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Mankato

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Stephanie Peterson Honors Portfolio

Stephanie Rose Peterson
Minnesota State University, Mankato

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STEPHANIE PETERSON

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Honors Portfolio

A student's reflections on the varied experiences of college and the learning they can provide in the areas of leadership, research, and global citizenship.

STEPHANIE PETERSON

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About Me

Hello and thank you for visiting my page! My name is Stephanie Peterson and I am going into my final year of studies at Minnesota State University - Mankato. My major is Biomedical Sciences and (hopefully) German as well. I am also minoring in Chemistry. My future plan is to attend graduate school with the ultimate goal of being a biomedical researcher and professor. I'm also part of the Honors Program here at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Feel free to look through my portfolio. Enjoy!



Mission

My mission is to strive for excellence both in and out of the classroom. I plan to accomplish this by setting high standards for myself in all areas of my life, be that in academics or social situations. I don't know everything that the future holds for me, but I will embrace the positives and negatives with an open mind and an open heart so that I can learn from every experience.

Contact

Email: stephanie.peterson-1@mnsu.edu
Phone: 651-295-9538

Education



College - Minnesota State University, Mankato

I am now in my last year of school at Minnesota State University, Mankato and can honestly say that it has been a great experience. The professors are very helpful and approachable, which is something that I was afraid they wouldn't be when I first arrived at the school three years ago. I have been involved in clubs on campus such as the German Club, Habitat for Humanity, and the Pre-Med Club beyond my classes. Along with that, I have also had the exciting experience of working in a research lab on campus and it has been one of my favorite and most impactful experiences so far. I also studied abroad in Germany during my fourth year of studies, which was one of the most amazing experiences of my college career and of my life generally. As of right now, I plan to graduate in the spring of 2018 with degrees in Biomedical Sciences and German as well as a minor in Chemistry. I'm looking forward to the challenges and joys of my last few years as a student at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

High School - Centennial High School

I am a graduate of the Centennial High School class of 2013. The school is located in Circle Pines, Minnesota and has a student body population of about 2000. In my time at Centennial, I was very involved with the band, of which I was a part for four years. During my senior year I played in the Wind Ensemble, an audition-only group, and was given the chance to play at the Minnesota Music Educators Association Winter Convention as one of the few high school groups invited to play. It was a very exciting experience and I truly enjoyed that performance. I was also a rank leader in the marching band for three years. Beyond the band, academics were another reason that I enjoyed Centennial. I give sincere thanks to the many wonderful teachers I who taught me and helped to push my boundaries so that I could reach my highest potential. I believe that they are part of the reason for my place within the top percentile of my class. I was very involved in activities outside of my high school such as dance and different groups in my church. However, my time at Centennial during my high school years was great and I'll always remember it because of the wonderful people I met and the myriad of experiences I enjoyed there.

Leadership

Leadership Synthesis Essay

When I first began the process of learning about, and focusing on, leadership during an [Honors First Year Experience](#) class, I had a very narrow view of what the word meant. At the time, I thought of leadership as having a named position of power, but through the course of classes and other experiences, I have revised that view many times over into my current theory of leadership, which encompasses much more than just a title. Now, my idea of leadership stretches from singular positions to being a team player to making sure that a leader always acts in a way that they wish other people to act as well. In simpler terms, I believe strongly in leading by example in a way that is authentic to the personality, strengths, and weaknesses of each leader. By doing that, I believe that it is easier to work together with others towards common goals, which is the overarching objective of leadership to me.

There have been many opportunities and experiences which have been integral to the evolution of my view of leadership. The Honors First Year Experience course gave me a first insight into the breadth and depth of what leadership can be, while also giving me insight into my own strengths as a leader through the StrengthsFinder test. Those strengths of intellection, learner, input, harmony, and achiever are all values that I carry with me to this day. Having that initial idea of where my strengths lie has given me the chance to focus on using them in many situations, including during [lab work in classes and research settings](#). As a student researcher, I have had the chance to use my strengths in the areas of strategic thinking and relationship building to work together with my partner and/or advisor to help plan the best ways to tackle issues within the project, such as finding new ways to obtain data or deciding the best way to present the results that we found. Also, when working on group projects in lab courses, I found that the challenge of motivating everyone to work together was often one of the main challenges in the project. By using strengths in relationship building and as a learner, I was usually able to help my teammates to understand the concepts behind the projects and guide the group towards the final product.

In the Honors seminar [Exploring Leadership in the Context of Conference Development](#), I was able to discover other leadership styles and critique those styles through class work. That seminar also provided an opportunity to better pinpoint my weaknesses as a leader and learn to lean on others who had strengths in those areas. For example, I found that I was not the best at using the computer programs necessary to fit the conference book together, so instead I worked on more of the content while others put everything together. Another chance I had for critiquing leadership styles came through my involvement in a [scholar-administrator mentorship program](#) at the university. Through conversations with top administrators at the university, I was able to learn about how they perceive leadership and reflect on the extent to which I agreed or disagreed with their ideas. It was amazing to see how, across departments and colleges, collaboration was a main theme of each mentor's leadership model, which highlights the importance of working in a team.

Group or team work is a vital part of leadership and during my time as an [exchange student in Germany](#), much of the coursework in the language classes I took was done in groups. As such, I was able to observe cultural differences in roles within a group and compare that to groups I had worked with in the USA. Often, I saw that those from more collaborative cultures were more likely to fit within a group and work to include everyone, while those from more individualistic cultures were more likely to work on their own and expect others to keep up. I found that I changed which strengths I utilized based upon the people with whom I was working. This change in leadership style gave me the chance to see that, although I am an introverted leader, I can rise to the challenge of being first to voice ideas, especially in settings where I am working with those who are personally or culturally inclined to collaborate. This experience really allowed me to reflect on how leadership styles can be adapted to specific situations so that everyone can give input and be part of the process of achieving a goal.

Critical Leadership Experiences

[Honors First Year Experience](#)

[Scholarship Mentoring Program](#)

[Honors Leadership Seminar](#)

[Lab Coursework and Research](#)

[German Study Abroad Experience](#)

Research

Research Synthesis Essay

Starting out in the Honors Program, I thought that I had the research competency figured out. I believed that it was just the process of going from one question to finding one answer. At the time of my Honors First Year Experience class, I thought that the prior work/knowledge I had of research from research papers and learning about the scientific method in school was all the basis that I would need for future research. However, through the course of undergraduate research experiences and classes, along with the presentation opportunities that those experiences provided, I have been able to expand my view of research and more thoroughly understand what research encompasses. I now think of research as a continual, flexible process of finding questions, both in day-to-day life and through focused or directed lines of thought, and trying to find possible answers to those questions while at the same time keeping an open mind to new information that may alter the original questions.

The beginning of learning about research as a general topic, for me, came through understanding the vital role of information literacy. Being able to efficiently and effectively utilize the databases of knowledge that have been compiled is imperative no matter what subject is being studied. In [Honors First Year Experience \(FYEX\)](#), we had the chance to go to the library and walk through several ways to find reliable information on- and offline. We also looked at how to navigate the online databases, while at the same time learning about how to use those sources in an ethical manner. The ethical use of information was also a topic that we studied in [Molecular Biology](#) when creating our final project reports. We talked about how, in all disciplines, any information that you learn from another person/source must be attributed to that person or source, as to take credit for the work another person has done is highly unethical. Going from that base, we learned about source citations in both Honors FYEX and Molecular Biology as a way to use information ethically.

After understanding how to find and utilize information, I started to learn how to effectively synthesize information. Some of the experiences I have had that were integral to developing my skills in information synthesis were during Honors Public Speaking and Molecular Biology. The final project for [Honors Public Speaking](#) was to give a TED-style presentation about any topic. I chose Vaccines. In order to give a cohesive speech, I had to find data that supported my hypothesis that vaccines are safe to use, while also keeping in mind counter-arguments against vaccination, and compile that information in such a way that it would make sense to myself and others. Then, during Molecular Biology, I had to create a final project report that detailed my experiments from much of the semester along with other data about the methodology used and the reasoning behind each part of the experiment. While writing that report, I had to find reputable sources and bring the information I found together to explain where my hypothesis had come from, why the experiment was important, and what could be learned from the results. Together, these two experiences helped me to hone my ability to synthesize large amounts of information so that it can be made more accessible and useful.

All of that base knowledge of information literacy and synthesis came into play when I was able to be part of undergraduate research as a [student researcher at MSU, Mankato](#) and during a [Summer Undergraduate Research Program](#) at the University of Iowa. At MSU I, along with a partner and Dr. Sharlin, have been studying cochlear nerve myelination in a hypothyroid system in mice. This project came from unexpected results that were found during the thesis work of a graduate student in the lab. By using that project as a starting point, we were able to focus the initial questions so that it was more feasible that an answer, or possible answer, could be found. Having the chance to see the beginning stages of experimental design was very helpful for me as it allowed me to better understand ways that hypotheses come about and how researchers find questions that they want to answer. As a summer undergraduate researcher at the University of Iowa, I was able to see, and participate in, part of that process, but because the program was only ten weeks, I was not as large a part of the experimental design as I was during my time in Dr. Sharlin's lab. In both instances, however, I was able to gather data for the experiments and also apply to present those findings at various conferences. As lead researcher on the project here at MSU, I was responsible for keeping track of, working on, and finalizing the application to present at both Posters on the Hill in St. Paul and the Undergraduate Research Symposium at MSU. After being accepted to both events, as well as the Summer Undergraduate Research Conference at the University of Iowa, and presenting there, I was able to realize the importance of understanding every detail you can about your project, so that you are able explain it clearly and efficiently to those who wish to listen. Having these opportunities to work on novel research from the beginning of the project through to presentation of results has given me the chance to understand the whole process of research through a different lens, as the results were never guaranteed and each new finding led to new questions, which is something I had hardly considered when I first started focusing on research during Honors FYEX. It has also helped me to better comprehend the struggles of some research, from finding funding to finding appropriate methods to finding venues at which to present. All of this knowledge will be useful as I go on to graduate school and beyond, as I plan to continue as a researcher. I will be able to draw on the experiences I have had in order to conduct research in an integrative, ethical, and reflective manner.

Critical Research Experiences

[Honors First Year Experience](#)

[Honors Public Speaking](#)

[Molecular Biology](#)

[Undergraduate Research at MSU, Mankato](#)

[Summer Undergraduate Research Program](#)

Global Citizenship

Global Citizenship Synthesis Essay

When I started in the Honors Program, I had absolutely no idea what global citizenship meant. I thought that maybe it had something to do with learning about other cultures in the world, but that was the extent of my knowledge. However, through the course of my time in the program, I have been able to start learning about global citizenship and continuously expand my definition of the concept. Today, my idea of global citizenship includes learning about different cultures, recognizing that those cultures are valid and equal to my own, recognizing the effect of my own cultural experience and learning to see past those biases, and trying to better understand the interplay of culture and language on all people. The growth of my knowledge concerning global citizenship has been a constant process, but there are several key experiences that have helped me understand each facet of global citizenship more fully.

The first of these experiences was [Honors First Year Experience](#). During that class we talked about the basics of global citizenship and what it means to be a global citizen in the interconnected world of today. We explored the value of learning a second language and the value of learning about other cultures. The class also introduced us to the many ways to get involved with the diverse communities in Mankato, which demonstrated that becoming a global citizen is a constant process, not something that can only be developed in other places. In this class, I also started to recognize some of my own cultural perspectives, but the main experience in which I recognized my own biases was when I spent a year as an [exchange student in Germany](#). Being immersed in a different culture than the one I grew up in gave me the chance to see how what I consider to be normal is not necessarily the norm in other places/with other people. For example, I learned that in German culture, the separation between work and home life is very distinct. When you have finished your 8-hour work day, you are done and there is no expectation that you will be available until the next work day. This is quite different from the work culture of the US, where many workers are expected to put in long hours and bring their work home if necessary. It was very interesting to observe how the mindset I had about working was so different than what I saw in Germany, all because of the place in which I grew up.

As a student in Germany, I was also able to observe how history, which I had learned about in my [German 201 and 202 courses](#), interacts with the present to shape the attitudes of groups of people. This was especially apparent when talking with some of the local people in Germany, where elders in the community can still remember a time when antisemitism ran rampant. This knowledge of the past helped to inform some of my interpretation of the present, but the biggest thing was getting to talk with classmates and such about their views of the world. I also had a chance to specifically think about past events and their effect on today's culture in US when I read the [Common Read](#) book in 2014-15, "Coming of Age in Mississippi" by Anne Moody. Going through that story gave me the chance to really reflect on the changes that have happened in the US, even in the last few years and showed me how fluid culture can be. Thus, in order to fully grasp the concept of global citizenship, one has to understand that cultural practices and viewpoints and biases are forever changing and be able to adapt to those changes as well. Another part of global citizenship that was introduced a little bit in Honors First Year Experience was the idea of overlapping cultures within a community, but also within each person. Through taking [Sensitivity to Disability](#), I had the chance to really see that concept for myself when I interviewed a fellow student at the university to learn about her experience growing up with ADHD. This exercise showed me that life experience is a major contributor to each individual's cultural identity. It also impressed upon me the idea that culture is not only about outward displays such as clothing choices or holiday celebrations or food, but spans to perspectives on every topic as well as religion, biases, and reactions. This was another topic that the Common Read book brought to light as well, although I found it very impactful to speak with someone who shared my cultural background as a young woman from Minnesota, but who also had a whole other set of cultural identity traits that I do not possess. It helped me to realize where I fit into my culture and what that even looks like for me. Being in Germany also helped to solidify my understanding of my own cultural identity because I could find things that seemed strange and reflect on why I believed what I did.

Going to Germany also gave me the opportunity to observe how language and culture are interrelated and why it can be so beneficial to learn a second language. While I was in Germany, I had to interact with most people in German, which is not my first language. This gave me the chance to reflect on the way we express ourselves through words, which becomes much more difficult when you don't know the right words to use. That personal expression of ideas through language is an integral part of personal cultural identity and to have it limited helped me to realize how important language can be. I also had the chance to learn about the proper posture in which to speak German and that lesson showed me how the speaking of language can affect the collective mindset of a people. In German, good posture is very important and it meant that I didn't see a lot of slouching or laziness in the day-to-day life of the people there, which also, I believe, translates into a sense of determination to get things done well and with purpose. This was something I could compare to English, where posture is not as important and the culture is also a bit more relaxed. Those small effects are not something you think about if you don't learn new languages, so it helps to foster understanding when people learn those nuances of language and culture and the ways in which they interact.

Overall, I think that my understanding of Global Citizenship as a concept and practice has fundamentally changed throughout the past few years. I have come to view it as a continual journey of understanding yourself as well as other cultures in the world on a level that is much deeper than the surface. Global Citizenship means being aware, being reflective, and being open, all of which are traits that I can take with me as I move into the field of biological research because the sciences are more diverse and intercultural than they have ever been.

Critical Global Citizenship Experiences

[Honors First Year Experience](#)

[German Study Abroad](#)

[German 201 and 202](#)

[Common Read 2014-15](#)

[Sensitivity to Disability](#)