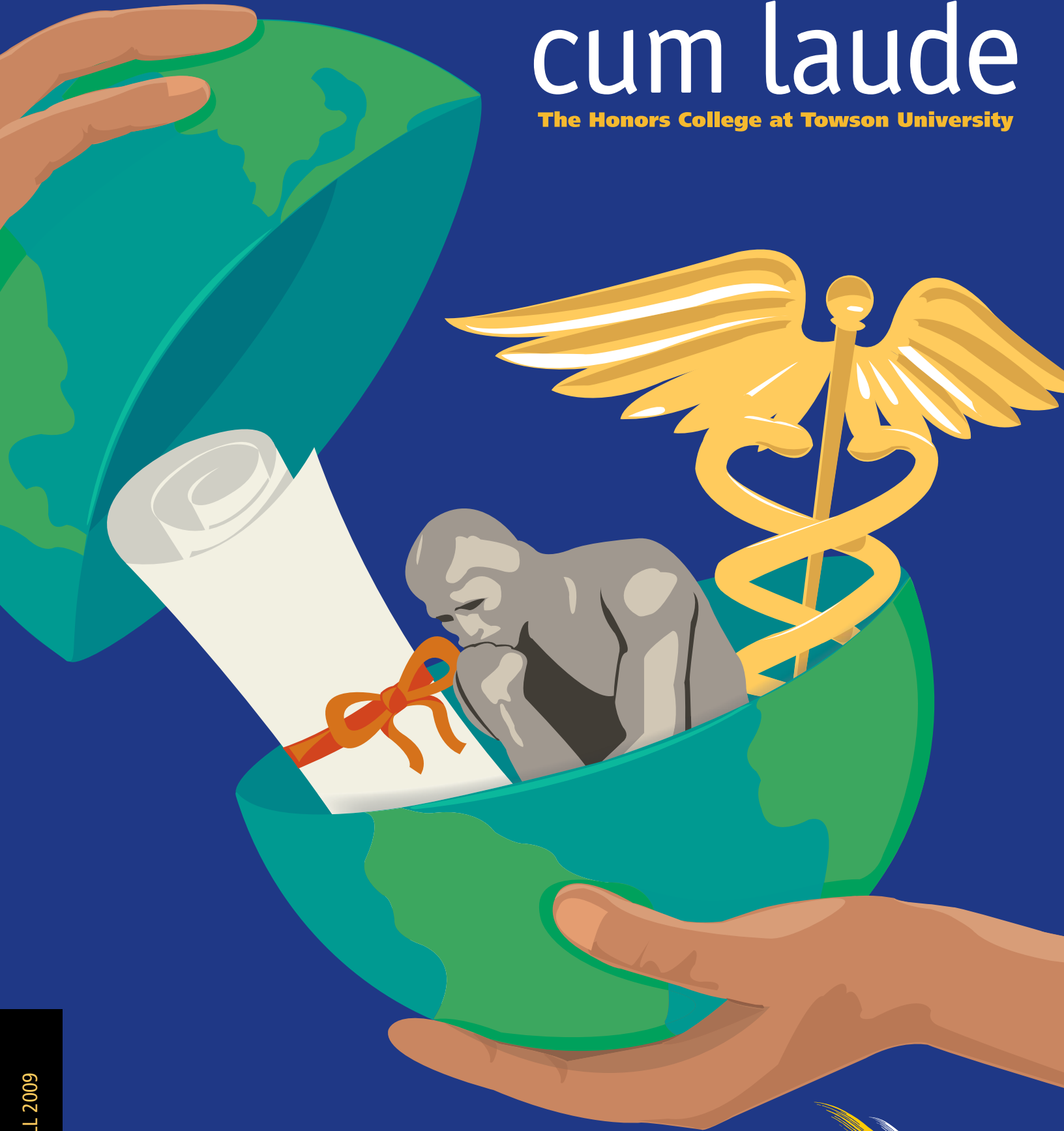


cum laude

The Honors College at Towson University



ISSUE 4 ■ FALL 2009


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UNIVERSITY
Thinking Outside

cum laude contents



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The cover illustration for this issue of *Cum Laude* was created by Honors College student Alison Grissinger '10. Alison is majoring in art with a track in graphic design.

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Great students. Great minds.

Dear Friends of the Honors College,

I suspect you're surprised to find me here, someone you've probably never heard of unless you took a class in the German program where I've taught for many years. Dr. Maria Fracasso, whom you almost certainly knew, has returned to the psychology faculty after four very productive years as the first dean of the Honors College. Although the Honors College was founded way back in the 20th century (remember that one?), it had previously been administered by a director, and Dr. Fracasso was appointed dean in 2005 with the task of guiding the college to greater prominence within TU the communities we serve. And boy, did she ever succeed.



One of Dr. Fracasso's proudest accomplishments was the introduction of a new Honors College curriculum in 2006. The earlier requirements entailed 18 hours of honors course work, primarily honors versions of general education courses that most students completed in their first two years at TU. Dr. Fracasso spearheaded a new curriculum based on nationally recognized best practice—one that accompanies a student throughout all four years of their college experience, with upper-level courses stimulating an ever-increasing ability to think critically, creatively and independently. The new curriculum lets students study themselves and the world around them in honors seminars, discover the larger world through study abroad and explore the relationship between learning and practicing a profession.

Dr. Fracasso maintained the high quality of the Honors College student body during her time here. Our current students are every bit as well-prepared and intellectually curious as the students who preceded them. Figures for the 167 matriculating students in the fall of 2009 show an average weighted high school GPA of 3.78 and an average SAT score of 1863. And the Honors College's graduation rate is an eye-popping 40 percent, double that of the average national honors graduation rate of 20 percent. (Of course, many more graduate from college, but without completing the honors requirements).

Last but definitely not least, Dr. Fracasso left the college in good hands by making excellent hires. Erin Mountz, assistant dean of the college, conducts work on curriculum, advising and assessment that is crucial to our success. Kristen Tadkowski, director of academic operations, enriches students' time at TU with her cornucopia of stimulating and fun projects. And Rita Gray, executive administrative assistant, displays a cheerful competence that makes the office a pleasant and efficient place to work. They are all smart, dedicated, hard-working and helpful, and will play a large role in helping me keep the college on an even keel during my tenure as interim dean.

I hope you will keep in touch and let us know where you are and what you are doing. Our alumni are, after all, our ultimate indicators of success, and we hope you'll share your stories with us at honors@towson.edu. And, if you are so inclined, you can visit www.towson.edu/honors/about/support.asp and help support us in our mission to make the Honors College at TU ever-better.

All the best,

Michael O'Pecko
Interim Dean, The Honors College
Professor of German

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Honors College introduces groundbreaking courses in computational thinking

“Computers *work*, people *think*”—so said an old IBM corporate adage meant to remind employees that computers are only as smart as they’re programmed to be. The saying holds true today, but after just a few decades of development, computers have become so powerful and so ubiquitous that they’ve completely changed the way humans approach and solve problems.

A new wave of thought for computer competency is gaining popularity in higher education, and the TU Honors College is on the leading edge. It’s called computational thinking, and the concept is fairly straightforward: Just as important as any traditional educational component—reading, writing, or math, for example—is the need to understand how computing principles can be employed in research and problem-solving of all kinds.

Computational thinking courses come to TU by way of a grant from the National Science Foundation, part of a broader effort by the NSF and other organizations to reform the way that computing is taught from grade school through the college level. TU faculty members Charles Dierbach and Harry Hochheiser of the Department of Computer and Information Sciences, and Christopher Ariza of the Department of Music have been working with faculty from across the university to develop several courses in computational thinking for fall 2009.

So how exactly will honors students apply computational principles to answer traditional questions? According to Charles

Dierbach, associate professor of computer science, participants in the classes will focus on the concepts of computing, rather than technology-specific knowledge or skills. Classes will encourage students to use computer science principles to solve a myriad of problems from across the liberal arts and sciences.

For example, students in an English-focused seminar will employ social networking theories to analyze the networks and relationships of characters from well-known texts, such as Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (think of it as a Facebook for 14th-century Italy). Students in a kinesiology course will develop computer-based algorithms for healthy and effective diet plans. Students with an interest in fine arts will use flow charts to navigate possible roadblocks in video and audio production, for example, lighting, camera field of view, image resolution and file compression. Course participants will also examine the critical differences between automation and human control in film production.

“By providing innovative, discipline-specific introductions to computational concepts,

these courses will show Honors College students that computing and computational thinking are much more than just programming,” says Dierbach.

In addition to an introductory course in general computational thinking, the Honors College will offer four courses for the upcoming fall 2009-2010 academic year. Plans are currently underway to use these courses as models for computational thinking classes across the university.



Time to go

A study abroad experience is the perfect way to expand your horizons—academically, socially and culturally. And now, honors students have more reasons than ever to take the trip of a lifetime.

As a major advocate of study abroad, the Honors College offers a number of opportunities and incentives for students to undertake a study abroad experience. In addition to regular course credit, students

of the Honors College can earn honors credit for their study abroad program and are eligible for an Honors College Study Abroad Scholarship to help offset the costs of studying abroad.

Many opportunities exist for international travel and study. Interested students may visit the Study Abroad Office for information on TU’s study abroad offerings or contact the Honors College to learn more about unique honors-only programs and incentives.

Experiences in England

An honors student’s report from abroad

Honors College junior Ellon Scherer studied abroad in England during Minimester 2009.

Many of my friends have traveled abroad. I listened intently to their stories and looked at the pictures of all the wonderful places they’ve traveled. Last winter, I decided it was time to have my own adventure—and pictures—to share. But I wondered where I could go and how I would get there, and I wasn’t sure exactly where to start.

Fortunately, Towson University’s Study Abroad Office had the answers for me. Not only did they have the programs to help me decide the country in which I wanted to study, but both the Study Abroad Office and the Honors College provided scholarships to help fund most of my travels.

The study abroad program I choose, Jane Austen’s England, consisted of travels to many cities in England

including Winchester, Bath, Oxford, Lyme Regis, Plymouth and London. The class traveled to all the places that Austen had lived or visited during her life. It was amazing to see the places that had influenced her writing. In addition, the program taught me a great deal about England’s history from each of the cities in which we stopped.

While the program was an enriching academic experience, it was also a great social opportunity. The students participating in this class were all very unique, with different majors and interests. We all got along great and developed some wonderful friendships. In addition to making friends with other students, I

loved talking to the English locals and comparing language, customs and opinions.

As an added bonus to studying abroad, I was able to earn 3 units of honors credit by completing a study abroad project upon my return. Studying abroad was one of the best decisions I’ve made at Towson (along with my decision to live in the honors residence halls my freshman year!). I highly recommend that any honors student take advantage of the many benefits provided by the Honors College—and of course, studying abroad!

— Ellon Scherer ’10



Scherer poses for a quick snapshot at Stonehenge.

A stylized globe in shades of green and blue is positioned in the upper left corner. Below it, a golden scroll with a caduceus symbol is partially unrolled. The background is a dark blue gradient with white curved lines.

Going global

TU Honors College hosts the 2009 Maryland Collegiate Honors Council

On March 6 and 7, 2009, the Honors College at Towson University hosted the 2009 Annual Conference of the Maryland Collegiate Honors Council. Administrators, faculty, students and staff from 13 different Maryland honors colleges and programs attended the conference.

The conference theme, “Thinking Outside the U.S.A.,” merged Towson University’s “Thinking Outside” brand with Maryland honors students’ ability to reach beyond the confines of traditional classroom learning. Inspired by the focus on cultural and economic globalization, the conference provided highlights of honors students’ educational experiences outside the United States. The program was designed to encourage interaction and dialogue surrounding students’ academic experiences in different environments.

The conference included panel discussions, student presentations and poster exhibitions, as well as a keynote speech by Dr. Matthew Durlington, assistant professor of anthropology at Towson University, which addressed the theme of educational experiences outside the United States. In the evening, all students, faculty and staff were invited to take part in the World Showcase, which included an Italian dinner, and a culturally themed game of *Jeopardy* played by all conference attendees.

During the two-day conference, three of Towson University’s outstanding honors students showcased their work. The students presented posters and fielded questions from their peers on the research they conducted throughout the year.

Globalization: Its Impact on You, Me and Our World’s Economy

by Ermengarde Jabir, freshman, economics

Ermengarde Jabir demonstrated the effects of globalization on both individual and national economies. He explores the fact that businesses and travelers alike take their dollars all over the world—a dollar earned in the United States, either by a corporation or an individual worker, can move the economy in any country. The world has become a melting pot, not only culturally but also monetarily. Although most countries will survive without international trade, it is unlikely that any will truly prosper because they will not have the capabilities to produce the same amount of goods and services currently obtained through trade. Jabir’s work showed that the world population is interconnected through its financial transactions.

“As an economics major, my observations of everyday financial happenings as well as the knowledge I have gained through my coursework have made it clear that globalization is here to stay,” says Jabir.

“This MCHC conference provided a forum for me to further my research of globalization and its impacts on both national economic structures and society, while promoting the university and the Honors College to a wide audience.”

“This MCHC conference provided a forum for me to further my research of globalization and its impacts on both national economic structures and society, while promoting the university and the Honors College to a wide audience.”

—Ermengarde Jabir

First Principles: A Survey of History’s Defining *a priori* Assumptions

by Jeffrey Bothe, junior, cultural studies

Jeffrey Bothe examined the works of a selection of influential philosophers and scientists, and called into question the self-evidence of two of history’s central *a priori* assumptions—monism and pluralism. He believes these two ontologies—typically thought of as salient philosophical positions—are, in fact, tokens of the flexible, pre-rational cognitive modules humans appeal to in the post-hoc construction of scientific and philosophical narratives.

“I am grateful I was able to highlight my study abroad experience in South Africa, a trip that changed my life.”

—Alexis Smith

South Africa’s Health Care—Post Apartheid

by Alexis Smith, junior, deaf studies and speech-language pathology

Alexis Smith focused on the lower class’ health care system in South Africa. She explained the ways in which housing and nutrition affect health drastically in poor areas, focusing specifically on the plight on the young population without health care. She also provided an overview of the huge AIDS/HIV epidemic in the country.

“I wanted to attend this year’s MCHC conference because of the ‘Thinking outside the U.S.A.’ theme,” says Smith. “I am grateful I was able to highlight my study abroad experience in South Africa, a trip that changed my life. Sharing my experience with others was exciting, as I was able to convey the problems facing South Africa’s health-care system, and how apartheid influenced this. I hope I was able to enlighten people at the conference who may have never heard about these issues any other way.”

New honors seminar series blasts off with former NASA astronaut

In spring 2009, the Honors College hosted the very first installment of its new annual seminar series. It seems only fitting that the series took off with a speaker who knows a thing or two about successful launches: former NASA astronaut Dr. Don Thomas.



The seminar series, titled “Reflections,” is expected to be an annual event that brings together the Towson University community of faculty, staff, students and neighbors. The inaugural presentation on March 11, 2009, invited Thomas to reflect upon his life, career and the journey to his current position of leadership.

Thomas, who currently serves as director of the Willard Hackerman Academy of Mathematics and Science at Towson University, spoke about his 19-year career with NASA and his time in space.

He discussed with the audience the road to becoming an astronaut, from his childhood dream to his eventual selection by NASA after numerous unsuccessful attempts. He described his unique experiences and impressions from several missions, including the emotional highs and lows of journeying into space, and how various aspects of his life changed after his experience in orbit.

Thomas joined NASA in 1988 as a materials engineer for the Space Shuttle Program. In 1990 he was selected as a mission specialist astronaut in NASA's 13th group of astronauts. He is a veteran of four space shuttle mission and has logged over

1,000 hours in space, completing nearly 700 orbits of the Earth and traveling nearly 20 million miles in the process. He served as a NASA International Space Station program scientist at the Johnson Space Center in Houston where he planned and coordinated numerous science experiments being performed from 2003 to 2006.

He received his bachelor's degree in physics from Case Western Reserve University, and his master's and doctoral degrees in materials science from the School of Engineering at Cornell University. Prior to joining NASA, Thomas was a senior member of the technical staff at the Bell Laboratories Engineering Research Center in Princeton, N.J.

In his role as director of the Willard Hackerman Academy of Mathematics and Science, Thomas has been visiting numerous schools in the Baltimore area and talking to students of all ages about his experiences in space.

The event was well attended by faculty, staff, students and alumni. Based on the popularity of this first installment of the Reflections series, the Honors College looks forward to the continued success of the annual event.



provided such a great learning environment. In fact, I remain friends with many of my classmates from that class.

Overall, I learned that it is important to stretch yourself beyond your areas of interest and explore a wide range of course content. Through projects, assignments and assessments for these classes, I learned how to research in depth and develop new strategies for remembering information. I used these

research and memorization strategies to assist me through graduate school, and I am now passing them on to my own students.

I also really enjoyed my summer study abroad course with Dr. Pippen in which we examined architecture and literature in England. I never thought I would see quite so many churches in such a short amount of time, but now I definitely know a flying buttress when I see one! It was my first time out of the country, and such a unique experience to be a part of.

My advice to Honors College students is to not shy away from classes that are not related to your major. The experiences they will provide you are invaluable. Push yourself beyond your realm of comfort—you will learn new skills that will transfer to other areas of your life. Also, take advantage of all the opportunities the Honors College has to offer you! I had the good fortune to be able to go and present at a National Conference in Orlando, Florida and explore England—all because I was in the Honors College at Towson University.

— Stephanie Lee '00

News and Updates from Honors College Graduates

Stephanie Lee

Stephanie Lee graduated from the Honors College at TU in 2000 with a degree in Elementary Education and a concentration in middle school math and science. Since graduation Stephanie has completed the Technology for Educators Program at Johns Hopkins University and is currently teaching sixth-grade science at Westland Middle School in Bethesda, Maryland. In 2008, she won the Marian Greenblatt Excellence in Teaching award, and was qualified as a candidate for the Montgomery County Public Schools Teacher of the Year award.

My experiences in the Honors College provided me with the opportunity to explore topics that I otherwise wouldn't have pursued, and challenged me outside my realm of comfort. With a strong interest in science and math, I would have been happy enough to stick with the standard education classes, with my focus in math and science. My first semester, I was greatly challenged in an honors class in political science. The next semester, I took an honors geography class—also a selection outside my area of interest, but the small class size

Alumni - We would love to hear from you!

- May we contact you in the future to find out where you are and what you are doing?
 yes no
- What is your preferred method of contact?
 phone e-mail U.S. mail
- Would you be available to talk to a current student about similar job/field interests?
 yes no

Name: _____

Name While at Towson (if different): _____

Current Preferred Mailing Address: _____

Current Preferred Phone: _____

Current Preferred E-mail Address: _____

Place(s) of Work: _____

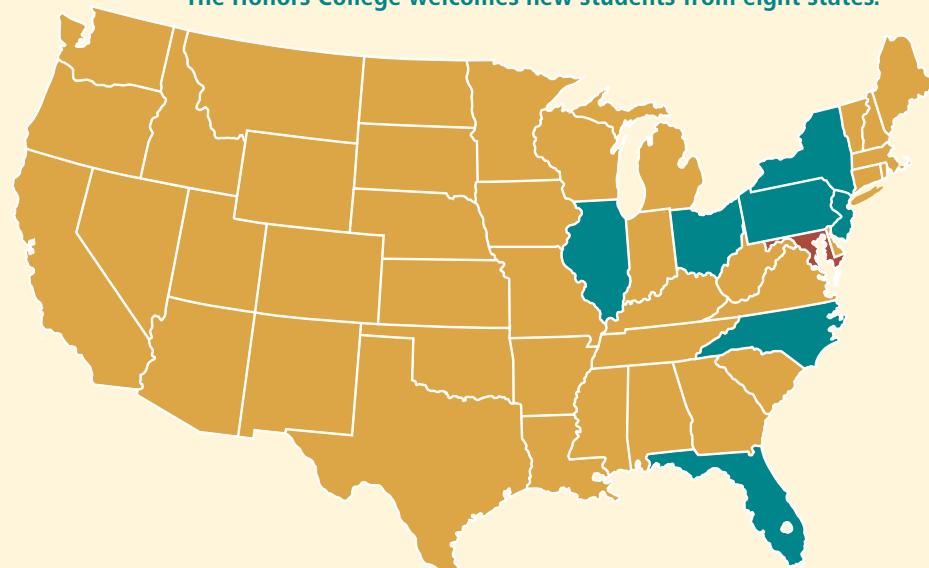
Job Title(s): _____

Accomplishments: _____

Family News: _____

Mail this form to: The Honors College,
Towson University, 8000 York Road,
Stephen's Hall, Room 302
Towson, MD 21252
or fill it out online at
www.towson.edu/honors/alumninews.asp

The Honors College welcomes new students from eight states.



Honors by the Numbers

- Total incoming class: 220**
- First-year students: 166**
- Transfer students: 18**
- Current TU students: 36**
- Average SAT: 1827**
- Average GPA: 3.92**
- Out-of-State: 23.49%**
- Most common majors:**
Biology and Elementary Education

Honors Student News and Events

Fall 2008



See you around downtown

Honors College students experienced Downtown Baltimore in November. The group visited the National Aquarium, Maryland Science Center, and enjoyed a life-size movie at the IMAX theater. Some students visited historic Fells Point by water taxi, while others hiked their way up Federal Hill.

Light the Night Walk

In November, the Honors College Student Council (HCSC) organized a group of 15 students to participate in the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's Light the Night Walk that took place on TU's campus. The Light the Night Walk is an annual fundraising event that benefits cancer research in the areas of leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma.

Spring 2009

First annual Senior Hoop-la Basketball Game

In January, the Honors College hosted the first-annual Senior Hoop-la Basketball Event. Over 60 students, faculty, staff and alumni joined us in our private terrace at the Towson Center Arena to watch Towson take on rival Drexel. Attendees were treated to a special halftime show that featured area mascots Doc, the Oriole Bird, Poe from the Ravens, the Green Turtle, McGruff the Crime Dog and others competing in a mini basketball game full of entertaining antics.

The Honors College goes to *Grease*

In February, the Honors College provided tickets and transportation to Baltimore's Hippodrome Theatre to see *Time Magazine's* 2007 pick for the "#1 musical of the year," *Grease*. The students took a trip back to the time of poodle skirts, drive-ins and T-Birds with a spectacular cast of performers. The students Hand Jived their way back to Towson as they took part in a lively discussion about the performance.

Faculty win ... again

The third annual Generation Jeopardy game, hosted by the HCSC, pitted honors student against their faculty members. Armed with nothing but their knowledge, nine honors faculty and staff members defeated 36 students for the third year in a row. While the game tested the groups' knowledge on categories from poetry to social networking, the goal of the event was to involve faculty and students in activities outside of the classroom. Associate Professor of Management, William Smith, said, "Anything that has to do with the world when I was growing up I can answer. I don't know that much about hip-hop, certain parts of pop culture. And if they ask me a *Grey's Anatomy* question, I'm dead."

Relay for Life

Over 50 students participated on the Honors College team for the second annual Towson University Relay for Life to benefit the American Cancer

Society. The TU Relay raised over \$50,000 for cancer research, education, programs and advocacy. A highlight of the event was the Luminaria Ceremony where the Honors

Colleges' executive administrative assistant, Rita Gray, led the group of over 780 participants in the remembrance and honor of cancer survivors.



Support Honors!



Honors College T-Shirts
S-XL: \$15; XXL: \$16

For more information or to purchase a shirt, please e-mail hcsc@towson.edu or stop by the Honors College Office.

A frightening night at the theme park

On a brisk October evening, 38 honors students braved the spooky sites and attended Fright Fest at Six Flags theme park. As part of the Halloween-themed event, students were treated to the "Monster Mash" by a group of ghouls, rode roller coasters in the pitch-black, and were chased through the park by zombies.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Meet Jessica Kitner '09

As Jessica Kitner '09 enters the work force, she knows she's up to any challenge. The recent Honors College grad is confident that her four years in the Honors College provided her with the well-rounded experience that will translate well to the "real world"—both socially and professionally.

"The Honors College put me in an atmosphere where there were other students like me," she says. "I made friendships that I know will carry on beyond college. And when I think about the professors I will never forget, most of them are ones that I met through the Honors College."


Kitner graduated *magna cum laude* from the Honors College at TU in the spring of 2009, earning a bachelor's degree in English with a track in Elementary Education. She has returned to her hometown of Harrisburg, Pa., while she searches for a full-time teaching job.






"The Honors College is an elite organization for driven students."

THE HONORS COLLEGE YEAR-IN-REVIEW




- Third Annual Generation Jeopardy: Students and faculty compete for bragging rights
- Great Outdoor Movie Night




- Honors College students go to *Grease... the Musical* at the Hippodrome Theatre

- Pizza with Honors College study abroad
- Happy Halloween trip at Six Flags Fright Fest



- Honors College Graduation: Over 100 students graduate in fall 2008 and spring 2009 ceremonies
- Overseas Thank You: Students create cards to send holiday wishes and thanks to U.S. marines stationed in Iraq

- Honors College Student Council members spend a day at the Maryland Renaissance Festival
- Relay For Life: Over 50 honors students participate in recognition of cancer survivors to raise funds for the American Cancer Society
- Honors College Welcome Back Barbeque



- End-of-the-Year Ice Cream Social
- The Honors College hosts the 2009 Maryland Collegiate Honors Council Conference "Thinking Outside the USA"

