



HONORS NOW

The Tennessee Tech Honors Program newsletter

Formerly *Honorable Mention*

Spring 2022

Honors Student Creates Body-Positive Dance Group

Emma Fox, a junior special education major, is the founder and instructor of the Fox Dance Collective, an inclusive, free dance class. Fox is exploring the correlation between dance and self-esteem as part of her involvement in the Tech Honors Engagement Fellowship.

Fox wanted to share her love for dance in an environment that contrasts with the traditional dance community’s pressure for dancers to have the “ballet body,” and can give dancers a negative body image.

“I really wanted to make a safe space for dancers, because a lot of people have trauma based on dance studios, and the way that the ‘ballet body’ has to be,” she said, “and so I really



Fox Dance Collective members learn steps to “We Don’t Talk About Bruno,” led by Emma Fox. Photo by Lauren Finley.

just want to create a body-positive space where anybody, no matter how much experience they have in dance, can just come and have a good time and meet people.”

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From Honors to Mayo Clinic RN



Alumna Erin Guenther shares her journey in Honors. Photo provided by Guenther.

Erin Guenther (Nurs ’20) transferred to Tech and joined Honors in 2017. Her experience in the Honors Program led her to a career in the Mayo Clinic Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in Rochester, Minnesota, where she is now a registered nurse.

Guenther faced the challenges of both a new major and an unfamiliar college environment. However, she believed joining the Honors Program would be worthwhile, and committed to it.

Q: What inspired you to transfer to Tennessee Tech and to join the Honors Program?

A: I transferred to Tech after doing one semester at UTK. I decided to transfer to Tech for the smaller school atmosphere, smaller class sizes, and larger access to faculty when one-to-one attention was needed. I wanted to be a part of the Honors Program to foster the sense of community I was after. Some of my best friends and biggest opportunities came from the Honors Program!

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Connecting New and Experienced Conferencegoers

TCHC Participants and Their Research

Grady Hicks (ESS) “Comparing the Effects of a Bottle Bill in Tennessee to Other States”

Claudia McDavid (PMed) “Development of a Field Test for Identification of Cocaine and Heroin Utilizing Thin Layer Chromatography”

Taylor Fletcher (Chem) and **Sydney Asmus** (Chem) “Synthesis of a novel Terpenoid and optimization of its preparation for yield and environmental impact using Design of Experiment”

Attending academic conferences to present research is a longstanding, tried-and-true bonding experience for Tech Honors students. For some, annual honors conferences at the state, regional, or national level have served as an introduction to conferences in their major discipline. For others, these meetings are a chance to see academia from a fresh perspective: through the eyes of honors students from other universities in an array of fields.

Chemistry major Taylor Fletcher, one of four Tech attendees at February’s Tennessee Collegiate Honors Conference (TCHC) hosted by ETSU, agrees. She attended the Tennessee Academy of Science gathering last semester, but this was a chance to find out what goes on in other fields.

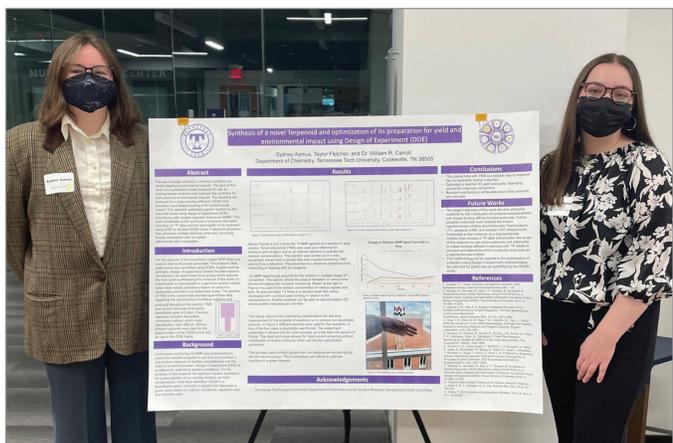
She recommends TCHC to future Tech Honors students, advising participants “to go to as many other presentations as you can. The Honors conference is interdisciplinary, so there are tons of cool projects being showcased about subjects you’ve never heard of.” She adds that

“it is a great opportunity to get to know other Honors students” at other universities, as well as a chance to present your research.

Pre-Med and Forensic Chemistry major Claudia McDavid enjoyed speaking to forensic science majors from MTSU whose drug-related research complemented her own. Speaking to others who share her aspirations toward a career in forensic pathology made TCHC “a great way to connect with people in my field.” McDavid also enjoyed the chance to “connect with other honors students and hear about a wide variety of research” — including her fellow Tech attendees.

Tech’s contingent also placed second in the annual TCHC trivia contest. Fletcher observed, “we thought [it] was pretty good considering we were four people against the eleven people [from UT-Chattanooga] in first place.”

The opportunity to attend TCHC was partially supported by grants from the Associated Scholars Guild (ASG), the Honors Program student organization.



Honors students (Left: Sydney Asmus and Taylor Fletcher, Right: Claudia McDavid) presented their research at East Tennessee State University in February.

Once More to SOAR

A combination of leadership development, tradition, frenetic preparation, occasional hilarity, and community-building, Honors SOAR participation is an annual highlight that, for many Honors students as well as our staff, answers the well-meaning (if naïve) question, “Well, what are you doing now that classes are out?”

Under the stewardship of Honors summer recruitment leader Hannah Long and her assistant Emma Fox, first-year Honors students and prospective students get a thorough if capsulized introduction to what Honors means at Tennessee Tech, and how refreshingly different it is from the heavy-backpack, extra-homework associations of high school programs.

Approximately 30 Honors Big Sibs from a range of academic majors assist the first-years by describing their varied personal experiences with Honors courses, contract proposals, research, internships; reassuring them about the quality-not-quantity philosophy of small, interactive classes in which they found a group of peers who share their love of asking questions and discussing ideas in depth. The Big Sibs as well as Long and Fox are trained and supervised by our staff coordinator for co-curricular

matters, Mrs. Lindsey Roberts, an alumna of Honors who went on to serve the program as a graduate assistant prior to her current position.

“We can give incoming students brochures and direct them to our webpage, but it is the perspective of our current students that illuminates the Honors experience in a way we cannot otherwise capture.

“At the most recent SOAR session, one Big Sib relayed her journey from regarding research as intimidating to recognizing it as an avenue to do what she enjoys out in the field while developing critical skills as a wildlife scientist. Katherine Wieczorek learned the value of research and identified a faculty mentor through an Honors Getting Started in Research Group. Although research is not a requirement of the program, she detailed the bevy of benefits it conveys including the detailed letter of recommendations her research mentor can write for her as she applies for jobs.

Parent and student faces alike lit up across the room as she shared her story. This is what truly gives incoming students a glimpse of how Honors can help them tailor their educational paths and prepare them for meaningful careers,” she said.



Left: Real Honors Siblings: New first-years Matthew and Mary Grace Bickel (ME and EE, respectively) flank Dr. Barnes at the first SOAR session of 2022. They are the younger siblings of Elizabeth Bickel (ChemE, in cursu honorum and Distinction in the Major, '17). Right: Big Sibs ready themselves to dispel myths about Honors.

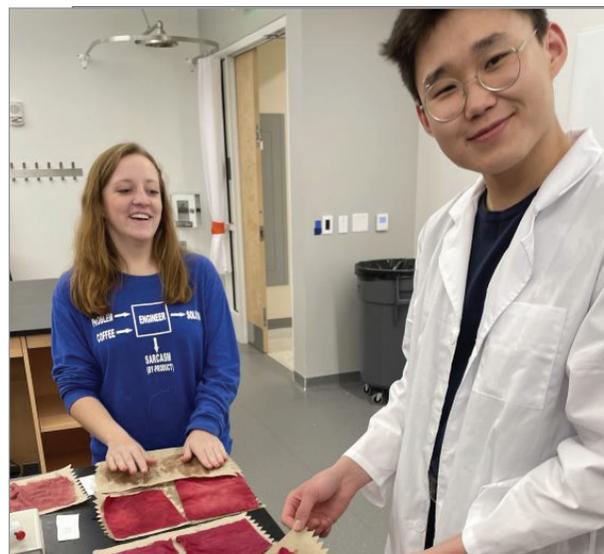
Big Sibs Serve at SOAR

Before they leave SOAR for home, the latest group of Honors first-years are equipped with Big Sibs and swag (including a tiny Honors stapler), and they take care of unfinished business with the empathetic and practical assistance of Big Sibs and Honors staff. Administrative assistant Mrs. Lizabeth Sheets supports any last-minute Honors course registration adjustments on the spot, and helps to solidify students' confidence in taking responsibility for their college education. For current students and staff, Honors SOAR is an exercise in modeling an agile, accessible, team-based workplace and community for the next generation of intellectually driven, caring, communicative young adults.



Above: Left: Big Sibs answer incoming students' questions at Honors checkout during SOAR. Right: Hannah Long (EXPW) and Emma Fox (SPED), Honors Summer Recruitment Leader and Assistant, pose in front of TJ Farr Hall. Below: Big Sib Marlee Miller (Hist) displays the new Honors T-shirt designed for ASG by Emma Fox and Hannah Long. Note the four pillars of Honors encircling the brain flower on the back of the shirt.





Honors Colloquium: the Chemistry of Fibers, co-taught by Honors alum and now-instructor of Chemistry, Emily (Rush) Allonge and Fiber Arts faculty member Rena Wood, challenges students to think creatively about the connections between science and art. Demonstrating their work in the lab and the fiber studio are Hannah Long (EXPW) (left) and Helaena Pfeiffer (ChE) and Belguutei Ariuntugs (Math) (right). This semester's other Honors Colloquium, The Rhetoric of Science and Data Literacy, is taught by English faculty members Dr. Mary Ramler and Dr. Daniel Ernst.

2021-22 *in cursu honorum* graduates

Noor Alsharif (Psych)
 Weston Beebe (CompE)
 Alexa Brugere (Nurs)
 Lydia Cooke (Chem)
 Abigail Cothron, (CivE)
 Caleb Dunlap (ME)
 Lauren Ennamorato (ChemE)
 Jonas Fornehed (CSC)
 Jacklyn Friesel (ME)

Shaun Guyette (SCS)
 Taylor Hornback (Nurs)
 Jason Houbre (CompE)
 Jennifer Isham (WFS)
 Livia James (Psych)
 Kaitlyn Kidwell (Physics)
 Sydney Knight (Design)
 Anarae Lambert (MDS)
 Charis Littell (Biol)

Carlos Medrano (CSC)
 Rachel Paris (Chem/Biol)
 Emily Rhoton (ChemE)
 Ella Rogers (CompE/CSC)
 Emma Schridder (Chem)
 Warren Sims (ME)
 Daniel Summers (CompE)
 Jacob Thompson (CivIE)
 Emily Watson (ECED)

What is the Honors Minor?

The Honors minor is not the same as graduating *in cursu honorum* which is the highest level of academic challenge.

The Honors minor, while available to all Honors Program students, has a lower GPA threshold, allowing students with a 3.1-3.49 GPA to be recognized for completing the 22 credit hours of Honors requirements on their transcript.

As part of a student's official Program of Study, the minor also recognizes that an Honors student who opts for an Honors curriculum is strengthening their academic

readiness for their future career as well.

Students eligible for the Honors minor, whether or not they have chosen it, are not simply doing "Honors on the side"— they are pursuing graduation from the Honors Program's course of academic requirements, and continue to do so through their dedication to learning.

In brief, it is not a replacement or a conversion of our program: it is an additional benefit, whether or not a student ends up (as most do) *in cursu honorum*.

Guenther Q&A continued from page 1

One of these opportunities was Honors Experiential Learning, through which students obtain Honors credit from outside the classroom. This allows students to gain practical experience in their career of choice, and each experience can be uniquely tailored to the student who undertakes it. Honors Experiential Learning can take the form of projects such as faculty-mentored research or internships.

Q: What aspects of the Honors Program were most impactful or rewarding for you?

A: The most impactful aspects of the Honors Program were the smaller class sizes, opportunities to do leadership development courses, upper-division projects with faculty, as well as always having resources available and a solid support system within the university.

Guenther cites leadership and time management as some of the most important skills she developed during her time in the Honors Program. Because she majored in nursing, she was also able to tailor her Honors curriculum to be relevant to her nursing studies, resulting in working alongside faculty on their research projects. Now that she has carried these skills with her beyond college, Guenther shares advice for students who may be in a similar situation to hers.

Q: Do you have any advice for nursing majors who want to be in Honors?

A: Do as many Honors hours as you can prior to upper-division nursing! Choose an Honors Experiential Learning [area] that you are passionate about and make the most of that opportunity.

The Honors Program instilled a sense of confidence in Guenther as she learned vital skills for cooperation and leadership within the

workplace, such as teamwork and delegation. These abilities led her to continued success throughout her career, and Guenther not only developed into a capable nurse, but also obtained new positions as a student preceptor and the leader of the new-higher mentor program. Other notable career accomplishments include her seat on the Board of Unit Operations and Practice, Quality and Safety; and her dedication to becoming a Central Line-Associated Bloodstream Infection (CLABSI) champion, meaning that Guenther has worked tirelessly with her peers to successfully reduce the number of hospital-acquired infections related to central line procedures.

Q: What aspects of both Honors and your current career have led you to your future goals?

A: The Honors Program encourages involvement throughout many different subsets in education which has really led me to do the same in the workplace. Because of my involvement while in the Honors Program and the wide range of subjects I was learning, I started in the workforce craving the same thing. I believe this led me to be a more well-rounded individual and someone who isn't afraid to take on something that seems so disconnected to my career. With the aspirations of one day being a women's health practitioner, I will not only have the education of how to provide healthcare but will also need knowledge about business, insurance, and any legal needs. Since I've always had such a broad spectrum on my education, taking on those educational responsibilities does not scare me.

Guenther cited her time in the Honors Program as the reason for her desire to continue learning. She plans to attend the University of Minnesota in 2023 to obtain her doctorate and become a women's health nurse practitioner.

In Memoriam: Dr. John Harris

Dr. John Harris, professor emeritus of biology and former Honors Program director, passed away this winter after a career of service and mentorship to his students and the community. Dr. Harris taught at Tech for 49 years, the last four of which were spent launching the College of Interdisciplinary Studies. He was a recipient of the Tennessee Academy of Science Distinguished Service Award, and a U.S. Fulbright Scholar in India.

During his time as Honors Director (1978-1983), he established the Associated Scholars Guild (ASG), the Honors student organization, which became a thriving hub for student co-curricular involvement. Years after his

formal retirement, Dr. Harris continued to be selected as an Honors graduation ceremony faculty representative by biology majors. He saw through the very first *in cursu honorum* graduates in 1980. That same year, he brought 12 students from programs in various states to Oak Ridge National Laboratory and The Farm (a study in contrasts that reflected his creative approach to learning) for “Energy, Environment, and Resources in the 1980s.”

The achievements of Dr. Harris typify the values central to the mission of the Honors Program: intellectual leadership, research, and community engagement. We will miss his warm smile and support.

Faculty: Propose an Honors Colloquium!

That course you’ve always wanted to teach just might be an Honors Colloquium, a three-credit-hour, discussion-based special topics course that brings together inventive ideas in a course that does not exist at Tech. Proposals are currently being accepted for Honors Colloquia for the Spring 2023-Spring 2024 cycle. Past topics include Human Anatomy and Visual Art, The Science of Breadmaking, The History of Terrorism, Alternative Energy Devices and Policies, and many more. Teaching teams welcome. Email Dr. Rita Barnes at ritabarnes@tntech.edu for proposal guidelines.

Honors Alumni Updates

James White (Biol, Fren, Germ ’09) has completed his Ph.D. in history at the University of Alberta, where he teaches in the departments of History and Religion.

Rosa Vasquez (Biochem, Biol ’15) has completed her Ph.D. in Chemical Biology at the University of Michigan. As a National Geographic Explorer, she documented microbial species in the Amazon’s Boiling River.

Aaron Bibb (Engl ’02) is an attorney practicing in Madison, Wisconsin. He recently visited Dr. Barnes with his wife, Elizabeth, also an attorney, and their two children.

Emily Byrum (Nurs ’20) is an RN in Pediatric Oncology at Vanderbilt University Hospital.

Kyle Clendenon (BMGT ’11) is a third-year law student at U of TX-Austin, where he is a Cyber Fellow at the Robert Strauss Center for International Security and Law.

Mel (Psych ’98) and **Arthur Goldsipe** (ChemE ’97) live near Denver, Colorado. Mel continues to be active in volunteer work and is happy to be living near family. Arthur works remotely for MathWorks.

Autumn Douthitt (ChemE ’17) works for Arnold Engineering in Tullahoma.

Contact Dr. Rita Barnes at ritabarnes@tntech.edu to submit your update!

Fox Dance Collective continued from page 1

Fox has been successful in doing so, according to Bailey Ricketts, a dancer in the class. “I think Fox Dance Collective is a super body-positive and judgment-free class, so as someone who never really danced growing up, I feel very relaxed in there.”

Ricketts said that as a junior, her school work load has increased her levels of stress. “However, when I’m in the class, it’s nice to just relax, stretch, and forget my worries [in] that small time frame”

Participants have varying levels of dance experience, but all are welcome. “You don’t have to [know] any terms or techniques because Emma teaches them all at a pace that fits well for everyone during

each class,” Ricketts said.

Emma Fox has 15 years of dance experience in multiple genres, including jazz, tap, and others. She sets a comfortable and welcoming tone by consistently asking, “How are we feeling?” throughout the class, which melts away any pressure or stress.

At their meeting on February 2, Fox was teaching her own choreography for the song “We Don’t Talk About Bruno” from Disney’s *Encanto*. She was open to the dancers’ suggestions for steps and combinations, and encouraged the dancers to improvise at certain points in the song.

The Fox Dance Collective hopes to perform in a recital soon. Until then, the group will

continue to meet and include dancers of all skill sets on Wednesday nights at 6:30 in room 203 of the Fitness Center.



Emma Fox. Photo by Lauren Finley.

Contact us: We invite both current Honors students and Honors graduates to send their news. Photographs are always welcome, too! Write to Honors Director Rita Barnes at ritabarnes@tntech.edu.

Honors Now

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