



# areté

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The Magazine of The Honors College  
at the University of Houston

# THE HONORS COLLEGE





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Dear Friends,

I am pleased to present the first issue of the Honors College's *areté* magazine since becoming dean of the College last July. In this annual magazine, we reflect on the previous year's accomplishments, share future goals, and celebrate individuals and initiatives. This issue is no exception.

The following pages illustrate our fundamental goal of providing a rigorous and transformative undergraduate education. The rigor comes from a community of motivated students, faculty, and staff with the opportunities of a large cosmopolitan research university. The transformation comes from our emphasis, in and out of the classroom, on critical inquiry when thinking, writing, and speaking.

We create agile and innovative thinkers and thoughtful, principled doers. In addition to the resulting personal successes, who else is better prepared to tackle the problems, large and small, that face our society today?

Few public events embody our philosophy better than the Great Conversation, when we gather to discuss interesting topics over dinner to make the Honors experience accessible to students through scholarships. This April 20, the 32nd Great Conversation was held in the Morian Hall of Paleontology at the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

We appreciate the continued support of alumni and friends, which is so important to the success of our current and future students. There are many ways to do this. Consider joining an upcoming in-person or virtual event, or a Human Situation lecture. Tell us about you, and how your Honors experience shaped your personal and professional selves.

Enjoy this celebration of the Honors experience!

Warmest Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heidi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent dot above the 'i'.

Dean, The Honors College





# 10 YEARS BONNER LEADERS PROGRAM

*“The diligent care Bonner Leaders  
have for their community,  
coupled with their phenomenal education,  
allow them to practice and grow  
the social action and advocacy skills  
which are needed to build  
the tomorrow they imagine.”*

*Janet Lawler, Ph.D.  
Bonner Faculty Fellow*

Since its inception, the Bonner Leaders Program has become an integral part of the Honors College at the University of Houston. The intensive, four-year, co-curricular program engages students in collaborating with partner organizations and has made a significant impact on the students, cultivating civic leaders who can successfully address pressing societal challenges.

“This program prepares Honors students to take the next step in their education — applying the rigorous foundation in critical thinking established in The Human Situation courses to complex social issues while learning how to effectively support meaningful change in their communities,” Honors College Dean Heidi Appel said.

Students log thousands of service hours, undertaking community projects that align with their interests and passions, confronting social issues ranging from educational inequality, food insecurity, refugee resettlement and voter ID assistance. Leading a variety of initiatives to support local nonprofits, schools and organizations, Bonner Leaders have made a tangible impact on the local community.



“Bonner Leaders are defined by how much they care,” Janet Lawler, Bonner Faculty Fellow, said. “I have already seen how they are not just high achieving in their academic work and disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, but how much they want to use it to truly change the world. They care about their position within their community, and they want to make it better, not to just fill a line on a resumé or volunteer for a few hours.” The Bonner Foundation has consistently brought together diverse communities and enthusiastic scholars who aspire to make a positive change. The first Bonner Leaders Program was endowed at Berea College in Kentucky in 1990 by Corella and Bertram Bonner to provide underserved students full scholarships in exchange for participation in service-learning projects. Since then, dozens of

Bonner programs have emerged across the country, even after endowment funding was exhausted. The Honors College offers the only Bonner Leaders Program in Texas, producing impressive student leaders with a strong understanding of social issues and how to address them.

“Andrew Hamilton started the Bonner Leaders Program at UH in 2013 when he was the associate dean of the



Honors College,” Trinity Rayder, director of the Bonner Leaders Program, said. “He had the goal of leveraging University resources to support the surrounding community and get UH students outside of the University bubble by engaging as active members of the Houston and Third Ward communities. Our students gain valuable experience through this work and develop skills and civic attitudes that we hope they carry with them into their professional and personal lives.”



UH Bonner Leaders hit the ground running its first year, participating with a variety of organizations in hands-on activities to positively influence the Houston community. However, after actively discussing and examining the interwoven relationship of poverty and its overall effect on nutrition, education and health care in the “Introduction to Civic Engagement” course, it quickly became apparent that the students wanted to do more.

Bonner Leaders developed grant-like project proposals such as the UH chapter of the Campus Kitchens Project, which recovered unserved food from UH’s dining halls and delivered it to those in need, getting seed money from Clinton Global Initiative University. In 10 years, several of the Bonner projects were further developed and still exist, such as Aspire, an SAT, ACT and college readiness tutoring and mentoring program and the Math Confidence Through Cubing Club, math tutoring and mastering of the Rubik’s Cube, offered at Navarro Middle School.

“Bonner and other community engaged learning initiatives in the Honors College have been so successful for a long time, but there is much more that could be done,” Rayder said. “We work with 100 students in Bonner, but there are 2,500 students in the Honors College. It would be amazing if in the next 10 years every Honors student participated in a robust community-engaged learning experience that prompted them to continue to serve the Houston community.”

Bonner Leaders commit to serving 5 to 10 hours of community service per week on service initiatives in personal and professional development training. Students are encouraged to be action-oriented and to go beyond the confines of the classroom to creatively make and execute a plan to improve the current quality of life in the Houston community. By

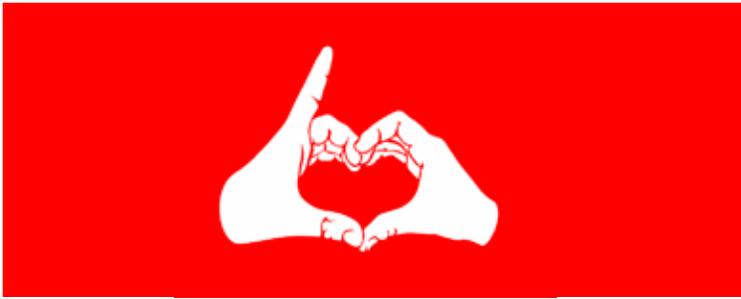
learning about challenges related to poverty and taking steps to address them, Honors students are instilled with a strong sense of civic responsibility and gain skills to be effective leaders and change-agents.

Beyond direct service, leaders delve into policy research projects sophomore year, tackling myriad social issues, and they complete a social action project as a cohort in their junior year. Seniors reflect on their service, academic and personal growth in the program through a final presentation or capstone project. Staff provide mentorship and

guidance, ranging from strong written communication skills to working collaboratively and thinking critically, preparing leaders for service projects and future career success.

“This leadership program now, and I hope over the next 10 years, will uniquely empower Bonner students to continue to use and practice the skills they learn in their courses to care about, design for, and act in their communities,” Lawler said. “The diligent care Bonner Leaders have for their community, coupled with their phenomenal education, allow them to practice and grow the social action and advocacy skills which are needed to build the tomorrow they imagine.”





# Phillips 66 and the Energy Scholars Program

By Julia Brown

As a public research university situated in the energy capital of the world, the University of Houston has committed itself to initiatives that support the creation of a more sustainable future through energy education and research.

The Energy Scholars program — created by the Office of Undergraduate Research and Major Awards (OURMA) with support from Phillips 66 — aims to support this goal. The program gives undergraduate students the opportunity to gain firsthand experience in developing innovative solutions for cleaner, more sustainable energy.

Energy Scholars work closely with a faculty mentor on real-world research projects and, in the process, learn what research looks like in their field. The program leverages UH's robust resources and expands the roster of

faculty-mentored undergraduate research opportunities available on campus. Debbie Reyes, program manager for OURMA, states, "Energy Scholars contribute to the ongoing conversation about energy and sustainability at UH. They build on their knowledge and skills while learning to become leaders in their field."

The program provides professional development as well as research proficiency. Energy Scholars attend a summer webinar series that addresses topics such as research ethics and responsibility, data management and building an effective resumé. Program participants become strong applicants for graduate school, industry internships, and fellowships and major awards.

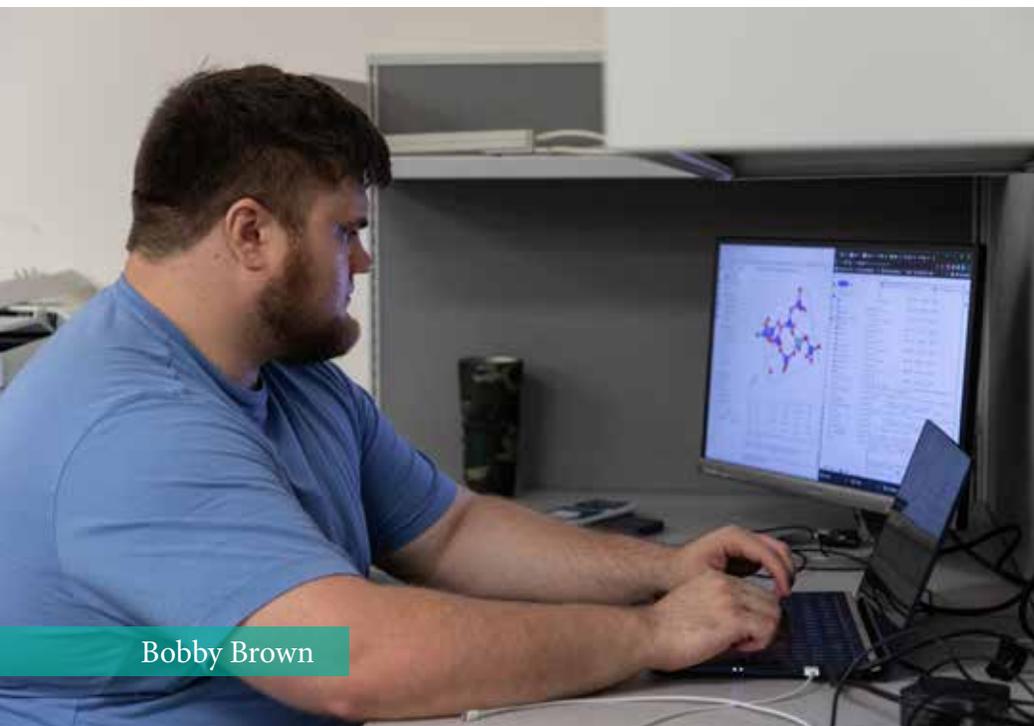
Energy Scholar Tessnim Mohammed is a third-year architecture student in the

Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture and Design. She also minors in energy and sustainability as an Honors student. "Sustainable architecture was always something I was interested in. This gave me the opportunity to dive deep into that while also looking at the world of design and structure."

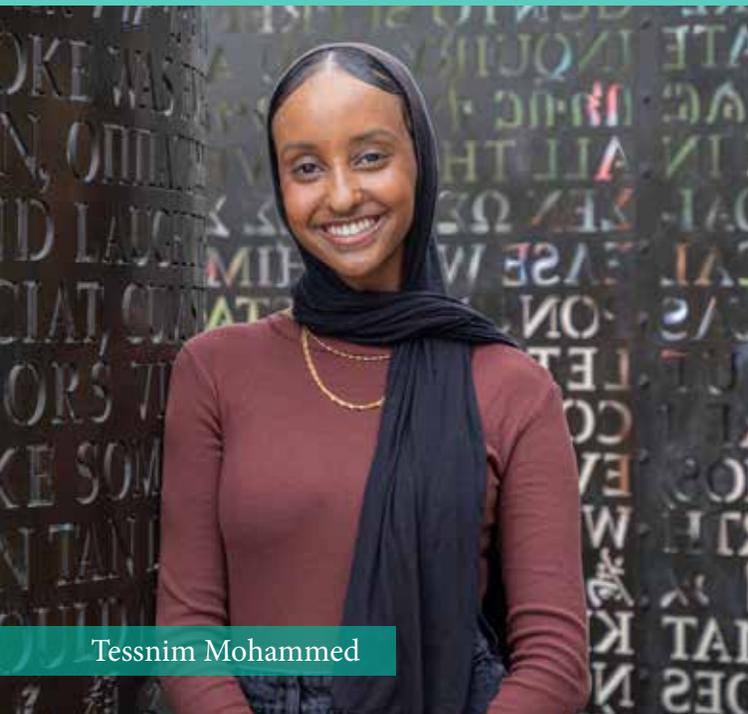
With the guidance of mentor Ross Wienert, Mohammed does research on sustainable architecture and how building code (the set of rules and regulations architects use) is changing over time, given the increasing sense of environmental responsibility in the field. Mohammed is using the Toyota headquarters in Plano, Texas as a case study of a building designed to minimize the negative effects on the environment while maximizing building performance.

"Without this program, I would have never known how much I enjoy research. I'm passionate about so much more than just design," Mohammed said. She is considering research at the graduate level in her future.

Sophomore Glynn Serda is a chemical engineering major who was curious about research before joining the Energy Scholars. Serda's search for a program mentor led to a conversation with a teaching assistant from a previous class, who recommended Serda talk to Professor Michael Harold in the chemical and biomolecular engineering department. Serda began working with Prof. Harold on a project involving the oxidative dehydrogenation of ethane to ethylene. Serda's diligence and interest led to a second project



Bobby Brown



Tessnim Mohammed

with Prof. Harold, electrifying steam methane to produce cleaner hydrogen. He spent the summer visiting his lab daily to run experiments, collect data and change variables.

Working with Prof. Harold and the cadre of graduate students in the lab helps Serda feel a sense of connection with his studies. "I like having a support system in my field encouraging me and offering good advice," Serda said. His appreciation for the process of independently devising research questions and designing experiments has grown through the lab, and he is leaning more toward graduate school as a next step in his academic career.

Applicants to the Energy Scholars program must be enrolled full time at UH with a GPA of at least 3.0. Solutions related to energy efficiency and sustainability require a multi-discipline approach: students of all majors are eligible to apply. In the current cohort, there are students with majors in engineering, architecture, chemistry and economics. Previous research experience is not required, but students do apply with a developed research proposal and faculty mentor identified.

Both Serda and Mohammed highly recommend that any student thinking of applying should do so. "There is so much experience and knowledge to gain from mentors who have gone through what you're going through. They can offer so much wisdom and insight," Serda said.

Mohammed noted that by participating in the program, the amount of opportunities presented will increase due to exposure and networking. "It will



Sadia Ashraf



Glynn Serda

widen your interests and teach you a lot that you can't learn from just taking your courses," Mohammed said.

OURMA is recruiting its second cohort of Energy Scholars for 2024, thanks to continued and increased support from program sponsors: the Baker Hughes Foundation, Shell and BP who are joining Phillips 66. "We're excited about the possibilities that Energy Scholars can provide UH students," says OURMA's Executive Director Ben Rayder. "Academically, students will learn about a globally important topic that's also central to Houston's identity. They will also forge professional pathways that can benefit them beyond their time at the University of Houston.



By Julia Brown

## Meet Dean Heidi Appel

By Julia Brown

Honors College Dean Heidi Appel has always loved plants. Her earliest memory is of waking up from a nap as a toddler and looking up through a canopy of tree leaves at the blue sky. As a young child, she happily spent hours in the large maple tree in her family's backyard, perched 10 feet up in a crook of branches, entranced by the color of sunlight filtering through the leaves.

Appel grew up in Waterford, Michigan. Her family camped all over the state. The time they spent in the outdoors helped to develop her appreciation for the natural world. She remembers being particularly captivated by the interaction between plants and insects: she loved to curl up on a bed of moss and study the miniature world of mosses and lichens.

That childhood fascination evolved into a lifelong desire to study plants. She went from exploring nature as a young person to earning master of science and doctoral degrees in biology from the University of Michigan.

As a researcher at the University of Missouri's Bond Life Sciences Center, Appel discovered the perfect intersection of

her curiosities and interests in the field of chemical ecology, particularly, plant response to insects. Her research centered on *Arabidopsis thaliana*. Also known as the rockcress plant, this species grows very quickly indoors and has a fully sequenced genome, which allows researchers to order seeds with specific mutations.

In 2014, Appel and her team—the University of Missouri bioacoustician Rex Cocroft and undergraduate researchers she worked with — made a few fascinating discoveries. Plants have “selective hearing,” in that they respond to some stimuli, and not others. The rockcress responded to chewing insects but failed to respond to wind and insect song. The team also discovered that plants could “learn” from experience; plants that were pre-exposed to the sound of chewing caterpillars secreted more mustard oil — their natural insect repellent — when exposed to actual chewing caterpillars. The sound helped to “prime” the plants.

Quantifying these results and recognizing their importance formed one of the most memorable research experiences of Appel's career. She called the project “Arabivibe,” a term created from “*Arabidopsis*” and “vibration.” The findings have

## Q&A with Dean Appel

wide-reaching agricultural implication and may point to a way to ultimately help crop plants boost their defenses against insect pests.

In the summer of 2014, Appel's research went viral after she emailed a reporter at the New York Times with an undeniable subject line: "Plants can hear." The story was picked up by National Geographic, the Washington Post, National Public Radio, and over 4,000 national and international outlets.

Appel knows that a researcher's responsibility extends beyond achieving quantitative results — a good researcher should also be able to communicate the importance of her findings to a variety of audiences. She enjoyed the challenge of explaining research complexities to journalists and lay audiences. Her article at TheConversation.com, "Five Things I Learned When My Research Went Viral," garnered thousands of page views. "Capturing the public's imagination with a research story was immensely gratifying because it broadens their appreciation of what scientists do," Appel states in the article. The experience led her to new professional opportunities and collaborations, and in 2018, Appel was recognized as an American Association for the Advancement of Science Fellow.

A dedicated researcher and educator, Appel is also a leader and innovator in honors learning environments. Of her 20 plus years of higher education experience, a substantial percentage has been spent in honors education — prior to serving as dean of the Jesup Scott Honors College at the University of Toledo, she held a senior associate directorship at the University of Missouri Honors College, and various teaching posts at Schreyer Honors College at Pennsylvania State University.

At the University of Toledo, she developed community engagement initiatives and high-impact learning experiences for honors students, like the partnership she facilitated between the University of Toledo and the Toledo Museum of Art. She led the effort to establish common goals for honors education across all majors, as well as a university-wide revision of honors curriculum.

Providing students with the skills they'll need to address current societal challenges requires knowledge sharing and collaboration across colleges and universities. To that end, she's helped to form a national network of honors deans and directors.

With this dedication, skill, and experience, and her unique sensitivity to complex natural ecosystems and eagerness to facilitate communication at every level, Dean Appel begins a new chapter here in the Honors College.

*So what's a scientist doing at the helm of the Honors College when they are more commonly led by humanities professors?*

Why not! Science is a way of understanding the world that depends on the very things provided by the humanities — strong critical thinking, effective written and oral communication, and close reading of texts. I still practice science because I love the challenge it provides.

*What drew you to honors administration?*

Initially, it was to spend time with my arts and humanities roots. I soon realized, though, that I could have a larger impact in honors than in science. The strong liberal arts tradition of honors education provides the foundation for life-long success for any major. This is a cause for celebration and a deeply satisfying thing to support.

*What's your favorite thing about our Honors College?*

I love the experience the Honors college provides for student success. From the Human Situation course to the interdisciplinary minors, our students are challenged in the classroom to develop their full potential. Our many co-curricular programs provide opportunities for students to apply what they've learned to challenging situations outside of courses. And, our faculty, staff, and students, are remarkably talented and full of creative energy. Together, these make us one of the best Honors colleges in the country.

*What are your goals for the Honors College?*

There is room to improve our current efforts, and we need to be looking 10, 20, even 30 years down the road to prepare our students for what's ahead. This future will require nimble, critical thinking about complex issues, clear communication to navigate across differences, and the courage to make difficult decisions informed by an understanding of one's core values. To guide the formation of our next strategic plan, we spent spring semester understanding what we do well and what we can do better, with an eye to the future our students will inherit.

*Do you have a message for Honors alumni?*

I sure do! As I get to meet you, I'm impressed by your stories of how the Honors College shaped your success in life. Please reach out to share your story, schedule a visit, and help us to enhance the experience for current students by attending events, serving as mentors, and staying in touch!



# UNWINDING the Chemical Planet

How one student's journey from industrial design to environmental justice inspires hope for the generations to come.

Anne-Elisabeth Baker speaks with seasoned thoughtfulness; despite its unhurried telling, her story will undoubtedly crescendo with achievements — in academia, policy or maybe even public office.

Baker ('22) is an Honors College alumna and graduated as class valedictorian with a bachelor's degree in Industrial Design (Honors) from the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture and Design. She is already successfully pursuing her master's in environmental management with a concentration in environmental economics and policy at Duke University. But her story began in Lake Jackson, Texas, home to her second family, community theater, but also to towering industrial chemical complexes, an incongruous gatekeeper to the highways and roads ushering families, like hers, to nearby Surfside Beach.

Growing up with friends whose parents worked as engineers in these plants, Baker recognized the urgent need for sustainable practices. She developed a keen interest in packaging and its direct impact on the environment. Motivated by her passion and curiosity, she chose the University of Houston, renowned for its industrial design program.

"Industrial design (ID) is basically product design — it encompasses everything you interact with on a daily basis, from consumer electronics to home goods and automotive design," Baker explains. Fueled by her desire to merge design with sustainability and realizing a broader scope was needed to comprehensively tackle plastic pollution, she pursued a minor in Energy and Sustainability from the Honors College.

During her time at the University of Houston, Baker was involved in the Student Industrial Designers Society of America (SIDSA), where she helped organize conferences, portfolio reviews and both community and relationship-building events. "As the only industrial design group on campus, this was a great way to connect with alumni from our program and bring them back into the fold," she shares.

Baker was also a founding member of Precious Plastic UH, a recycling workspace for students in the Hines College. "As industrial designers," she emphatically notes, "we are the ones creating the waste

that ultimately goes to landfills. So, if we're not thinking actively about a product's entire life cycle, from ideation to disposal, we're not doing it right." Precious Plastic UH provided ID students with an opportunity to both think about, and implement, life cycle processes for the products they're designing.

Driven by her determination to effect change, Baker embraced various opportunities, including the Civic Houston Internship Program (CHIP) through the Hobby School of Public Affairs. As a CHIP intern, she spent eight months working with Air Alliance Houston, an environmental justice and community advocacy non-governmental organization. Reflecting on the impact of this internship, Baker highlights, "It significantly influenced my educational experience, helping me understand local-level policy and become a



In her final year, Baker received an invitation from the Honors College to participate in an oil and gas (O&G) research project, examining carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS) in low-producing and orphaned oil and gas wells. This was as far upstream as a person interested in the

life cycle of plastics could go. Excited at the prospect of adding rigorous academic research to her growing expertise, Baker leapt at the opportunity. Together with a multidisciplinary team, she embarked on a comprehensive exploration of carbon and methane methodologies developed by climate tech startup, CarbonPath.

Some might say CarbonPath was born from impatience. Impatience at how slow the fossil fuel industry was moving towards sustainability and regeneration. In the U.S. alone, there are over three million oil and gas wells; 92% of those are classified as either low-producing or orphaned. This means they leak methane into the environment, a greenhouse gas 80x more potent than carbon dioxide.<sup>1</sup> CarbonPath founders, all former career O&G individuals, developed a methodology to finance

the closure of these old and leaking wells through the issuance of carbon credits.

When CarbonPath began this process in 2021, there were no other registries that had an approved O&G well closure

better community advocate and practitioner." Through this opportunity, she discovered the intricate connections between product design, plastics, and their impact on people's lives. This realization solidified her commitment to understanding the implications of environmental policies and regulations on individuals, particularly as they applied to the petrochemical industry's externalities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/methane-emissions-are-driving-climate-change-heres-how-reduce-them>

methodology and the Honors College was tasked with analyzing the CarbonPath methodology according to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) guidelines. The report, which can be found at [www.thehonorscollege.com/carbonpath](http://www.thehonorscollege.com/carbonpath), published in October 2022 was conducted by principal investigators Kate Ranachan, Ph.D., Jonathan Williamson, Ph.D., and doctoral Undergraduate Research Assistants: Baker, Zosia Bulhak, Phu Le and Jacob Lightfoot.

Overall, the team found that CarbonPath's methodology aligned well with the IPCC guidelines, receiving high and medium confidence levels across evaluation criteria. The team expressed confidence in CarbonPath's ability to address climate change through carbon dioxide and methane emissions reductions within existing structures. Using established plugging and abandonment technology and state-level certification further bolstered their confidence in CarbonPath's ability to issue high-quality carbon credits without requiring additional legal or regulatory changes.

The methodology was deemed to be a catalyst for positive change in communities where low-producing and orphaned wells are located, including potential growth in the green jobs sector and the redeployment of O&G workers. Overall, the research found that CarbonPath's methodology could withstand the weight of scientific scrutiny and, in certain aspects, surpassed other energy sources that the IPCC includes in its analysis.

"What we see in the industrial parts of Houston, and what I saw in my hometown, with BASF, Freeport LNG, Dow Chemical — all of those facilities that you have to drive through just to get to the beach ... when I was little, I called it the chemical planet instead of the chemical plant." Baker

reflects on her childhood slip of the tongue with a smile, a malapropism that today, almost feels tongue-in-cheek.

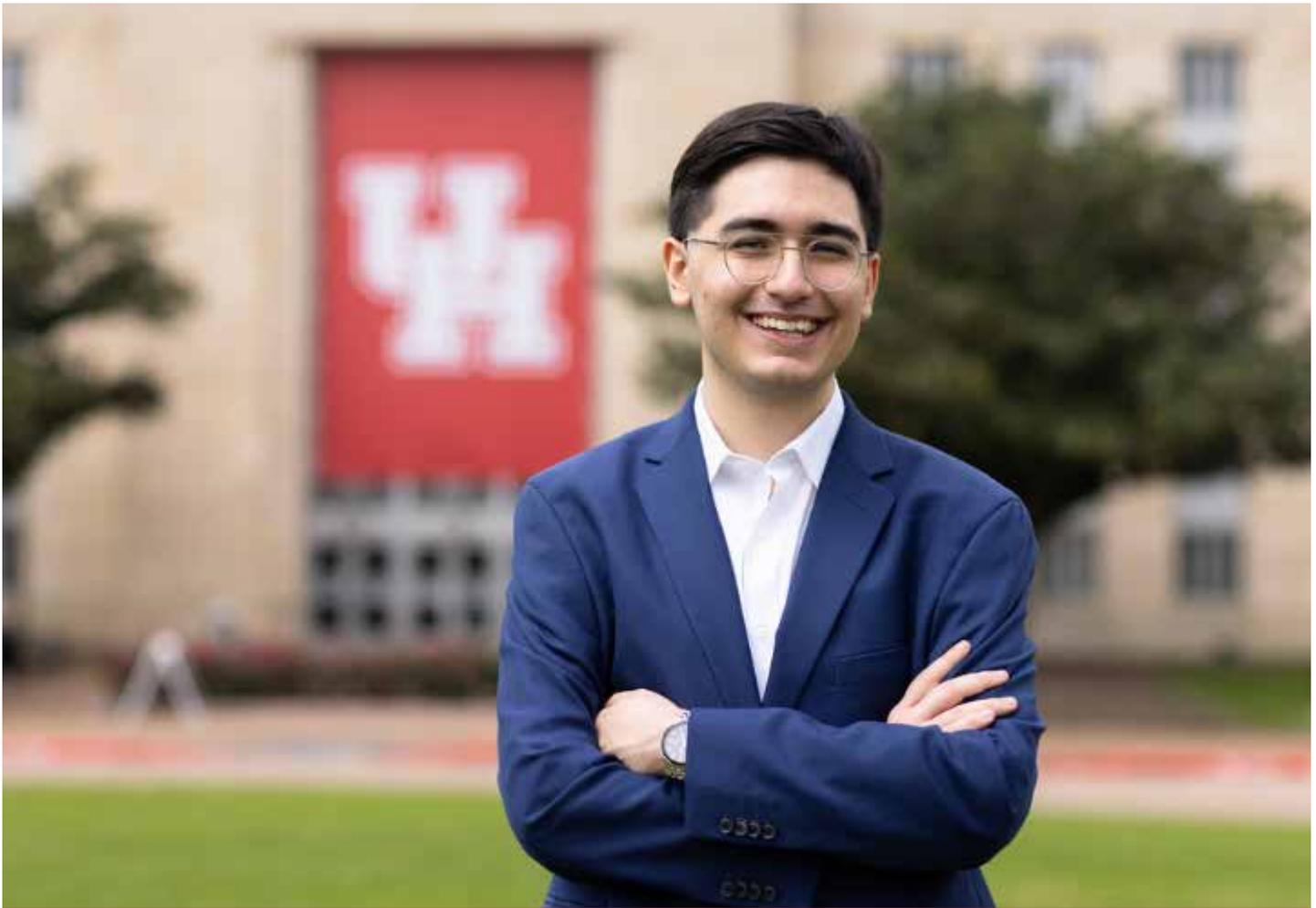
Reflecting on her experience, Baker notes that her involvement in the CarbonPath project became a stepping stone to the next phase of her academic life. It equipped her with the research skills and confidence to pursue ambitious projects at Duke University and beyond. Her understanding of the O&G industry's complex life cycles expanded beyond her hometown, her own chemical planet, providing her with the broader perspective needed to truly address the environmental crisis.

Industrial solutions like CarbonPath are trying to remind us we are not fated to live on a chemical planet, they are finding financially viable, and economically sustainable ways to stop emissions from fossil fuel production. "The CarbonPath project was really formative in my academic journey," Baker closes thoughtfully, "It made me think about the scale and scope of the impacts of the oil and gas industry that I was not seeing."

With her unwavering dedication to environmental stewardship, Baker envisions a future where policy design and human-centered approaches converge to create lasting solutions. Her story demonstrates the transformative power of education, the value of community and the impact of research.

The Honors College celebrates Baker's achievements as a testament to its mission of fostering exceptional scholars and problem solvers. Through our commitment to academic excellence and innovative research like CarbonPath methodologies, the College continues to empower students to drive positive change in the world.





## The Voice of Mielad Ziaee in the Boardroom

By Jillian Holden

**A**s the world grapples with food insecurity, health disparities and difficulties in education, remarkable individuals like Honors College student Mielad Ziaee emerge as beacons of hope and agents of change. As a first-generation Iranian American, Ziaee has demonstrated a profound commitment to pushing boundaries and helping others, proactively addressing varied issues in health disparity and food insecurity. From organizing campus events to improving mental health resources, his exceptional achievements and positive impact have not gone unnoticed.

"I didn't believe it when I found out," Ziaee said. "I was out of town in Baltimore when they called ... but when I called back and reached the Governor's Office of Appointments, I learned I was selected as the student regent. I was first shocked and am now very excited to see what this year holds."

Ziaee was appointed by Gov. Greg Abbott as the prestigious University of Houston System Student Regent, a well-

deserved recognition of his commitment to serve his community. Serving throughout the 2023-2024 academic year, Ziaee will be responsible for representing 70,000-plus students as a liaison between the four colleges of the University of Houston System and the Board of Regents. He will have the same duties and responsibilities as a board member but will not vote.

"I've always been interested in leadership. I think what makes UH different than any other place in Texas or any other university, is our drive to move forward towards the top 50," Ziaee said. "It's exciting, and I wanted to be a part of that conversation, coming from a low-income, diverse, Iranian American background. I wanted to have a seat at the table, and to do that, you need to sit on top of things like budgets and policy."

Currently on a pre-medicine track with minors in biology and Medicine & Society, Ziaee's religious pursuit to reduce

health disparities, supply clean food and provide equal opportunities among underserved populations began in Iran as he witnessed the impact of health disparities and the struggles faced by marginalized communities firsthand. All should have access to quality health care, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status, and he consistently works to raise awareness about the challenges faced by surrounding communities.

“This semester, I’m doing a lot, and I’m interested in the intersection of technology, AI, big data and policy with advanced precision medicine,” Ziaee, psychology major, said. “Within academia, I’m currently doing research with the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and the Kennedy Krieger Institute, looking at how we can predict food insecurity in a clinical setting.”

Gifted a platform that elevates his advocacy to a statewide level, Ziaee, a Tier One Scholar, is excited to contribute to decisions and policies that will shape the future of higher education. His efforts to reduce health disparities extend beyond the classroom, and after enrolling, he merged academic pursuits with a passion for social justice, recognizing the need to create sustainable solutions.

Laughing, Ziaee stated, “People respond to my emails now as a regent. This opportunity, this title, gives you credibility. Now, I need to work on matching students with accessible resources. I don’t think we’re missing a lot at UH, but by nature of our large university structure, it’s easy to get lost in the weeds. How do we match students with what they need? How do we build a culture?”

Ziaee dedicated time and energy to various on and off-campus initiatives, actively volunteering at local health care clinics. Seeking long-term solutions to food insecurity, Ziaee partners with community leaders to spur initiatives aimed at increasing food accessibility while reducing food waste. Involved with local food banks, Honors in Community Health (HICH) and community organizations, he has made a tangible impact on the Houston community, eventually founding a university-wide food pantry. Leveraging his knowledge and expertise, Ziaee aims to create an effective network of support and resources for underserved populations.

“I was also selected as a research fellow for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and have been chosen to participate in research on a new dataset of people that are of varied backgrounds as the NIH works to increase the diversity of the genetics of the people in its database,” Ziaee said. He will be working with the NIH on the All of Us Research Project to reach out to 1 million people of different backgrounds across the United States to gain insight into how the surrounding environment, lifestyle choices and biology affect overall health.

A dedicated student advocate, Ziaee prompts positive change and engagement within the University community. Driven to promote inclusivity and enhance support systems for first-generation students, Ziaee targets equal access to educational resources, improving higher education. He will have the opportunity to voice student concerns and opinions during UH System-wide discussions.



President Khator, Mielad Ziaee and UH Board of Regents President Tilman Fertitta

“The Board of Regents is the highest level of governance at the University outside of the state and federal government,” Ziaee said. “I knew that coming in, but now that I’m in it, I’ve seen that it’s so much more, and it’s given me a lot of appreciation for the University.”

Ziaee is currently pursuing his passion for data and analytics with UH’s Hewlett Packard Data Science Institute and has been researching with the Tilman J. Fertitta Family College of Medicine since his sophomore year in food-related issues. He is also researching an innovative approach to tailor disease prevention and treatment that considers the differences in genes, environments and lifestyles.

He is also a Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo Scholar, the membership coordinator of HICH, the secondary board representative for Future Health Professionals and the youngest to be appointed to the American Red Cross Board of Directors Houston Chapter. A passionate student mentor, he was selected as an Outstanding First Year Student in the Honors College last year, and he has presented work at institutions such as Harvard University.

Looking ahead, Ziaee plans to pursue his master’s degree and doctorate, continuing his research in artificial intelligence and health disparities.

# \$1M

# to Prepare More Community Health Workers

By Mike Emery

Harris County and Houston are home to the world's top medical institutions, but even they need a hand in addressing the growing health issues facing today's communities. This is especially true in underserved neighborhoods with little or no access to health care resources or information.

That's where community health workers come in. These professionals help people of all ages and cultural backgrounds become better informed about health and wellness. Most importantly, they're able to meet people within their communities to build trust and understanding.

Those seeking to support their neighbors as prospective community health workers need to look no further than the Honors College at the University of Houston. The Community

Health Workers Initiative (CHWI) is training and certifying students and community members alike to serve as advocates for a healthier Harris County.

CHWI is housed in the Honors College's co-curricular program Data and Health. It has been recognized by local media and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner. In addition to community health worker trainings, the initiative facilitates professional apprenticeships for its students and has built a network of community partners.

Recently, CHWI received a boost to its effort through a \$1 million grant from Harris County Public Health. Funding will support the University's efforts in growing the number of community health workers through training and apprentice-



ships. Likewise, it will assist the CHWI to coordinate efforts with University service projects and research activities.

“This grant is truly a win for the residents of Harris County,” said Dan Price, director of UH’s CHWI. “Each day, our communities face new questions regarding their health and well-being. Our Community Health Workers Initiative can certainly provide some of those answers, but we can further extend our service to Houston and beyond through the support of Harris County Public Health.”

According to Price, more people are realizing the value of community health workers, particularly as COVID-19 continues to threaten the county. During the earliest days of the pandemic, these workers were needed to help communicate where and how to receive the vaccine. With the annual rollout of new vaccines, they will continue to play an important role in promoting awareness of COVID-19 and mitigating its spread throughout the region.

The Harris County Public Health grant not only supports the training of future community health workers, it also is a figurative shot in the arm for the regional workforce.

Price added that there is a distinct need for certified community health workers in professional environments such as clinics, community centers and non-profit organizations. Although they are not medical professionals, certified community health workers can support those seeking guidance on where to receive care or treatment. They may also be called upon to assist in translating language within health care literature or prescriptions. Community health workers may also provide basic information on medical appointments or advice on daily wellness practices.

“Harris County Public Health (HCPH) is proud to provide this financial investment to the University of Houston to support the expansion of their Community Health Workers Initiative,” said Harris County Public Health Executive Director Barbie L. Robinson. “As the Public Health Strategist for the county, HCPH recognizes the importance of developing a strong local workforce for community health workers. Our investment will directly contribute to the University’s efforts to recruit, train and employ a diverse community health worker workforce that will have lasting impacts on the neighborhoods and communities within Harris County and across the region.”

Through the grant’s support, CHWI will work to standardize training for community health workers so they meet core competencies required by the Texas Department of State Health Services. These competencies include communication skills, interpersonal skills, service coordination skills, capacity building skills, organizational skills and a knowledge base

on specific health issues. The grant also will support off-campus training to reach even more aspiring community health workers.

Since its inception in 2018, CHWI has trained and certified more than 500 students and Harris County residents as community health workers. Thousands of others have participated in trainings to receive continuing education units and expand their knowledge in community health.

“The role of community health workers is to be supporting people as they navigate the health care infrastructure and help them arrive at solutions,” Price said.

Through CHWI, students have applied their talents to projects supporting mental health in Houston’s Sunnyside neighborhood and Cuney Homes. Other projects supported residents of Galena Park and Jacinto City. These included initiatives aimed at young parents, as well as health fairs and workshops in partnership with Community Health Centers.

Erika Manriquez was trained by CHWI and now serves as a community health worker in Houston. During her time as a student, she was part of the CHWI group working in Galena Park/Jacinto City. She said those initial interactions with community members truly prepared her for her new career path and inspired her to keep giving back to the city and county she calls home.

“From my very first day working as a community health worker, I realized how important and rewarding my job was going to be,” she said. “This program has trained me from the very beginning on how to be an effective community health worker, and that has allowed me to make an impact in my community and create wonderful bonds with my fellow community members. I have lived in this area for 20 years, and it’s great to be able to share the knowledge I have gained through the Initiative with my community.”

The ideas for these and other programming were sparked by CHWI curriculum and supported by external funding. The new Harris County Public Health grant will also lend support to future projects aimed at making a difference in Houston and Harris County.

“Through the CHWI, UH undergraduates are co-trained with community members to address health disparities, providing invaluable perspectives for their careers and additional support for the communities,” said Honors College Dean Heidi Appel. “We’re pleased to be part of the UH commitment to addressing differences in health care and health outcomes in our region.”

# HonorsMed

## The Inaugural Cohort

By Narsi Chokshi, Yusuf Islam, Isaac Mesina, Brandon Than, Anaya Ubha and Yousef Zamil

Over the course of the last three months, we have screamed at the top of our lungs at UH football games, poked fun at each other around a campfire until 2 a.m., and made Friday night dinners into four-hour events. While it might seem that we have known each other for years, it is incredible that we came together just three months ago through the HMed program. HonorsMed (HMed) is a conditional acceptance program in partnership with the Tilman J. Fertitta Family College of Medicine that provides six students an early acceptance to medical school (eight-year pathway).

Our journey began by applying to UH and UH Honors College in September. After receiving our acceptance to UH and the UH Honors College, we applied to the inaugural HMed program in October by responding to prompts on our perspective of Houston healthcare, commitment to

medicine, and adapting to change. After a thorough review of applications, UH College of Medicine extended interview invites in January and soon we began preparing for our interview in February. Although initially nerve-wracking, the interview with UHCOM was a conversation-style discussion with thought-provoking questions. The faculty created a comfortable environment that allowed us to share our perspectives on medicine while gaining more insight into the UHCOM and its principles.

In late February 2023, we were invited to a visit day at the UHCOM where all of our expectations were beyond surpassed. Seeing the modern layout of the newly constructed building, speaking to welcoming professors who had a contagious passion for medicine, and learning about medical outreach initiatives that aligned with our goals only further solidified our belief that the HMed program was the perfect fit for us.

We waited anxiously for the next two weeks to receive a decision on our application and finally, in mid-March, we received our acceptance! While some of us ran around the house screaming and others had to triple-check the email to make sure it was real, there was no doubt that we all celebrated and cherished our acceptance in our own ways.

Soon afterward, we all met each other for the first time at the Honors College Class Registration in April. We soon began bonding over procrastinating on the 1,000-word count essay prompts or frantically reading our notes minutes before the



Left to right, HMed students pose with Tilman J. Fertitta College of Medicine student (center), Isaac Mesina, Yusuf Islam, Yousef Zamil, Brandon Than, Narsi Chockshi and Anaya Ubha.

# Connect the Docs

By Arlene Macdonald, Ph.D.

interview. This close-knit connection continued to transfer over to our first semester where we learned to navigate our freshman year together. Since HMed offers conditional acceptance to UHCOM, there is an atmosphere of collaboration rather than competition. Having this shared mentality of being in the program together for the long run, we utilize one another as resources and continue to support each other.

Throughout this first semester, each of us were able to grow academically and personally by exploring our own individual avenues of interest. From Brandon providing service as a Bonner Leader, to Yusuf volunteering with local food banks, to Narsi giving tours as an Honors Ambassador, to Yousef pairing with faculty to participate in research, to Anaya doing outreach workshops with Honors in Community Health, to Isaac training with other students at the campus rec, we had an amazing first semester!

In addition, we have had several lunches with the College of Medicine and opportunities to sit in on lectures/seminars. Speaking with current medical students and faculty broadens our horizons on what characterizes medicine and helps prepare us to become competent, well-rounded physicians. We are looking forward to attending more events and meeting the incoming cohort next semester!

It was unknown to us at the time that HMed would be anything more than an academic pathway. However, it quickly became an opportunity to develop connections, make memories, and undergo experiences that will last us a lifetime. Along with the destination of becoming physicians, it is the journey of bonding with the HMed cohort that matters and we wouldn't trade it for anything!

In September, second-year medical students at the Tilman J. Fertitta Family College of Medicine hosted a welcome session for the inaugural HMed students to answer questions and offer advice on all aspects of medical education. Two of those College of Medicine students, Emma Lakey and Isabella Martingano, are extending that mentorship opportunity to all UH pre-medical students, with an initial outreach to students in the Honors College Medicine & Society minor.

Connect the Docs, the student organization they founded, provides undergraduate students one-on-one mentorship opportunities with a Tilman J. Fertitta Family College of Medicine student who shares similar interests and commitments.

The student-led and student-serving initiative is emblematic of the University of Houston community spirit and the commitment of the rising generation of healthcare professionals.

Applications to the Connect the Docs mentorship program will open each fall with a December submission deadline. For further information contact President Emma Lakey, [elakey@cougarnet.uh.edu](mailto:elakey@cougarnet.uh.edu) or Vice President Isabella Martingano, [idmarti2@cougarnet.uh.edu](mailto:idmarti2@cougarnet.uh.edu)



Emma Lakey



Isabella Martingano



# The Streets are Paved with Possibility

## Creative Work Students Ask Big Questions in the Big City

By Robert Cremins

Two recent Creative Work course offerings, Summer in the City and Houston Artists at Work, encouraged students pursuing the Creative Work minor to trek beyond the walls of the college to explore Houston. With its thriving arts district and rich expanse of arts-based businesses and nonprofits, the city proved to be the perfect setting for interdisciplinary, collaborative learning.

“In the city Creative Work is in its element,” said Robert Cremins, director of this pre-professional program. “One of the key themes of our coursework is the symbiotic relationship between places and their creative citizens.”

For 10 weeks in the summer, Summer in the City participants attended class in the remarkable environment of the Ion building. The Ion is the hub of the Ion District — Houston’s new Innovation District. The building itself is a stunning example of creative repurposing, a subtle contemporary architectural reinvention of the late 1930s midtown Sears store. The course was taught by Christine Galib, Ph.D., senior director of entrepreneurship and innovation at Ion, who stimulated inquiry of vital interest to Creative Work: What is creativity? How does studying it inform our perspectives of our entrepreneurial strengths and skills, ultimately positioning us to be sustainable change leaders no matter what careers we pursue?

Using a mixed-media approach, Galib inspired students to investigate creativity, innovation, design thinking, self-awareness, leadership, mindfulness and systems thinking. The course culminates at the Ion’s social stair with a showcase presentation by each participant of a real-world solution to a challenging Houston problem.

The class made such an impression on two participants, Camille Anigbogu and Sophia Wilson, that they successfully applied to become Ion Student Ambassadors. “It was an



amazing experience,” Anigbogu said. “The Ion is still relatively new [and] it was cool to be in a space that was part of Houston history. Sometimes after our class there would be Ion events, so I’d get to hear from speakers who are involved in technology or different art projects.”

Anigbogu particularly appreciated having access to the Ion Prototyping Lab. “In this lab, there’s the space to 3D print any ideas [students] have and other machinery where they can prototype things they have ideas for — products, technology. It’s also a place to get mentorship.”

The Ion experience helps bridge the famous gap between the two cultures of the academy, the sciences and the humanities. “As a creative person who is also a political science major, and therefore not really a tech or STEM person, I still felt very valued,” Wilson said. “[I felt] that my type of intelligence and sensibility were valued in this world, and that the tech world is broadening in the same way that the idea of [creativity] is broadening. [In the class] we got to have this nice overlap. It’s not something that I had thus far in my creative education.”

Anigbogu and Wilson both enjoyed the networking events they attended and continue to attend. “The Ion wants to connect more students to resources,” Anigbogu explained,

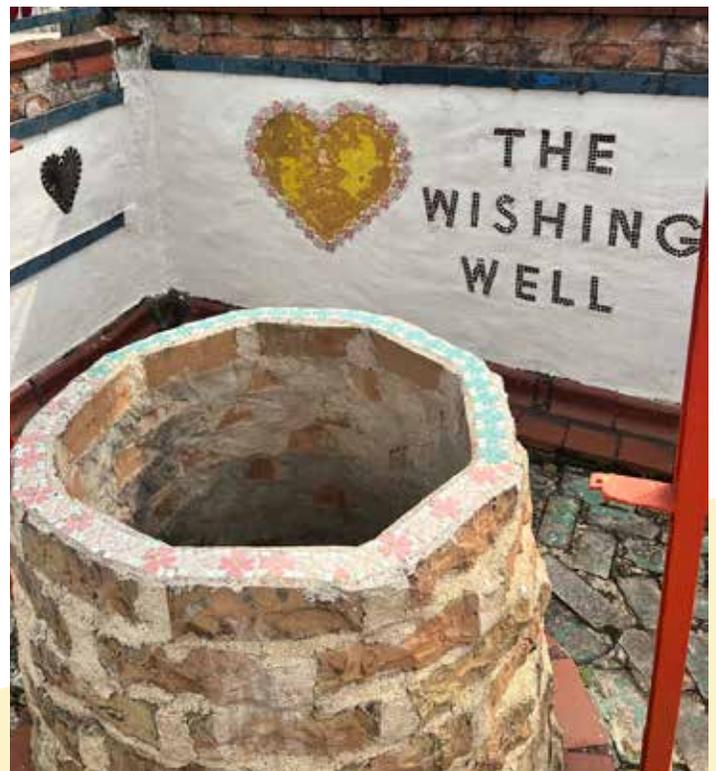


“not only at the Ion, but also other tech and entrepreneurship resources in Houston.” Reflecting on the first Summer in the City, Wilson said, “It was so out of my comfort zone but so within my potential. [I was] surprised at how capable I was.” The versatile Galib, this time in her role as creative writer, visited the Honors College in spring 2023. She was a guest of the Creative Work’s new capstone course, Artists at Work. This class explores and demystifies the creative process across a range of imaginative practices. The inaugural Artists at Work experience puts a particular emphasis on Houston creatives, allowing students to continue to mine the city for further artistic and intellectual possibilities. With their feet firmly planted in the fertile ground of HTX, students sought answers to the question, “Once you have a great idea, how do you realize it?”

Many case studies, both archival and contemporary, helped with this inquiry. Dialogue with notable creative citizens was particularly enlightening. A roster of guest speakers discussed the realities of creating and sustaining community arts organizations. Other guests included Jamie Portwood, programming director at WriteSpace (an emerging Houston literary arts organization) and Pete Gershon, curator of programs at the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art. Gershon also gave students a guided tour of the Orange Show campus, where students learned about features such as the Orange Show monument and the community-created Smither Park.

Other explorations of the city’s “creative climate” included visits to Classical Theatre Company at the historic DeLuxe Theater, “Cambodian Rock Band” at the Alley Theatre, the Alberto Giacometti exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts and the “Artists on Walter Hopps” talk at the Menil Collection.

Sydney Stogel says that the Creative Work program was her favorite part of her university education because it made her re-examine what it means to be creative. “It’s perfect for hungry minds and imaginations. Community and conversation with people around us are necessary in order to create our best work, and I’ll continue to work with The Artists at Work creative community long after graduation.”



# HONORS DEBATE TEAM



By Jillian Holden

The legacy of the University of Houston's Honors College Debate Program predates the very existence of the University itself. Originating when the University was known as Houston Junior College, the debate program continued through the institution's transformation into the University of Houston in 1934.

During that time, the UH debate program held a prominent position as one of the top two qualifiers for the national debate tournament, an invitation-only competition. For a significant period, the University of Houston and Harvard university dominated the debate arena, with UH consistently producing the highest number of qualifiers.

During a pivotal moment, the national debate tournament, once hosted exclusively by West Point, the United States military academy, found a new home at UH. Due to tensions

related to the Vietnam War, the military academy could no longer host the tournament. In a historic move, the tournament turned to UH, marking it as the first time the competition ventured beyond its traditional venue.

As with many academic programs, the UH debate team would face its own ebb and flow over the years. Almost a decade ago, the Honors College — along with generous donors, alumni and friends who recognized the importance of nurturing critical thinking skills — took up the mantle of revitalizing the program. This revival would spark a resurgence of intellectual curiosity that paved the way for a new era of debate excellence at UH.

Today, the debate program at UH is the third largest in the nation. Students primarily engage in policy debate, the longest running and most rigorous form of debate in the

country. Each year, the team focuses on a single topic, conducting intense research and analysis in preparation for competition. Recent topics have ranged from artificial intelligence and antitrust law to nuclear weapons policy.

Rob Glass, the director of the program, emphasizes the team's commitment to logical reasoning, intense research and evidentiary-based arguments. "It's not just about rhetoric; it's about building a compelling case through meticulous research and thoughtful articulation," said Glass.

The foundation for any debate program begins with the formation of its novice and junior varsity debate teams. What sets UH apart is its emphasis on nurturing talent from all walks of life. Though the debate program is housed in the Honors College, participation from all colleges is highly encouraged, especially for those just starting out.

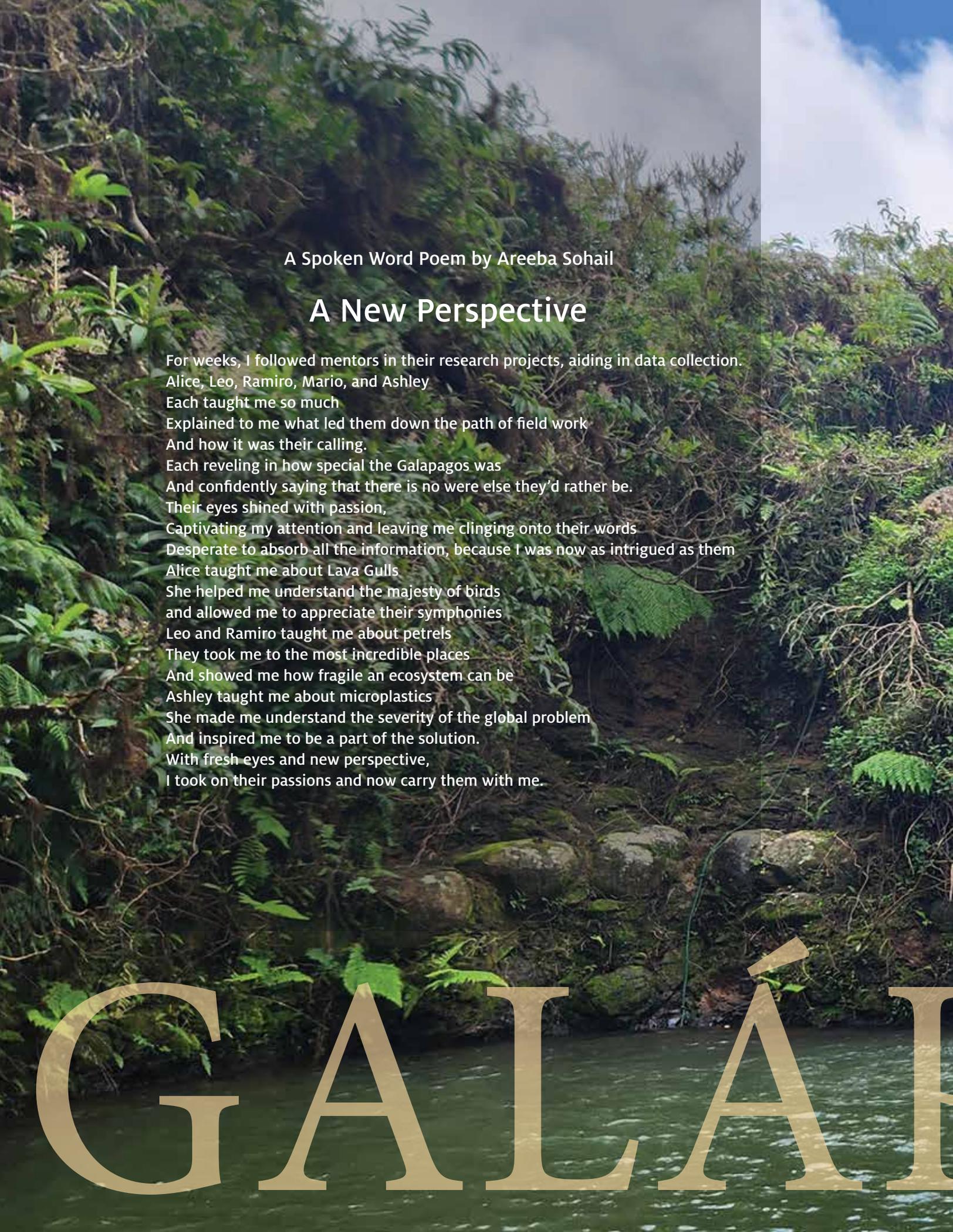
Glass, in his fifth year as director, brings a wealth of experience to the debate program at UH. Before coming to the University of Houston, Glass worked with several high schools and colleges on the east coast, including Stuyvesant High School, Binghamton University, Mamaroneck High School and the University of Rochester. Additionally, he has been a leading contributor to the field of data analysis in debate, including the first rigorous study of large-scale judge behavior in debate. Under his guidance, the UH debate program has achieved remarkable success with back-to-back championships.

Heidi Appel, dean of the Honors College, acknowledges the unique contribution of the debate team to the University's academic landscape.



"The UH Debate Program is an integral part of the Honors College and the University, offering a unique blend of intellectual rigor and community engagement," said Appel. "It aligns perfectly with our mission of nurturing well-rounded scholars and leaders."

Participation in the UH Debate Program goes beyond the accolades and victories. It serves as an opportunity for academic and personal growth. Students engage in extensive exercises of analytical thought, honing skills in legal and policy research, reading comprehension and critical thinking. While the program encourages introspection and fosters teamwork, relationships and the community forged through debate extends beyond the program, creating connections that last long after students graduate.



A Spoken Word Poem by Areeba Sohail

## A New Perspective

For weeks, I followed mentors in their research projects, aiding in data collection.  
Alice, Leo, Ramiro, Mario, and Ashley  
Each taught me so much  
Explained to me what led them down the path of field work  
And how it was their calling.  
Each reveling in how special the Galapagos was  
And confidently saying that there is no were else they'd rather be.  
Their eyes shined with passion,  
Captivating my attention and leaving me clinging onto their words  
Desperate to absorb all the information, because I was now as intrigued as them  
Alice taught me about Lava Gulls  
She helped me understand the majesty of birds  
and allowed me to appreciate their symphonies  
Leo and Ramiro taught me about petrels  
They took me to the most incredible places  
And showed me how fragile an ecosystem can be  
Ashley taught me about microplastics  
She made me understand the severity of the global problem  
And inspired me to be a part of the solution.  
With fresh eyes and new perspective,  
I took on their passions and now carry them with me.

# GALÁPAGOS



# PAGGOS





The Honors College returned to Jordan to see how humanitarian aid workers at the Jordan Health Aid Society international (JHASi) have been addressing the various disaster-related crises in the Middle East and North Africa region. In addition to aiding Syrian refugees in Za'atari camp with family planning, nutrition, and maternal care, the students' other projects took a deep dive into the impacts of climate change on health. Their research, concept notes, and proposals helped establish and fund a new region-wide initiative on Disaster Management and Coordinated Humanitarian Response.

Two students worked in a local non-governmental organization (NGO) that provides legal assistance to vulnerable populations from various backgrounds. Adding this new partner gave Team Jordan a two-pronged approach through which students better understood the challenges of providing long-term refugee care in a middle-income country. Students concluded six weeks of service at their assigned NGOs and completed creative projects in-country.

Cultural experiences included Eid al-Istiklaal (Independence Day), a Royal Wedding, Eid al-Adha (The Celebration of Sacrifice), Petra, the Dead Sea, Jarash, Ajloun Castle, Madaba, the Roman Theater, the Citadel, Wadi Rum, Wadi Mujib, Aqaba, dance classes, and more. Students also studied and practiced day-to-day Arabic with faculty from the School for International Training — Jordan and UH, and the host families with whom they stayed.

# JORDAN



# EUR

Faber-Economon European Travel (F.E.E.T.)

By Lizzie Weaver

“When people reflect on memorable moments from a trip, they probably would not add getting locked out of an apartment building to the list. Throughout my three weeks in three European countries, less glamorous moments were just as impactful as witnessing a beautiful view or piece of artwork.

Once we arrived in Rome, our final stop, Harrison and I made the short walk to the apartment where we were staying to meet the man who would give us the keys. As soon as he left to take his son to watch the highly anticipated A.S. Roma football game, we knew we probably should’ve asked a few more questions about the door. To ensure we would be able to get back into the building, the next hour and a half consisted of us becoming experts on the mechanics of the two deadbolts and the order the keys had to be inserted. It led to multiple conversations, one mainly of hand gestures with an elderly woman and a slightly more vocal one with a younger tenant who spoke more English. Although I cringe when I think about how we looked to passersby on the street and in the building, I appreciate how this experience forced me to be present and think critically. It allowed us to connect with locals, which might not have been as easy if we stayed in a hotel.

These seemingly forgettable moments empowered me in my ability to solve problems while traveling. They made me more excited to explore the cities and things I might not have otherwise. I am extremely grateful for the FEET Scholarship for providing me a unique opportunity to make memories and learn more about myself.”



# OPE

By Harrison Ngo

This trip was my first time traveling outside the United States, so it was a little intimidating to learn that I would be visiting six different cities in three different countries. However, I was so glad that I applied because I made memories I will cherish for the rest of my life.

In the Netherlands, I got to pet a ferret named after Fidel Castro. Lizzie, my travel partner, and I got to see the beautiful stained glass of Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. We also took a gondola ride through the Venetian canals, hiked up Mount Vesuvius, and had so many other wonderful experiences.

I am very grateful to have had this opportunity and want to thank Hanneke Faber, Aristotle Economon, Keri Myrick and the Honors College for making this possible.



# Model Arab League



## WASHINGTON, D.C.

Since 1988, the Honors College has participated in the National University Model Arab League (NUMAL) conference, held in Washington, D.C. each spring. The League offers students an excellent opportunity to develop professional skills while learning about the social, economic, cultural, and political issues facing leaders of the Arab world. Participation in MAL is valuable to students of all academic majors and backgrounds. Delegates learn to master public speaking and discussion, writing and editing, interpersonal relations, and cross-cultural dialogue. Participants come away with practiced skills that will serve them well in their future endeavors. This past spring, 10 delegates represented the Honors College.

# Model United Nations



## WASHINGTON, D.C. CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Model United Nations (MUN) is a program designed to educate students of all ages about current events in international relations. Model UN participants will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of how the bodies of the UN and its countries cooperate with one another to address today's critical global issues, such as eliminating famine, protecting human rights, providing basic life necessities, preventing or ending armed conflicts, and more. This year, a total of 19 delegates represented the Honors College in Washington, D.C. and Chicago.

# From Basement to Beauty

## Gapinski Alumni Reflect on Honors Transformation

By Jillian Holden

**H**onors College alumni Mike Gapinski ('94) and Kim Gapinski ('94) personify UH pride. Both have had remarkable academic journeys marked by leadership roles, active engagement in Greek organizations and campus activities at the University of Houston. The Honors College offers a unique experience, with the Great Conversation, lively discussion and ways to stay involved after graduation shaping academic and social life in profound ways.

"Thinking back, the Honors College has come a long way — from the basement of a library to the beautiful space it is in now," Mike said. "When we were in school, it wasn't even a college. It was the Honors Program."

The Honors Program was created in 1958, with 25 freshmen and two Honors thesis candidates. It advanced to become the Honors College in 1993 as the University grew, serving the intellectual needs of gifted students in over 100 fields of study. The couple noted that the Houston community has grown exponentially along with it, with new businesses and lively institutions contributing to the city's vibrancy.

"I was excited about moving to a new state, participating in the Honors Retreat and being swept up in the culture Honors immediately surrounded you with," Mike said. "Now, everything — dorms, food, sports arenas are better."

Living across from each other in Taub Hall, the Gapinskis fully immersed themselves in the college experience, immediately enjoying the assets of a 30,000-student campus available to only 10% of UH students in the Honors Program. Dorms became a backdrop for memorable moments, late-night study sessions and lifelong friendships. Mike arrived on a National Merit scholarship and pursued a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering, and Kim pursued a bachelor's degree in Russian studies.

"I think there was a natural University involvement because the Honors College students represented a large percentage

of students living on campus at that time. Our social life revolved around the University, and we were very connected by activities such as student life, athletics and Greek life," Kim said. The vibrant communities provided an environment for belonging and support, leadership development and camaraderie with diverse individuals.

"We think of our UH friends as family now," Kim said. "We have stayed in touch, traveling the world together. We go to the away games together. We were in each other's weddings, each other's children's weddings and these are the people I will be friends with forever."

The Gapinskis noted the benefit of hands-on research with faculty members as undergraduate students in the Great Conversation courses. They eagerly sought opportunities to debate, discuss and learn from peers and professors alike, and these exchanges broadened their perspectives, challenged assumptions and led to personal growth. Kim noted that professors were diverse in teaching styles and direction, prompting flexibility and allowing students to develop valuable skills still applicable in their careers.

"It is nice to see the national recognition we didn't have before," Kim said. "It doesn't feel as much like a community college as it did at the beginning when it just closed down on the weekends. It's its own little city now."

From participating in student organizations to organizing student events, they embraced all opportunities to contribute and make a difference. Their fervor for excellence cascaded across the University, inspiring others to push the boundaries of what is possible.

"We are very excited about the new dean and excited to see where she leads us," Mike said. "It is interesting to have a dean whose background is in the sciences instead of literature, and the Honors College is the tip of the sphere of the University."





# THE HUMAN SITUATION

YEARS

**L**iberal education in the Honors College begins with The Human Situation, a year-long course in which students of all colleges and majors join with faculty representing a range of humanities fields to read, discuss and write about the foundational texts and ideas of Western world literature.

Guided by the vision of a common academic experience for all Honors College students, the course began in the fall of 1977 with four professors, a mere 75 students, and a list of ancient Greek texts. Today, Teams Alpha and Omega together enroll over 600 students and are taught by nearly 20 professors. While the classic texts of Greek civilization – foundational to modern science, democracy, philosophy, medicine, drama and academic life itself – still figure prominently in the fall semester, the course has evolved to include books from a number of other ancient cultures. Recent Antiquity reading lists have featured texts from Roman, Hebrew, Christian, Islamic, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Indian and Chinese traditions.

Early in its history, the course grew to include a spring semester covering the origins of Modernity, the period beginning with the Renaissance and leading to the present. Spring reading lists invariably include a Shakespeare play, along with literary and philosophical texts representing broad intellectual movements such as the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Modernism and Post-Colonialism.

The course offers students several ways to engage with the assigned texts. Each week, they attend a series of lectures given by an interdisciplinary team of Honors College faculty, as well as small seminar-style discussions led by a single faculty member. They write a number of critical essays on the assigned texts, and receive detailed feedback on both the content and style of their writing.

The semester culminates in an oral final exam, during which students are called upon to think on their feet as they synthesize and articulate their thinking over the course of the semester.



# BOX OF BOOKS

The Human Situation “box of books” scholarship was introduced at the 40th celebration of the Human Situation course, the College’s signature course. A \$500 donation allows a freshman to buy a “box of books,” all the texts needed for the Human Situation sequence, Antiquity, and Modernity. If you would like to help provide a “box of books” to an Honors student, please contact Miguel Lopez at [mlopez78@uh.edu](mailto:mlopez78@uh.edu) or call 713.743.1802.



# Faculty Awards

## 2022 TED L. ESTESS AWARD FOR ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

Brenda Rhoden

## 2022 VINCE AND LOUISE FOSTER AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Jesse Rainbow

## 2021 LERNER FAMILY FACULTY FELLOWSHIP AWARDS

Marc Hanke  
Helen Valier

## 2022 MATTHEW B. AND TAMARA STEELE AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Aaron Reynolds

## 2022 BEE AND KEE WONG FACULTY ENGAGEMENT AWARDS

Ben Rayder

## 2022 UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH MENTOR AWARD

David Rainbow

## STAFF SCHOLARSHIPS

Julia Brown  
Deborah Reyes  
Alice Yang

A variety of awards have been established to recognize exemplary faculty who go above and beyond in their efforts to reach students and whose leadership grows and sustains our curricular and co-curricular programming. The Honors College thanks the 2022-2023 recipients for their commitment to mentorship, teaching and service.

# WELCOME NEW Faculty and Staff



**Nick Jacobsen** joined the Honors College in fall 2023 as the associate director of the Energy and Sustainability minor. Before joining UH, Jacobsen spent many years teaching courses for Miami University in Ohio and Texas A&M and more recently coordinating the ecology and evolutionary biology doctoral program at Texas A&M University. Jacobsen completed his bachelor's degrees in ecology and

evolutionary biology from Rice University and received his doctorate at Texas A&M University from the applied biodiversity science program.



**Haley Baker** serves as assistant to the dean of the Honors College, helping facilitate College functions in conjunction with the dean's office. Beginning in 2018, Baker was an administrative assistant in Lee College's Veteran Center, guiding veteran students through the often-complicated process of obtaining education benefits and vocational rehabilitation. In 2022, she completed her undergraduate studies at University of St. Thomas where she earned a bachelor's in

English literature and communication. Baker continues to nurture her passion for education in the Honors College.



**Cara Shokler** is a program director for the Community Health Worker Initiative (CHWI). She assists with program outreach as well as the design and implementation of both community-driven and student-led public health projects and programs in the greater Houston area. In addition, she assists with a number of interdisciplinary projects on community health and data led by the student organization, Honors in Community Health.



**Livia Garza** is a program manager for the Office of Undergraduate Research and Major Awards, coordinating the Houston Early Research Experience (HERE) and office communications. An Honors alum, she earned bachelor's degrees in economics and liberal studies from UH. She also received a master's degree in library and information science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



**Janet Lawler** is an instructional assistant professor for civic engagement and community-engaged learning in the Honors College and serves in the Bonner Leaders program. Prior to joining the Honors College, she held a postdoctoral position at Carnegie Mellon University in the Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence and Educational Innovation. Lawler earned her doctorate

in politics from the University of Virginia and was recognized with a Distinguished Graduate Teaching Award in the social sciences and education and an All-University Teaching Award. She writes and teaches on the democratic political thought in digital spaces, critical and normative theories of social media discourse and algorithmic governance. Her work has been published in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Political Science*.



**Miguel Lopez** ('23) is the director of honors relations at the Honors College. He is responsible for overseeing various key areas, including managing alumni relations, coordinating Honors College events, facilitating reservations for Honors spaces and engaging with donors and the community.

Prior to joining UH, Lopez served as communications coordinator at Texas Chiropractic College, communications and social media specialist at Lee College and community engagement specialist for the City of Baytown.

He has a bachelor's degree in strategic communication (summa cum laude) with a minor in law from UH, and he holds an associate's degree in English and Spanish from Lee College, where he was a member of the Honors program. Lopez frequently presents research and speaks at higher education conferences, galas and symposiums across the country.



**Arlene Macdonald** joined the Honors College in 2023, teaching in and directing the Medicine & Society program. Before coming to UH, she was a faculty member in the Institute for the Medical Humanities at the University of Texas Medical Branch, where she taught the social, ethical, and political dimensions of health and illness. Macdonald received her doctoral degree in Religious Studies

from the University of Toronto. Her doctoral research used ethnographic methods to understand the interplay of the biological, socio-political, and spiritual in the resurrected lives of organ transplant recipients. Her recent research examines the health endeavors undertaken by Sikhs in the city of Brampton, Ontario.



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**Photos:** (1) Dean Heidi Appel poses with the Honors College Advisory Board members following her first meeting with the board; (2) Jonathan Rapping, founder and chief executive officer of Gideon's Promise, takes questions at the Grand Challenges Forum; (3) Best-selling author Matthew Crawford visits with attendees after speaking at the annual 2023 Ross M. Lence Master Teachers Series dinner; (4) Honors College students participate in Day of Service in the nearby Third Ward of Houston; (5) Students explain their research methods and outcomes to audiences attending the 2023 Undergraduate Research Day in the M.D. Anderson Library and Honors College; (6) Students share about the various program offerings at the annual Co-curricular Program Fair; (7) The Scholars Invitational is an early orientation specifically designed for select incoming Honors College students; (8) Bonner Leaders participate in the Books for Development, an organization committed to providing books to children in underdeveloped countries; (9) In the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship program, Julio Bravo, Honors student and chemistry major, researches a class of molecules known to contain compounds that are effective treatment for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases;



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10) The Honors Coffeehouse event showcases the many talents of Honors students; 11) Members of the Honors College young alumni group attend the Great Conversation at the Fertitta Center.



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# Honors in Action



M.D. Anderson Library  
4333 University Drive, Room 212  
Houston, TX 77204-2001

The Honors College has been rated among the top 10 in the nation by *Public University Press*.



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**Photos:** (12) The ODK Academic Society holds its 2023 initiation in the Honors Commons; (13, 14) UH President Renu Khator and Honors alum and Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia Safa Ansari-Bayegan were featured speakers at the annual Convocation in the Moores Opera House; (15) Honors Student Governing Board hosts game night in the Honors Commons following the Convocation; (16) the PBK Academic Society's Mu Chapter at UH welcomes its largest group, 100 initiates; (17) HCAB members and Honors alumni, Martin Cominsky and Sean Gorman, host 14 students and Dean Appel to the first Honors Arts Evening to see the Houston Grand Opera perform *Intelligence* at the Wortham Theatre.



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