



# EKU Honors Annual Report 2020-2021

***EKU***

# Honors in a Pandemic Year

In the 2020-2021 academic year, COVID-19 presented unprecedented challenges to higher education worldwide. ECU Honors students and faculty responded to these challenges with innovation, compassion, and dedication, creating opportunities and achieving in remarkable ways. As a result, this year's annual report serves as a testament to the resilience of the ECU Honors community in exemplifying—even amid the multiple crises of the past year—the core values embodied in our program motto: Dream, Persist, Serve.



# Non-Traditional Honors Student Named Goldwater Scholar

In March 2021, Andrew Elliott, a junior chemistry major, was named ECU's fifth-ever winner of the Barry Goldwater Scholarship. The Goldwater Scholarship is the most prestigious nationally competitive undergraduate scholarship program in the United States for students seeking careers in the natural sciences, math, and engineering.

A father, martial arts enthusiast, and pastry chef who returned to college after many years developing a family-operated small bakery business, Drew plans to obtain a MD/Ph.D. and a career as a research oncologist. Learn more about Drew and his plans at [stories.ecu.edu/people/non-traditional-student-elliott-wins-goldwater-scholarship](https://stories.ecu.edu/people/non-traditional-student-elliott-wins-goldwater-scholarship).



# A Virtual Honors Study Abroad: Voyages in the Francophone Atlantic

Because of the pandemic, all EKU-sponsored study abroad programs, as well as our distinctive Sidewalk U. program, were cancelled from Summer 2020 through Summer 2021. In response, honors program associate director Dr. Randi Polk developed an innovative winter term virtual study abroad experience. Titled "Voyages in the Francophone Atlantic," the course took 15 students on a virtual cruise with ports-of-call in French Guinea, Senegal, France, Quebec, and Haiti. Student voyagers had the opportunity to interact live with guests in some of these locales, and the class collaborated on a service project to send school supplies to students in Conakry, Guinea. Three of the students turned their virtual cruise experience into a presentation that they shared at the Spring 2021 annual conferences of the Kentucky Honors Roundtable and Southern Regional Honors Council.



# Honors Students Again Take Top ECU Undergraduate Research Awards

ECU Honors seniors Mary Boujaoude and Skylar Carter took first and second place respectively in this year's annual ECU Library Research Award for Undergraduates competition.

Mary, a sociology major, took first place for her remarkable creative honors thesis project titled, "Relentless: The Social Identity of Chronic Illness and Disability." Mary was also named the 2021 winner of the Dean's Award of Merit as this year's top graduate in ECU's College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences.

A social work and Spanish double major, Skylar took second place with her probing capstone project for her Spanish major titled, "Disparities in Services for Latino Children in Kentucky's Child Welfare System."

The success of Mary and Skylar represents a continuation of what has become a strong tradition of ECU Honors Program students winning the overwhelming majority of these annual awards that recognize the very best undergraduate research projects produced on our campus each year.



Mary Boujaoude



Skylar Carter

# Honors and the Arts in the Pandemic Year

Professors Julie Hensley and Bernardo Scarambone planned their brand new HON 402 interdisciplinary arts seminar, "The Creative Imagination: Death and Life," long before the arrival of the COVID, not knowing that by the time they taught it for the first time in Fall 2020 that the material would be more relevant and urgent than they had dreamed possible. The works produced by their 15 students in the course spanned the spectrum from dance to drama, painting, poetry, and music. Together, their final projects stand as a remarkable and profound artifact of the human experience of the pandemic.



"Seven Years," by Ciara Ochoa and Hadley Farris (dance)



"What We Should Have Learned from 1918" by Lizzy Barnes (painting/multimedia)

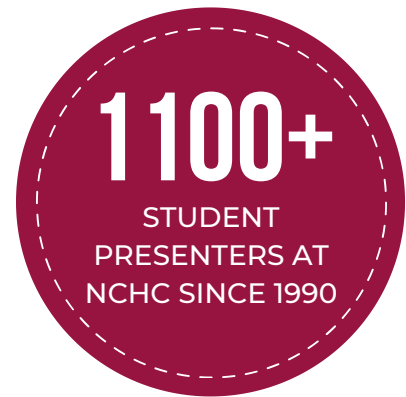
Likewise, in Spring 2021 Dr. Martin Brock of the ECU chemistry department partnered with ECU Honors Executive Director Dr. David Coleman (a historian) to offer an interdisciplinary seminar titled, "Pandemics and People." Alongside biological, historical, social, and political contexts of the current pandemic, students also completed creative projects in areas such as mock grant proposals, poetry, personal memoirs, and the visual arts.

# Nicholas Koenig: NCHC National Honors Student of the Year and ECU's First Rhodes Scholar Finalist



EKU senior biology major Nicholas Koenig graduated in Spring 2021 as one of the most accomplished and awarded students in ECU Honors Program history. Already the winner of a Goldwater Scholarship in 2019 and a DAAD German government science research fellowship in 2020, Nick added two major nationally competitive accolades in 2020-2021. First, in October he became the first-ever ECU student to reach the finalist stage of the Rhodes Scholar competition. A few weeks later, he was honored by the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) as National Honors Student of the Year. Amid his intensive studies and multiple application processes, he continued to serve our campus community tirelessly—this year as Student Government Association Vice President. He closed the year as recipient of the Dean's Award of Merit as this year's top graduate from the ECU College of Science and student speaker at graduation. Nick will begin graduate work at Cambridge University in England in Fall 2021. He aims for a Ph.D. and a career as a research botanist and college professor.

## By The Numbers



**17%**  
OF EKU HONORS PROGRAM STUDENTS  
ARE FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

**130%**  
INCREASE IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND  
HISPANIC STUDENTS OVER THE PAST 7 YEARS

**\$2.1 MILLION+**  
EKU HONORS ENDOWMENT FUNDS AVAILABLE TO  
SUPPORT STUDENT TRAVEL AND RESEARCH



# Dog Walks with the Director

With none of our traditional monthly honors pizza suppers, no Sidewalk U., and no conference travel this year, ECU Honors faculty and administrators found innovative ways to connect with students and build community. For his part, ECU Honors Executive Director Dr. David Coleman invited students (one each day) to join him for his regular 5:00 pm dog walk at the ECU Woodchip Trail. This provided an outdoor and socially distanced opportunity for Dr. Coleman to get to know many of the students in more personal ways and to provide insight and advice on matters ranging from study abroad opportunities to internships to nationally competitive awards for which the student might consider applying. It also provided him with critical insight and feedback concerning the challenges that students were facing in this especially difficult year. Dr. Coleman enjoyed this process so much that he plans to continue to invite students for these daily walks even after the pandemic has passed.



# In Memoriam: Dr. Bruce Robert MacLaren (1943-2021)

This spring, ECU Honors alumni and faculty mourned the passing of our dear friend, professor, mentor, and colleague Dr. Bruce MacLaren. Dr. MacLaren was a beloved teacher and leader in the ECU Honors Program throughout its first quarter century. Our alumni remember his brilliance, insight, and humor as a teacher in our Honors Civilization sequence, as well as several honors interdisciplinary seminars following our 2012 curriculum redesign. In 2000, he founded the ECU Chautauqua Lecture Series, serving as its director for ten years. Above all, students and faculty alike remember him as a transformative and caring influence on their lives individually and on our ECU Honors community as a whole.



# Building Opportunity

## Give to EKU Honors

You can directly support EKU Honors students by giving to the Bonnie Gray Society Endowment. Established by alumni at the time of founding director Dr. Bonnie Gray's retirement in 2008, this endowment provides a permanent source of financial assistance for students who attend the innovative Sidewalk U. study away programs each year. Sidewalk U. takes students on learning adventures to locales across America and even into Canada and Mexico. Lives are changed and horizons broadened by these cultural odysseys, and the Bonnie Gray Society Endowment helps make them possible each year.

- ▶ Visit [www.alumni.eku.edu](http://www.alumni.eku.edu) to give to the Bonnie Gray Society Endowment.
- ▶ Click "Make a Gift," choose to "view all giving opportunities," and search for "honors" to easily find the endowment.





## EKU HONORS PROGRAM

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