

# *With* HONORS

A Magazine of the Youngstown State University Sokolov Honors College



## PENGUINS UNITE IN HOMECOMING WIN



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Honors homecoming wins .....	2-3
Tressel Institute for Leadership and Teamwork.....	4-5
YSU PenguinPulse and community engagement .....	6-8
The YSU-BaccMed and honors pre-health experience .....	9
Welcoming our international students .....	10-11
Honors student research experiences .....	12-13
Honors orientation returns .....	14-15
Alumni connections .....	16-17
Celebrating student success .....	18-20



Honors alum and 2022 Homecoming Queen **Francesca Byrne** returns to the field to celebrate with the newly crowned **Oluwatumininu Adeeko**, honors senior and 2023 Homecoming Queen. See story on the honors homecoming wins on pages 2 -3.

*With Honors* is an award-winning yearly publication of the Youngstown State University Sokolov Honors College for alumni, students, faculty and staff, parents, and friends. This edition covers events and accomplishments taking place during the 2022 calendar year.

The largely student created publication was recognized by the National Collegiate Honors Council with a first place award in 2021.

QR codes throughout the magazine can be scanned with a smartphone for quick access to videos and other supplemental digital content.

**Interim President**  
Dr. Helen Lafferty

**Provost**  
Dr. Brien Smith

**Dean and Associate Provost**  
Dr. Amy Cossentino

**Student Editor**  
Kirsten Moore, HC28

**Student Graphic Designers**  
Omega Jaricha, HC30  
Avery Jones, HC27  
Alaina Peccon, HC28  
Alyssa Smith, HC27

**Student Videographers**  
Anish Chougule, HC28  
Scott Gregory, HC28

**Student Writers**  
Lindsey Chludzinski, HC26  
Madison James, HC30  
Celeste Kapalin, HC29  
Sho Maharjan, HC29  
Kirsten Moore, HC28  
Lauren Rager, HC26  
Nella Silvestri, HC28  
Hannah Werle, HC30

**Graphic Design Mentor to Students**  
Renee Cannon

**Staff Editor & Magazine Seminar Instructor**  
Mollie Hartup, US6

*Created and designed by Honors College students with support from the YSU Office of Marketing and Communications.*



## Mission Statement

Inspiring a love of learning  
through opportunity, community and family

# DEAN'S LETTER

## The honors way: leading, learning and serving

True to three decades of honors at Youngstown State University, the focus remained to create and support experiences to enrich student learning, leading and serving opportunities. These distinctive features centered around the five pillars of the YSU Sokolov Honors College resulted in student success both within and outside of the classroom showcased by our student writers throughout this magazine edition.

While we came together to celebrate student achievement, we also provided support, as families do, during times of difficulty. In fall, our student body mourned the passing of Kevin Sobnosky, a beloved senior honors student. Kevin's friendship to so many and impact to the community won't be forgotten.

Some of the new initiatives and student success highlights for the Sokolov Honors College this year include:

- Welcomed the largest incoming class in Fall 2022, comprising 371 students from the United States and 13 additional countries. This marks a 24% increase from the Fall 2021 class (299 students) and over a 10% increase from the largest class previously in Fall 2020 (336 students).
- Largest honors student body in the history of honors at YSU with 23 countries represented outside of the United States.
- Reestablished honors orientation sessions with 213 students attending sessions in March and May and matriculating to YSU. Alumni, parents, current students and faculty engaged in an across campus collaborative effort to create an experience of welcoming new students and their families to YSU.
- Oluwatumininu Adeeko was recognized as the Cooperative Education & Internship Association (CEIA) 2022 Intern of the Year.
- Biology major Tafadzwa Mapiki received a competitive MCAT prep scholarship that provided her with tuition for a Princeton Review MCAT prep class.
- Nine students attended the National Collegiate Honors Council with four presenting at poster sessions and five in the general session. Kira Bowman, a senior Biochemistry major, placed second for her research on extracting COVID-19 from human excrement.
- New initiatives and activities launched for YSU-BaccMed and honors pre-health students included field excursions to NEOMED, networking mixers, MCAT prep sessions and seminars and opportunities to learn from local physician speakers including Dr. Rashid Abdu.
- Incorporated the five badges and goal setting from the Tressel Institute for Leadership and Teamwork within the first year honors seminar series.

Offering experiences to develop knowledge and skills to prepare students for life beyond college, remains the commitment of the Sokolov Honors College staff and faculty. Our appreciation goes out to our donors, alums and friends of honors, who support our efforts to create and deliver an exceptional experience. The value of college can't be overstated and is best understood from the words of Kevin Sobnosky, "College, without a doubt, builds character and shapes people to become better than they were before."

With honors,



Amy Cossentino, Dean

IN REMEMBRANCE  
KEVIN SOBNO SKY

2000-2022





Gabe Perrotta with the Best-Theme-Oriented Trophy

## Cover Story: Honors unites for homecoming, celebrates two big wins

By Lindsey Chludzinski, HC26

The call goes out each year for student organizations to craft theme-centered, YSU-spirited floats to be part of the annual homecoming parade, a long-held campus tradition. This past fall, two honors organizations joined forces to add their flair to the eighty-second year of festivities. Members of MALAINA, an initiative to celebrate student diversity, and Honors Trustees, the student leadership board of the college, crafted a float embracing the heart of the honors family.

The students knew that they wanted a design consistent with the proposed theme of "Penguins United!" Sophomore and president-elect of honors trustees, **Gabe Perrotta**, suggested modelling their float after Disney's beloved amusement park ride, "It's a Small World." The students took the idea and ran with it; dubbing their masterpiece "It's a Small Waddle."

"I feel like homecoming is about all coming together from your roots."  
- Gabe Perrotta



**Bronson DeAngelo**, a junior, helped build a wooden boat. Freshman **Camille Herb** painted a detailed mural featuring President Tressel, Pete the Penguin, Mickey Mouse, and several key buildings from around campus. Several students pitched in during the multi-week assembly process. Flags from hundreds of countries were draped around the boat's exterior.

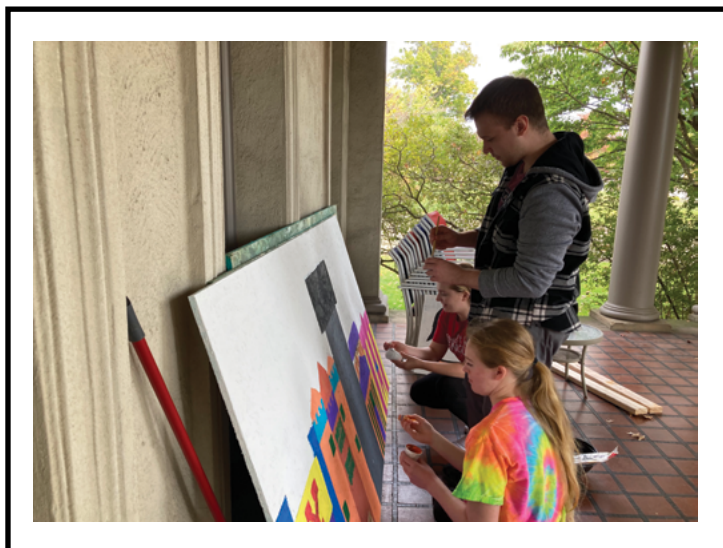
Like the construction itself, the day of the event required much teamwork. MALAINA members dressed in cultural attire while representatives of Trustees sported penguin costumes. **Caitlyn Sapp**, junior and treasurer of Trustees, confidently drove the float after learning to pull a trailer just for the occasion. Candy was distributed, many laughs were had, and when it came time for awards, the team excitedly accepted the "Best Theme-Oriented" trophy.

The two groups' advisors, Johnny Ware and Presley Bowser, concluded that watching students from varied backgrounds work in such synergy was rewarding. "It was really nice to see two different organizations come together, have two different perspectives, work together, and execute a project," Bowser said. The students agreed. From start to finish, the process was about collaboration. "We started with an empty trailer and ended with this beautiful float...we had different ideas, but we found a way to merge all of them," Sapp said.

Although it took a lot of planning and problem-solving, the groups were more than satisfied with the final product, which showcased the creative side of the honors community. Meanwhile, honors students were well-represented on the homecoming court. Honors student royalty this year included senior **Elsa Khan**, senior **Alicia Lonsinger**, and senior **Oluwatumininu Adeeko**, who was also crowned Homecoming Queen. Alum **Francesa Byrne**, 2022 Homecoming Queen, returned to pass on the crown to Adeeko.



Camille Herb and her painted mural creation



# Preparing future le one

## Honors partners with Tressel Institute for Leadership and Teamwork

By Kirsten Moore, HC28

During the 2022 fall semester, the Sokolov Honors College introduced its students to the Tressel Institute for Leadership and Teamwork (TILT) curriculum. This program, which aims to foster leadership development among students, provides badge certifications for each successfully completed module.

“The top skills employers look for are continuous learning, time management, decision-making, collaboration, and emotional intelligence. We wanted to create a curriculum

that empowered students to take initiative during their time at YSU and beyond when they enter their future careers,” said TILT Strategic and Launch Manager Jenna Binsley, also an honors alum.

Binsley serves as one of the founding and guiding leaders for students in the TILT program. Her duties include developing the TILT content and implementing the program in different courses. So far, honors and athletics have adopted the TILT curriculum.

The TILT Personal Leadership program Binsley assisted in curating is divided into five badges – My Personal Journey, My Commitment to All, My Healthy Habits, My Career Pathway, and My Financial Game Plan. To earn a badge for each section of the curriculum, students watch videos recorded by guest servant leaders who share their own personal experiences relating to each topic. Students then work to set their own badge-related goals before meeting with their honors mentor.

First-year honors students complete the five badges



Former President Tressel joins an Intro to Honors class and instructors Jenna Binsley and Presley Bowser during class at Kohli Hall.

# Leaders... badge at a time

between Intro to Honors in the fall and Campus Community Partnerships in the spring. Graduating seniors complete My Financial Game Plan during their capstone experience, taught by Presley Bowser, honors assistant director, who has taken the lead in supporting all honors students' badge progress.

"As students begin their academic and professional careers, it is important to begin developing industry-specific and appealing soft skills that they can use to promote themselves in competitive job markets. Each badge opens the door to self-reflection and assists students in developing goals specific to their dreams," said Bowser.

Former YSU President Jim Tressel, founder of TILT, shared his perspectives on the badge structure during remarks to students. He indicates the badges help students develop who they are as a person and what they will do in the future, and at its core, the program is intended to add value to the student experience.

"Eliciting thinking and reflection is really valuable. Looking at those goals, thinking about, 'What is it I need to do to accomplish those? What is it going to take? Whose help do I need? What do I have to learn?' [allows you] to put that pen to paper. If you become really effective at setting goals and coming up with a plan to accomplish them, it will serve you for the rest of your life," Tressel said.



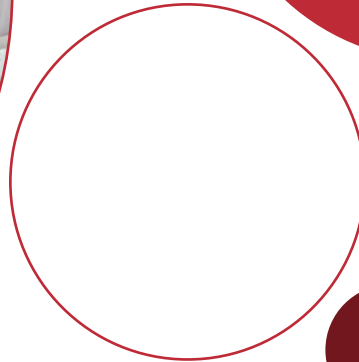
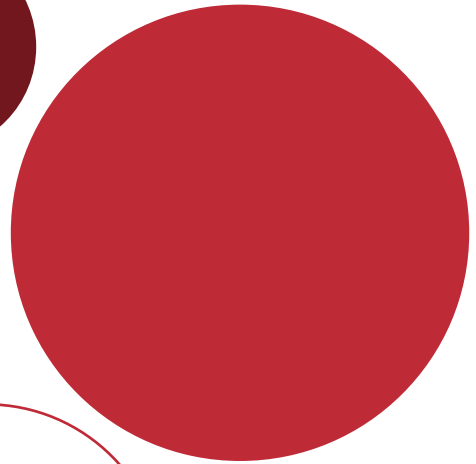
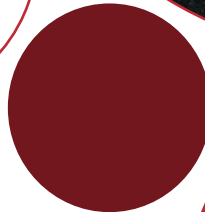
Pictured from left: TILT Manager Jenna Binsley, former President Jim Tressel, and Sokolov Honors College Assistant Director Presley Bowser.

Scan the QR code to hear from Tressel and honors alumni **Ashley Audi, Sarah Elisabeth Odidika, Kelcie Schiraldi** and **Isabel Stoeber**, all guest servant leaders for TILT.



TRESSEL INSTITUTE FOR  
**LEADERSHIP**  
& TEAMWORK

# YSU PENGUIN PULSE





# A one-stop shop for community engagement

By Lauren Rager, HC26

Honors students have embraced a new way to find and log service opportunities through YSU PenguinPulse, technology which is benefiting all of campus and the community.

YSU PenguinPulse provides service opportunities from numerous organizations in one place, and it simplifies the search process for students. Various groups, such as classes and student organizations, can maintain a designated page to list events and opportunities to serve. Community partners can also list service opportunities and promote them to all of YSU.

Lexi Rager, former associate director of the Sokolov Honors College, spearheaded the onboarding of the new technology, which will help tell the story of the significant community impact YSU students, faculty, and staff are making.

"We know that our students, faculty, and staff are out in the community volunteering, serving, doing service-based research, and really making a big impact on the Mahoning Valley," said Rager, who added that YSU PenguinPulse will allow that impact to be captured in one place.

YSU launched the new tool in August 2022 with an invitation to Saturday of Caring as the kickoff to the United Way YSU workplace campaign. The monthly event provides essential food to more than 400 families in the area. Students, faculty, and staff attend each month to pack and deliver the food.

After volunteering, YSU PenguinPulse simplifies the process of tracking hours served. Students only need to submit the number of hours provided and write a short reflection that will automatically be sent to the right verifier. Community partners have also reported increased access to volunteers since the implementation of YSU PenguinPulse.

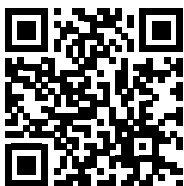
Rager believes YSU PenguinPulse will be instrumental in achieving a university goal of earning the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement.

"YSU PenguinPulse is beneficial because, finally, we can see the 'big picture.' We can see where the service is happening and with what community partners. We can see what causes students seem to be really passionate about," said Rager.

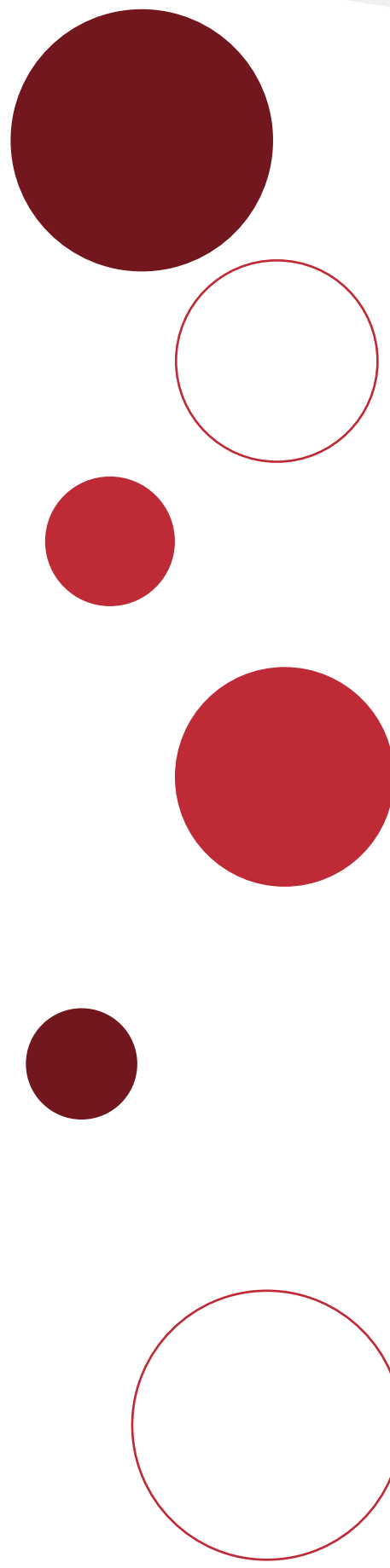
Honors student and International Business major **Madison James** recalled her experience volunteering and seeing other groups serve alongside her.

"I was sort of expecting to only see honors students, but the basketball team was there, students from honors, and people from the community," said James.

Through YSU PenguinPulse, James discovered she enjoys volunteering at Saturday of Caring. While there, James observed a couple people arriving at the event without realizing they needed to sign up for food ahead of time. Instead of sending them home empty-handed, James proposed an idea and developed an informative flyer with a list of alternative places people visit the same day, or throughout the week, to receive food and essentials quickly. She recognized that helping indirectly can also fulfill individual and community needs.



Scan the QR code to  
experience the YSU  
Saturday of Caring for  
United Way!



## Honors enhances connection to community art museum

By Nella Silvestri, HC28

In an effort to connect students with a community cultural gem, the Sokolov Honors College fostered opportunities for hands on learning at the Butler Institute of American Art. During fall semester, current and prospective honors students got to experience the museum, located adjacent to campus.

First-year honors students explored the museum as part of their Discover Youngstown assignment, which encouraged students to freely explore the museum. All 371 first-year honors students later presented what they learned at the museum to their classmates in the Introduction to Honors seminar.

During the Fall Sokolov Honors College Open House, 150 prospective honors students and guests spent a portion of their day at the museum. Docents guided guests around the museum, and the Butler offered free memberships to all prospective students in attendance.

My classmates and I in the Honors Magazine Editing and Production Seminar had a very special opportunity to collaborate with Reynier Llanes, a Cuban American artist whose work was showcased at the Butler. We were able to meet the artist, ask him questions, and admire his beautiful artwork while learning more about how to interview individuals for articles.

Incorporation of the Butler into the honors curriculum has been rewarding, spreading Youngstown's culture and history to students across campus while also providing a gratifying experience that makes us feel more connected to our Sokolov Honors College family. Personally, I have enjoyed volunteering at the Butler gift shop for the last year. My work has allowed me to grow my people skills, learn how to navigate new situations, and get to know members of our community and local art lovers.

Founded in 1919, the Butler was the first museum dedicated exclusively to American art. Admission is free.





# YSU-BaccMed

## changes lead to launch of honors pre-health experience

The movement of the YSU-BaccMed program administration to the Sokolov Honors College in 2022 sparked an expansion of pre-health experiences for all honors students planning a career in medicine.

Prompted by evidence that honors students are more prepared for medical school along with the retirement of Dr. Diana Fagan, professor of Biology and YSU-BaccMed faculty coordinator, the honors team began supporting students in YSU-BaccMed who were pursuing early assurance seats at two partner medical schools, NEOMED and LECOM.

While learning the specifics of the pathway programs, honors implemented supports to benefit all honors pre-health students, such as an honors seminar focusing on MCAT preparation, a simulated MCAT exam, guided interview preparation, and continual professional development opportunities provided in part by a formalized partnership with Eastern Ohio AHEC.

“As we immersed ourselves in learning about the pre-health world, it became obvious that what we were learning could benefit not only our YSU-BaccMed students but enhance the readiness for all honors students considering a health-related career,” said Amy Cossentino, dean of the Sokolov Honors College.

Honors developed a Healthy Futures newsletter as a mechanism to communicate opportunities, such as field excursions to Ohio Medical Education Day and NEOMED to any interested honors student. In both cases, a blend of YSU-BaccMed and honors pre-health students attended the events.

Reading the newsletter paid dividends for honors student Tafadwa Mapiki, a Biology Pre-Medicine major who learned about and later received a scholarship for Princeton Review MCAT preparation.

“The newsletter is where I got to know about all the scholarship opportunities.” said Mapiki. “Whether you’re in the BaccMed program or not, you can still make it to medical school with the YSU Honors College helping you.”



Students who participated in OMED from left are Shirleyah Peakes, Tafadwa Mapiki, Sameer Samad, and Anna Maillis.

While the entire team plays a part in supporting honors pre-health students, several individuals have taken on key roles within YSU-BaccMed. Johnny Ware leads recruitment efforts with a special focus on empowering students from populations historically underserved in medicine. Dr. Alicia Prieto Langarica serves as faculty advisor, Brett Kengor serves as Academic Advisor, and Mollie Hartup directs the administration of the program.

Additionally, students culminate their BaccMed experience through clinical shadowing connected with an honors course made possible by physicians at Mercy Health with coordination by Sara Michaliszyn, associate dean of the Bitonte College of Health and Human Services

“We are so excited to continue to grow and build upon the premiere pre-health experience offered in the Sokolov Honors College through a team approach that stretches across campus and the community,” said Hartup. “We thank Dr. Fagan for her years of mentoring future physicians and wish her well in retirement.”



Scan the QR code to hear from students about their YSU-BaccMed experience.

# Coming to America

By Celeste Kapalin, HC29

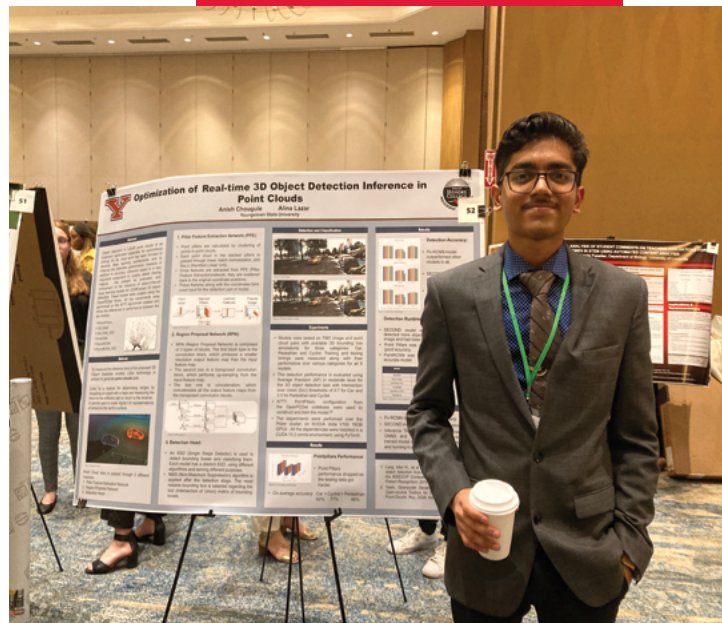
Students come from all over the world to attend Youngstown State University. In fact, honors welcomed the largest incoming class of 70 international students in Fall 2022. The new students increased the global perspectives within the Sokolov Honors College to include representation from 24 countries and 5 continents.

Two such examples are Sokolov Honors College students **Anish Chougule** and **Omega Jaricha**. From India and Zimbabwe respectively, their journeys to YSU could not be more different. When Chougule started thinking about college around age fifteen, he was eager to get out of the country. His desire to explore new cultures was strong and his parents were supportive. Determined to make this dream a reality, he even turned down India's Ivy Leagues.

Jaricha, on the other hand, had no intention of coming to the US. After being denied a visa to Canada in 2020, he began his college education in Zimbabwe. But when his friend **Tafadzwa Mapiki** joined the Sokolov Honors College, she encouraged him to join her. He filled out the application and later applied to honors in hopes of a scholarship. He took six months to think about it and ultimately decided against leaving home.

But Mapiki was persistent. When he told her that he did not have enough money, she told him that he could get a job in the US. Although still skeptical, he applied for a visa and got one. In the end, however, he chose not to use it. His sister, though, much like Mapiki, was not taking no for an answer. She bought him a plane ticket, and before he knew it, he was starting his journey to America as the first in his family to leave the country. After several long flights, with this being his first time on a plane, he arrived in Youngstown, Ohio.

Now, both are enjoying life within honors at YSU. Chougule is a Computer Science major who has presented his research at the National Collegiate Honors Council conference. Jaricha is a Civil Engineering major who loves his math classes and working for honors. They both experienced culture shock upon arrival but found that everyone at YSU and honors is kind and welcoming, which made their transition smoother, even though they both still sometimes miss the foods from home.



Anish Chougule presenting research at NCHC conference in Dallas



Omega Jaricha  
at home in Zimbabwe

# From the Austrian hills to YSU

By Sho Maharjan, HC29

*“Do whatever you want to do in the moment.”*

These are the words **Katrin Hoeller** has based much of her life around. It is a saying that gave her the courage to travel over 4,000 miles from her home country of Austria to the United States. Hoeller had always dreamed of learning about different cultures, specifically in the US, and felt the best way would be through living with a host family. In her last year of high school, the perfect program came knocking on her doorstep. Through the program Cultural Care Au Pair, she could work and live with a family in the US. Grasping tightly to the nine words she had always lived by, Hoeller boarded a flight to Philadelphia where she would take care of two beautiful girls for two years.

Although she enjoyed taking care of her kids, Hoeller soon desired to broaden her horizons and attempt something different. Creativity had always flowed through her, a trait seemingly passed down from her mother, which gifted her with a love for art. She also liked working with computers and was very interested in the digitalization of art, therefore majoring in Graphic Design seemed like a great amalgamation of both of her passions. Hoeller soon found herself on a bus from Philadelphia to Youngstown State University, riding the waves of the same saying that brought her to the United States in the first place.

The experiences she has had at YSU so far have felt exactly like what she had seen in American movies set in college. The close-knit group of friends she has found has contributed to an easier transition into university. She has made amazing memories like doing homework outside with friends, burning a croissant in the microwave, taking out Styrofoam boxes filled to the brim with cereal from the dining hall, and making leaf angels in the numerous piles of fallen leaves. Being a part of YSU's Sokolov Honors College has been an amazing support system for her, and she is grateful there are many people to help answer her questions. The programs within honors assist her in maneuvering through her future while presenting many opportunities for her. All these things she has experienced so far has made Hoeller realize that she made the right decision to come to the United States and Youngstown



Hoeller on the mountain Rote Wand in Austria

“Do whatever you want to do in the moment.”

# Honors students gain faculty mentors through research

By Celeste Kapalin, HC29

While all students participate in academics, many Sokolov Honors College students go above and beyond by completing research in their field, including the examples highlighted here.

Under the direction of Dr. Alexis Byers, students **Lucy Allen, Justine Appolonia, Devan Miller, and Saad Yousuf** spent the year working on a project titled Graph Theoretic Approach to DNA Self-Assembly.

Presented at the PME conference by Allen in February and the MAA conference by Appolonia and Miller in March, their research entailed looking at creating minimal labeling for graphs that follow certain criteria. Finding minimal labeling leads scientists to find the cheapest way of constructing synthetic and self-assembling DNA structures, allowing them to treat and diagnose patients with greater efficiency.

Byers taught Allen a lot. "She was the first to introduce to me that research is just learning. In having this perspective, it is much easier to spend time with the research and to ask questions as the goal is to just learn rather than be right," said Allen.

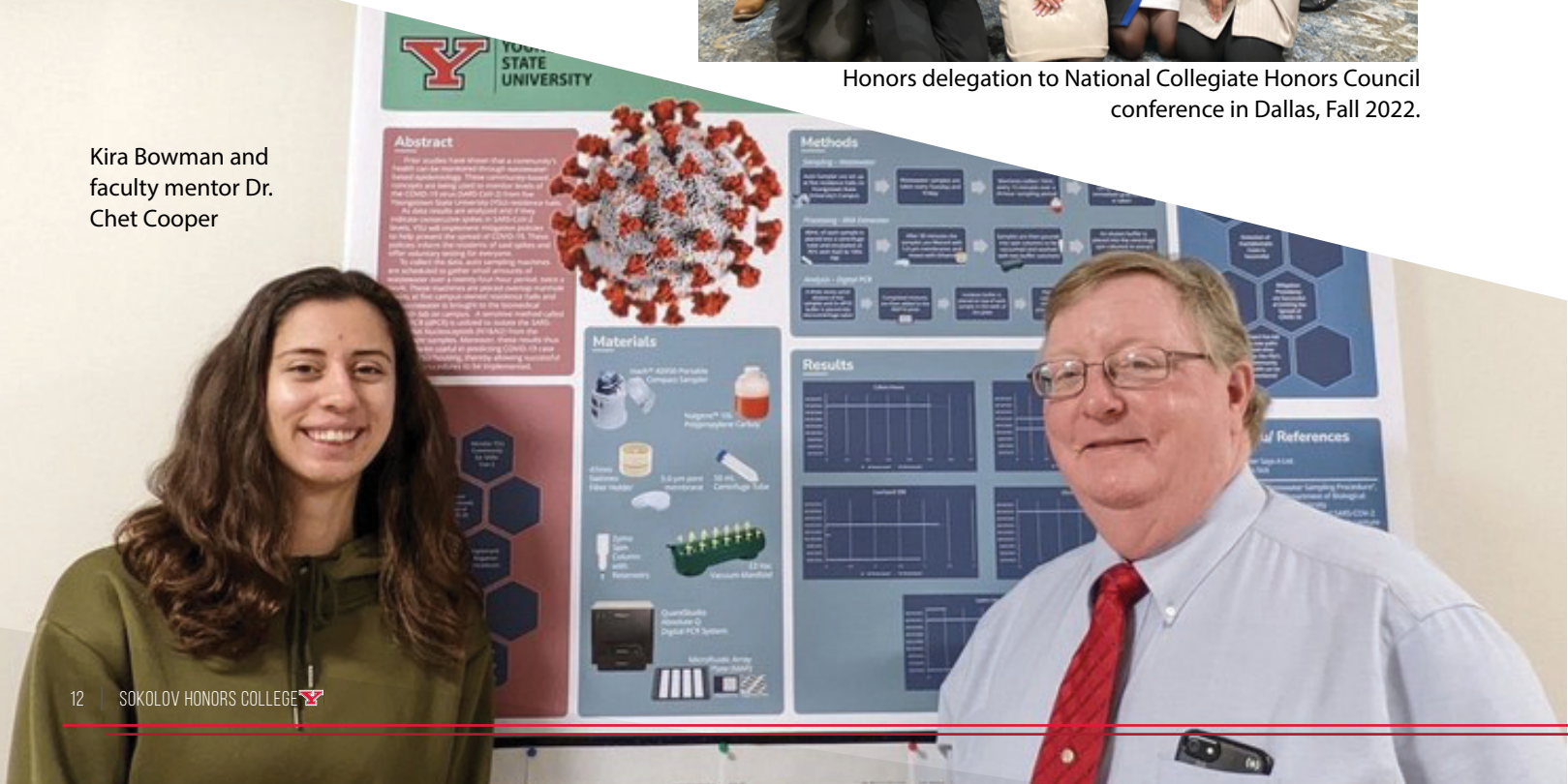
"I have also learned the importance of spending time laying the groundwork before jumping into the deep end of the project."

Senior Biology major **Kira Bowman** has been conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Chet Cooper for the past three years. Five automatic sampling machines collect wastewater from campus-owned resident halls twice a week, which she then tests for the COVID-19 virus using a sensitive method called digital PCR. Her work has been helpful in predicting COVID-19 cases in YSU housing. In turn, mediation procedures have been implemented.



Honors delegation to National Collegiate Honors Council conference in Dallas, Fall 2022.

Kira Bowman and faculty mentor Dr. Chet Cooper



# Graph Theoretic Approach to DNA Self-Assembly

Lucy Allen  
Youngstown State University

YSU PME Conference  
February 25, 2023

Joint work with: Justine Appolonia, Ananya Kalidindi, Devan Miller, Saad Yousuf

Advisor: Dr. Alexis Byers  
Youngstown State University



From left, Lucy Allen, Dr. Alexis Byers, Saad Yousuf, and Devan Miller.



Working with Cooper has been the defining mentorship of her college career. "Without Dr. Cooper's tutelage I would not be the student I am today," said Bowman. "He has provided structure when conducting experiments and is always there to answer questions."

Bowman presented this project at the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference in November, where she won second place in the environmental sciences category. This is an opportunity she owes to honors. "Without the Sokolov Honors College, I probably wouldn't have met Dr. Cooper or ever worked in his lab," she said.

**Madison Ricciuti** is a senior Mathematics major. Under the guidance of Dr. Alicia Prieto Langarica, she is working to predict the frequency and severity of flight delays. Using January 1988-2008 flight data and a combination of R, Excel, and Tableau, she creates corresponding visualizations. Separate generalized linear models are then used as she attempts to make her predictions.

Her work has been showcased at Quest, the Choose Ohio First regional conference, and the STEM showcase. Since being involved in research, she has "learned how to apply all of the theoretical information [she] has learned in [her] classes to work more similar to a career in the industry."

She has also learned how to overcome obstacles and grown to see that progress is not linear.

Ricciuti gained much of her knowledge from Dr. Prieto and honors. "The experience I have had over the past three years has made me a more well-rounded individual, which will directly make me more well-rounded in my profession."



Madison Ricciuti and faculty mentor Dr. Alicia Prieto Langarica



Scan the QR code to hear more about the NCHC student experience.



# Welcome to the family

Special honors orientation sessions give students early introduction to YSU, honors  
*By Hannah Werle, HC30*

A collaboration of YSU faculty, staff, students, and alums led to the success of two honors only orientation sessions in Spring 2022. The day-long welcome to YSU, planned entirely by honors for honors students, allowed new students to begin building relationships while learning more about YSU and registering for their fall classes.

The honors team worked to create an environment that was active and engaging while disseminating important information. Students and their guests began the day together but later diverged to follow separate paths with programming specially tailored to the needs of each group.

Student breakout sessions throughout the day included a campus tour, a wellbeing workshop, academic advising, registration, and more.

The sessions are designed to help the students grow their community, form relationships with other honors students, and prepare for college life.

Several honors alums, such as **Michele Johnson**, volunteered to come back to share their time and perspectives with students. Johnson is also a member of the Sokolov Honors College Advisory Board.

"I wanted to help high school seniors have a positive and memorable start to their YSU experience," said Johnson who drove in from Columbus to spend the day with students and their families for both honors orientation dates.

"By helping answer questions and ease fears about the newness approaching, I know we've helped students and parents have an easier transition into college."



Time is also devoted to planning out various sessions for the orientation day and how best to craft the content that will be shared throughout the program.

“Planning orientation for honors students is a major undertaking and requires time, effort, and collaboration from many individuals across campus,” said Mollie Hartup, director. “We are grateful for our campus partners and alumni for their contributions.”

Students reported positive outcomes from attending orientation, including making some lasting friendships and learning more about what to expect from college.

“I thought the orientation was nicely explained and put together. It definitely eased me into the honors college experience,” said **Ryan Smith**, a first-year student who attended the 2022 honors orientation.

“My parents and I drove six hours to attend honors orientation, and it was definitely worth it,” said **Adrian Nelson**. “The first time I came here, I immediately fell in love with YSU and realized it was the school for me.”

Honors college students, faculty, staff and administration create a seamless and enjoyable experience for everyone who attends the orientation. With engaging speakers, sessions, and workshops designed to educate students and guests, the honors orientation gives participants the tools needed to succeed in their future at YSU.



Registering for classes during orientation



Ryan Smith and family



Airyana Washington



Scan the QR code to hear from Mason, Zane, and Adrian sharing their honors orientation experience.

# Honors plays integral role in lifelong learning

## Honors alum provides opportunity for learning at local law firm

By Celeste Kapalin, HC29

Honors students are meeting the needs of local businesses through alumni connections. **Matthew Vansuch**, US6, is one such alum. He graduated with a BA in Political Science in 2002 during the early years of the University Scholars program. Everyone was very close and knew everyone else, which he describes as a “great early lesson in human dynamics.”

Vansuch is now a partner at Brouse McDowell law firm in Canfield. Over the past couple of years, he has reached out to the Sokolov Honors College twice to fill clerk positions. Each time two honors students were hired. **Alexis Blessing, Brock Tegtmeier, and Vincent DeSanto** are still with the firm, while **Maureen Baker** had to move on due to scheduling conflicts.

Vansuch and his partners wanted to provide current honors students with opportunities because they are invested in the present and future of the Mahoning and Shenango Valleys.

“We want our young adults to see this area as the vibrant community with abundant economic opportunity that it is, where they can develop themselves, their careers, and their families. All of us can do that by providing our current students opportunities with us,” said VanSuch. “We join a number of businesses in the Valleys who are doing this.”

For honors students interested in the legal profession, Vansuch considers this a great opportunity for them to get their foot in the door.

“They discover that we also have offices in Akron, Cleveland, and Toledo, so they can live here without limiting their practice to just the Mahoning and Shenango Valleys,” said VanSuch. “They don’t need to move away to get that bigger law experience.”

The students also gain valuable experience working in a professional office and developing their network. With many responsibilities in the office, and sometimes outside of it, these students are an important part of the practice.

Blessing, a Political Science major and Honors Trustee, absolutely loves it at the firm and is learning valuable skills she can put into practice when she becomes an attorney.

“I work part-time performing basic clerking tasks and believe that this is a great stepping stone. I am grateful for honors reaching out about this opportunity,” said Blessing.

Honors opened doors and experiences, both on and off campus, for Vansuch that he believes shaped who he is today; this includes lifelong personal relationships. Now, he is giving back to honors and its students by doing the same.



From left, Brock Tegtmeier, Alexis Blessing, Attorney Matt VanSuch, and Vincent DeSanto.

# Alumni reflect on lasting impact of honors experience

By Madison James, HC30

Two honors alumni were selected for publication in the peer-reviewed *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* for their reflections on the impact of honors in their professional lives. Both essays capture what each author perceives as the value of honors.

In her essay, "A Safe Place to Explore: The Value of Honors in Higher Education," **Mary Beth Messner**, US4, describes how honors offers a different opportunity for high-achieving students. Like many honors students coming out of high school, Messner found herself in situations where she had to downplay her intelligence to fit in, but upon the introduction of honors, felt she had found both a home and an authentic family.

"The respect and hunger for learning in each member of the program encouraged a pursuit of academic excellence focused not on personal achievement but rather personal fulfillment," writes Messner.

The enthusiasm among honors students to want to learn gave Messner, and many others, a common experience. Honors offers students opportunities to expand their scholastic abilities vastly, and to find an institution filled with students who have similar goals.

Messner writes, "Belonging to such a community impacted me professionally. I've explored both corporate and healthcare work environments but find myself ultimately most comfortable in higher education where a focus on learning and research is valued."

Even after years have passed since her time with honors, Messner attributes her personal and professional success to the honors program.

Messner currently serves as Director of Online Programming and Instructional Design at Catawba College in Salisbury, North Carolina.



Mary Beth Messner



Scan the QR code to access the edition of JNCHC containing the alumni reflections.



Michelle Panuccio

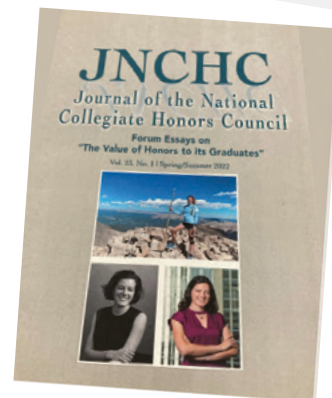
In a similar essay, "Valuing Diversity," written by another alum, **Michelle Panuccio**, US6, the concept of honors as a place where students can thrive academically, professionally, and personally is reintroduced. Panuccio also points to her honors experience as her first opportunity to discover the value of diverse perspectives.

"The honors program at Youngstown State University was the first place where I was introduced to a program that spent time identifying and valuing students with a wide array of backgrounds, identifying similarities, finding common ground, and encouraging us to be our authentic selves," writes Panuccio, who as a hiring manager now strives to build teams with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Though Panuccio works in IT, she has hired team members with backgrounds in disciplines such as Art, History, and Philosophy, seeing the value they can bring to the team.

"Being part of the honors program helped me to see that I had something special and unique to contribute, but that there were also a lot of other very talented people around me who had something different, and equally valuable to give," she writes.

"When I build teams today, I'm not looking for a single set of skills, I'm looking for a complete set of team members who complement each other and push each other to be their best. That is what it feels like to be part of an honors program: everyone is strong—everyone works hard—and everyone has the same goal—to do good work and have fun, together," she concludes.



# Learning,

# Lea

## Mya Blanco earns Phi Kappa Phi fellowship

Honors alum **Mya Blanco** received a Fellowship worth \$8,500 by The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi—the nation’s oldest and most selective collegiate honor society for all academic disciplines. Blanco is one of 62 recipients nationwide to receive a Phi Kappa Phi Fellowship.



Blanco received a bachelor’s degree in Biology with a concentration in pre-dentistry from YSU and is now studying to be a dentist at University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine.

Blanco paved an accelerated pathway through YSU, graduating in only two years but making time to be involved in campus and the community. She served as founder and vice president of the YSU Pre-Dental Club and vice president of MALAINA within honors. Blanco also received the YSU Pin, a top award which recognizes up to five graduating seniors who have achieved academic success and demonstrated outstanding leadership, motivation, and creativity in university and community activities.

## Tafadwa Mapiki recognized as YSU STEM Co-op of year



Biology Pre-Medicine major **Tafadzwa Mapiki** was named Youngstown State University STEM Co-op of the year for work conducted last summer at a Microbiology research internship at the University of Florida.

In future, the data that Mapiki gathered will help a hematopathologist determine the exact organelles to target in cells of certain tissues during therapy of gammaherpesvirus-associated tumors. Mapiki was selected to present her research at the National Collegiate Honors Council conference in Chicago in November of 2023.

## Centofanti leads transcribing efforts, gains awards and national recognition

# ding

Under the leadership of honors student Julie Centofanti, YSU students have transcribed more than 30,000 pages of historical documents and gained recognition on the state and national stage.

In the last year, Centofanti received the Charles J. Ping award from the Ohio Campus Compact, organized a second joint with the University of Texas at Arlington, and co-authored an article that was selected for publication in a peer-reviewed *Honors in Practice* journal.



# &

# Serving

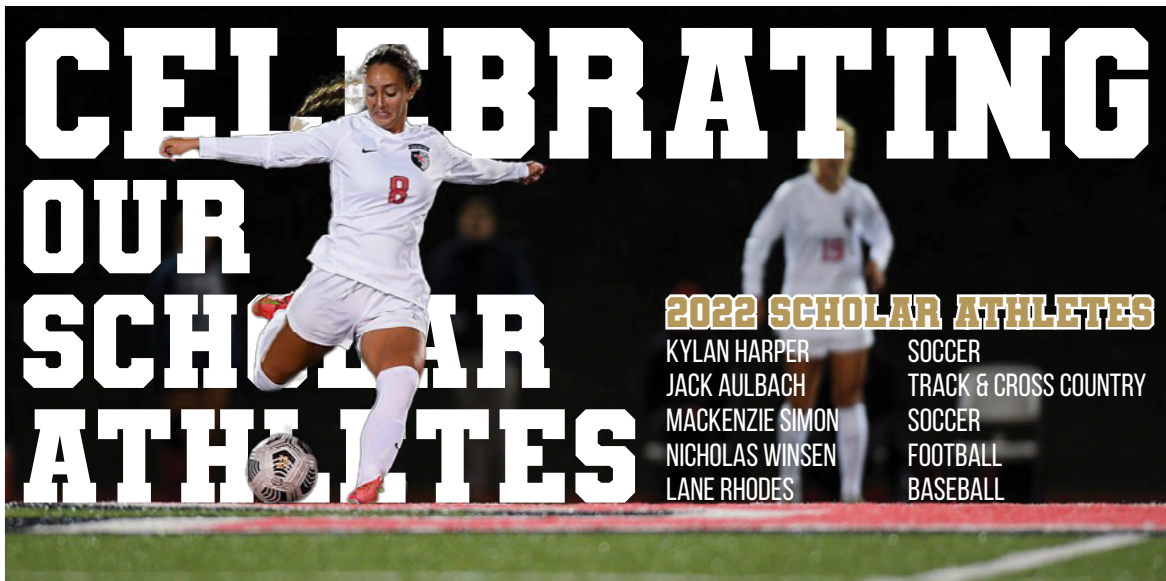
In her essay, Centofanti writes, "Fostering community within honors while serving the community at large is deeply ingrained in the YSU Honors College..."

This opportunity allowed me to reflect on my personal leadership growth in teaching members to follow proper transcription techniques, making adjustments when necessary, and making new friends in a virtual environment."

Centofanti developed the transcribing initiative in the summer of 2020 during the early part of the pandemic to provide a meaningful way for students to serve while building relationships within honors.

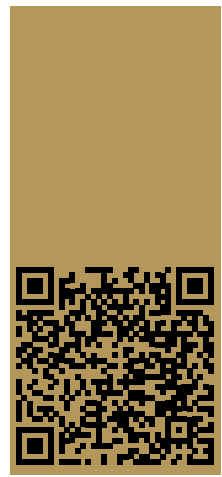


**MALAINA** leaders from left include Yara Habo, Raneem Al-shariff, Nora Habo and Emily Vo. The honors MALAINA initiative strives to raise awareness of cultures from around the world.



**2022 SCHOLAR ATHLETES**

KYLAN HARPER	SOCCER
JACK AULBACH	TRACK & CROSS COUNTRY
MACKENZIE SIMON	SOCCER
NICHOLAS WINSEN	FOOTBALL
LANE RHODES	BASEBALL



Scan the QR code to learn more about the scholar athletes.



Congratulations to the scholar athletes honored as Sokolov Honors College student athlete of the month. Johnny Ware, honors coordinator who serves as a liaison between honors and athletics, developed this recognition to highlight students going the extra mile in the classroom and on the field. Ware is pictured with **Nicholas Winsen**.

### Rocco Bruno gains research experience, mentorship from local physician-scientist

What began as a summer internship for honors student **Rocco Bruno** turned into an ongoing research experience for Bruno and others. Bruno was selected in 2022 for the 10-week Summer Pediatric Research Scholars (SPRS) program through Akron Children's Hospital where he paired with developmental neurologist and neuroscientist, Ronald Seese, MD, PhD.

Under Seese's mentorship, Rocco worked at least 20 hours each week on research studying the cerebellum's role in modulating the involuntary physiologic activities of the body. Bruno's work helped discover the specific areas of the cerebellum that control the fight-or-flight autonomic response (the "adrenaline rush").

"This has huge clinical relevance -- there are many neuropsychiatric conditions where the cerebellum is affected, and those patients

often suffer from debilitating dysautonomia. Thus, Rocco's results have the potential to influence how we diagnose and treat these symptoms in a countless number of patients," said Seese.

Bruno, who will attend medical school at The Ohio State University College of Medicine, stayed on as a researcher after the internship concluded through the honors independent study seminar.

"Anyone can learn how to do research. What makes Rocco an extraordinary young biomedical researcher are three attributes that cannot be taught: enthusiasm, drive, and leadership. Rocco is naturally gifted at all three," said Seese.

Impressed by Bruno's performance, Seese recruited additional researchers from the Sokolov Honors College, **Aaron Ferguson** and **Sean Baumeier**, and has plans to recruit an additional student in the fall.



"Any student interested in biomedical sciences would benefit from conducting biomedical research," said Seese. "Students who are especially hungry to take their undergraduate education to a new level -- a level where they learn how to discover something new and important -- will find getting involved in research satisfying."



Dr. Ron Seese (left) and Rocco Bruno

Mackenzie Goodin served as student marshal representing the Sokolov Honors College in Spring 2022 when she graduated with her BSN. Goodin received employment offers from medical facilities around the country and chose to work locally as a nurse with Mercy Health.



*Lead, learn, and serve  
with the Sokolov Honors College.*

Come see us for yourself.  
Learn more at [ysu.edu/visithonors](https://ysu.edu/visithonors)  
or call 330.941.2772.





One University Plaza, Youngstown, OH 44555

[www.ysu.edu/honors](http://www.ysu.edu/honors)

330.941.2772

[honors@ysu.edu](mailto:honors@ysu.edu)



Youngstown State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, disability, age, religion or veteran/military status in its programs or activities. Please visit [www.ysu.edu/ada-accessibility](http://www.ysu.edu/ada-accessibility) for contact information for persons designated to handle questions about this policy.