

# MURIEL A. HOWARD HONORS PROGRAM

## *Official Newsletter*



We've been  
busy as a bee  
in Honors!



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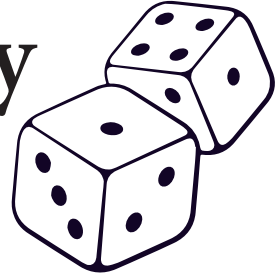
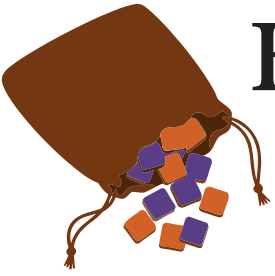


## RECENT EVENTS RECAP

- A. HONORS STUDENTS TABLING AT FALL OPEN HOUSE
- B. HONORS HALLOWEEN COSTUME CONTEST AND PUMPKIN CARVING
- C. HON 389 MOCK TRIAL TEAM COMPETING AT ST. BONAVENTURE
- D. HON 101 MOCK TRIAL: STATE OF MIDLANDS V. CHARLIE MARTIN
- E. 2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL HONORS ART GALLERY FEATURING 14 ARTISTS
- F. SAGE LAMBIE PERFORMS IN *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE* RADIO PLAY
- G. GRACE MALDONADO WINS 1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE IN BENGAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPETITION
- H. HON 111 STUDENTS COMPLETE MARSHMALLOW TOWER CHALLENGE
- I. HONORS LEADER EVENTS: PAINT ALONG WITH BOB ROSS, CURIOSITY OVER CONFLICT, AND STRINGING BEADS AND FALLING LEAVES

# HON101 Cultures of Play

Dr. Tim Bryant's new course is more than just fun and games

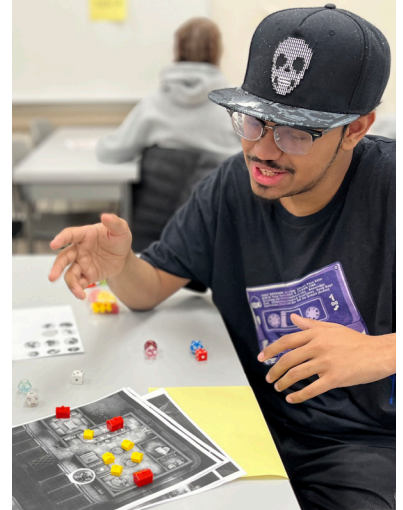


Do you like games? Either playing them or creating your own? Whether they be board games, PC, console, or RPG, games are just fun. They offer a way to relieve stress, connect with a community, and use our imagination. This fall, Associate Professor of English Dr. Tim Bryant offered HON101: Cultures of Play—a new Honors seminar utilizing gameplay as a primary course format.

At first, many students were unsure of what Cultures of Play would entail. Some expected a more traditional lecture-style course, and few, if any, students were prepared to play the African game Mancala on the very first day. Students quickly learned to expect the unexpected, including when they learned that the cryptic “H3” hidden in the course outline referred to a competitive Hungry Hungry Hippos tournament! Moreover, students found that experiencing gameplay first-hand is the best way to understand key game mechanics that can differentiate a best-selling game from one that collects dust on the shelf.

Instead of a typical final assessment, the course culminated in a gaming convention where students had the opportunity to playtest game prototypes designed by their classmates. Students drew inspiration from the games they had experienced earlier in the semester as well as from their own imaginations to create their prototypes. Concepts varied tremendously, from board games like “Music Mania” by Mary Q. (top left) and “Owl Pelletz” by Max W. (bottom left) to “Volvai,” an RPG by Matthew L. (top right). The gaming convention enabled the designers to troubleshoot their prototypes while receiving constructive feedback and ideas from their classmates.

Not every Honors seminar features actual gameplay, but Cultures of Play is just one of many Honors courses that center experiential learning and fun in the classroom. Reflecting on the course, Vyla M. (“The Journey of Ra”) said that her high school teachers made Honors coursework sound difficult and tedious, but having fun in class improved her experience. Keep an eye out for other game-related courses taught by Dr. Bryant as well as more Honors Game Nights next semester!



“By positioning play as the vehicle for exploring humanism, I hope to exploit the inherent interactivity of games to ensure that students not only study ways of being human at an intellectual level, but also experience new ways of being with each other, as scholars and as players, in unexpected but satisfying ways.

The many, ambiguous ways of defining fun offer, in the context of learning, a lot of potential rewards as well as pitfalls. To avoid some of the bigger pitfalls, like operating with no useful definitions at all, I draw upon Brian Sutton-Smith's seven rhetorics of play as well as ancient and modern games that in themselves offer implicit definitions of what humans have found to be fun. The potential reward for risking ambiguity is the definitions students themselves discover through their own authentic experiences of play.

My biggest fears, of giving up control to the unpredictable nature of play-based activities, were usually answered by some of the most memorable, shared experiences in the classroom, as my students ventured into new territory and I did, too.” —Dr. Bryant



# Congratulations to our Fall 2025 Graduates

Join us in celebrating our 19 Honors students graduating this semester! These talented athletes, artists, educators, researchers, and change makers are ready to take the next steps in their careers. We are immensely proud of all that you have achieved both academically and personally.

We wish you success in your future endeavors!  
Keep in touch as Honors Alumni!



## Rachelle Clark

*International Relations (Peace and Conflict)*

**Involvement:** Founder of Bengals Vote Coalition; Member of Alpha Epsilon Phi sorority; Pi Sigma Alpha, Alpha Lambda Delta, Tau Sigma, and Phi Upsilon Omicron honor societies.

*"Life is more than trying to fit in. Age is just a number. What matters most is how you feel about yourself. Your story makes you, YOU. Ask questions, be curious, and be bold! You are here for a reason! Even if you don't realize it yet, the world needs your talent, your skill and your purpose. Do your best and do it right, if you can't – then take things off your plate. You don't need to say yes to everything, choose where you want to give your energy!"*



## Lindsay DePietro

*Psychology  
Criminal Justice and Writing Minors*

**Involvement:** Women's Soccer, Psychology writing TA, SUNY Institute for Local News Internship - interned for The Buffalo Hive.

*"If I could go back in time I would definitely try to get involved in more clubs and attend different on-campus activities. So my advice to any future students would be don't be afraid to try new things and put yourself out there! Attend a lot of on-campus events and try out different clubs. Doing these things can not only create fun memories but will build your resume and connections."*

## Linda Coleman

*English Education (7-12)*

**Plans:** Start subbing part time, and get my Master's degree in special education and certification for TESOL.

**Involvement:** Member of the English Education Student Association and the Western New York Network of English Teachers.

*"My favorite thing about Buffalo State is the people! I have loved getting to know everyone, especially the other people in my major!"*



## Gregory Edbauer

*Childhood Education with Middle School Math Extension*

**Plans:** Return to Buffalo State for my Master's degree.

**Favorite Honors Memory:**  
The Honors BBQ.

*"Don't wait to reach out and use the resources available to you such as free tutoring."*





## Asher Freudenhammer-Glass

Art and Art History  
Chemistry Minor

**Involvement:** FNL Improv Comedy

**Favorite memory:** DND Saturdays in the Bishop downstairs lounge.



## Emily Goodstal

Psychological Science  
Art Therapy Minor  
Child Advocacy Studies Certificate

**Involvement:** Women's Lacrosse, Women's Basketball, SAAC rep, P.E.O. member

**Influential Professor:** Dr. Kamper Demarco was one of the most influential professors I had. She is a light and full of positive energy to help people. I learned so much from her.

*"College goes by fast, but you will grow so much in a short amount of time. Just embrace it all and give yourself grace."*



## Bridgit Higgins

Mechanical Engineering Technology



## Shaikh Ismid Jobayer Kibria

Computer Information Systems

**Influential Professor:** Dr. Sarbani Banerjee has made me realize my true self and helped me in every possible way. From making me her first EURO student to writing me recommendation letters

whenever I needed and advising me on my schedule, she has done so much for me, guiding me at every step of the journey. She is the one who taught me to grab every opportunity I could get, something which I will remember for the rest of my life."

## Rainna Frombgen

Music and Business Administration

**Plans:** Work full time, begin working as a personal trainer, and travel. Later on, I may go back to school for an MBA.

**Favorite thing about Buffalo State:**

How supportive the professors are.

They all care about their students and it is clear that they are here because they want to teach and make a difference.

*"Use the campus resources as much as you can. There are a lot of helpful resources such as the Career and Professional Education center, Milligan's food pantry, free counseling, and a fitness center."*

## Emma Hesseltine

Psychology  
Criminal Justice Minor

**Involvement:** Women's Soccer

**Favorite Honors Memory:** Taking my freshman year Honors course with several of my teammates.

**Influential Professor:** Dr. Norvilitis because I took Psychology of Culture with her and we did volunteering in Buffalo which was inspiring.

## Meghan Johnson

Psychology

**Plans:** Continue my education with a Master's in Mental Health Counseling or Clinical Psychology.

**Favorite Honors Memory:** Going to my first Honoring Honors with my friends during freshman year.

*"Read your textbooks and get to know your professors!"*

## Awa Konte

Biology  
Chemistry Minor

**Plans:** Take the next steps towards medical school.

*"Thank you to the teachers who saw potential in me, the friends who encouraged me, and my family who brought a little bit of home to me with every Facetime call. Wish me luck... and hopefully a little more sleep!"*



## Nathan Koss

Television and Film Arts

**Plans:** Pursue a career in film editing while continuing my work as a travel cinematographer for my friend's YouTube channel, *Claw Quest*.

**Favorite Honors Memory:** The "Exploring Buffalo" HON189 course I took in Spring 2025. Despite having lived here my entire life, the class introduced me to parts of the city I had never seen before. We formed meaningful friendships, discovered new places, and enjoyed some truly great food.



## Michael Parks

English Education (7-12)

**Plans:** Get my Master's in English Education or Library Science and become an English Teacher or School Librarian.

**Involvement:** Member of English Education Student Association (EESA).

*"My favorite thing about Buffalo State are all the friends I made in my program."*



## Alexis Roth

Fashion and Textile Technology, and Public Relations & Advertising Writing Minor

**Involvement:** RUNWAY Student Director, Marketing Director, Stylist; Fashion Textile Technology Intern of the Year.

*"My favorite part about Buffalo State was the opportunities I had to get hands-on experience. The teachers go above and beyond to give students real-world action from running a fashion show to doing press for an event. I've been given great opportunities to try things out in the real world."*



## Sarah Zakeri

Art and Psychology Art Therapy Minor Child Advocacy Studies Certificate

**Plans:** Go on to a graduate school and doctorate program in Art Psychotherapy and Mental Health Counseling!

**Favorite Honors Memory:** Attending NRHC and presenting my castings!

*"Try as much as you can! Don't cruise through your degree. Make the most out of your education."*

## Kait Krauss

Special Education and Childhood Education (English Concentration)

**Plans:** Work in a high school life skills class for a little bit before getting my Master's in applied behavioral analysis to work toward becoming a BCBA.

**Favorite Honors Memory:** Going to Delaware Park for class in HON 111 with Matt.

*"Get involved, let yourself have fun, don't be afraid to meet new people, and (most importantly) make sure you have an ice scraper for your car."*



## Jessie Ricotta

Psychological Science Philosophy Minor, Technical Writing Certificate

**Plans:** Incoming MSW student at Binghamton University.

**Involvement:** PSI CHI/Psychology Club Treasurer and President Honors Leader, Hulicka Scholar, EURO, Crisis Text Line, Empire State Service Corps, People Inc.



## Adrienne Willis

English Education (7-12)

**Involvement:** Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., SLE Orientation Team, BAM, EESA, Men's Basketball Team Manager.

**Favorite Thing About Buffalo State:** The diverse culture it holds.

**Favorite Honors Memory:** The Honors BBQ.

**Advice:** Self-advocation.



Save the date for  
**Honoring Honors [H<sup>2</sup>]**  
on March 6, 2026!

# Senior Applied Learning Experiences

Upper-level students are encouraged to find or create opportunities to take what they learn in academia and apply it to the real world. We have so many intelligent and hard-working Honors students who use their time at Buffalo State to participate in rewarding Applied Learning Experiences. We asked these seniors: (1) What was your applied learning experience? (2) What was something you learned from your internship, project, etc.? and (3) Do you have a fond memory from your experience?

## Bridgit Higgins | *Mechanical Engineering Technology*

1) I had the opportunity to join an existing project as part of my senior design requirement. The project is an AI-Driven Solar Panel Cleaning System funded by the SUNY IITG Grant. Our team's focus was on the robotic arm and the cleaning mechanism itself. I got to help design multiple cleaning tools and a holster system for these tools while considering different constraints of our robotic arm.

2) This project combined concepts learned throughout my courses here at Buffalo State and hands-on experience. Students across multiple departments worked on it which also helped with applying collaboration and combining ideas to create the best final result possible. This experience gave me a sense of how real world projects may go after I graduate and begin working in my field.

3) I think my fondest memory is when we finished our first cleaning tools and had completed phase one of our project. It felt great to have created our design and the CIS Team created a program where we could see our system work in real time. It felt like such a great accomplishment that our hard work led to the final product we had envisioned.



## Rachelle Clark | *International Relations*

1) I completed a faculty-led study away trip to Belize in Spring 2024.

2) Not everyone lives the same way. It's really important to immerse yourself in something different than you are used to because it's an opportunity to become more well-rounded and appreciate cultures other than your own. Life is more than money. Living slowly and intentionally teaches you more lessons than money can buy.

3) I don't even know how to pick just one!!! It was so hot there—around 105°F every day, and I sought out every opportunity to swim that I could. After we climbed the Mayan Ruin of Xunantunich, which taught us how critical it is to preserve ancient cultures, we swam in the Mopan river by the Guatemalan border with all our clothes on. Beyond that, we snorkeled in Caye Caulker and learned about all the reasons to protect our oceans. It was truly an incredible and inspiring week-long journey that at times was so hard that I cried, but I will forever be grateful for the opportunity to grow, and I cherish every minute.

## Cadence Aguilar | *Social Work*

1) My applied learning experience was a faculty-led study abroad in Rwanda with the Anne Frank Project.

2) It is possible to truly and wholeheartedly forgive someone for acts that are even as heinous as killing your entire family. It's natural to be skeptical about that statement, but let me explain. Many who lived through the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi are adults, grandparents, teachers, the same age as those you encounter in everyday life. Even though over 30 years has passed since the genocide, the people of Rwanda always remember and still grieve the one million lives lost. The pain of losing your children, parents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, neighbors—that never leaves you. However, you can release the animosity you feel towards the perpetrators. True reconciliation takes hard work and conversation, and if you want to bridge that gap to truly forgive someone, you must be willing to put in that work to understand why someone did what they did, and they must also be willing to commit to change. Rwanda is proof of 30 years of this hard work and has taught me that it is possible to truly forgive others. I just need to be willing to do the work, too. Look into reconciliation villages if you want to know more!

3) As cliché as it may sound, it is not the destination, but the journey, that made the experience. Much of our trip was spent in long bus rides throughout the hills of Rwanda. We would laugh, sing, and talk for hours with one another about anything and everything. The trip requires an immense amount of vulnerability, and you have to let yourself feel the sadness and anger that comes with it. We often consoled and hugged each other while we cried, and very openly talked about our feelings with one another the entire time. We all processed this trip together and that kind of bond truly can't be broken.



## Emily Goodstal | *Psychology*

1) I have had three applied learning experiences. My first one was in Dr. Norvilitis's class where I helped refugees with bus systems in Buffalo. My second was through the internship program in psychology where I worked at the bereavement center connected to hospice services. My third experience was being a TA for statistics and psychology writing.

2) I learned many things including patience, understanding, and learned when to talk and when to listen.

3) I loved my internship experience at the bereavement center. The staff and counselors there are very kind and welcoming. I would come almost everyday and they loved to hear about how my classes were going and my college experiences. They taught me so much about helping others and what kinds of resources to give people in crisis. This not only taught me more about the professional field I want to pursue, but also what a healthy work environment is like.



# Honors Alumni Spotlight

## Grant Asklar

Grant Asklar ('23), a Niagara Falls native and lifelong musician, was first introduced to Buffalo State through the Summer Music Institute and the Buffalo Youth Jazz Orchestra. These early experiences enabled him to connect closely with music faculty members, including Dr. Mark Filsinger and Dr. Rick Fleming, whose encouragement led him to pursue Music Education at Buffalo State. We recently caught up with Grant, who is currently on the North American tour of the Broadway show *The Book of Mormon*.

### WHAT WAS YOUR DREAM JOB COMING INTO BUFFALO STATE?

I had 2 dream jobs coming into college: to be a music teacher or a Broadway musician. I am immensely grateful for my music education degree; I was able to use my classroom experience to teach private music lessons for 4 years. Even though I am not teaching in a school right now, I see myself eventually making my way back to teach in the band room. While my primary instrument was saxophone, I was fortunate to have opportunities at Buffalo State to play clarinet and flute in Wind Ensemble and in smaller chamber group settings. Getting performance opportunities on secondary instruments was essential for my future career (musical theatre jobs almost always require playing multiple instruments, or "doubling").

### WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FONDEST MEMORIES AT BUFFALO STATE AND IN THE HONORS PROGRAM?

It has to be student teaching in Italy through the International Professional Development Partnerships (IPDP) program. I was able to teach general music at an English-speaking International school while getting feedback from my incredible supervising teacher, Dr. Kerry Renzoni. I loved traveling, being abroad, and getting home-cooked meals from my host family. My fondest memory in the Honors Program was the Honors BBQ every fall. It was the best place to enjoy a great meal, play games, and make new friends. The prizes were great, but nothing beats getting the annual Honors T-shirt!

### WHAT IS IT LIKE AS A TOURING MUSICIAN?

We play 8 shows a week and typically stay in one city for that whole week. I am the Reeds player and I play 10 instruments in the show – piccolo, flute, bansuri (wooden flute), oboe, clarinet, alto sax, tenor sax, and 3 different recorders.



I am the only woodwind player in the 9-piece orchestra and am very close with all the other musicians – we spend lots of time together hanging out outside of the show. I love trying out coffee shops in each city and finding the best local restaurants. The coolest things I have done so far are whale watching and white-water rafting.

### WHAT DO YOU ENJOY ABOUT TEACHING?

My biggest joy as a teacher is when my students succeed. I love teaching beginner instrumental lessons and seeing students learn their first notes and starting from scratch. When I was teaching at Matt's Music in North Tonawanda, I organized recitals for my students – I would love watching them perform for their families and see the incredible growth in their early musical training. The past few summers, I have loved directing the Buffalo State Summer Music Institute Jazz Ensemble - the same program I attended during high school!

### WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR CURRENT STUDENTS?

My advice is to truly embrace the community you're a part of. Attend Honors events, get involved, and take the time to build relationships with your peers outside of the classroom. Many of my closest friends today are people I met through the Honors and Music programs. For Music Education students, I encourage you to take full advantage of everything the program, faculty, and your peers have to offer. Make the most of every rehearsal and performance opportunity and find hobbies you enjoy outside of the practice room.

**Enjoy the journey and Go Bengals!**

A photograph of two students sitting at a desk in a room with bookshelves and a desk lamp. One student, with curly hair, is seen from the back, while the other, with glasses and a grey sweater, is facing her. They appear to be in a conversation.

## Advice from our Honors Leaders

"Start building relationships with all your professors; you never know how they can support and impact you throughout your college career." – **Eric B.**

"As contrarian as it may sound, SCHEDULE your downtime! We forget to take care of ourselves sometimes, saying we will "do it if we have time", but you are important too. Take about 2 hours a week, at least, to dedicate to something you enjoy. It will help keep you sane!" – **Cadence A.**

"If you are on the fence about applying to be an Honors Leader, I would say: go for it! It never hurts to apply. Everyone has what it takes to be a leader. The Honors Leader position will foster the skills you have, introduce you to new ones, and help you flourish. By applying, you'll get real practice being interviewed, which will build your confidence and improve your communication skills! Being an Honors Leader has entirely transformed my time at Buffalo State by introducing me to a ton of incredible people, increasing my confidence, and helping me make so many positive memories." – **Anna B.**

"Serving as an Honors Leader has brought me into the most supportive community I've ever had the pleasure of being a part of. It makes the semester a thousand times easier knowing that around 20 other incredible, hardworking, and caring students have your back. Applying gives you the opportunity to invest in your school and to have your voice heard. Knowing that what you do matters on campus is inspiring." – **Kevin T.**

# Gratitude from our First-Year Mentees

"Veronica has made such a positive impact on me since the semester first started. She is very helpful and bright every time I see her. This semester has been a breeze with her! I hope everyone gets a chance to meet Veronica!" – Caidyn W.

"My Honor Leader Glasha has been so great. She is like a shining star helping me navigate through college. She has helped me get involved in events, gave me great study tips, has the best advice, and she is a friend when you need one. I am so grateful to her, and I wish her nothing but amazing things for her future."  
– Moraima A.

"Navigating this semester has been a learning curve for me as a freshman in college, however having an Honors Leader like Cadence has really made life easier. After checking in with me and seeing my frustrations with a particular class Cadence had asked me for my location on campus. By the time I had walked out to go to my meeting with the professor of that class, they were already waiting outside for me to help advocate for me and to come up with a plan to help me get back on track in the class. I've really appreciated Cadence keeping me calm and levelheaded throughout the semester and I really believe they are the reason I have been able to come around in that class. I'm fortunate to have them as my Honors Leader." – Trin B.

LOOKING TO BUILD YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS?  
**APPLY TO SERVE AS AN HONORS LEADER NEXT FALL!**  
STAY TUNED FOR INFORMATION SESSIONS AND  
APPLICATIONS THIS FEBRUARY

# Message from the Honors Director

**“HERE I GO. STRONGER AND WISER INTO THE NEW.”**

–Rupi Kaur, *The Sun and Her Flowers*

As fall semester of 2025 draws to a close, I want to begin by commending our fantastic students. Whether this was your favorite semester ever or a particularly challenging one, I am so proud of the effort and determination I saw from so many of you this semester:

For taking a challenging elective and giving it your best efforts.

For surviving your first semester living away from home.

For balancing your classes, work, extracurriculars, and family responsibilities.

For taking extra time to volunteer in your community and on campus.

And I want to especially congratulate those students graduating this December. **YOU DID IT!!**

Amid all the busyness of the end of the semester/holiday season and as we approach the shortest and darkest day of the year, I hope we can all find some time to rest, reflect, release the old, and look ahead to the new discoveries and experiences that await. Here in the Honors Office, we're eagerly anticipating spring semester. From our annual Honoring Honors banquet to a talk from author Tara Westover whose work HON444 students are reading this year to the record number of students who submitted proposals to the Northeast Regional Honors Council spring conference, spring semester in the Honors Program promises to be full of opportunities to lead with curiosity and to celebrate with and learn from others. In the meantime, though, I wish everyone in the Honors family a restful and enjoyable break, and I invite you to join me in reading about and celebrating the accomplishments of our terrific graduating seniors!

–Dr. Herb



Honors Program tabling at Open House, November 2025



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