

# *Honorable Mentions*



*Fall 2020*

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## A Letter from the Editor

Amanda Trout

This semester has been a series of ups and downs, lefts and rights with no clear end in the foreseeable future, but despite this many people and organizations have worked diligently to create an environment with as much stability as possible. I would like to personally thank all the students who worked hard writing the articles featured in this newsletter, the HCA Executive Board and Director for diligently hosting meetings every month, and the loyal following of readers who support both the Honors College and its current members. Please enjoy a close look at the world of Pitt State in the pandemic by those who live it every day.



## Former Honors College Director Dr. Becky Brannock to Retire Following Summer 2021 Semester

Amanda Trout

Dr. Becky Brannock, or “Dr. B” as she was referred by HCA students, served as the Director of the Pittsburg State University Honors College from 2002-2007. With her recently announced retirement date of July 31st, 2021, the staff of Honorable Mentions was presented with the opportunity to ask Dr. Brannock about her memories of her time spent with members of the Honors College as well as her plans for life post-retirement:

*What is your favorite memory from your years as Honors College Director?*

I had the privilege of serving as the HC director from 2002-2007, under the direction of Dr. Bob Ratzlaff, who was the Academic Affairs VP at the time. In looking back at that five-year stint out of my nearly 25 years at PSU, those were some of my most enjoyable and memorable times at the university. What made them so special to me were the relationships that I was able to develop with the HC members. I really cannot just single out one favorite memory because there were so many of them! From the overnight orientation for new members in the summer to the welcome back picnic in the fall, the HC spring banquet, float trips and dinner theatres in between, there was never a dull moment. Participation in service projects such as the Big Event, Hospice Walk, Christmas Caroling at nursing homes, Adopt-a-Family at Christmas time to name a few, were ways that members were able to give back to the community.

I could not be prouder of the lives our HC members have created. I still hear from several our alum and it makes my heart so grateful to hear them living such productive, happy lives. We have physicians, dentists, attorneys, teachers, nurses, engineers, physical therapists, those in marketing; the careers just go on and on!

*What are some of your plans for after retirement?*

This is my 41<sup>st</sup> year as an educator and I believe it is time to pass the torch. In the past couple of years, I have had two books published (one textbook and most recently a children's book—both are in the area of school counseling). I suspect that I will continue to write in retirement, with plans for a second children's book to be published in 2022 and the possibility of a second edition for my textbook. My husband and I bought an RV several years ago and we look forward to visiting the states that we have not had the opportunity to visit. First up will be a trip to see the fall foliage in the New England states, which is something we have always wanted to see, but school has been in session during that time of the year. We also have a desire to make a trip to Europe when it is time to travel safely again. I plan to open a flea market booth and will also expand my gardening with a recent purchase of a greenhouse to be able to raise my own plants for my vegetable garden and flowerbeds. Of course, having more time to spend with family and friends is something I am really looking forward to also and remaining active in our church. There will be no shortage of activities to do! I am very blessed to have had a career that I have loved for so many years. I cherish the relationships that I have developed with my students, my colleagues, and to be able to share my passion for the school counseling profession. Life has been good to me and for that, I am so very grateful!

The staff and students at PSU will certainly miss Dr. Brannock at the University, and we with the Honors College would like to personally extend a thank you to Dr. B for all her years of service. In the spirit of celebration, we will end this article with the quote Dr. Brannock says "sums up her professional career spanning nearly four decades":

*"Happiness is doing what you love and loving what you do for a living."*

# Homecoming 2020

## Grace Hawthorth

Like a lot of other events this year, Homecoming looked a bit different for Pitt State students. Since traditional Homecoming events such as the football game and the Raft Race could not be done under COVID-19 regulations, new and creative COVID-19 safe events were put on by the Campus Activities Center.



This year's Homecoming festivities consisted of a T-shirt Swap, a Cutest Pet Contest, a plate smashing event, a door decorating contest, a movie on the lawn of the Bicknell Center, a virtual watch party for the 1991 and 2011 football championships, and a virtual pep rally. This year's nominees to the Homecoming Court by the Honors College Association were seniors Kara Torgler, a Nursing major, and Josh Tegarden, a Graphic Communications major.

*"I was honestly flattered to be the selection for Honors College, I felt recognized as a senior and as a member,"* Tegarden said.

Tegarden made it into the top 12 pool. The Homecoming King and Queen winners for this year were D'Andrè Phillips Coble, a Mathematics major nominated by the Black Student Association, and Camille Holman, a Plastics Engineering Technology and Polymer Chemistry major nominated by Alpha Sigma Alpha. Although our HCA nominees did not take the crown, Queen winner Holman is an Honors College student.

*"It was a very exciting experience. I've worked very hard at Pitt State, so having that be recognized meant a lot to me,"* Holman said about winning Homecoming Queen.



# Reflections on the First Virtual Honors College Day

Amanda Trout

Covid-19 brought with it a lot of changes to the Honors College, from online meetings to virtual community service, from an internet overnight orientation to a mask-mandated Halloween party. One of the most beneficial changes to occur because of the pandemic was the creation and innovation of the first Virtual Honors College Day, an online recruiting event made to answer questions from high school students while introducing them to the program. Dr. Fuchs hosted the event on November 7<sup>th</sup> via Facebook.

Several current members of the Honors College attended Virtual Honors College Day as guest speakers, including sophomores Taylor Brynds and Ellie Lewis. Some of the topics these speakers talked about included the structure of the Honors College, benefits of the Living Learning Community, the Peer Mentor Program and the variety of stipends offered. High school students tuning in to the event were encouraged to ask any questions via a live chat feature.

Overall, the event proved as a successful recruitment tool. Several seniors from across the state and beyond tuned into the hour-long program, learning valuable information about the Honors College that will hopefully encourage them to apply for membership. Covid-19 inspired a new virtual era for much of the world, an era filled with the potential for innovative ideas that can serve our organization for the better.

# The Power of Music: A Student Review

Leann Trout



This semester at Pittsburg State University has seen many new changes regarding campus activities, club involvement, and—most noteworthy—classroom procedures. For many classes this meant changing an in-person structure to a fully online format, or choosing a delivery method that mixed the two, a Hyflex system where students were divided into smaller groups when attending class in person and did a majority of their class work online. The Honors College offered the Power of Music class this semester as an in-person class. However, some of the precautions that were taken in order to remain in-person included Zoom access to those who could not meet in person, mask requirements to all students present, and the majority of guest speakers meeting with the class via a Zoom conference.

The Power of Music class taught by Dr. Fuchs and Dr. Allison is one of the most unique Honors courses one can take. It explores the relationship between music and psychology, as well as the impact of music in the modern and ancient world. Highlights of this class include watching a documentary on the impact of music in Dementia patients, dissecting the movie *The Lion King* in order to identify the application of the musical elements to create a musical experience, painting a picture while listening to a piece of music, and a final group project requiring groups of five to six students to make a musical presentation using the knowledge they gained in class.

I had the opportunity to take this class this semester. Personally, I found that this class allowed me to express my creativity that often is suppressed in other classes that are less hands-on. Additionally, I found most of the projects and assignments to be worthwhile and not overbearing. However, a lot of the students -- including myself -- found that the two projects we were asked to do in this class were excessively long. My group members and I

struggled with creating an organized piece that we could present in front of the class that was more than five minutes long. In fact, we had trouble making it more than four minutes long. The other project that was asked to last more than five minutes was the personal presentation of one of our favorite songs. I chose to talk about "Yesterday" by the Beatles, and although I have a lot to say about the song, I cannot say it is easy to talk more than five minutes about it. Aside from these initially challenging aspects of the projects, both were fun to participate in overall.

My personal recommendation is to take this Honors course. The Honors Power of Music class is offered Fall even semesters, so it will be available to take Fall of 2022. One of the best aspects of this course is that any grade can take it, so you get to interact with both fellow classmates of your age and the Honors College upperclassmen. Furthermore, taking an Honors Gen Ed is a good experience in general. It makes an enormous difference when you have classmates that share your academic responsibilities and when you have group members that you can rely on. Lastly, taking an Honors Gen Ed course is much preferable than having to do an Honors project every semester. A mixture of the two is the best way to avoid the stress of coming up with a personal, relevant project each semester.

# Honors Speech: A Student Review

Sydney Hillmer

As a member of the Honors College Association at Pittsburg State University, students must earn a total of 21 “honors credits” to graduate in good standing. These credits can be earned through honors general education courses, honors contracts, approved study abroad experiences, participation in the Research Colloquium. For the Fall 2020 semester, Honors Power of Music and Honors Speech Communication were the two honors general education courses offered.

As a freshman, I really wanted to enroll in an Honors general education course my first semester so I could experience the benefits of the honors class structure versus the traditional class structure. Thankfully, Honors Speech Communication fit into my jam-packed schedule and was not completely filled by the time I enrolled. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, Honors Speech Communication was a hybrid class: class was online 50% of the time and the other half was spent in the conventional classroom setting. However, despite the disadvantages due to Covid-19, I preferred this honors class over some of the other classes in my schedule. Although this honors class covered more sophisticated material than that covered in regular sections of the same course, it involved much more active student participation and group discussion/projects than I noticed in my other general education courses. I was able to create and develop relationships with the other members of Honors College, as well as with the professor of this course, Ms. Jillian Moga. We were able to challenge each other with differing thoughts and ideas and learn more about a specific topic through each other's various perspectives. For example, we had to give a group speech where our group was “selling a pitch” to Pittsburg State University on how our association



could increase regional, national, and international enrollment numbers here at PSU. This was by far one of the easiest group projects I have ever done because everyone held themselves and each other accountable, while providing their best research and work to create a successful "sales pitch" in our speech.

The one thing I enjoyed most about this class was the permissive/mellow atmosphere. Our professor knew she could count on us to give our best effort and work no matter the circumstances. Because of this trust, it enabled much more freedom and lack of pressure throughout the course. Overall, it was a class that made learning fun and I highly recommend taking honors general education courses to earn some of your honors credits!

# Overnight: Virtual Edition

Evan Taylor

In a year riddled with the implementation of adjustments to ensure safety from, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19, the long-standing tradition of the Honors College Overnight was no exception. Typically, the incoming freshman cohort will travel to Pittsburg for a weekend during the summer to participate in fun activities and begin the important process of team building amongst the group members. Dr. Fuchs has mentioned the importance of this event for the latter. In a standard year, the freshman cohort comes to campus in August having already met all their fellow honors students. There would be little need for “get to know you” activities and corny icebreakers in the first few class periods because of the opportunity the overnight provides the cohort to meet one another in a setting where they can really be themselves.

For the 2020-2021 school year, however, the overnight had to be conducted through a series of zoom meetings. Instead of the chance for a face to face introduction, the freshmen were asked to make a PowerPoint slide about themselves and present to the cohort during the Zoom session. This required the freshmen to attempt to commit names, faces, background, and hobbies to memory all in a roughly two-minute time period while their peer was presenting before moving on to the next slide. Clearly no way to properly meet somebody. Later, an attempt was made to find roommate arrangements by splitting into breakout groups and answering a series of questions about your living habits and personal preferences on music, movies, sports, etc. Right on cue, the Zoom setting riddled the conversation with awkward silences and technical difficulties as people were still familiarizing themselves with the software.



Even upon returning to campus for the beginning of the semester, the opportunities for the freshman cohort to interact were stifled by campus policies. Students were required to sit with ample distance between one another and wear a proper face covering for the entire duration of the class period. The resulting environment was uncomfortable distances for natural conversation and immense difficulty to effectively put names to faces with only eyes and foreheads being freed from the masks. Even so, efforts were made to facilitate familiarity amongst the cohort. There were many offers for members to grab a meal together or head outside for a fun afternoon of physical activity as the importance of chemistry was realized.

Hopefully, a return to normalcy can occur with great haste for the sake of the 2021-2022 cohort. The first semester experience was enriching regardless of the obstacles we had to overcome and I know a return to a traditional year will allow the next incoming class to have some awesome opportunities and give current members a new perspective on the importance of being able to interact with your peers in person.