family members.

Q: Breeds and ages of your dogs?

A: Belle, an 11-year-old Great Pyrenees-Border Collie mix, and Alice (Allie), an 8-year-old Great Pyrenees. They're my everything.

Q: Personal mantra?

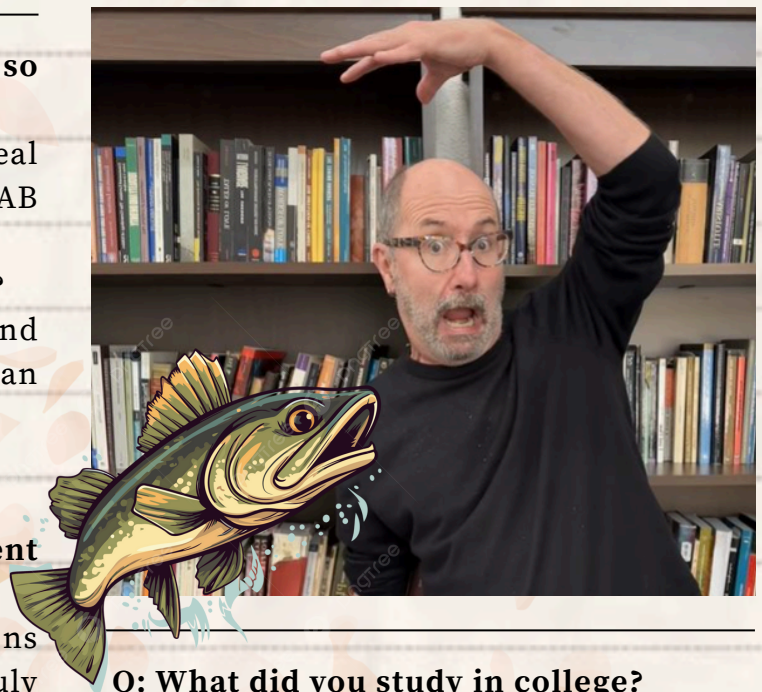
A: "Pray to God as if God doesn't exist."

Q: Favorite way to unwind after a busy day?

A: Cooking—it relaxes me completely.

Q: Favorite movies or series?

A: Favorite movie is "Armageddon." Favorite series: "Squid Game," "Queen of the South," and nostalgically, "Peppa Pig," for my daughters.



Q: What did you study in college?

A: Undergraduate degrees in English and Philosophy. PhD in Comparative Literature, focusing on the intersection of philosophy and literature.

Q: Favorite hobby outside of work?

A: Fishing. I love the quiet, precision, and even the anticipation.

Q: Best catch while fishing?

A: A 40-inch snook chased by a dolphin. Incredible moment!

Q: Advice for students hesitant to reach out to you?

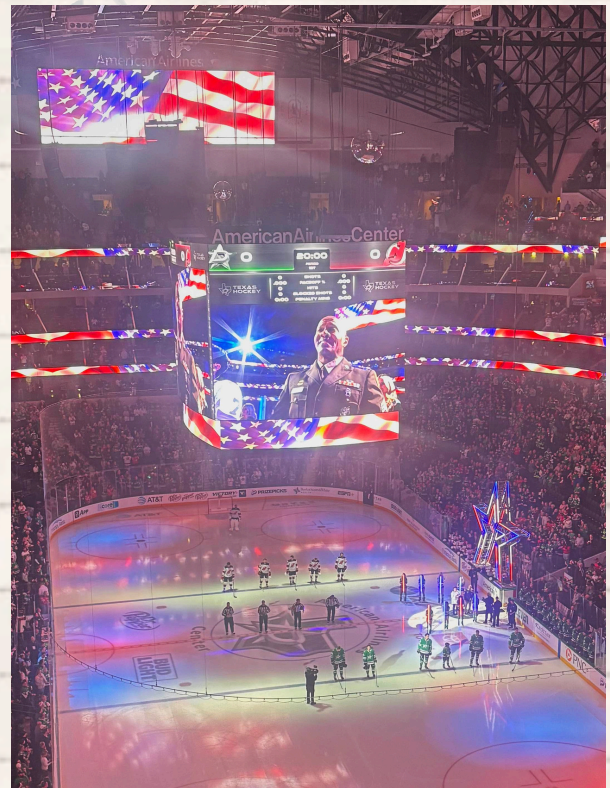
A: Please do! I learn as much from you as you do from me. Students inspire me every day.

BREAKING THE ICE: UTA HONORS COLLEGE BONDS OVER THRILLING DALLAS STARS VICTORY.

Author: Macy Scott
Editor: Yash Ajariwal

Victory green and black line the walls of the American Airlines Center as thousands of Dallas Stars fans cheer, their excitement vibrating through the arena as they celebrate a thrilling moment in the game. The energy is palpable, the crowd on their feet, their voices echoing as Thomas Harley, defenseman for the Stars, scores a crucial goal with less than five seconds left in the third period. The goal secures a dramatic victory for the Stars over the New Jersey Devils, leaving the fans on a high as they head out of the arena.

This incredible display of sportsmanship and skill is just one of the highlights of a memorable night for the UTA Honors College students who attended the game on March 4th, as part of a special Honors College field trip. This event, organized by the UTA Honors College, provided students with an exciting opportunity to engage with their university community in a fun and dynamic way. For the price of a discounted ticket, students were not



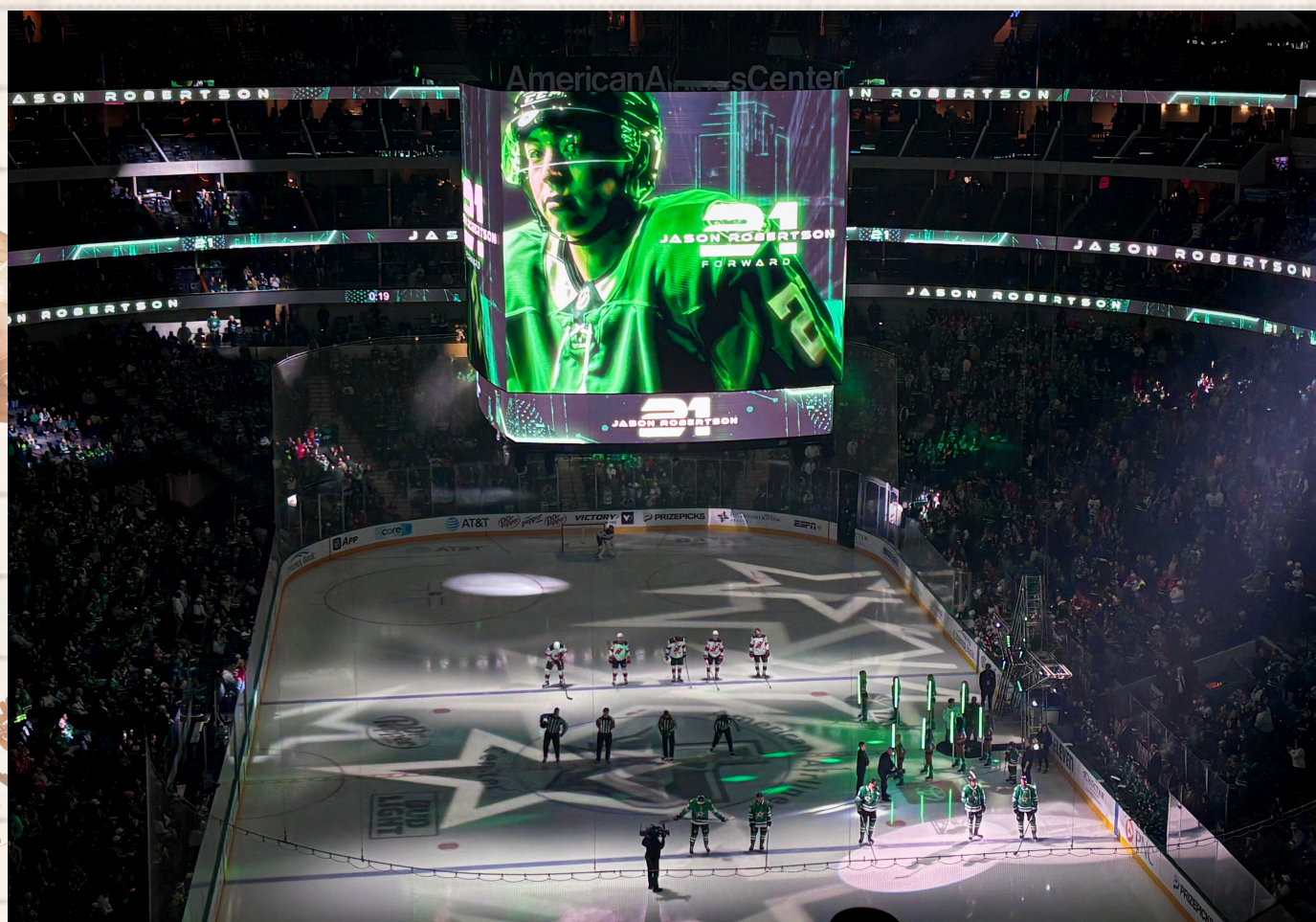
only given the chance to witness a live NHL game, but also received food court credits to enjoy some game-day snacks and beverages. In addition, each student was given a personalized UTA-branded hat, embroidered with both the Dallas Stars and UTA logos, a souvenir that would serve as a reminder of this unique experience. Freshman Cailyn Wright reflected on how the field trip



enhanced the sense of connection within the Honors College. “It deepened the bond within the Honors community,” she said. Although many of the students had never attended a game before, they found a shared sense of excitement. “[We were] enjoying what was going on with the people around us, and what was going on in the stadium.”

In addition to building community spirit, the event also helped foster a sense of school pride. While the Honors College is primarily known for its academic excellence, this trip to see the Dallas Stars in action highlighted that UTA isn't just about studying. Events like this serve as a reminder that university life isn't just about grades and lectures — it's about creating memories and experiences that will last long after graduation. The Dallas Stars game was a perfect example of how extracurricular activities can enhance the college experience, allowing students to relax, have fun, and form bonds that will enrich their time at UTA.

As the cheers of triumph echoed all the way to the parking lot, the Honors College students exited the arena with their heads held high, excited not only by the thrilling win but also grateful for the unique experience with the Honors College. For many, the event served as a reminder that sometimes the best way to learn and grow in college is to step outside the classroom and share new experiences with friends.



NAVIGATING THE HONORS CAPSTONE PROJECT: A GUIDE FOR MAVERICK HONORS STUDENTS

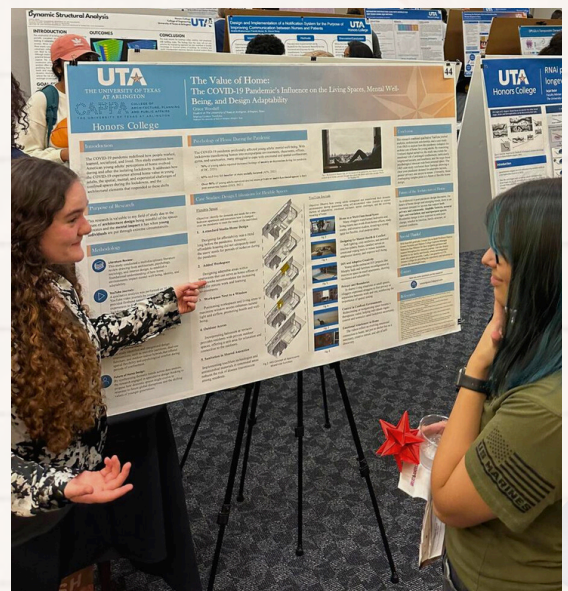
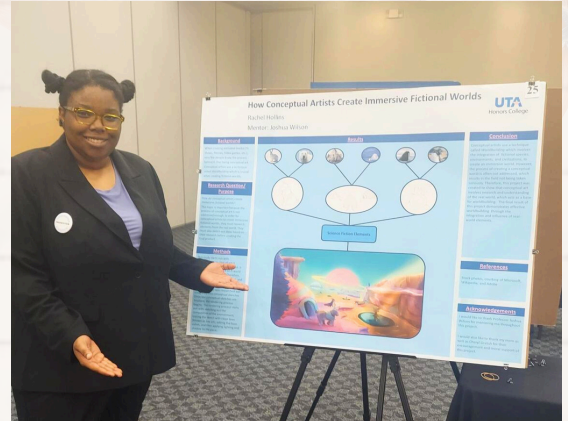
Author: Hieu Nguyen
Editor: Murtaza Mashi

As Maverick Honors students, we are tasked with completing an Honors Capstone Project as a requirement for earning our Honors degree. This project is not only an essential part of our academic journey but also an opportunity to showcase our critical thinking and research skills. By delving deeply into a well-researched topic closely related to our field of study, we demonstrate our readiness for the next step in both our academic and professional careers, whether that involves graduate school or entering the workforce. The Honors Capstone Project serves as a culminating achievement in our education, offering us the chance to showcase our talents, organizational skills, and commitment to excellence. It reflects our ability to go above and beyond in the pursuit of knowledge and stands as a significant marker of our academic pride and honor.

However, as Capstone Project season approaches, a common question arises among many bright students:

How do we begin?

The first step is selecting a research topic that aligns with your field of study. This ensures that the project is relevant and allows for a deeper understanding of the subject matter. It is critical to choose a mentor who can guide you through the process, offering expertise and insight into your research. Start by identifying potential mentors early in your university career. Getting to know your mentor's work style, research experience, and ethics are crucial to establishing a productive working relationship. For the best quality and consistency in your research, the Honors College requires students to select a full-time instructor who specializes in your field. This ensures that your project will benefit from their deep knowledge and commitment to excellence.



It's essential to have a general understanding of your project's outcome and research topic. Although there is no set timeline for choosing a topic, you are required to submit your proposal the semester before your presentation and must present a complete, final project no later than your final semester. You may choose to finish the project as early as your junior year. Before you have to start, take advantage of opportunities to gain research experience by joining research groups or academic labs at the university. This will provide you with a solid foundation in research methods and help you discover your academic passions. Immersing yourself in the research process early on will also ensure that you approach your project with both intellectual curiosity and a solid understanding of your subject matter.

SUPERHUMAN? OR LIFE AS AN HONORS STUDENT?

Author: Murtaza Mashhi

April, the wonderous month of spring—a month of warmth, birds, flowers and... finals? Projects? Contracts? Capstones? As all of us began our undergraduate education, we were taken by a whirlwind of commitments. Honors students are tasked with contracting courses, attending events, and exploring all that the Honors College has to offer, leading to an age-old question. How do some of our students find this perfect balance? Juggling multiple commitments can often be incredibly overwhelming, and before long, the deadlines start creeping up like goblins in the Mines of Moria. Soon enough, in the midst of the panic, we frustratingly start deep cleaning our rooms instead of tackling that assignment.

Worry not!

Procrastination is something most college students struggle with. Setting realistic goals and breaking down work into manageable chunks motivates students to take on these tasks one by one; and don't forget to get a sweet treat as a reward for finishing your assignments!

After checking off the sweet treat from your to-do list, we must now tackle the rest of our week. A well-structured schedule and outlining all the activities throughout the week certainly encourages discipline. Tyler Nguyen, a sophomore Industrial Engineering major, shares that he stays on track by planning his week out on Google Calendar. He highlights that he not only plans his classes but blocks out time for extracurriculars and recreation as well!

TO DO LIST



As students step into a new semester, they are buried under a flurry of activities. One might wonder what to do when there are too many things competing for your time. Prioritizing your commitments allows you to allocate your time and energy accordingly. Nikki Puno, a freshman nursing major, says, "I plan out my week in advance by prioritizing my academics while also leaving time for other activities."

While academic and extracurricular commitments are certainly a priority, be sure to schedule some recreational and self-care time. As deadlines begin to pile up, the urge to lock yourself in a room and grind through your material certainly becomes appealing. Unfortunately, this can eventually lead to student burnout. Self-care is, therefore, an essential part of your schedule. Short breaks, including chatting with a friend or a walk in the park, can help recharge your energy and boost your productivity. You may also acquire a study buddy! After all, isn't that what the college experience is all about?



GET INVOLVED! JOIN OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Author: Acadia Clementsi

There are many things students at UTA can do to be involved. From clubs to organizations, boundless opportunities are at your fingertips! Here in the Honors College, we love for students to be active on campus, and we encourage you to join other organizations and clubs that you might be interested in. However, it can be challenging to locate said clubs and organizations if you are unsure of where to look.

College is a place to discover who you are, and being a part of a community, organization, or club is a great opportunity to meet like-minded people who have similar hobbies, majors, or intended careers that you can get along with. Every semester, UTA hosts an Activity Fair Day where you can visit all of the clubs and speak with members. If you can't make it to the fair, or if you missed it, you can find all of the clubs available to you on the MavEngage directory. This can be found by typing "<https://www.uta.edu/student-affairs/student-organizations>" into the search bar of your device's internet app.



It will direct you to the student organizations page, where you will click on 'explore MavEngage page'. You will be directed to MavEngage, where you can scroll down and click on the 'find organizations' link. From there, you will have access to over 400 organizations and clubs here at UTA. Whether you want to join a club with others intending to go into the same field, join the Anime club, learn more about astrology, or be a part of the school newspaper, the Shorthorn, there are so many different clubs and organizations available at your fingertips! Attending events can also help you decide whether you want to join a club or organization. Branching out and meeting new people is important, so we hope you embrace all that UTA has to offer!



THANK YOU!

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