Merry Christmas! Welcome, readers, to the third annual Honors Program Newsletter. As the new director of the Honors Program, it is my privilege to carry on this Christmas tradition begun by Dr. Anderson. It is our desire to share the exciting endeavors of our Honors students with you, whether you are current OBU faculty or staff, current OBU Honors Students, alumni of the Honors Program, or external friends of OBU and OBU Honors.

Contents in this year’s newsletter:
(written mostly by OBU’s own Honors students)

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As you can tell from this Table of Contents, we fit a lot into an academic year in the OBU Honors Program! While I know that very few of you will have time to read every word of the newsletter, I hope you will let some titles catch your eye, and take a few moments to read about the learning opportunities that have been helping Honors students to flourish spiritually, intellectually, and interculturally.
A particularly important development for OBU Honors is the doubling of the Honors core curriculum from 12 to 24 credit hours. Beginning in Fall 2020, each Honors class will be team-taught by three Honors professors from fields such as philosophy, literature, fine arts, history, and theology. In dynamic, discussion-based classes, students will trace the history of ideas, rooted in the Christian faith and in the Great Books Tradition. They will have the chance to engage with the works of the greatest intellectuals down through the ages—Plato, Aristotle, Homer, Virgil, Augustine, Dante, Shakespeare, Locke, Jefferson, Franklin, and Dostoyevsky, to name just a few. We conceive of the Honors experience as an ongoing conversation about how humankind can pursue the good of the intellect through contemplation of truth, beauty, justice, redemption, sanctification, and eternity. You can read more about this new curriculum in senior Jonathan Wood’s article “Expanding the Core: The New Honors Curriculum.”

In closing, I just want to say that my greatest joy as Honors director is found in observing the transformations in Honors students’ lives from freshman to senior year. Students have the chance to grow in their love for God and for one another as they take part in challenging coursework, enjoy rich conversations with peers and professors, and complete their chosen Honors capstones. Being part of the OBU Honors Program is truly of value, not just as a steppingstone towards a career, but as a season of formation. It is my prayer that each Honors student learns to pursue not only knowledge, but “the wisdom that comes from heaven” (James 3:17). Such wisdom has eternal worth, and will be of benefit not only to our graduates, but to the world in which they live, work, and serve.

—Dr. Lindsey Panxhi

**Assistant Director’s Corner: Goals for Long-Term Funding**

I find myself writing and reflecting on the last Thanksgiving Day of the 2010s. I am reminded that God has greatly blessed my family in many ways, and there is much to be thankful for on so many different levels. As we look toward 2020, I would like to share my thankfulness in three areas, and close with an appeal.

First, I am thankful for my new role in the Honors Program in combination with new Program leadership. Dr. Lindsey Panxhi was appointed the new director of OBU’s Honors Program in May 2019 and has already taken the Honors community in new and exciting directions. It is a privilege (and dare I say honor?) to serve under her capable leadership. I am grateful for the opportunity to remain heavily involved in the Honors Program in my capacity of assistant director, while handing the reins of leadership over to a young, energetic visionary leader like Dr. Panxhi.

Second, I am grateful to see the new Honors core curriculum launch in 2020, bringing with it new opportunities for our incoming Honors freshmen. The Honors Committee has been working hard for the past three academic years towards this goal: seeing the curriculum fleshed out is tremendously exciting and rewarding. I cannot wait for our new students to enter the team-taught history-of-ideas Honors curriculum!

Third, I am thankful for the advent of a new decade, which will usher in new needs and challenges. The face of Christian higher education is changing, and liberal arts universities like OBU continue to find themselves beset by a myriad of difficulties, financial and otherwise. Such challenges provide OBU’s faculty and administration with the opportunity (and need) to be creative, flexible, and adaptive.

I am excited to anticipate the ways that OBU will change and grow in the coming decade.

The impending changes and challenges also provide an opportunity for OBU’s Honors constituency: alumni, friends, parents, and supporters far and wide. And thus, my appeal.

**The Honors Program is seeking to build a three-pronged endowment.**

Our goals are to secure long-term funding for:

(a) Honors student scholarships tied to enrollment in the Honors core curriculum and/or good standing in the program;

(b) grants for students participating in Honors-sponsored faculty-led corporate Study Abroad opportunities; and

(c) an endowed ‘Honors Chair’ for the Honors director to facilitate a half-time course load release.

If you find yourself in a position where you are willing and able to consider contributing to (or entirely endowing) one or more of these Honors funding goals, I cordially invite you to contact myself (tawa.anderson@okbu.edu) or Dr. Lindsey Panxhi (honors@okbu.edu) and we can help get the ball rolling.

I hope you have a blessed Advent season, and a very Merry Christmas surrounded by family and friends. May the love of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, be with you, now and always.

God Bless OBU!

—Dr. Tawa Anderson
Expanding the Core: The New Curriculum

by Jonathan Wood, Senior, English

The core classes in the Honors Program are the most essential, formative aspect of the program. This is where the new Honors freshmen have the opportunity to get to know one another in a classroom setting, learn about what it means to be a college student, and struggle through challenging novels like Crime and Punishment. Senior Sociology major Andrew Joyce, speaking about the past Honors core, said, “My professors challenged me, encouraging my peers and I to dive deep into the texts we read and wrestle with ideas we had not yet considered.”

The core has always been focused on giving students a crash course in critical thinking, but the new curriculum represents more than a mere crash course. Exciting changes have rippled across the Honors Program at OBU, and there is a new core curriculum set to take effect in the Fall of 2020. This new core is a complete overhaul of what it means to have a distinctive Honors Program here at OBU, and represents an intensification of what is already being done in Honors Critical Skills. The new program expands the Honors core classes from 12 hours to 24, but continues to replace classes in the regular OBU core, so Honors students will not have to add extra hours of coursework in order to get their degree. The new program is set to roll out in four semesters, across freshman and sophomore years. Each semester, students will be enrolled in a combined 6-hour Honors course that will team taught by three members of our outstanding OBU faculty.

The courses begin with The Ancient World. This will be team taught by a Literature, Philosophy, and Bible professor. Tori Harrison, a senior Graphic Design major, is excited that students taking the new Honors courses will “get to experience the teachings of so many great professors that they otherwise would not get to have!”

The course replaces the Old Testament and Composition II requirements within the normal OBU core. The course is rooted around the idea, often quoted by Dr. Jonathan Callis, that “the best person to teach Plato is Plato.” The entire freshman cohort and their professors will read through nearly the entire Old Testament, various Greek philosophers, both Homeric epics, several smaller literary works, and much, much more. On some days, the class will be divided into three smaller seminar-style discussion groups, each led by one of the three professors. Allowing for dedicated discussion days within the normal flow of the course will provide students the time necessary to engage critically with difficult texts. This approach seeks to maintain the current Honors commitment to small class sizes and frequent student-professor interactions, while still giving students a fantastic framework for what constitutes the history of Western thought.

The new core class sequence begins with The Ancient World in freshman fall, and continues into the Classical World in spring, which will cover the Roman Republic and Empire, along with the rise of Christianity. Sophomores will be immersed in The Medieval & Early Modern World in the fall, and will end the core class sequence in the spring with The Modern World, which will cover the Enlightenment up through the 21st century. Jonathan Soder, a junior Philosophy major, said, “What most excited me about the new curriculum is the rigor it promises. Truly, I believe this curriculum represents the best efforts of our honors director, assistant director, and many other faculty to make the OBU Honors Program competitive with most any program around.” This is an exceptional program, and incoming freshmen can anticipate being challenged academically, socially, and spiritually to think deeper, study harder, and understand more fully. The Honors Core is dedicated to the formation of Christian intellectuals who will pursue the good, the true, and the beautiful, and lead others to do the same.

The Honors Freshman Class of 2019

By Christin Muller, Junior, Computer Science and Animation

This past fall, the Honors Program had the privilege of receiving another excellent group of freshmen. While this class is smaller than last year’s group at 28, it is undoubtedly a brilliant cohort, with a mean ACT score of 29.9 and mean SAT of 1357.

This year’s incoming class comes from all over the US, with 13 students from Oklahoma, eight from Texas, and others hailing from Massachusetts, Kansas, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Arizona, and even Turkey! The freshman Honors class is not only diverse in terms of its geographical spread, however. This year’s incoming class spans 23 different majors and seven different minors, with five students pursuing double majors or double degrees. Every college within OBU is represented, with 1 student in the Nursing College, three in Fine Arts, nine in Math and Science, 2 in Business, four in Theology and Ministry, and eight in the Humanities and Social Sciences (including students pursuing double degrees).

With such a diligent and promising Freshman class, the Honors Program is excited to see where these brilliant students will go in their studies throughout their next four years. We hope that they will continue to pursue excellence in their studies, and we have no doubt that God has wonderful things planned for them during their time in the Honors Program!
If you ever find yourself in a car at max capacity with a trunk full of overnight bags and homework, hearing words like “capstones” or “orientation”, then you might be on the way to the annual Fall Honors Retreat. Of course, the chaos is all part of the fun, as incoming honors students spend the weekend playing games, fellowshipping with their peers, and learning about what it will take to graduate with Honors.

Each year, OBU Honors freshmen travel to the Sullivant Retreat Center near Norman on Friday afternoon, along with faculty and peer mentors, to enjoy the next 24 hours becoming familiar with the expectations of the Honors Program. Students enjoy several meals together, play board games, and spend time taking a break from the busy fall semester.

Freshman Grace Fairlie made new connections with her fellow students, one of the primary benefits of the retreat. “A group of us stayed up until 4 a.m. discussing theological issues, in pure Honors student fashion, and got to know each other as well!”

Another incoming freshman, Jayden King, said this of the fun: “I thought it was a great time! I got to know a few of the Honors students that I hadn’t met yet, and I developed good friendships while being there. I loved hearing about some of the experiences from older Honors students and getting to know them better too. Two of my favorite experiences were playing board games with Dr. Anderson and doing a good Bible study with three of the Honors students there.”

The peer mentors enjoyed the getaway just as much as the incoming freshman. Sophomore Micah Hinson, a peer mentor herself, had a great weekend at this year’s retreat. “The retreat was such an awesome time of community and fellowship. I loved the chance to get to know more of my Honors peers that aren’t in my graduating class... Also, I won the Empire name game and was very proud of myself.”

Members of the Honors Program love to have a good time and enjoy great company, but that is not the main feature of the retreat. The orientation section of the retreat is a time for seasoned Honors students to share their experiences in the Honors core curriculum, study abroad trips, and other program graduation requirements.

Freshman Faythe Simons explained what she found interesting from orientation. “I benefited from hearing about the capstones. Learning about the study abroad trips was really cool and I would love the opportunity to do something like that. It really fleshed out the program.”

The information given at the orientation session, though extensive, is necessary and incredibly impactful. Many students, like Laramie Snow, a sophomore, felt inspired by what peer mentors shared. “It was a lot, but I definitely learned about [the program] and what Honors is all about: what opportunities we have through it. It was nice to hear about the study abroad trips and things I could be a part of.”
Sophomore Nicholas Stark, who has led worship at several of the retreats, left last year’s retreat with fond memories. “I had so much fun at the Honors retreat last semester! It was a fantastic opportunity to get to know the other Honors students and faculty. It certainly facilitated my intellectual and spiritual growth both individually and among my peers. That retreat definitely brought some cherished memories!”

New students, armed with the needed knowledge to be successful in the program, can now look forward to future opportunities to enjoy game nights and excursions with Honors students of all classifications to build community with one another and take well-deserved breaks from the busy semester routine. Freshmen can look forward to next fall when they, too, can serve as peer mentors, making an impact on the class of 2024.

By Christin Muller
Junior
Computer Science and Animation

The Academic Conference: a dream for many students, yet at the same time, it often seems largely out of reach. While many students aspire to present their research at a conference, oftentimes this ambition is viewed as unattainable. Many students may believe that conferences are solely the realm of doctoral students and professors. However, this is not at all the case.

In the past year, at least nine excellent Honors students at OBU presented their research and papers at conferences spanning multiple disciplines. Their experiences attest to the benefit of seeking opportunities to go beyond the classroom walls with scholarly work.

Chloe Harrison, a 2019 Honors graduate who presented at the Christianity and Literature Conference last fall, elaborated on her experience. “I read a short story titled, “Things Left Unsaid.” While I have presented academic papers in a conference setting before, reading a creative piece was a new experience for me. It felt somehow more personal. The audience and other panelists were very welcoming and gracious, however, and we had a lovely discussion about the craft of storytelling during the Q&A portion of the panel. I also enjoyed listening in on the other panels and engaging in the scholarly community.”

Andrew Joyce, a Senior in the Honors Program, presented his paper entitled “Jesus, Light of the World: Reconciling Christianity, Postmodernity, and Sociology” at the 2019 Great Ideas Conference hosted by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He shared his impression of the event. “I greatly enjoyed the conference! It was a wonderful experience to hear presentations from undergraduates from other institutions and ask them questions about what they have been learning. Presenting my own paper was nerve-wracking, but the feedback from other students sharpened me as a writer and a thinker. The keynote speaker had graduate degrees in sociology and in theology, and his presentations were highly insightful and thought-provoking. It would be wonderful to go again. Going to conferences exposes you to scholarship you might not encounter at your own university and gives you the opportunity to grow as a student as they ask questions about your paper.”

Joyce also gave some excellent advice to scholars looking for ways to get themselves more acquainted with the world of academic presentation. “If you have the opportunity to go to a conference, apply! Even if it’s not a conference in your specific discipline, there are still many benefits to going.”

Along with Harrison and Joyce, other Honors students who presented at conferences during the past year include Noah Jones, Chandler Warren, Stephanie Zackery, Hannah Durkee, Jonathan Wood, Lauren Dean, and Luke Fornea.
Living in London: A Month of Learning Abroad

By Victoria Harrison
Senior, Graphic Design

From July 16 to August 14 of this past summer, 16 students accompanied Dr. Tawa Anderson and Dr. Lindsey Panxhi on the second corporate study abroad trip to London. The trip was the experience of a lifetime.

This London group was unique in that it not only included 12 honors students but also four students not in Honors. The group in its entirety was as follows: Addison Kubicek, Barrett Pannell, Becca Matthews, Chad Jordan, Dannie Deason, Jana Satzler, Jonathan Soder, Jonathan Wood, Josiah Jones, Lily Huff, Megan Kalinowski, Nathan Hamilton, Paige Noruk, Rachael Von Dollen, Rylie Hickman, Tori Harrison, Dr. Anderson and his wife Vanessa, and Dr. Panxhi and her husband Arsid.

Each day on this trip looked different. Most often, there would be class in the morning, lunch in the hostel, and then an excursion in the afternoon. Plans did get switched up a few times, with an occasional morning excursion and afternoon class. Some of the splendid excursions included: The British Library, the British Museum, Kew Palace & Gardens, Cambridge, Hampton Court, the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, Oxford, Kensington Palace, the Victoria & Albert Museum, Tintern Abbey, Stourhead Gardens, Stonehenge, Castle Cardiff, a tour of the Globe Theater, a viewing of Wicked! the Musical, a trip to the Harry Potter Studios, a tour of Parliament, a tower-climbing tour in Salisbury Cathedral, and bell-ringing in Brecon Cathedral. It was a busy trip, to say the least.

There were two classes offered on the trip. Dr. Anderson taught the Honors Biblical Ethics course, and Dr. Panxhi taught an English topics course titled “British Authors on Location.” The students were able to have extensive discussions in class about various topics. Many of the students enjoyed sharing what they had just discussed in class over lunch in the hostel. It was almost as if everyone got to benefit from both classes! (But only one student was brave enough to actually enroll in both courses! Most students just took one of the two.)

For many students, this trip helped complete one of the three Honors capstones. Junior Rylie Hickman explains that “the trip was a fun and convenient way to not only complete one of the Honors capstones, but to spend time in a community environment and interact with a different culture.” Many students felt as though the OBU Honors study abroad experience was one-of-a-kind. Junior Becca Mathews explains that “participating in an Honors study abroad is really unique in the fact that you get an immersive Honors trip by...
completing a colloquium, meeting a 3-hour class requirement, and also getting to spend time with your Honors peers.” Other students did not even need to complete their study abroad capstone, but came anyway. Senior Jana Satzler recounts that “the incredible opportunity to go to another country with OBU professors and fellow Honors students for a month of academic, spiritual, social, and cultural enrichment was too much to pass up!”

Each person has different favorite moments from the month abroad. Senior Jonathan Wood particularly enjoyed “visiting Hampton Court Palace, because so much history happened there that was truly brought to life by visiting the place.” Senior Dannie Deason loved getting to see history come to life: “I’m a Political Science major with a History minor, so my favorite part of the trip was getting to tour Parliament and the palaces. London was like stepping into a walking and breathing history book and getting to see these places of power that have shaped the trajectory of Western and European Civilization.” On the other hand, Jana treasured a moment towards the end of the trip the most: “I really enjoyed getting to admire the beauty of God’s creation with friends hiking in Wales. The climb was tough, but the view was well worth it.”

Other highlights of the trip were found in the relationships made within the group. Junior Rachael Von Dollen was particularly fond of the group dynamic: “I’m horribly introverted, so it’s very difficult for me to engage with other people, and most of the time I end up somewhere in the background as an observer. I didn’t have that problem so much in London, though; everybody made an effort to talk to me and to include me, which I appreciated very much.” Jana added: “It amazes me how much knowledge and wisdom my peers have, and getting to develop friendships with them as we learned together was a treat.” The group was kind to one another, inclusive, and extremely flexible. On one day in particular, they encountered unexpected closures of Tube lines, rushed through alternate paths in the Underground, and made it to the port of a Thames River Cruise just in time to see their boat leave them behind. The response was all laughter and eagerness to explore the area around the port. It is a memory that many students will carry with them. (And thankfully, they were able to re-book the river cruise for another day!)

The Honors Study Abroad experience is meant to help students engage an increasingly diverse world. This trip accomplished this goal in many ways. Rachael states, “The culture in London was much more of a melting pot than I expected, which was a pleasant surprise.” Becca was encouraged by her experiences in other churches: “Getting to worship with other people, even if they live on a different side of the globe, was so unique. It reminded me that we really are all made in the image of God and we are all individually called to Him and loved by Him.” Junior Jonathan Soder learned to think of himself as part of a larger community of humans throughout history, as he “was introduced to the community of the deceased by entering into the spaces they occupied and built and experiencing the vitality of their remaining influence.” Senior Barrett Pannell was glad to learn “that people are people no matter where you go, and God is still good no matter what continent you are on. That was very comforting, because even in a strange place I still knew God was there, and it didn’t seem so different from home.”

A month was a long time to be halfway across the world, but many students still miss parts of their London experience. Rylie explains, “I really miss the times we spent touring the sites and simply walking around London. Even if we were just walking to make our way to another site, it was never boring since it was such a novelty to be in a different country.” Dannie reminisces on small meaningful moments: “I miss laughing in the common room, walking down the streets of London with Lily and Paige on our way to get gelato, and I miss going to church together as a group on Sunday mornings.” Senior Jonathan Wood simply states, “I miss the camaraderie the most.”

It is safe to say that this study abroad trip went above and beyond all the students’ expectations. There is another corporate study abroad trip taking place summer 2020 to China. Students should seriously consider going, as it will definitely challenge, grow, and shape them, while also giving them friendships to last a lifetime.
Among the Honors capstones, the thesis is perhaps the most simultaneously daunting and rewarding. This 18-month process typically begins during the spring semester of junior year and is not completed until the end of spring senior year. Honors students begin by choosing a broad topic to explore for the duration of a Contracted Study during spring of junior year. At the end of the Contracted Study, the student submits a thesis proposal, and, if approved, begins the official process of writing a thesis. Senior year consists of reading, writing, revising, and likely reading some more in an effort to strengthen and specify thesis arguments as thoroughly as possible. Come April, Honors seniors begin thesis presentations. Each student presents the finished thesis project to a group of interested professors and peers in a forum held on campus. Once the thesis is presented and approved, students are given a printed and bound copy of their work.

During the spring of 2019, eight students in the OBU Honors Program presented senior theses as capstones, while two additional OBU students wrote senior theses to graduate with Honors in their discipline.

**PAYTON CLARK**, a Communication Studies major, wrote a thesis analyzing nonprofit mission statements entitled “Communicating Acts of Humanity: An analysis of testimony used in nonprofits.” In her study, Clark concludes that most organizations have pragmatic outlooks at base, not altruistic or moral motivations. In addition, she finds that celebrity testimony is no more credible than the testimony of others. The project was supervised by Dr. Vickie Ellis, professor and chair of communication arts.

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**JOHN “J. D.” ELLIS** wrote his thesis, entitled “What has Darwin to do with Design? The Compatibility of Evolution with the Christian Worldview.” J. D., a Philosophy major, was interested in the historical conflict between pro- and anti-evolution proponents in the Christian Church. He came to the conclusion that most aspects of the modern evolutionary perspective are compatible with most versions of contemporary Christianity. His work was highly praised by his external reader, Dr. Megan Loumagne of Oxford University, as a significant accomplishment in undergraduate research and scholarship. His thesis was supervised by Dr. Tawa Anderson, associate professor of philosophy.

**LAUREN DEAN**, an English major, wrote a thesis entitled “Illness and Wholeness: Spenserian Love in the Legend of Britomart.” In an effort to explore the physical effects of love in Spenser’s The Faerie Queene, Dean examines three characters and their relationship to romantic love. Dean draws connections between the language of “senses and humoral fluids,” helping to explain and clarify the relationship between the physical and the emotional and spiritual effects of love on a person. The project was supervised by Dr. Jonathan Callis, assistant professor of English.

**HANNAH DURKEE**, a Secondary Mathematics Education major, wrote a thesis over mathematics education in Oklahoma schools. Her research included a literature review that followed the historical development of mathematics education from a societal necessity in ancient cultures to a way to build critical thinking skills in more modern times, as well as providing a history of mathematics standards in Oklahoma. Her thesis, titled “‘When Will I Ever Use This?’ The Purposes and Standards for Mathematics Education in Oklahoma Schools,” was supervised by Dr. Sarah Marsh, associate professor of mathematics.

**KELSI GULESERIAN**, a Math major, wrote a thesis in the mathematical field of knot theory. Specifically, she proposed and
His close examination, however, showed that such attempts fail to adequately explain the materiality, temporality, and knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth. The project was supervised by Dr. Randy Ridenour, professor of philosophy.

**Jonathan Knox**, a Biblical Languages major wrote a thesis entitled “Causal Hamartiology and Pastoral Ministry.” Jonathan discussed the impact the nature of sin has on pastoral ministry. Jonathan observed that churches often focus on the gift of grace and the power of forgiveness with little reflection on the nature of sin. Jonathan studied the lexicon of sin in Scripture in order to understand the Greek and Hebrew words used to refer to sin. He concluded that outward sins are caused by inward sins, which are caused by the ultimate sin of idolatry. Armed with this understanding, pastoral teaching, preaching, and counseling should seek to deal with the underlying sin problem of idolatry, rather than urging people to try harder to avoid the outward sins that spring from idolatry. The project was supervised by Dr. Bobby J. Kelly, Ruth Dickinson professor of religion.

**Matthew Shively**, a Biblical Languages major, comes at the theological debate on election asking the question of “why election?” rather than “what is election?” Shively examines the relevant texts in Romans 9-11 and Ephesians 1, coming to the conclusion that neither presents election as a central doctrine. Shively concludes with a practical explication of living a life of humble worship with the knowledge of God’s election. The project, titled “Why Election?: The Purpose of Election in Paul’s Epistles,” was supervised by Dr. Alan Bandy, Rowena R. Strickland associate professor of New Testament.

**Chandler Warren**, a double-major in Bible and Philosophy, wrote a thesis in the field of analytic theology (a form of systematic theology which adopts the tools and methods of analytic philosophy). He explored how God might relate to a traditional doctrine of hell given a classical Christian understanding of divine attributes. His thesis was titled, “The God of Hell: On the Relation between the Divine and the Damned.” The project was supervised by Dr. Matthew Emerson, Dickinson Chair and associate professor of religion.
By Andrew Joyce
Senior, Sociology and Spanish

In the service practicum capstone, Honors students are given the opportunity to take their learning outside the classroom and spend a significant amount of time serving those in need. The service practicum is an opportunity to fulfill the mission of the OBU Honors Program to inspire global engagement and to mature servant leadership. Through engaging with those in need, Honors students are given the opportunity to do justice, see service in a larger, more meaningful and personal perspective, and to understand the complex problems surrounding those in need.

Senior biology major Abi McPheeters spent the month of January this year serving refugees in Uganda. Her service practicum gave her the unique opportunities to listen to people tell their stories, sing and play with kids in a children’s home, teach women to make soap, and create signs for a coffee shop that served as a ministry hub in its local area. She describes how she and her team engaged in service: “We met people where they were, in all situations, and worked to bring dignity to their lives.”

During her time in Uganda, Abi learned that “listening is a service to those still processing trauma.” She adds that she learned “to have joy in every circumstance and to love people in all circumstances.” Despite the war and violence the refugees she worked with have suffered, she helped to equip them with tools to try and give them back the things they had lost – to restore dignity to their lives.

Junior pastoral ministry major Zach Evans completed his service practicum at an organization called Gospel Rescue Mission in Muskogee, Oklahoma. This service organization exists to aid the homeless and poor by providing food, financial assistance, and resources to help find them a job. His work largely consisted of working the front desk, greeting those in need, and assisting clients with computer skills and building resumes.

During his time at Gospel Rescue Mission, Zach was stretched in ways he had not yet been. He was reminded that those in need are “no less human than I am.” Furthermore, he was reminded that “the Gospel has implications that extend beyond someone making one profession.” While Zach and the Gospel Rescue Mission would agree that faith in Christ is essential, the Gospel encourages us to help those in need with physical assistance as well. Zach feels “blessed to be able to play a very small role in the life-changing work of the GRM.”

While these students completed their service practicums in incredibly different contexts, both know that their service played a small but impactful role in helping those in need. The service practicum is an opportunity to express Christ’s love to those who desperately need it, and in turn to learn more about God and His redemptive work in all creation.
Colloquial Thoughts: Bison Honors Dialogues

By Julianne Ford
Junior, Secondary English Education

Colloquia are a highlight of many students’ experiences in the Honors Program at OBU. Colloquia are short courses focused on a specific area of a professor’s interest. They give professors and Honors students an opportunity to perform an in-depth exploration of a topic together. Throughout their time in the Honors Program, Honors students are required to take four colloquia, and at least two of the four courses must be outside of their majors. Honors colloquia are offered exclusively to Honors students, may be taken for one or zero credit hours, and are graded on a pass-fail scale. This allows Honors students to learn alongside their Honors peers of other years and majors in an enjoyable, low-stress setting. The small class sizes and discussion-based lessons also allow students to build personal relationships with other Honors students and OBU professors that they may not otherwise have been able to do during a normal course.

Junior Honors student Jonathan Soder says that his favorite colloquium has been “The Myth of the American West” with Dr. Carol Humphrey. This colloquium explored the idea that the American West is the United States’ own form of mythology, and this legend likewise contains fantastical elements that are not grounded in fact. The course was offered during J-Term of Jonathan’s freshman year. “We addressed the ‘West’ as the American mythos, similar to the pantheon of gods in the works of Homer for the ancient Greeks. I love big ideas, and this is certainly a big one that I missed growing up.”

Senior Graphic Design Major Tori Harrison’s favorite colloquium has been “Plagues, Pandemics, and Bio-warfare,” taught by Dr. Brad Jett. “I don’t get to do much science in my major, so it was super fun and interesting to gain an understanding for basic microbiology. My best friend took the class with me and we got to present on an outbreak of Cholera in 1854 London. Then, on the Honors London Study Abroad trip, we got to visit a famous site that had to do with tracking the virus! It doesn’t get much cooler than that.”

Senior Jonathan Wood most enjoyed “Music & Philosophy,” taught by Dr. Tawa Anderson and Dr. Chris Matthews. “I enjoyed it because it was an opportunity to sit around, look at art, listen to music, and discuss what made those things beautiful or not beautiful. We definitely asked big questions and were forced to think about things that we often take for granted.” Jonathan also appreciates the structure of colloquia because they allow for discussion and mutual growth for both professors and students. “Taking a colloquium is different from taking a regular course because it allows for discussion-based learning on topics that are outside the purview of normal coursework. It enables faculty to teach on topics that they themselves have a passion for investigating further, and bring students along on a magic journey of learning.”

Dr. Daniel Spillman, associate professor of history, can attest to the growth that both professors and students experience over the course of a colloquium. “I relished the weekly discussions, and I often found that students offered original observations that actually enriched the readings for me, too.” Dr. Spillman taught his first colloquium, “The Roaring Twenties: America in the 1920s,” in the Spring of 2019. He enjoyed researching a “fascinating era” and creating an immersive experience of that era for his students. “I had a blast searching for popular magazines from the 1920s such as Ladies Home Journal; I bought a few on eBay so that I could pass them around in class. My wife even got involved by making a popular 1920s recipe for pineapple upside-down cake for the class!” Dr. Spillman hopes to teach more colloquia in the future. “I loved teaching the Honors Colloquium! I would teach another class again in a heartbeat!”

Colloquia that were offered in 2019

“From Dinos to Dodos” with Dr. Dale Utt
“Politics, Presidents, and Power” with Dr. Carol Humphrey
“Spiritual Disciplines” with Dr. Tawa Anderson & Dr. Chris Matthews
“Harry Potter in London” with Dr. Lindsey Panxhi & Dr. Tawa Anderson
“Magical Realism Around the World” with Dr. Jessica Rohr
“The Name of the Rose” with Dr. Randy Ridenour
“Veggie Tales: Theological Animation” with Dr. Alan Bandy & Professor Ben Baxter
“The Best of All Possible Worlds: Utopian and Dystopian Literature” with Dr. Lindsey Panxhi
“The Roaring Twenties: America in the 1920s” with Dr. Daniel Spillman
“Music & Philosophy” with Dr. Tawa Anderson & Dr. Chris Matthews
“Film & The Transcendent” with Dr. Jonathan Callis
“Worship & Ethnodoxology” with Dr. Lee Hinson
Commencement is a time to celebrate completions and new beginnings. With mixed emotions, the OBU Honors Program bids farewell to students who have completed their Honors requirements and their OBU degrees. Those new graduates then embark upon new adventures in academic, family, and/or vocational spheres of life.

By Dr. Tawa Anderson
Assistant Director of the Honors Program

On May 17, 2019, the Honors Graduation Banquet recognized 14 grads – eleven graduating “With College Honors,” and three more graduating “With Honors” in their respective disciplines. After graduates, family, friends, and faculty shared a sumptuous lunch together, Dr. Lindsey Panxhi, assistant professor of English and recently appointed director of the Honors Program, sharing an edifying message compiled from graduates’ own recollections of their experiences in Honors. Graduating seniors were then recognized and hooded:

Rachel Birchfield, Natural Science, With College Honors. Rachel is now working as a phlebotomy technician and applying to Physician Assistant’s School.

Payton Clark, With Honors in Communication Studies. Payton is serving as a graduate assistant while pursuing her Masters of Arts in Communication Studies at the University of North Texas.

Lauren Dean, English, With College Honors. Lauren is working at a swimming pool and Trader Joe’s at home in Massachusetts while applying to Masters programs in English Literature.

John Dylan Ellis, With Honors in Philosophy. John is now working with Church Insurance Specialists and enjoying life as a husband and new father.

Allison Foster, Biology, With College Honors. Allison is attending Long School of Medicine in San Antonio, Texas.

Kelsi Guleserian, With Honors in Mathematics. Kelsi is now pursuing a graduate degree in Math at the University of Oklahoma.

Chloe Harrison, English, With College Honors. Chloe is attending the University of Roehampton in London, England, working on her Master’s degree in Publishing.
Casey House, Biochemistry, With College Honors. Casey is attending the University of Oklahoma’s School of Medicine in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Noah Jones, Philosophy, With College Honors. Noah is pursuing a Ph.D. in Philosophy at the University of Oklahoma.

Megan Kirkendall, Multilingual Communications, With College Honors. Megan hopes to obtain her CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and begin serving as a TESOL instructor.

Jonathan Knox, Biblical Languages, With College Honors. Jonathan is enjoying life as a new husband, serving as Student Minister at Fairview Baptist Church, and taking online classes through Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Matthew Shively, Biblical Languages, With College Honors. Matt is serving as a pastoral intern at First Baptist Church of Sudbury, Massachusetts, while pursuing his Master of Divinity through Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Chandler Warren, Philosophy and Bible (double major), With College Honors. Chandler is living in Scotland, pursuing his Master of Letters degree at the University of St. Andrews.

Stephanie Zackery, Psychology: Pre-Counseling, With College Honors. Stephanie is at Oklahoma State University obtaining her Masters in Counseling, with the goal of eventually pursuing a Doctorate in Counseling Psychology.

In addition to recognizing our graduates, four Honors students received individual scholarships and awards. Two Deaton Memorial Scholarships are awarded to a rising junior and rising senior who are among the top three GPAs in their respective classes. This year’s recipients were Jonathan Soder, a rising junior from Hale Center, Texas majoring in Philosophy with a double minor in English and Biblical Studies; and Jonathan Wood, a rising senior from Bentonville, Arkansas majoring in English with a Biblical Studies minor.

The Michael E. Travers Memorial Honors Scholarship was established in honor of Dr. Travers, who passed away in March 2017 after a lengthy battle with prostate cancer. The Travers Memorial Honors Scholarship is awarded to a rising senior in the Honors Program who exemplifies the qualities that marked Dr. Travers’ 40-year career in Christian higher education:

(a) deep appreciation for and love of the world of ideas and literature,
(b) academic excellence,
(c) vibrant personal commitment to evangelical Christian faith, and
(d) thorough integration of Christian faith with academic endeavors.

This year’s recipient of the Travers Scholarship was Victoria “Tori” Harrison, a Graphic Design major from Piedmont, Oklahoma.

The Thomas E. Dowdy Memorial Thesis Award was established in honor of Dr. Dowdy, professor of sociology at OBU from 1987 until his death in 2006. The monetary prize award, established by his wife, Mrs. Beverly Dowdy, honors the memory of Dr. Dowdy and his deep commitment to outstanding student scholarship at Oklahoma Baptist University. The 2019 recipient of the Dowdy Memorial Thesis Award was Kelsi Guleserian, a Mathematics major from McKinney, Texas, whose thesis was written under the supervision of Dr. Cherith Tucker, assistant professor of mathematics. Kelsi’s thesis was entitled “Links in Higher Dimensional Spheres,” and resulted in the discovery of new mathematical principles which have since been presented at multiple regional conferences.

Between the accomplishments of our graduating seniors, and the recognition of outstanding rising juniors and seniors, the graduation banquet is a time to celebrate the excellence of OBU’s Honors students.
It has been nearly two decades since I graduated from OBU, and my life since then can roughly be divided into three phases: what my husband and I refer to as “the naïve years”, “the insane years”, and “real life”.

After graduating from OBU in 2001, I began a 10-year journey to earn a combined MD-PhD degree at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. I married my husband Kevin in 2003, and then after he completed his undergraduate degree in electrical engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, he joined me at Mayo Graduate School to earn a Ph.D. in Biochemistry. Our three children were also born during this period: Dixie (2006), Ezekiel (2008), and Lily (2011). Besides active ministry in our local church (Sunday school, Children’s Ministry), I served on several committees in medical school and graduate school, taught classes at the local community college, assisted in graduate school classes, presented my research at national and international meetings, played in soccer and softball leagues, volunteered as a coach for Upward Basketball, and took my children to various toddler classes and recreational activities. My husband and I refer to these years as “the naïve years” because we were young, full of energy, and had the time to pursue everything that we felt was important. We were ready to tackle the world and solve all of its problems.

In contrast, the next six years were difficult. I had matched into the Pathology Residency training program at Mayo Clinic, so we were fortunate to not have to move, but we had no clue what we were getting ourselves into. Our youngest was three months old when I started residency, and for the record I do NOT recommend starting residency with an infant. 80-hour workweeks were the norm when including all of the required clinical and academic work. At first we tried to keep up with all of our outside activities such as coaching our kids’ soccer and basketball teams and continuing to serve at church, but for the sake of our marriage and family we had to learn to cut back. Life became just a series of complex juggling acts with pick-ups, drop offs, meals, morning and bedtime routines, and work. My husband and I refer to this period as “the insane years” because quite literally they were insane. Looking back, we know that if it weren’t for the grace of God, we never would have survived.

In 2017, all of the sacrifices of the previous six years paid off. We moved our family across the country to North Carolina where...
I had been hired into my dream job as a Pathologist at Duke University Hospital and Assistant Professor of Pathology at Duke University School of Medicine. I teach residents, fellows, and medical students, and I am starting a new Molecular Genetic Pathology fellowship program at Duke. My own research primarily centers around biomarker discovery in leukemias and lymphomas, understanding the immunologic milieu in cancer, and understanding the clinical limitations of highly sensitive molecular tests. Our children were entering the first, fourth, and sixth grades when we moved, and they have adjusted to our new life beautifully, making friends, playing sports, and doing well in school. We call our current phase “real life” because we feel this is a happy medium between naïve overscheduling and insane overworking. Our greatest challenge at this point is to understand God’s will for our lives and to not simply cave to society’s expectations of us and our children.

As I look back over the past nearly two decades, I continue to be grateful for my time at OBU and the opportunities I had in the Honors Program. The most straightforward link to my current profession is of course my Honors thesis project, which was based on research I performed at Mayo Clinic the summer before my senior year. That experience led to the letter of recommendation from my summer research mentor which landed me a spot in Mayo’s MD-PhD program. Another benefit of my OBU education was the extensive Western Civilization curriculum tying together philosophy, history, literature, and the arts. As I get older I appreciate more and more how this curriculum taught me to think critically, analyze and understand the origin of ideas, and appreciate things from others’ perspectives. I feel that this skill set is especially important in today’s political climate and in the area in which I now live.

Most importantly, I learned from my mentors in the Honors program and the Science department at OBU that being intellectual and being a person of faith are not mutually exclusive. Faith, religion, and family values are often attacked in academic and scientific environments, and the strong foundational values instilled in me at OBU have helped me stay true to those values despite our trials. Our children are approaching the age that we will start thinking about colleges in a few years. I look forward to visiting OBU with them and walking together on Bison Hill where my journey began.
If you are an OBU honors alumnus and would like to update the OBU honors community as to your life events since graduation, please email details to the honors director, lindsey.panxhi@okbu.edu.