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Honors Capstone Portfolios

Honors Program

12-2021

Taylor Forstner Honors Portfolio

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Taylor Forstner

Minnesota State University, Mankato
Honors Student

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Hello, a bit about me:

My name is Taylor Forstner, and I am an Honors Student at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am a pre-dental student majoring in Biomedical Science. I will graduate in December 2021. I then plan on continuing my education in dental school. Thank you for taking the time to check out my portfolio! You can begin by clicking the competency buttons below or by using the navigation bar at the top of the page.

My Mission Statement:

My mission as an MNSU Honors student is to develop skills in the three competencies of leadership, research, and global citizenship. By doing so, I will better myself by becoming a more knowledgeable and well-rounded person. I will also become more intentional and reflective within my education. My goal is to use the skills I learn in the Honors Program in my personal life and in my future dental career. I am passionate about helping others and want to ensure that I can provide the best possible comfort and care for my future patients.

Leadership

"Upon graduation, honors students will have demonstrated the ability to utilize personal leadership values and guide groups toward a common goal."

Research

"Upon graduation, honors students will have demonstrated the ability to exhibit information literacy skills, synthesize and integrate ideas, produce original research or creative works, and contribute to knowledge."

Global Citizenship

"Upon graduation, honors students will have demonstrated the ability to exhibit second language and communication competencies and exhibit cultural competency and awareness."



To learn more about the MNSU Honors Program, please visit <https://mankato.mnsu.edu/academics/academic-support/scholarly-communities/honors/>

To view the Honors Program Competencies, please [click here](#)



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"Honors students are committed to developing in several competency areas such as leadership, research, and global citizenship. The program provides class experiences designed to support competency development and a variety of co-curricular activities to enrich their growth. Students demonstrate their emerging competencies through electronic portfolios in which they document their activities and engage in meaningful reflection about their learning. The Honors Program challenges students to move outside of their comfort zones and to think critically about the world and their personal contributions to the communities in which they live."

Click the button below to view the Honors Program Competency Rubrics

[Honors Competency Rubrics](#)



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Leadership

Synthesizing Essay

Before my time in the Honors Program, I never saw myself as a leader. I always thought I was too shy and introverted to be a leader. I thought that all leaders had to be loud, outgoing, and bossy. However, the Honors Program pushed me to expand my comfort zone and redefine my definition of what it means to be a leader. Looking back, I can now see that the experiences I have gained through completing the leadership competencies have made me much more confident in my ability to be a leader.

It wasn't until I took Honors 201, where I reflected on my identity and leadership traits, that I slowly started to realize that I actually have been a leader in the past and that I am capable of being a leader in the future. One thing that greatly helped me come to the realization was the **StrengthsFinder Activity**. Through this activity, I learned that my top leadership strengths are achiever, empathy, discipline, futuristic, and focus. Simply defining what I value and what traits I have as a leader was the first step in growing my leadership confidence and abilities.

The next step in my leadership journey was to implement my leadership strengths. One way that I did this was by incorporating my leadership traits when working in a group setting. For example, when completing **RISEbio Blog Posts** with my lab partner, I utilized my traits of discipline and focus to practice my teamwork skills and ability to work with a partner towards a common goal. As a result, I slowly became more confident in taking the lead in a group setting. This confidence was helpful when becoming a **Student Ambassador Tour Guide**. Being a tour guide not only allowed me to practice my leadership strengths, such as achiever, but it also allowed me to recognize my weaknesses as a leader. Some of my weaknesses include public speaking, lack of confidence, self-doubt, and perfectionism. However, by continuously pushing myself out of my comfort zone, I learned to minimize my weakness and amplify my strengths. For example, I became more comfortable with public speaking and even more confident in leading a group.

As I became more confident in my ability to be a leader in a group setting, I decided to take the leap and run for a position on the Student Ambassador executive board as the **Student Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator**. Being a part of the Student Ambassadors executive board has helped me recognize the importance of various roles within a team setting and better understand and implement my personal leadership values and philosophies. I was then able to use my personal leadership values and philosophies as a **Kids Connection Teacher**. As a classroom leader, I learned what was effective and ineffective about my leadership style and used that knowledge to establish rules and boundaries within my classroom better. I am thankful that I went out of my comfort zone and gained these experiences, as I know they allowed me to grow my confidence and have significantly contributed to the development of my leadership skills. In addition, these experiences will help me feel much more comfortable when taking on new leadership roles in my future, such as in dental school or when working in a dental office.



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Research

Synthesizing Essay

Before entering the Honors Program, I never saw myself as someone who could do research. Even though I found it interesting, I thought that research was something you had to be an expert for in order to do. Additionally, I felt that all research had to be science or biology-related. Thankfully, I learned that research comes in many different forms and that even as a regular college student, I am still capable of participating in research.

Something that really broke open the world of research for me was being accepted into the RISEbio Program. RISEbio stands for Research Immersive Scholastic Experience in Biology. One of the main perks of being a RISEbio scholar was that I got to participate in real-world research starting right away in my first year of college. While in RISEbio, I did an experiment involving the **LacZ gene** and transgenic mice. At the end of the experiment, I had to write my first full-length Lab Report. While working through this lengthy 14-page assignment, I learned how to access credible sources through websites such as google scholar and effectively evaluate and incorporate them into my paper. While this project was scary at first, this experience was beneficial for me as I continued advancing in my college courses. For example, in microbiology, I also had to write a lab report; however, this time, it was about **Unknown Bacteria**. I used what I had previously learned about writing lab reports and using credible sources to complete this assignment. Furthering my information literacy and synthesis skills, I completed my first non-science-related research project in my technical communications class. I created a **Dental School Case Study presentation** by combining and organizing multiple outside sources.

However, my growth in the research competency really advanced when I started working in the **Cancer and Immunity Research Stream**, which allowed me to conduct original research. Additionally, experience in the RISEbio research stream helped me feel much more confident as a young scientist. This confidence was beneficial when it came time to **present my Research Poster**. This unique and valuable experience allowed me to work on my public speaking skills while sharing my partner and I's research findings with members of the biology community on campus.

I am very thankful for all of the research experiences I have gained throughout my time at MNSU. As a result, I feel more confident in my ability to conduct research and feel a greater sense of understanding and belonging to the science community. In addition, I will be able to use what I have learned from my research experiences in my future research projects in dental school.



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Global Citizenship

Synthesizing Essay

Before my time in the Honors Program, I never really thought about my own culture or the culture of others in much depth. I grew up in a small, predominately white rural town in Southern Minnesota. Almost all of my peers were just like me, so questions about culture were never really raised. After all, we were all the same. Or so I thought. I had such a narrow definition of what culture meant.

Coming in college, naive about the expansive definition of culture and what culture all entails, I immediately thought the only way to expand my knowledge of culture was to take a language course. It seemed obvious that taking Spanish classes would help me complete portions of the global citizenship competency. I took three Spanish courses; however, I benefited the most from SPAN 201: Intermediate Spanish. By attending my Spanish class and completing the assignments and projects, I demonstrated my understanding of the differences between English communication and Spanish communication. I started to learn the fundamentals of how to speak Spanish. I got to take my speaking skills a step further when completing the **Virtual Dual Immersion Project**. During this project, I got to have Zoom meetings with Students from Mexico to practice speaking Spanish and learn more about their culture. Through this experience, I started to reflect on what makes my culture different, which I hadn't really done before, as I grew up with people I thought were all the same as me.

Thanks to the **Honors 201 identity map and TED talk activity**, I started to become more self-aware of my own culture and identity and recognize my own cultural biases. Before this activity, I never thought that I was someone who had culture. I slowly started to realize the expansive definition of culture. I began to understand that culture can mean more than just different languages and countries. I learned that culture could be more personal, not just about a large group of people. Additionally, I realized there is never just one single story about a culture and that I should take it upon myself to ask questions and gain knowledge of other cultures.

I started asking these important questions while **working in assisted living** to get to know the various cultures of the residents I worked with. In doing so, I dug deeper into what culture entails and reflected upon this for my HONR 455: Honors Practicum credits. Reflecting on my experiences working as a CNA allowed me to understand that culture can also be based on people's age and the experiences they have gone through in their lives. For example, I was able to analyze the differences in generational cultures. Furthermore, I demonstrated my awareness of differences in cultural practices and adjusted my own behavior to help bridge cultures.

I really got to tie everything that I had learned from the global citizenship competency together when I went to **Guatemala for a dental volunteer trip**. In Guatemala, I used the Spanish language skills that I had learned from my Spanish courses. I also used my increased self-awareness that I had learned from Honors 201 to remind myself to check my bias. Additionally, I used what I had learned from my experiences as a CNA to help recognize the differences in cultural practices and adapt my behavior in the clinic setting.

My understanding of culture is now completely different from what it was before joining the Honors Program. I now see myself as someone who has a culture. Additionally, I have become much more aware of my own cultural biases. Initially, I thought that everyone I grew up with was just like me, but now I realize that we all have a unique and personal culture shaped by our experiences in life. Furthermore, I now know that culture means so much more than where you're from, what language you speak, or what skin color you have. I will be able to use my new and expansive definition of culture when working as a dentist to ensure that I am self-aware, open-minded, and appropriately adapting my behavior when working with patients from different backgrounds. Doing so will help me provide the best possible comfort and care.



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