HONORS NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2019 EDITION

Honors Class of 2022 FYSP Pre-Session

In August, Honors welcomed the honors class of 2022 to campus! Students arrived at RMU a week before the semester began for four days packed with fun and educational experiences. To begin the week, librarian David Bennett took the freshman class through a tour of downtown Pittsburgh which included a ride on the T! From there, the students were split up into groups that kayaked, rode bikes, and went geocaching. After a fun-filled day, they ended with a picnic dinner in Moon Park. During their pre-session, Honors students also completed a community service project and attended a dinner and book discussion at the University House.
The honors visiting scholar for the fall was author Nafissa Thompson-Spires. She is the author of Heads of the Colored People, which was the summer reading for the freshman honors class. During her time at RMU, Thompson-Spires met with the Identities and Inequalities Honor Seminar class in which she discussed her background, how she became a writer, and the challenges that came with writing her novel. She also hosted a “RealTalk” discussion session with African American students in which the group discussed the short stories from her book and visited several classes where she spoke about how to be a better writer and provided tips for writing a novel. Her visit ended with a book reading which was also attended by the RMU community and Point Park University and CCAC’s honors program students.

Honors Humanities Does "Mushroom" Art Installation

Professor Burgess-Lefebvre and her honors humanities class participated in an art installation project called, “The Mushroom Project.” Students made “mushrooms” by using a paper bag, wooden stick, and some rubber bands. Students were then led to the path between Massey and Hale where they stuck their mushrooms into the ground. Burgess says that she does this art installation every year. She enjoys “mixing things up” and doing hands on activities with her students which is influenced by her own educational experience. Honors Humanities is also focusing on the theme of kindness this semester and participating in the “Free Listening Project,” which has students sitting in a public area with signs that say “Free Listening” for one hour every week. Honors student Victoria Yeany says that she enjoyed this project and it challenged her to be kind in “a way that [she] hasn’t tried before.”
Honors Spotlight: Katrina Lewis

This past May, Katrina Lewis participated in a Statistical and Applied Mathematical Sciences Institute (SAMSI) Undergraduate Modeling Workshop held at North Carolina State University. While there, she was assigned to a group that focused on the biomass of remote Alaskan forests using a variable known as Above Ground Biomass (AGB), which assesses how dense a forest may be. Her group's objective was to create a continuous map of predicted AGP with uncertainty quantification for the Bonanza Creek Experimental Forest in interior Alaska. Data was collected from forest inventory plots, satellite imaging, and LiDAR plane lasers. After concluding their research, Katrina's group had to give a thirty minute presentation on their findings. Katrina said that this experience was "phenomenal" and that it helped her gain a lot of knowledge in just a short amount of time. Katrina would like to give thanks to Dr. VanDieren who had introduced her to this workshop and aided her throughout the application process.

RMU Wins Pink Feet Competition

For over ten years the RMU Honors Program has participated in a friendly competition with the honors programs of Point Park University and CCAC to raise money for the Western PA Susan G. Komen Foundation. The three honors programs "race" to see who can raise the most money during the month of October. Originally, the fundraisers involved selling pink paper feet for $1 to hang on the cafeteria windows with messages honoring those touched by breast cancer. This is why the competition is referred to as the "pink feet competition." Although the original fundraising activity involved selling paper feet, the fundraisers have evolved and this year honors students Hannah Bartus and Skyler Kutzner created an escape room to raise funds.

This summer the Komen Foundation of Western PA presented RMU and Point Park with the Promise Keepers Award. Honors student Skyler Kutzner, Prof. VanDieren, and representatives from Point Park University attended the reception in which the award was presented.
The foundation recognized the pink feet competition as one of the longest running independent fundraisers for their organization. Additionally, this November, for the first time ever RMU won the pink feet competition, raising $1,000 for the foundation.

Honors Spotlight: Cheri McChesney

Over the summer, Cheri McChesney worked at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in their Biomedical and Biomanufacturing Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program. She was directed by graduate students in a lab focused on the study of osteoarthritis, a degenerative joint disease. While there, she completed a project that would "determine the optimal uptake conditions for a newly-developed iodine solution to track cartilage breakdown and use spectral computed tomography to demonstrate the ability of contrast-enhancement to distinguish between calcium and iodine signals." She then presented her research in Atlanta, GA at the Biomedical Engineering Society meeting. Cheri said that this program has "confirmed [her] interest in biomedical engineering and sparked a desire to pursue future education following the completion of [her] undergraduate degree."
Honors Alumni Spotlight: Jacob Pearson

Honors recently sat down with RMU 2018 graduate, Jacob Pearson, to discuss the recent publication of his honors thesis and his current job. Jacob graduated with a double major in marketing and accounting. His completed thesis was entitled, “Sponsorship Activation at the 2018 Rio Olympic Games.” With the help of his advisor, Dr. Apostolopoulou from the Department of Sports Management, Pearson conducted a case study of the 2018 Rio Olympics and sponsorship activation. To do this, he researched the top three sponsors of the Rio Olympics, their advertising strategies, and the engagement levels of their constituents. He focused specifically on how to move beyond the "simple ad" and concluded that digital media was the most effective strategy utilized during the 2018 Olympics. Jacob was essentially the first person to publish this announcement. Getting his thesis published was no easy feat, however. It took him and his advisor (along with some other notable professors) around nine months of hard work to get his thesis published in a European journal. Pearson said that the honors program helped him tremendously, and that the honors research methods class “gave a good, solid foundation to start conducting research.”

Jacob is currently an accounting support and accounts payable clerk for Toshiba Business Solutions. In the future, Jacob hopes to pursue another degree in the science field.

A Special Kudos to the Following Honors Students

Congratulations to Katrina Lewis for being awarded a Northeast Regional Honors Council Partners Scholarship to participate in the Partners in the Park Program at Cedar Breaks National Monument during the summer of 2019.

Karoline Betteridge’s short film "He Follows" was viewed at the S.O.S Indie Horror Film Fest in Ohio.

Beth Barbis was invited to create artwork to be auctioned off at the Art of Cycling, A Benefit for Bike MS. Her piece "Through the City," a digital painting featuring a cyclist on the Roberto Clemente Bridge, was displayed at Kindred Cycles in Pittsburgh in November before the auction in December.

Congratulations to the following students for being awarded the Vira I. Heinz (VIH) Program for Women in Global Leadership scholarship:

Sara Chernicky
Class: 2020
Major: Biomedical Engineering
Mia Kroczyn
Class: 2021
Major: Industrial Engineering
Hopes to study: Sustainability in Iceland

Jessica Sales
Class: 2021
Major: Industrial Engineering
Hopes to study: Sustainability in Costa Rica

Congratulations, and good luck, to the honors students who graduated in December! The four graduates presented their completed theses this fall at the Honors Research Symposium.

Kyjahna Gerard presented "Improving Breastfeeding Compliance for STEM Employees"

Dylan Miller presented "The Impact of Regulatory Cost from Dodd-Frank on Community Banks"

Emily Nobers presented "Generational Gaps in the Workplace and How Does RMU Compare?"

Allison Wentzel presented "Next Fall This Fall"