

Honors Program Salutes Honors Program Students

Congratulations to all students, family, parents, and friends

Spring 2024 on April 20, 2024

Dear UCCS Honors Program's Faculty, Mentors and Community: **We are honoring all our Spring 2024 graduates with this online version of our Spotlight.**

In 2007, UCCS Honors Program (HP) started intentional conversation around Gray Matters that things are not just binary; life, society, interactions, and many other situations and places have the non-binary qualities – they are essentially gray matters: Honors Program mantra has been that *Gray Matters*. We are proud to share Spring 2024 portfolios enter into UCCS Kraemer Library's permanent collections today as examples of Gray Matters framed with Complex Systems.

Partnership based on mutual respect can always leads to tremendous growth. UCCS Honors Program faculty is proud of tremendous growth in all our students and is celebrating this moment today with our class of Spring 2024 students.

These students are just beginning their partnership with their future. Wonderful things await as they embark on their own unique journey. Attached spotlights provides glimpses into their achievements, future plans and aspirations.

UCCS-Honors Program is proud of our “once a cohort always a cohort” campaign and has launched several initiatives last year with the intent of meeting our students where they are. Based on student's feedback, UCCS Honors Program is launching Graduate Studies pathways using Accelerated Masters Programs (AMP) starting Fall 2024. Aspiring Pre-law and Pre-Med students will be connected with existing UCCS resources as they enter UCCS as Honors Program cohorts. In partnership with UCCS Computer Science Department, HP-cohorts will have access to four gray matters and complex systems focused graduate level courses in the MSCS-McGMI Program (pre-requisites required). Plans are underway to arrange internship with UCCS-ICORE (icore.uccs.edu) scientists to mentor blueprints to HNRS 4950 portfolios.

We are proud of our class of Spring 2024. *Congratulations to Advita Bhatia, Jaylee Hepner, Joel Hill, Madaline Holguin, Sherman Kettner, Jerri Thomas, Jace Toon and Nikita Waintrub.*

A special message from UCCS Honors Program Director on behalf of UCCS Honors Program Faculty, Staff, & Portfolio Mentors.

Advita Bhatia -- Honors Program Spotlight Spring, 2024

I was born and brought up in India and moved to Colorado with my family in 2018. At UCCS, I majored in Biochemistry on the pre-med track with a minor in Music Composition and Sound Design. To recharge, I love hiking, rock climbing, reading books and painting. I am honored to have been selected as the Outstanding graduate for my major. I am also receiving a Departmental Honors in Research and Academics. I was an author on a recent ACS publication which highlighted my work in Dr. Crystal Vander Zanden's lab at UCCS. During my time here, I have presided over three clubs, one of which I started during my senior year. I was also selected as one of the finalists for the Ron Wisner Human Spirit and Leadership Award at UCCS.

What fascinates Advita about the Honors Program

The honors program played a huge role in shaping my undergraduate education. It gave me the critical lens to analyze complex issues that especially exist in the field of medicine. The honors designated courses allowed me to take a deeper dive into my favorite subjects of genetics and neurology. I would like to extend a special thanks to my honors advisor, Dr. Robert Sackett who provided me with a safe space to have multiple deep conversations about my interests and steered me towards a successful honors portfolio.

Advita's Future Plans

After graduation, I plan to apply to medical schools during my gap year. I aspire to be a neurosurgeon one day. I will also be working as a CNA and medical scribe during the gap year.

Acknowledgements by Advita

I have had access to multiple experiences at UCCS that have really shaped my personality over the last 4 years. The Honors Program has gifted me a unique way of thinking that will give me an edge no matter where I go. I would like to specially acknowledge my research mentor, Dr Vander Zanden and our campus pre-health coach, Ms. Sarah Fillman who I have built a close relationship with. Both of them have provided me with great mentorship and guidance over the years that has really allowed me to make the most of my undergraduate career at UCCS.

Congratulations on being UCCS Honors Program's spot-light feature!



Jaylee Hepner -- Honors Program Spotlight Spring, 2024

Mock trial has made me into who I am. Every time I step foot into a courtroom, I feel the same rush that I did from the first time I started doing it. This year I was the president and we made it on to the second round for the first time ever. I really love doing it and it's become really important to me over the years.

What fascinates Jaylee Hepner about the Honors Program

I really love that what the program teaches you can be applied to anything. Gray matter and complexity is a very human experience. Dr. Sackett has become very dear to me. His words in the program have helped me significantly but the fact is he also always says hello in the hallway. He remembers who I am even though I've never had a course outside of honor ones with him. He is really important to the program and I'm so excited to for his next stages.

Jaylee Hepner's Future Plans

I would love to be an active alumni for the school. I want to go to law school here in Colorado. I want to become an environmental lawyer who makes a difference in our environment.

Acknowledgements by Jaylee Hepner

I would like to thank my mom and dad for always believing in me. My mom helped me make my resume to get into the program and she really helped me along the way. She also helped me do my field work for my final project. So, I am very grateful for her help. I also want to thank Dr. Bayuga for always helping my me with my project and for helping me learn how to do field work. I could have never done my project or research without him.

Congratulations on being UCCS Honors Program's spot-light feature!



Joel Hill - Honors Program Spotlight April 14, 2024

Tell us something about you which you can share. What have you done – what makes you what you are – maybe you also like bicycling, swimming, yoga apart from your degree program. Here list your achievements etc.

I love travelling and my favorite experience from college was getting the opportunity to take part in a premed shadowing fellowship in Rome, Italy in 2022. While there, I got to get incredibly valuable experience in San Camillo Forlanini Hospital as well as immerse myself in the rich culture and history of Rome. I also enjoy exercising, movie nights with friends, and reading.

What fascinates Joel Hill about the Honors Program

I have thoroughly enjoyed the focus on complexity and grey matters in both fiction and in real life. The discussions I have had with other people in the Honors Program, whether at socials or in actual classes, were always engaging and fascinating to me. I especially enjoyed the GPS class that was a part of the Honors program and the fact that I got to work with others despite it being during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This helped me find a great sense of community in the Honors Program that carried all throughout my college experience.

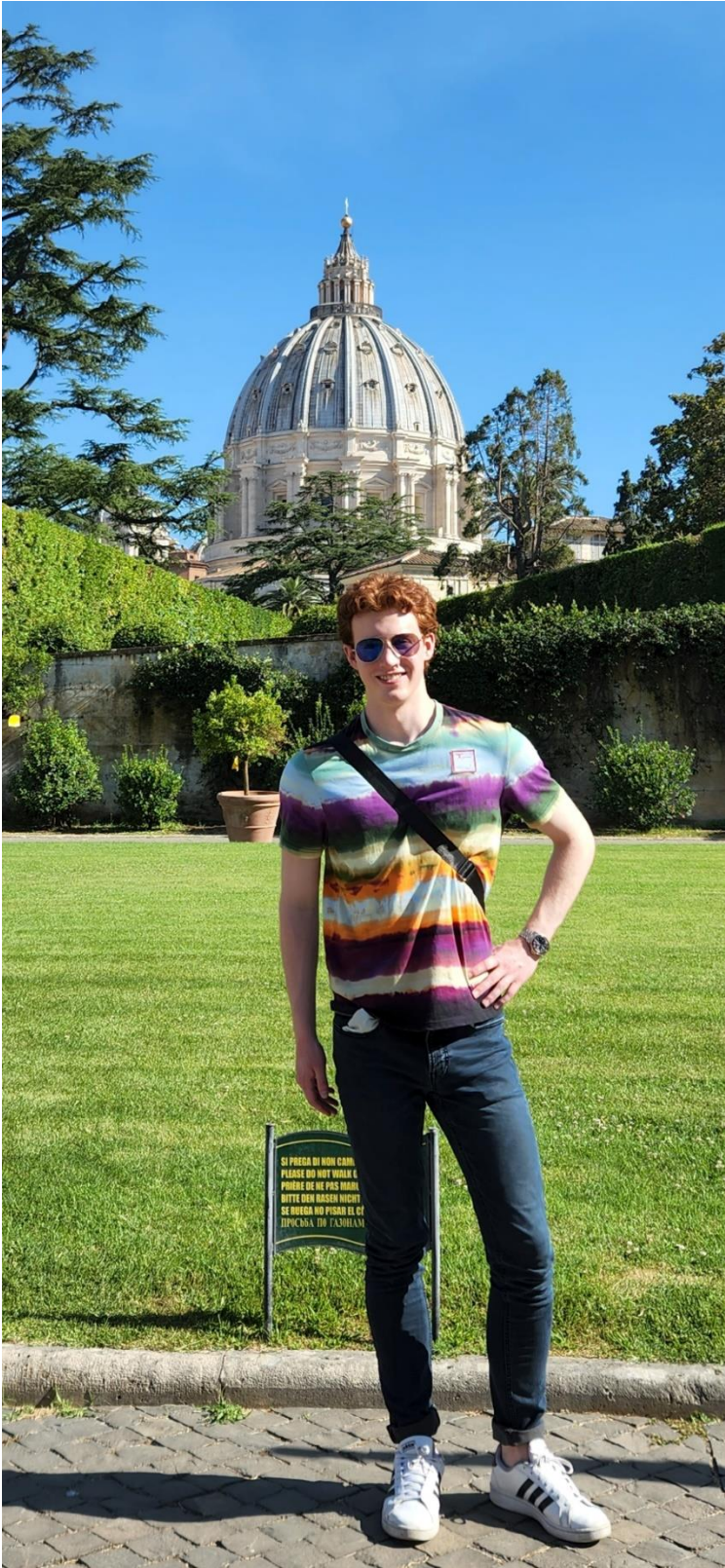
Joel Hill's Future Plans

After graduation, I am planning to take the MCAT and begin working as an ECG Tech for a local hospital until I apply for Medical School next spring. In addition, I will continue to shadow in hospitals and clinics to gain further experience and insight into my chosen career as a doctor.

Acknowledgements by Joel Hill

I am most thankful for my mother and late father. No matter what hardships I went through in college, whether big or small, they always stuck by me and gave me the support I needed.

Picture of me in the Vatican in Rome, Italy



Madaline Holguin- Honors Program Spotlight Spring, 2024



My name is Madaline Holguin, and I am currently a senior at UCCS, majoring in Exercise Science. I graduate this May 2024 with my bachelor's degree! I have been in the Honors Program at UCCS since 2021, and before that I was inducted into the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society. I have volunteered at the National Museum of WWII Aviation for over 6 years and have run the UCCS Dance Club since 2021. In November of 2023, I led my Dance Club in a full-length dance performance at The ENT Center of the Arts for my Honors Portfolio. I choreographed 6 pieces as well as coordinated the entire performance from start to finish. I recently got hired to be the principal ballet instructor at a local dance studio and obtained my phlebotomy certification. In my free time, I love crafting, creating jewelry out of WWII airplane metal for the museum, hiking, dancing, and painting.

What fascinates Madaline about the Honors Program

Being a part of the Honors Program has proved to be a wonderful experience for many reasons. I have relished meeting people with similar goals and aspirations, as well as experiencing a whole different side of the college experience. I enjoy the rigor and the stimulating discussions we have in our meetings over such important and polarizing topics. The Honors Program has given me a place to truly challenge myself and reach my highest potential, while supporting me along the way and providing wonderful knowledge I would not have gained otherwise.

Madaline's Future Plans

I will return to UCCS next semester to finish my pre-medicine minor, with the goal to begin medical school in August of 2026. I have not decided where I will go to medical school yet, but my ultimate goal and dream career is to become a neurosurgeon. This field fascinates me, and I have always loved a challenge. Most importantly, I believe it is truly a gift to possess the knowledge and skill to save a person's life and to make a difference and impact in the world in a profound way. My favorite quote is "Reach for the moon and even if you miss you will land among the stars." I fully intend to reach my fullest potential to make a difference in the world, even if it means being in school for a good portion of my life. My passion is being a life-long learner, and I feel my intended career goals will fulfill that passion.

Acknowledgements by Madaline

I am profoundly grateful to my parents who have always encouraged me and taught me to believe in myself and that anything I set my mind to is possible. Without them and their unending love and support I would not be where I am today. I am also grateful for my fiancé, Bailey, who has been an incredible support and shown me unending kindness, love, and patience through my schooling and beyond. The love and support I have from my family and friends mean everything to me. I could never have achieved such a profound Honors Portfolio and overall experience in the Honors Program without Dr. Kuzma, he was truly wonderful. Finally, a special thanks to everyone who has given me kind words and support through this journey, and my cat who has sat patiently on my lap though all the hours of homework.

Congratulations on being UCCS Honors Program's Spot-light feature!

Sherman Kettner -- Honors Program Spotlight Spring, 2024

A glimpse into who I am reveals a deep-rooted faith in Christ Jesus, which serves as my guiding light in life. Beyond academics, I find solace and joy in the simple pleasures of existence, whether embarking on scenic bike rides, immersing myself in music, or engaging in outdoor pursuits like hunting. Alongside these pursuits, I cherish moments spent with family, often playfully teasing my sister whenever she's around. Beyond the realm of academia, my interests span the digital landscape, from indulging in PC video games to enriching my knowledge through historical exploration, particularly fascinated by the intricacies of the WWII era. This multifaceted approach to life shapes not only my personal journey but also influences my contributions to the Honors Program and beyond.

What fascinates Sherman Kettner about the Honors Program

One aspect that continually fascinates me about the Honors Program is the opportunity it provides for engaging with a diverse array of students. Whether attending events or participating in discussions, I am consistently amazed by the intellectual depth and diversity of perspectives present. Reflecting on my initial experiences, particularly during the enlightening GPS 1010 Gray Matters course, I recall feeling invigorated by the stimulating conversations and insights shared among peers. Additionally, what sets the Honors Program apart is its commitment to tackling controversial and complex topics head-on. Here, every viewpoint is not only welcomed but valued as a potential source of learning. Rather than seeking to change minds, the emphasis lies on fostering understanding and empathy for differing perspectives. This inclusive approach not only enriches our academic discourse but also cultivates a deeper appreciation for the complexities of the world around us.

Sherman Kettner's Future Plans

This is summer I have an internship with KBR as a software developer than this coming Fall I will return to UCCS to pursue a Masters in Computer Science.

Acknowledgements by Sherman Kettner

I would like to thank my parents, in particular my mother for teaching me all through grade school, and my father for always being willing to take a second to help me solve a problem or proof read my essays. I would also be remised to not mention the faculty of Immanuel Lutheran High School for all they did to prepare me for college. Speaking of College, I would like to thank the Bachelor of Innovation faculty for all their support. In particular Dr. Stiles, and Dr. Lewis. Finally I want to thank my best friend Dasker, for always be willing to help me get my programs working.



Jerri Thomas – Honors Program Spotlight March 29, 2024

My love of reading started early. Trips to the library, book fairs, and Books-A-Million were my favorite places to go. It was an easy decision to choose literature as my field of study. As an English Literature major, I think it goes without saying that I love writing as much as I do reading. I love visiting and creating new worlds and people. More often than not, I gravitate toward classic, fantasy, and horror novels. I value my time at UCCS as I have been able to find my shared love of literature among my professors and classmates. I have also been afforded the opportunity to share my own writing – “14:12” – in the *riverrun* student journal.

What fascinates Jerri about the Honors Program

Though my time in the UCCS Honors Program was limited, I was not lost on the support and companionship within the community. During my first semester at UCCS, I was fortunate enough to study under Dr. Karen DeVries, who would later serve as my Honors mentor. Dr. DeVries has been supportive in regular courses, the Honors program, and postgraduate planning. I greatly appreciate their efforts in ensuring I receive the support needed to succeed.

Jerri’s Future Plans

Post-graduation, I hope to accomplish multiple goals. I wish to further my education by completing my master’s degree in literature or creative writing. I also hope to enter the publishing field and help authors prepare their novels for publication. Finally, and perhaps expectedly, I hope to complete my personal writing projects. Ultimately, I want to find fulfillment in working with the written word while advocating for the importance of literacy and reading comprehension.

Acknowledgements by Jerri Thomas

There are numerous people who have supported me on this journey and made this accomplishment possible. To my mother, Arleen, and my late father, Gerald – who nurtured my love of reading by taking me on frequent library trips as a child. To my sister, Frankie – who loves me as though I am one of her own children. To my best friend, Tori – who gladly sat with me on Facetime as we completed our assignments together. To my professors – Dr. Carter, Dr. DeVries, and Dr. Ortega, and every educator I have had the privilege to study under at UCCS and PPSC – who have provided me with the resources and support necessary through this journey. To my primary school educators (to name a few) – Mrs. C. McCants, Mrs. Rudolph, Mr. Thomas, Ms. Robinson, and Major Brown – who saw my potential and never doubted my abilities. To my work family, Rhoda, Kendra, and Yolanda – who have been my cheerleaders since the beginning. And finally, to every friend I have had, every teacher who has taught me, every author who has inspired me, and every word I have written and yet to write – thank you.

Jace Toon – Honors Program Spotlight Spring, 2024 (March 21, 2024)

Hello! My name is Jace and I am graduating in May with a bachelor's of science in nursing. I am from Overland Park, Kansas and I enjoy hiking, cooking, and exploring Colorado. I am in the Chancellor's Leadership Class, Honors Program, and the UCCS chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International Honors Society of Nursing. I also mentor around 30 students between freshman and junior year, helping them find ways to succeed through college.

What fascinates Jace about the Honors Program

What has fascinated me the most about the Honors Program is how much of a family my cohort has become. As an out of state student, I expected it to be hard to make friends on campus. I quickly became close with my cohort in our GPS class, and I still talk to a lot of them even if they have graduated. I have also appreciated how supportive the Honors professors are. All of them still check in on me, even if I haven't seen them in a couple of years.

Jace's Future Plans

After I graduate, I will be going back to live in Overland Park with my fiancé. I will work as a new graduate ICU nurse in one of the top 25 neurology specialties in the nation at the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City. I hope to eventually go back to school and become a CRNA or a nurse practitioner.

Acknowledgements by Jace

I am thankful for my mother, father, sister, and fiancé who have all supported me through everything. All of them have pushed me to strive for more and work as hard as I can. I also am thankful for my own mentors who have kept me on track to get where I want to with nursing and beyond. Finally, I am thankful for every professor I have come across through Honors, CLC, and nursing school. I have not had a bad instructor, and each of them have supported me throughout my journey through college.

Congratulations on being UCCS Honors Program's spot-light feature!



Nikita Waintrub -- Honors Program Spotlight Spring 2024

I will be completing a bachelor's in mechanical engineering with a minor in computer science and aerospace engineering. I think going out to get food with friends is one of life's greatest joys and that a hot cup of tea will solve all your problems. I love cats, dirt biking, and taking walks in Colorado.

What fascinates **Nikita** about the Honors Program

Since as long as I can remember, I always strived to academically challenge myself. Knowing I was going into a STEM degree meant that I would have little time and opportunities to pursue art and humanities. The UCCS Honors Program appeared to be a great way to ensure I would be able to think about concepts beyond just math and science while at UCCS. I also believe being able to think about situations through the lens of Complexity and Grey Matters will make me a better engineer.

Nikita's Future Plans

After completing my undergraduate studies at UCCS, I plan on getting a master's degree. I greatly enjoyed my time at UCCS and its faculty which is why getting a master's sounds much less daunting than it was when I first started. After completing my studies, I hope to be able to do work that will directly benefit my community.

Acknowledgements by **Nikita**

Moving away to a brand-new place for college is a daunting yet exciting chapter in my life. It turned out to be an interesting and fun experience thanks to my parents who pushed me to pursue my interests regardless of how difficult they may be. My sister, who is my best friend and was there with me every step of the way. My professors, which passionately taught each lecture and grew my love for engineering. And lastly, Dr. Carl Sagan, whose book "Pale Blue Dot" inspired me to pursue mechanical engineering in the first place.

Congratulations on being UCCS Honors Program's spot-light feature!

