

Honors Program Salutes Honors Program Students
Congratulations to all students, family, parents, and friends.

Dear UCCS Honors Program's Faculty, Mentors and Community: **We are honoring all our recent graduates graduating from HNRS 4950 in Summer and Fall 2021 in this online version of our Spotlight.**

In 2007, UCCS Honors Program was established with Dr. Hackman as our first Director. 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!

In 2020, Honors Program developed HNRS 4950 (Honors Program Portfolios) to replace ID 4950 and INDS 4950. HNRS 3011 (Conversations on Complexity) course, a transition course from GPS 1010/3010 towards Honors Program Portfolio was offered for the first time in Spring 2021 and then in Summer 2021. They have significantly improved our engagement as well as providing focus to our students to complete the UCCS Honors Program plan of study in three or four years.

Attached are spotlights on students who have completed HNRS 4950 recently: Jade Ellis, Grace Wenham, Karel Hernandez Bandrich, and Bradley Baker. HNRS 4950 students' portfolios are part of UCCS Digital Collection, thanks to Ms. Mary Rupp at the UCCS Library. We are also spotlighting Madaline Holguin for her essay on *Gray Matters* in GPS1010/3010 class, which appealed to the HP-faculty very much, and we want to share with all of you as well.

HP faculty also believes that *once a student joins as HP-cohort they will always be a HP-cohort.* With cohort 2022 students, we now recognize our students in the following four categories:

To graduate with the *Peak Performer* designation from the **UCCS Honors Program** students must have a cumulative GPA of 3.5 after their last semester and satisfy all the academic requirements of their cohort year, including required engagement hours. The student will be recognized during the UCCS Honors Program's Fall or Spring Graduation Ceremony either online or in-person based on UCCS Honors Program schedule.

If a student has a cumulative GPA after their last semester at UCCS of 3.25 or above, but less than 3.5, and satisfies all requirements of the Honors Program as stated above, then they will graduate with the **UCCS Honors Program Mountain Lion** designation and will be recognized during the UCCS Honors Program's Fall or Spring Graduation Ceremony.

To graduate with the *Honors Graduate* designation from the **UCCS Honors Program** students must have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 but below 3.25 after their last semester and satisfy all the academic requirements of their cohort year, including required engagement hours. The student will be recognized during the UCCS Honors Program's Fall or Spring Graduation Ceremony either online or in-person based on UCCS Honors Program schedule.

A student whose cumulative GPA is below 3.00, but who has completed all other Honors Program requirements (see Plan of Study p. 3 of this document), will receive a designation of UCCS Honors Program *Spirit in Action* during graduation.

This acknowledges the UCCS Honors Program value of "*once a cohort always a cohort.*"

We are proud of our students!

UCCS Honors Program Director on behalf of UCCS Honors Program Faculty, Staff, Portfolio Mentors.

When you search “Gray Matter” in Google, it comes up with this: “Gray matter, named for its pinkish-gray color, is home to neural cell bodies, axon terminals, and dendrites, as well as all nerve synapses. This brain tissue is abundant in the cerebellum, cerebrum, and brain stem. It also forms a butterfly-shaped portion of the central spinal cord.” Personally, I do not think this is what we have been discussing in class, unless I am getting mixed up with my Anatomy class.

What the Honors Course means when we talk about Gray Matters is complexity. The areas in things, life, ideas, situations, and virtually everything that are not completely clear. There is no real “yes or no” or “black or white” answer to these things, there can be multiple answers and perspectives, and who is to say which answer is right or wrong? Gray Matters and complexity offer a way to look at the world around us with a different perspective to allow deeper meanings to infiltrate our minds and create thinking “outside the box.” In the real world there is no stark black and white most of the time, there is a lot of Gray to consider.

There is a lot of Gray Matter surrounding most things in life when you stop to think about it. A person’s decision to bet on a certain team during a game, a scientist developing a new drug that has the power to potentially save lives, a person intervening with nature to save a bird caught in a storm. All inherently simple, positive decisions. But at what cost in the larger scheme? What could the deeper implications be? Just as in Dr. Kuzma’s example of choosing to download Grandma onto a server so you are able to talk to her whenever you choose (but it kills the actual living Grandma) or letting her pass away naturally no longer with a way of contacting her. For some people the obvious choice would be downloading her to still be able to communicate with her. But to some this would be incredibly wrong. You are killing Grandma. You are being selfish. Having her on a computer does not do her any good, and once you pass away yourself, what are other people who never knew Grandma going to do with her consciousness on a computer?

Similarly, human emotion is in itself Gray Matter and a complex system. All the Gray that exists in the world is further complicated by our emotions. Different people have different feelings about things that happen. The way your body and mind interact with each other to form movement is a great example of complexity. A place where that comes into my life is through dance. Just the very method of your body and brain coordinating to create consciousness and movement, let alone dance is complex. All the steps, movement, coordination, and teamwork create a complex system. Each individual person has their own movements and parts that contribute to the dance as a whole. Twenty people on stage performing a choreographed dance together is made up of each individual and their dance which is coordinated by their individual brains. The interacting parts are the brains, bodies, minds, and people all together to create a performance. I do not know that there would be a huge global impact other than perhaps if a video recording of the dance goes viral on YouTube and millions of people around the world watch it. In the smaller scheme of things, a local impact would be the people performing, and the impact on those who come to watch the performance.

The world would suffer from a lack of dance. If dance did not exist, there would be no way for artists to express themselves through movement, cultures to pass down history and

traditions, or ways to heal the sick through special dances. Dance can have a huge impact on people both performing and watching. Through music and movement there are many emotions and individual pieces that come together. All of these make up a complex system and I can say from experience that at a good dance performance everyone involved is a part and feels strongly connected. This is a unique experience and deserves to be called Gray Matter and complex because of all the pieces that go into a single performance.



Madaline Holguin—Honors Program Spotlight October 20, 2021

My name is Madaline Holguin, and I am currently in my first semester here at UCCS. I spent the last two years at PCC receiving high honors on the President's List as well as being invited into the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society. At UCCS I am majoring in Exercise Science with a pre-medical focus. I have lived in Colorado most of my life and love nature and especially the mountains. I am a classically trained dancer, mostly ballet, and have been excited to share my love of dancing with other students at UCCS. To that goal, I started a dance club and am teacher and president which has proved incredibly rewarding. My other interests include painting, crafting, jewelry making (from recovered WWII airplane metal), crocheting, and history. I have volunteered at The National Museum of WWII Aviation for the past 6 years, which has fed my love of history and aviation.

What fascinates Madaline Holguin about the Honors Program

Being a part of the Honors Program has proved to be a wonderful experience for many reasons. I have relished in 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 for my highest potential, while supporting me along the way and providing wonderful knowledge I would not have gained otherwise.

Madaline Holguin's Future Plans

I plan on graduating from UCCS in Spring of 2023 with my bachelor's degree in Exercise Science with a minor in pre medicine to apply to medical school. I have not decided on where I want to 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 make a difference and impact in the world that not everyone can. 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 true passion is being a life-long learner, so that will most definitely be fulfilled.

Acknowledgements by Madaline Holguin

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 owe my writing skills, which have gotten me this far, to my middle school teacher Mr. Jeffery Bloodworth. Without him and all his time, help, and passion for educating young people, I would never have had the means to aspire this high. My understanding of math, which was no small feat, I attribute to my math teachers Mrs. Welsh and Mrs. Cassidy, without whom I would be lost in a sea of numbers. The love and support I have from my family and friends mean everything to me. Special thanks to Dr. Bates, Carmen and MaryEllen, Sandy and Sherry, my extended family at the museum, 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!

Bradley Baker -- Honors Program Spotlight Spring, 2022

My name is Bradley Baker, and I'm a senior preparing to graduate in May with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering with minors in aerospace engineering and leadership. I was born and raised in Colorado Springs, and I enjoy hiking, biking, camping, and gardening. I also work on campus as the lead coordinator for the campus tour program.

What fascinates Bradley Baker about the Honors Program

The honors program has given me so much more than I expected when I first applied. Of course I've enjoyed deep conversations about complex topics and grey matters, but the people of the Honors program really fascinate me. From my GPS class and onwards it's always been the people here in the honors program that bring life to our deep conversations, movie discussions, and all the other honors events.

Bradley Baker's Future Plans

After graduating in May, I'm hoping to start my career as an aerospace engineer. Right now, I'm still applying for jobs, but once I find a spot, I intend to work and get experience for a couple years before starting to pursue my masters and maybe even a PHD one day. One really long term goal is that I aspire to be an astronaut, but there's a lot to do in between now and then.

Acknowledgements by Bradley Baker

It's been a long road to get to where I am now and I couldn't have done it without the support of my parents and my brother and sister. Dr. Kuzma and the rest of the Honors program faculty have been great resources during my time as an honors student as well. And of course I have to give special shoutouts to Karel, Ariadna, Seth, Jade, Kelly, Hanna, all my friends in CLC, and all the Clyde's Guides. Thank you all!

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



Karel Hernández Bandrich -- Honors Program Spotlight Spring, 2022

I am a student majoring in mechanical engineering and minoring in math and leadership studies. I was born in Mexico City and I moved to the United States in 2016. I am passionate about education and I hope to one day become a college professor. On campus I work as a student ambassador and as a lab instructor, and I am also the event coordinator at the Latinx Student Union and a member of Students Today Alumni Tomorrow. I love travel, photography, reading, and hiking.

What fascinates Karel about the Honors Program

The Honors Program is a space where I can challenge myself to pursue new ideas and dive deeper into some topics. As part of this program, I have been able to write laboratory exercises that are currently in use to teach here at UCCS, and my recently finished portfolio explored a genetic algorithm to optimize the design of truss bridges, making them light yet strong. These are opportunities that I would not have had outside the Honors Program. I love the conversations about gray matters, particularly mathematical and scientific complexity. All the people behind the program are extremely supportive and have given me ample space to pursue my interests.

Karel's Future Plans

This summer, I plan to study the French language in Paris and tour Europe. I will be sure to take my camera along! In the fall, I will be starting grad school. I plan to pursue my master's in mechanical engineering here at UCCS, and hopefully get a teaching assistant position to gain experience in education.

Acknowledgements by Karel

I am deeply grateful to my parents, who are always there to support me, my siblings, my grandparents, and all my family. My friends are always there for me and make every day in school a joy. And I wouldn't be here without my teachers, every single one, from kindergarten to my professors. Their example, their dedication and the passion they have for their work are a true inspiration for me. I will be forever grateful for all the scholarships I have received, which have allowed me to pursue a bachelor's degree for free. And a shoutout to Dr. Melanie Mitchell, whose book *Complexity: A Guided Tour* hooked me on the subject of complexity and provided the inspiration for my portfolio.

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Jade Ellis -- Honors Program Spotlight Fall, 2021

My name is Jade Ellis, and I am a senior studying philosophy and political science with a pre-law minor. I was born and raised in Minnesota. I moved to Colorado to attend UCCS in 2019. I enjoy skiing, spending time with my friends and family, reading, writing, and hiking with my dog, Luna. I will be graduating this Spring (2022), *summa cum laude* with completion of the Honors Program and after two years of being a Bastiat Honors Scholar. I also spent all three years of my undergraduate career as an editor for the Scribe.

What fascinates Jade about the Honors Program

I joined the Honors Program to challenge myself academically and grow as a student. I really enjoyed meeting and learning from our advisors: Dr. Kuzma, Dr. Semwal, and Dr. Sackett. It was a great way to meet people my freshman year and I still speak to many of my friends from the program. I have really enjoyed studying complex systems and “gray matters.” Thinking about the complexity of individual situations was something that heavily influenced my career at UCCS and developed my critical thinking skills, particularly as it relates to philosophy and ethics. Needless to say, these ideas will stick with me for a long time.

Jade’s Future Plans

I plan to attend graduate school after finishing my undergraduate degree. I hope to obtain my MA in philosophy, legal advocacy, or politics, philosophy, and economics (PPE). I hope to work at a non-governmental organization (NGO) or non-profit organization promoting environmental justice and helping combat the climate crisis.

Acknowledgements by Jade

I am incredibly grateful to my high school teachers who supported me in my decision to attend UCCS. Specifically, I would like to thank my history teacher, Ms. Young, who always believed in me and pushed me to become a better version of myself. At UCCS, I am incredibly grateful for all my professors who cared about my success inside and outside of the classroom. Most notably, I would like to thank Dr. Joshua Dunn, Dr. Jennifer Kling, Dr. Joseph Kuzma, Dr. Robert Sackett, and Dr. Verlan Lewis, for giving me an opportunity to learn and always listening to me. I would also like to thank my parents, Jan and David, for their never-ending support and belief in me.

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Grace Wenham -- Honors Program Spotlight Fall, 2021

My name is Grace Wenham and I am in my fourth year at UCCS working towards my bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering and a minor in Strategic and Organizational Communication. I was born in Arizona but have lived in Highlands Ranch since I was about 7 and I love Colorado. I am a member of the UCCS Track and Field program and my event is 400m hurdles. I also enjoy hiking, biking and skiing.

What fascinates **Grace Wenham** about the Honors Program

One thing that drew me to the Honors Program was the prospect of staying close with my freshman year GPS cohort as we all continued to attend Honors Program events and discussions throughout our college experience. These discussions about complexity were valuable to me and I began to apply the lessons learned to my college experience. Another thing was the appeal of being recognized for my grades and achievements in school. Once I was in the Honors Program, I especially appreciated the film discussions that Dr. Sackett often led because they always proved to be insightful and were a learning experience in which I had the opportunity to hear the different perspectives of my peers.

Grace Wenham's Future Plans

I am in my fourth year at UCCS and therefore I must graduate from the Honors Program, but I have another year left to complete my bachelor's degree. I hope to graduate in May 2023 with this degree and potentially secure a job with Xcel Energy, whom I am currently interning with. I hope to find a job where I can contribute to finding cleaner energy solutions in order to help combat the climate crisis. I don't currently have plans to pursue a Master's degree, but should the need arise I would consider completing this step as well.

Acknowledgements by **Grace Wenham**

I am grateful for my family for always supporting me and encouraging me when I doubted myself. I would also like to thank my mentor Dr. Semwal as well as Dr. Sackett and Dr. Kuzma whom I all considered to be role models and looked up to very much. Last, I would like to thank my professor Mr. Adragna for leaving a lasting impression on me through his positivity and support as well as being the most organized and thoughtful professor I've had the opportunity to learn from.

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