



THE ROUND TABLE

THE HONORS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

UNG
UNIVERSITY of
NORTH GEORGIA™
HONORS PROGRAM



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Celebrating 30 Years of the Honors Program at UNG

The University of North Georgia Honors Program recently celebrated a major milestone with its 30th Anniversary Event. The event brought together current Honors Program students, faculty, and alumni for an evening of celebration. Alumni traveled from near and far to reconnect with classmates and faculty, reflect on the lasting impact the Honors Program has had on their lives, and share insight with current undergraduate students, creating an opportunity for generations of Honors scholars to come together as one community.

Throughout the evening, guests shared stories reminiscing about their time in the Honors Program and enjoyed a good old-fashioned round of Honors Trivia that sparked laughter and friendly competition. The event highlighted the close-knit and supportive environment that has defined the Honors Program for the past three decades, reminding alumni and current students alike of the program's commitment to learning, leading, and serving through an enriching academic community.

In addition to celebrating the program's history and achievements, guests participated in a silent auction, raising over \$600.00 in support of the Honors Program. After thirty years, the Honors Program continues to provide an environment where students and alumni are encouraged to grow, connect, and thrive.

Learn, Lead, and Serve Through an Enriching and Innovative Academic Community



“I thought the 30th anniversary event was a great success, and I appreciate everyone's help making it so. It was a warm occasion that felt like a reunion and celebration of the program's first thirty years! I'm looking forward to the Honors Program's future; there's a lot of great opportunity ahead.”

*Amy Burger, Honors Advisory
Council Chair*

Celebrating 30 Years of the Honors Program at UNG



Women of UNG

2026 UNG Female Leader Awardees

Each year, the University of North Georgia honors female students and alumnae at the Women's Leadership Recognition Luncheon. Two outstanding Honors Program students were honored this year - Brecklen Pavlich and Emilyn Slemons.

Brecklen, a Business Management major on the Gainesville campus, has taken advantage of research opportunities at UNG. She has presented research at several conferences, including the Annual Research Conference (ARC) and the Southern Regional Honors Council (SRHC). She participated in the UNG study abroad program in London, engaging with global firms including Deloitte and Lloyd's of London.

This spring, she successfully defended her Senior Honors Thesis, "Practicing the Art of Perspectives: The Power to Understand and Resolve Conflict." Outside of academics, Brecklen served as the President of Enactus, focusing on projects aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and even hosting UNG President Mike Shannon at the club meeting.



Emilyn, a History major on the Dahlonega campus, has presented research at conferences, including the Georgia Collegiate Honors Conference (GCHC), and she was one of four UNG students who presented research at the Capitol. Earlier in Emilyn's academic career, she was named a Fulbright UKSI scholar, and was funded to attend a program in Aberystwyth in 2024.

Emilyn's passion for leadership goes beyond her academic ventures. She is currently serving on the Lumpkin County Chamber Board, and still diligently works on Women, Together Period, Inc., a non profit organization she founded in 2021.

Expanding Horizons: Academic Adventures Abroad

With excerpts from article by Clark Leonard

UNG rising senior, Emma Wilson, was selected for The Fulbright Canada-Mitacs Globalink Research Internship, a prestigious program that provides U.S. students the opportunity to go to Canada to conduct advanced research projects for 10-12 weeks (between May and August) in their field of study.



Wilson, a nursing major from Peachtree City, Georgia, worked on a project at the University of Regina that developed visual educational resources on breastfeeding among refugee populations.



"I'm kind of a science nerd, and I really like caring for people. I want to have first-hand experience," Wilson said. "This opportunity has paved the way for me to travel and network and see a different aspect of nursing."

Emma is involved on campus in a variety of ways. She is a member of the Honors Program and has also served in Student Government Association (SGA). Mallory Rodriguez, director of student life and leadership, said Wilson is willing to take initiative.

"Emma is not afraid to jump in and take ownership of projects and discussions. I love that she's always ready to share an opinion and contribute to decision-making and discussions and advocacy work our students are doing through SGA. This mentality really helps her stand out among her peers," Rodriguez said. "She's not afraid to challenge a process or ask a hard question."

Crossing the Finish Line with Honors

FEATURING: ARWEN MCPHERSON

We caught up with Arwen McPherson to learn more about her experience with the Honors Program, finishing her Capstone, and her motivation through it all.

What motivated you to join the Honors Program?

Truthfully, I joined the Honors Program because it was familiar to me. I had come up through grade school in advanced classes, so the idea of not being in the Honors Program seemed wrong to me. Some of why I joined was external pressure to excel, but I was also hoping to meet more people like me who were academically dedicated and felt driven to exceed expectations. Whether or not I knew it at the time, Honors students are leaders, and I was looking for a place to find other leaders who understand.

How has participating in the Honors Program influenced your college experience?

In some ways, the Honors Program over-prepared me for classes! That may sound silly, but it was very helpful albeit challenging in the moment. I approached the Honors criteria by upgrading courses with the course contracts, so I primarily worked with additional projects on top of my coursework. Some things I did included writing analysis papers, painting pictures, and making presentations. The funny thing was that many of the projects I did for the Honors Program were done in prerequisite courses where the next semester I would have to do a similar project for the class itself!

Essentially, I was learning how to do advanced coursework a semester or two in advance. The content I learned from analysis papers enhanced by learning experience in future classes because I had deeper knowledge to recall upon. All in all, I think being part of the Honors Program has given me a greater trove of knowledge and helped me really make the most of my college education.



Crossing the Finish Line with Honors

FEATURING: ARWEN MCPHERSON

How did you come up with your capstone, and what was it like doing the project?

Initially, I had no clue what to do for my capstone. My major is in interdisciplinary studies, so the project concept could come from practically anywhere and not be confined to a single subject. Freedom is nice but also causes decision paralysis! I started by having a meeting with Dr. Quarles and Dr. Lin over the Summer to brainstorm ideas.

Originally, the plan we came up with was for me to redesign the Honors part of the UNG website, but that turned out to be too difficult because of needing to work with the UNG technology team. I think it was then that Dr. Q reached out and offered a similar opportunity to design the official website for Georgia Collegiate Honors Council (GCHC). GCHC had been using a page of the Honors website of whichever university was hosting the Georgia Collegiate Honors Conference that year, so an official website was truly needed. It was a difficult project, but it also combined the two concentrations of my major – fine arts and business – in a tangible way that also gave back to the Honors program.

I was the lead of every step of the process beginning with a wireframe made with paper and highlighters to coding a functional tab system on the website itself. The incredible part to me is that this website is up on the internet to be used by anyone and isn't just a school assignment to be graded. There's something empowering about knowing that you can create something to be used to help others.

How does your capstone relate to your future aspirations or areas of academic interest?

The interesting part of my major is that it's a hybrid of different usual majors, but the fun of it is that I have built a complex skill set comprised of many different subjects. For example, I have taken both UX/UI and digital marketing classes from the art and business departments that would not typically overlap but complement each other well. This combination well equipped me to work on the capstone because I was aware of artistic visual hierarchies as well as business law regarding websites and accessibility. I aim to go into a field related to digital marketing and/or web design, and the experience I have gained from this capstone project will help propel me in any of those directions!



Honors In Action: Research & Leadership

FEATURING DAGEN SHEHORN

Rising junior Dagen Shehorn excels in her own research and in her work on the Cyberhawks team, which added a first place finish in in the Department of War Chief Information Officers Cyber Workforce Competition to its accolades this year.

Q: What is your major, and what are you currently hoping to do with it?

A: I am a cybersecurity major, but I am also minoring in neuroscience and criminal justice! I plan to work in the defense industry, but one day I hope to work on cybersecurity implementations for brain computer interfaces (BCIs) when that infrastructure is more readily available in the next decade and a half!

Q: Tell us a bit about your GCHC experience and the research you completed for those presentations.

A: I've gotten to present at GCHC twice! My freshman year, I won second place for my research on vulnerabilities in modern day cars via electronic control units (ECUs). I spent a semester doing a deep dive on vulnerabilities affecting modern day cars, as they have an interesting and extensive attack surface!

My sophomore year I won first place presenting the beginning of my research for my thesis defense-- my true passion project! I presented research on the neuro ethics and cyber ethics of using brain computer interfaces (BCIs) for both medical and commercial use with the increase of available technology, and the increase of attack surface on those implants.



DAGEN PICTURED WITH DR. KAREN KORNWEIBEL, DEAN OF HONORS AT KSU AT GCHC 2026.

Q: What's next in your Honors journey – maybe tell us a bit about your thesis plans?

A: Next in my honors journey will be completing my honors thesis! I will be building a brain computer interface (BCI) from scratch, including wiring and building the hardware system itself! I will spend time analyzing neuro signals, Electromyography (EMG) readings, output, and noise reduction to get a readable signal and have the BCI complete an action. I will then explore how these signals can be manipulated and changed to demonstrate how cybersecurity is needed to be included in development of these life-changing devices!

Honors In Action: Research & Leadership

FEATURING DAGEN SHEHORN

Q: How has Honors supported your academic journey?

A: Honors has supported my academic journey through giving wonderful networking opportunities, allowing me to delve deeper into my studies through honors contracting courses, and providing me support in my research. I earned a grant this past semester that is going to enable me to complete my thesis project!

Q: Cyberhawks earned a national trophy this year! Tell us a bit about the experience.

A: I've had the wonderful opportunity to get involved with CyberHawks at UNG! I have been on the competitive red and blue teams since my freshman year, and last year I had the privilege to serve as club vice president. I had the honor of getting to compete in the Department of War (DoW) Chief Information Officer (CIO) Cyber Workforce competition.

It was an incredibly challenging, interesting and fun competition where we faced off directly against other SMCs and service academies. On day 1 we knocked out Texas A&M, day 2, knocked out West Point, and on Day 3 in the championship we knocked out the Citadel!

This was definitely one of my favorite competitions due to the unique structure and environment! I am so excited to continue not just competing, but leading competition teams as red team captain next year!



DAGEN AND THE TEAM AT THE DEPARTMENT OF WAR CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICES CYBER WORKFORCE COMPETITION



DAGEN AT THE DEPARTMENT OF WAR CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICES CYBER WORKFORCE COMPETITION

Q&A

STEMNetX Scholarship Awardee: Albany Zavarce Angulo

Q: Tell us about the STEMNetX Scholarship - it is a new award!

A: It is a great opportunity not only to network but to explore different pathways that you can take depending on your interests. It is also a great way to meet people in different areas, which is great because it can open your mind to multiple perspectives such as schools to go to do a masters/PhD. Also, they have such a cool program that pays for summer research; in my case I asked if I could do a fall research project since the professor I wanted to work with was busy, and they make it work out for me, they're so nice and friendly.

Q: What was the most interesting part about the program?

A: I thought it was very cool how many coding classes we had, the network activities we did between the group I was with, and the field trip day we had was very interesting and cool.

Q: How did the experience impact your work at UNG?

A: The experience impacted because it gave me the opportunity to work less and focus more on the research I was doing since I had the fellowship money which worked as a stipend to help me pay for conferences or to get paid for doing work. It helped me so much.

Q: Tell us about your thesis and how Honors has impacted your academic career.

A: My thesis was about the flood in the Guadalupe River in Texas that happened this past July 2025. I worked with Dr. Ignatius, she was my mentor. I used satellite imagery, USGS data and news reports to help me understand better what might've caused that storm to be as devastating for the area. The Honors program not only encouraged me to take risks and do a cool final project at the end of the semester, but it also gave me the opportunity to challenge myself into doing a research project which made me realize how capable I am to do many projects at once if I stay organized and believing on myself.

Q: You're graduating! What comes next?

A: After graduation, I want to get a job that lines with up my interests such as GIS, remote sensing, and geospatial intelligence. My end goal is to get a PhD, but I want to fight the right program for me.



Showcasing Success

Honors Students Present at the Southern Regional Honors Council Annual Conference

Southern Regional Honors Council (SRHC) is a non-profit organization, dedicated to advancing opportunities for Honors Program students. SRHC Annual Conference took place this year in Montgomery, Alabama. The theme of the conference this year was “Inspired by History,” putting an emphasis on the history of Civil Rights in the United States, particularly in Montgomery.

Honors students come from all over the southern region to present their research projects. This year, five students from the UNG Honors Program attended SRHC to present their undergraduate research.

The student presenters included, **Brecklen Pavlich** (*Business Management, 2026*), **Gabrielle Grogan** (*Biology, 2027*), **Hailey Pruitt** (*Chemistry, 2026*), **Tram Nguyen** (*Psychology, 2029*), and **Zachary Furbush** (*International Affairs, 2026*).



Rising to the Challenge: The Collegiate Leadership Competition

In March of 2026, three teams of Honors students competed at the Collegiate Leadership Competition at Berry College.

The Collegiate Leadership Competition (CLC), was founded in 2015. Schools from all over the world gather at Berry College in Rome, Georgia, to participate in a global leadership competition. The purpose of CLC is for students to actively apply their leadership knowledge and skills and build community with other students.

The Honors Program sent two teams of students this year to compete at CLC. Each team was passionate to about learning, fine-tuning their skills, and furthering their knowledge of what it means to be an effective leader.



The teams included the following Honors Program students: **Ethan Brinson** (*History, 2029*), **Thomas Floystrop** (*History, 2029*), **Tommy Murillo-Bivins** (*Cybersecurity, 2029*), **Emma Perron** (*Psychology, 2026*), **Mary Sanders-Tucker** (*Computer Science, 2029*), **Olivia Dunn** (*Marketing, 2029*), **Giana Harris** (*Psychology, 2029*), **Katie Anne Jones** (*Political Science, 2029*), **Lydia Menhorn** (*Interdisciplinary Studies, 2029*), and **Nik Starks** (*Physics and Engineering, 2029*).



KUDOS & CONFERENCES

GCHC Podium Presentations and Panel Sessions:

- *Who Owns Your Thoughts: Privacy, Consent, and Autonomy in Brain Computer Interfaces:* Dagen Shehorn
- *Resisting Securitization: Individual Level Factors Contributing to the TikTok Refugee Movement:* Zachary Furbush
- *From Graves to Operating Tables: Body Snatching in Medical History,* Emma Reece
- *Design, Pilot, and Evaluation of a Leadership Assessment Center:* Brooke Tatum
- *Task Automation vs. Job Replacement: Quantifying the Efficiency Gains of AI in the Economy and the Opportunities of Jobs for the New Work Force:* Armando Soto
- *Lethe the Lucky Phasge: A Narrative Discovery, Annotation, and International Data Sharing:* Gabeielle Grogan

GCHC Poster Presentations:

- *The Distinct Dialect of Southern Appalachia:* Asha Furtah, Katie Anne Jones & Kaitlin Long
- *Appalachia Through the Lense of Social Media :* Nik Starks and Leanne Grady
- *How Real Artists Struggle in the Modern AI Landscape:* Tram Nguyen
- *The Impact of Resilience on Southern Appalachian Foodways:* Grayson Ludington
- *Reclaiming Appalachia: Insider vs. Outsider Perspectives in Film:* Angelica Pascual Jose
- *Hurricane Helene in Southern Appalachia:* Scarlett McPherson
- *The World of Telemedicine: Impacts on Healthcare Access and Outcomes Within Certain Healthcare Types in Southeastern Appalachia:* Angel Aguilera & Chloe Baaklini
- *Environmental Impacts of Gold Mining in North Georgia:* Thomas Murillo-Bivins & Sophie Hoy
- *How Invasive Species Impact Leaf Litter Communities in Southern Appalachia:* Rilee Williams, Gianna Harris & Edward van Zyl
- *A Battle Over the Bottle: Class, Race, and Federal Control in Southern Appalachia:* Grace Weatherly
- *What Effects Does Isolation Have on Mental Health in Southern Appalachia?:* Karis Doker & Davis Kellum
- *How Kentucky Can Learn From Tennessee's Educational Reforms:* Lauren Collins

SRHC Presentations:

- *The Cognitive Catalyst: Leveraging Emotional Awareness to Restore Rationality in Conflict Resolution:* Brecklen Pavlich
- *Lethe the Lucky Phage: A Narrative of Discovery, Annotation, and International Data Sharing:* Gabrielle Grogan
- *Synthesis of Phenylguanidine and Quinoline Derivatives by Acid and Metal Catalysis for the Inhibition of Peptidylarginine Deiminase 4 in the Context of ACPA (+) Rheumatoid Arthritis:* Hailey Pruitt
- *How Real Artists Struggle in the Modern AI Landscape:* Tram Nguyen
- *Resisting Securitization: Individual Level Factors Contributing to the TikTok Refugee Movement:* Zachary Furbush

AWARDS & HONORS

National Awards and Summer Internships:

- Boren Scholarship: Zachary Furbush
- Goldwater Scholar: Micah Chandler
- Fulbright Canada-Mitacs Globalink Research Internship at the University of Alberta: Micah Chandler
- UMD Applied Research Laboratory for Intelligence and Security (ARLIS) Research for Intelligence and Security Challenges (RISC) Internship: Thomas Murillo-Bivins
- Northeast Georgia Health Center Internship: Makenzie Levine

UNG Campus-Wide Awards:

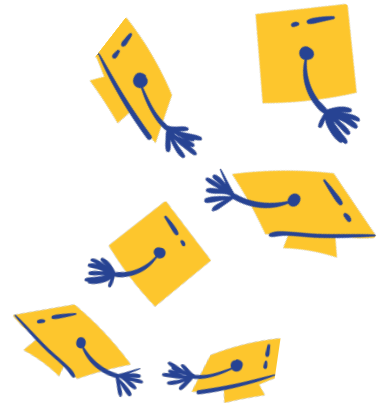
- Academic Recognition Day Scholar: Emilyn Slemons
- Distinguished Chinese Flagship Award: Zachary Furbush
- The David Potter Award: Sara Gonzalez-Gonzalez
- Healthcare Services & Informatics Administration Outstanding Student Award: Alondra Alvarado-Ortiz
- Management Excellence Award, Dahlonga Campus: Aidan Pavlich
- Management Excellence Award, Gainesville Campus: Brecklen Pavlich
- Rachel Ford Springer Award: Emma Reece & Emma Wilson
- Graduating McNair Scholar: Melody Dobbs
- Gary McGlaun Award: Hailey Pruitt
- UNG-Gainesville Most Outstanding Honors Student: Hailey Pruitt



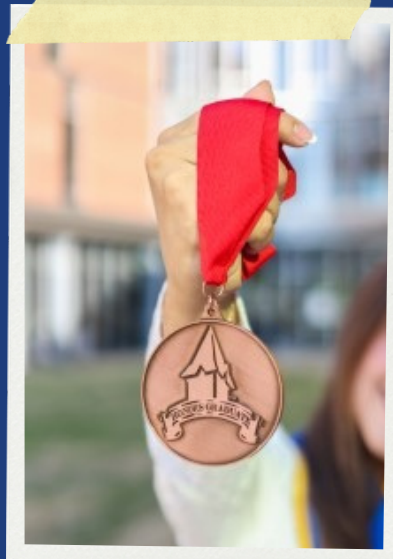


Congrats

SUMMER/FALL 2025 GRADUATES



- Taylor Berry, *BS Chemistry and Biochemistry*
- Autumn Cleymans, *BA East Asian Studies*
- Sheila Ganley, *BA International Affairs*
- Kaitlyn King, *BS Biology*
- Madeline Lindell, *BA Communications*
- Brianna Litz, *BA Modern Languages/Spanish*
- Ella Reid, *BA Strategic and Security Studies*
- Carson Teems, *BS Psychology*





Congrats

SPRING/SUMMER 2026 GRADUATES



- Alondra Alvarado-Ortiz, BS Interdisciplinary Healthcare
- Lily Ann Chuhran, *BS Kinesiology*
- Melody Dobbs, *BS Psychological Science*
- Kian Esmaeili, *BS Computer Science and Cyber Security*
- Isabella Forham Neuwirth, *BS Nursing*
- Erin Halter, *BS Visual Arts*
- Arianwen McPherson, *BS Science*
- Haley Pruitt, *BS Chemistry and Biochemistry*
- Emma Reece, BS Physical Therapy
- Emma Wilson, BS Nursing
- Albany Zavarce-Angulo, *BS Environment and Spatial Awareness*



ALUMNI UPDATES

Jacob Maddox, Secondary Education with a Concentration in Chemistry

Prior to graduation, I accepted a position at Denmark High School teaching Chemistry through the Teacher Candidate Residency Program. After graduation, I retained my position and stepped back into my coaching shoes and became an assistant softball coach. I am now actively in graduate school at the University of Georgia obtaining my M.Ed. in Science Education and receiving my Gifted Endorsement and AP Certification. I have also completed the Forsyth County Leadership Certification program, so I can work my way into administration when I am ready! In March 2026, I got married to Ashleigh Harada. She is a graduate of UNG (CO'25) and is a 4th grade teacher at Chestatee Elementary School. We now reside in Cumming with our crazy, but sweet, dog Finley."

Melissa Louise Brown, Psychology \ Neuroscience

I got two miniature poodle puppies (named Zeke and Kai) back in December. They just turned 6 months old! I completed my first solo backpacking adventure in the North GA mountains. I went to Fort Mountain State park and did the Gahuti trail (a total of 8.7 miles). My camp site overlooked a gorgeous view of the mountain range. I'm going on my next backpacking trip in a week from now! Plenty of trail hikes with friends too. My brother and I have been learning how to fish... still haven't caught a single fish yet but hey! We are getting out into nature and enjoying each other's company. I've been working a big girl job working as an RBT with autistic kiddos. I love my job! Feeling very blessed. I miss y'all!



2025

2025

ALUMNI UPDATES

2022

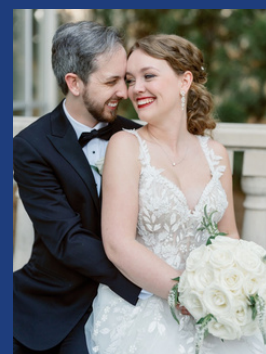
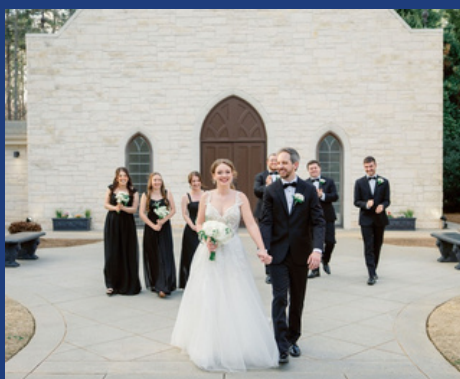
Kaitlyn Grace Bowers, **Graphic Design**

I got my dream job right after graduation working full time as a children's librarian! Now after four years of an awesome career, I have moved into a new chapter with my husband Joe Bowers (met at UNG) as I am delighted to be able to stay at home to raise and school our first little one, Theodore."

2018

Charlotte Blankenship, **Studio Art, concentration in Photography**

This past February, I married my best friend, Austin Blankenship! We have bought a house and moved up to Cumming, just 30 mins south of the Dahlonega campus. We are looking forward to more trips to campus and continuing to get involved with the alumni program and mentor programs."



2017

Margaux Usry Cousturian, **Biology**

I'm married with 2 dogs and a cat! I am the primary medical provider (PA-C) at a functional medicine clinic and soon to move to Georgia."

ALUMNI UPDATES

2015

Jennifer Ward Whittington, Biology

The cat distribution system gave us a kitten last July. My older cat has not been happy about having a brother



2016

Rachel Perez-Udell, Biology

The birth of my first child, Beatrice Lidia Udell on March 11th, with my husband, Andrew Udell.



2016

Kaylee Marie Todd, Chemistry

Joshua and I expanded the orchard again this year, but this time was by welcoming our daughter "Susie" to the farm in January. Our family has made the move to Ellijay to be closer to Aaron Family Orchards, but I'm still working in Rogers as the lab manager for our chemistry department.



ALUMNI UPDATES

2016

Sarah Elizabeth Orr, **Biology**

I welcomed my daughter, Claire, into the world in January 2025. While I was pregnant, I interviewed for various faculty positions all over the country. In fall 2025, I began a new position as a tenure-track Assistant Professor of Biology at The University of Tampa. I teach genetics and have established a research laboratory focused on ecotoxicology and genetics of social insects.



2007

Amy Burger, **English Literature**

Amy and her husband Ross welcomed their beautiful daughter, Matilda, in October. Amy currently serves as the Honors Advisory Council Chair.



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