

MURIEL A. HOWARD HONORS PROGRAM

Official Newsletter



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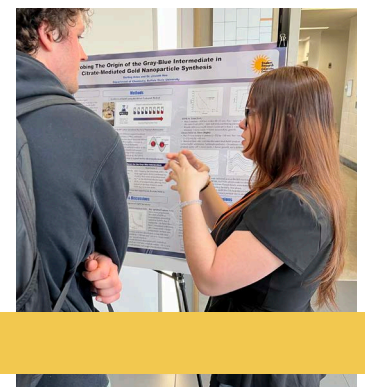
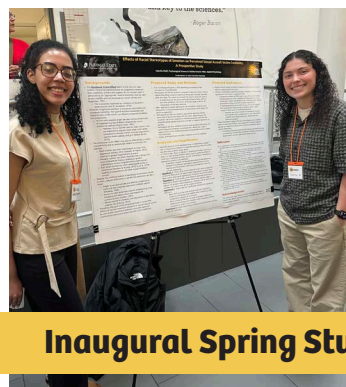
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NRHC 2026: New Haven



During Spring Break, nine Honors students traveled to New Haven, Connecticut to attend the Northeast Regional Honors Council (NRHC) Conference. This annual meeting brings together students from honors programs across the region to present their academic and creative works spanning all disciplines. Buffalo State’s impact could be felt at nearly every conference session this year including the performing arts showcase, roundtable discussions, poster presentations and more.

The NRHC Conference offers ample opportunities for attendees to network, learn, and explore. Holocaust survivor Andy Sarkany opened the meeting with a powerful talk advocating for resilience and social justice. Colin Caplan, an accomplished entrepreneur and local foodie, entertained attendees with his passion for New Haven-style pizza as he opened the “City As Text” exploration day. Social events included karaoke night, game night, and a “secret society” themed gala. Students even received free professional headshots!

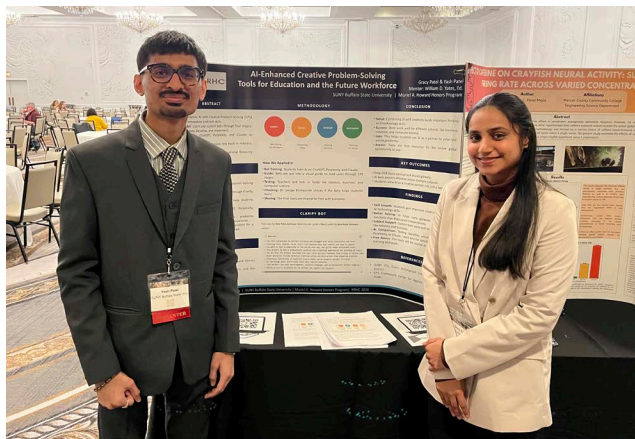
Check out these highlights from the conference, and stay tuned for information on how you can attend NRHC 2027 next spring in Baltimore, Maryland!

“Attending the NRHC Conference was a highly valuable experience that helped me build confidence, strengthen my communication skills, and develop a more professional approach to presenting and networking. It also improved my organization and exposed me to a wide range of innovative ideas from students and faculty across different universities.

As a Buffalo State student, participating in NRHC also felt like a great way to represent and promote our university while engaging with a larger academic community. Overall, it was an excellent opportunity for learning, collaboration, and growth.” – Yash Patel



“NRHC was the perfect opportunity to express my academic interest within a safe environment. For anyone who wants to get started in the professional world, make great connections, and hear great ideas, I highly recommend this conference to all students in the program.” – Andrew Binks



“One highlight of NRHC was being part of conversations that encouraged me to think more broadly about my goals and how I can contribute to my campus community. I would encourage future Buffalo State students to attend because it is a valuable opportunity to network, build confidence, and bring back ideas that can enrich their own Honors experience.” – Gracy Patel



Glasha Zinenko facilitating her roundtable discussion, “Is Honors Ethical?”, which explores the (in)equities and exclusivities of honors programs from a philosophical lens.



*Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University
Photograph by Mike Lott*

“One highlight was meeting my friend Tracy who attends Gallaudet University. She gave an amazing presentation about women’s body images in art. Afterwards, we spent hours signing and talking with one another about ourselves, our lives, our schools, and so much more. I also met Mike, a community college student from Pennsylvania, who traveled with us around New Haven for a day, and who is an amazing photographer. You never know who you are going to meet, or who you may encounter.

At NRHC, not only will you become closer with the other students you travel with, but you will taste, see, and learn things you never knew before. We made friends with Amtrak conductors and passengers on the train and got to enjoy the beautiful landscapes of the ride. As anxious as I am, I got out of my comfort zone and had so much fun!” – Cadence Aguilar



“I thoroughly enjoyed the NRHC conference. It allowed me to meet new people, express how I feel about the Honors Leader program, and experience new things. I also realized how much I could talk about with fellow Honors students at other schools. Presenting and attending other sessions made me realize how much more I could present about in the future.” – Brookelynn Bender



Cadence Aguilar discusses “How Peer Mentors Changed Our Honors Program” alongside Honors Leaders Jamie Ervolina, Brookelynn Bender, and Xinozea Ferguson-Giscombe.

Award-Winning Publication



The fall 2025 issues submitted to the contest were created collaboratively by Honors Intern Arie Dorsey and Assistant Director Matt Baran.

The Muriel A. Howard Honors Program Official Newsletter took home 1st Place in the NRHC Publications Contest! Evaluated on both content and design, the judges noted, “This publication is awesome! So fun to read and very professionally designed and polished.” Buffalo State also won this recognition in 2023. Check out both awards the next time you visit the Honors Office in South Wing!



Xinozea Ferguson-Giscombe performed original songs during her interdisciplinary presentation, “The Decommmodification of Queer Bodies of Color: A Historical Examination of Colonialism’s Impact on African and American-Indigenous Music and Dance to the 21st Century.”

Bengala + RUNWAY

Amplify

Presented By



NEW ERA CAP FOUNDATION



Kaylee Starkweather Student Collection

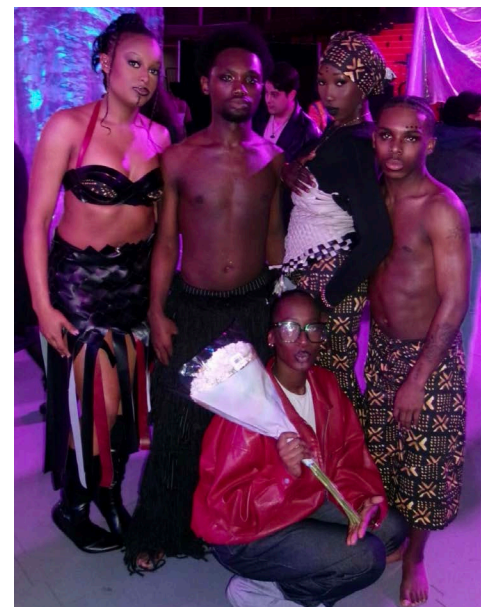


On April 25th, standing backstage in Buffalo State University’s Sports Arena, everything finally started to feel real. After months of sketching, sewing, fittings, revisions, stress, and long nights in the studio, RUNWAY 2026: *AMPLIFY* was no longer something we were preparing for; it was happening. For me, and fellow Honors designers Miya Giddens, Grace Maldonado, and Kaylee Starkweather, the night represented so much more than fashion. It reflected resilience, storytelling, culture, and the ability to continue creating even when the process becomes difficult.

Produced by students in Buffalo State’s Fashion and Textile Technology Department and presented by the New Era Cap Foundation, this year’s RUNWAY show challenged designers to use fashion as a form of advocacy and expression. According to the official RUNWAY focus statement, *AMPLIFY* invited designers to “channel fashion as an instrument of expression, advocacy, and transformation.” Throughout the night, that message could be felt in every collection that stepped onto the runway.

As one of this year’s 15 senior designers, I partnered with DUMAS RISE Providers through my collection, *Ligne 223*, which was rooted in “empowerment, resilience, and community care.” As a first-generation Malian American designer, creating this collection became deeply personal for me. I wanted the garments to reflect the intersection of African heritage and futurism through sculptural silhouettes, layered textures, and references to traditional Malian craftsmanship. More than anything, *Ligne 223* became more about visibility and cultural preservation. There were many

moments throughout the year where the pressure, exhaustion, and uncertainty could have easily overshadowed the vision, but in many ways those challenges became part of the collection itself.



Zeinab Keita Senior Collection

Watching the other Honors designers throughout this process made that feeling of resilience even stronger. Senior designer Miya Giddens partnered with Habitat for Humanity through her collection, *Sol-Luna*. In her featured designer video, Giddens explained that her work was rooted in “community, purpose, and impact,” while emphasizing “the importance of building not just homes, but hope.” Her collection reflected themes of stability, support, and care while showing how fashion can communicate empathy and human connection in a powerful way.



Miya Giddens Senior Collection

Kaylee Starkweather Student Collection

Senior designer Grace Maldonado partnered with Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper through her collection, *Sombra del Agua*, which centered on “sustainability, preservation, and connection to our waterways.” Through movement, texture, and layered storytelling, Grace transformed environmental advocacy into something emotional and immersive while highlighting the importance of protecting natural resources and preserving humanity’s relationship with the environment. Her bold collection earned her the \$1,000 RUNWAY Impact Award.

In addition to the senior designer collections, Honors student Kaylee Starkweather was recognized as the winner of the Student Collection Award during the evening’s final awards presentation. Starkweather was one of two designers featured in RUNWAY’s student collection section, and her recognition reflected the creativity, innovation, and craftsmanship that continues to emerge from Buffalo State’s next generation of designers.

Although all four Honors designers approached fashion from completely different perspectives, what connected us throughout the year was resilience. Behind every collection were months of failed samples, creative risks, balancing coursework, emotional stress, and learning how to push through uncertainty. Fashion programs often show the finished product, but rarely the countless unseen moments that happen before the lights come on and the music starts. This year’s RUNWAY reminded me that some of the strongest parts of design are the persistence and honesty required to keep creating through challenges.

Beyond the garments themselves, RUNWAY 2026 reflected Buffalo State University’s commitment to giving students space to tell meaningful stories through creative expression. At a time when many young creatives feel pressure to conform or minimize themselves, this year’s collection proved the opposite. They showed that creativity, grit, and resilience within the next generation of designers continues to run strong.

Looking back now, what stays with me most is not just what walked down the runway, but everything it took to get there. The countless late nights, the problem-solving, the unwavering support between designers, and the shared understanding that despite every challenge, we created something even more meaningful than we could have imagined.

- By Zeinab Keita



Grace Maldonado Senior Collection



Zeinab Keita Senior Collection



Honors Students in the Lab

On May 6th, 2026, nearly 100 Honors students participated in Buffalo State's inaugural Spring Student Showcase! Students across all majors and disciplines came together to present their research and creative projects, experiential learning, off-campus internships, and artistic performances. Several students conducted projects as part of the Early Undergraduate Research Opportunity (EURO) program and the new Advanced Undergraduate Research Award (AURA) program. Let's hear about their experiences!

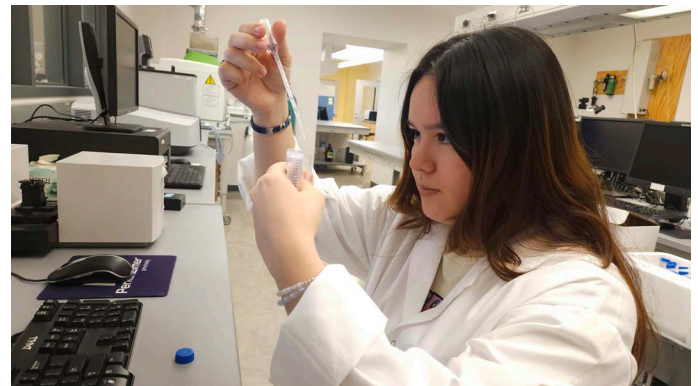


MEÏCA S. LUZAIRE | EURO

"This semester I have been working on a psychology research project, which has actually been a really interesting experience for me. My project explores how college students think about Child Maltreatment and how they react to it emotionally. I chose this topic because it's something that seriously affects a lot of kids, and I wanted to understand how people my age see it and respond to it. I created a survey using Qualtrics. The questions I asked were focused on empathy, emotional reactions like sadness or anxiety, and how serious students rate different types of maltreatment. Designing the survey was challenging because I had to make sure the questions were clear and not biased, but it helped me understand how research actually works. Through this experience, I learned a lot about how to design a study and how to measure people's responses using a 1 to 5 scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). It showed me that research is not just about asking questions but asking the right questions to get meaningful answers. I also learned that people react differently, like some might feel strong empathy while others may feel overwhelmed or distant. Honestly, this experience helped me grow and become more confident in my research skills. It also made me more interested in research and connected to my goal of wanting to work in the psychology field so I can help young people."

DARLING ARIAS | AURA

"I began my research journey last year as a sophomore because I wanted to gain lab experience beyond what I was learning in class. Dr. Jinseok Heo introduced me to the study of gold nanoparticles (AuNPs) using techniques such as Raman spectroscopy and UV-Vis spectroscopy. At the time, I had never imagined working with something like this, but I decided to take it as a challenge and step out of my comfort zone. That decision ended up shaping my entire research experience. During my first year of research, I learned much more than just scientific concepts. I developed perseverance, attention to detail, and strong organizational skills. Now, a year later, I continue my research with Dr. Heo, but with a new focus. My current work explores a different approach to AuNP synthesis, specifically investigating why a bluish-gray color appears at the beginning of the reaction. One of the most enjoyable parts of this experience has been conducting multiple trials and creating graphs to analyze my data. Through this process, I have strengthened my ability to think critically, interpret results, and understand how small changes in an experiment can lead to different outcomes. I am very grateful to Dr. Heo and the faculty at Buffalo State for providing me with these opportunities. Through research, I have grown not only as a student but also as a future forensic scientist. This experience has strengthened my confidence and confirmed my passion for pursuing a career in the scientific field."



LORELAI MUCCILO | AURA

"The 2026 AURA program has provided valuable support for my research project on speech scaling and Parkinson's disease. This funding has given the neurodegenerative speech lab the ability to purchase new, necessary equipment for data collection. During this project, I've engaged in participant recruitment, led community outreach, and attended local events centered on Parkinson's disease. I have helped analyze audio files and draw tentative conclusions based on preliminary results. Using our data, my faculty advisor Dr. Senthinathan and I have recently been able to submit the project for presentations at the upcoming American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) convention in Indianapolis and the International Parkinson and Movement Disorder Society (MDS) conference in Seoul (pending acceptance for both). This study is ongoing, and I hope to continue collecting data over the next academic year."

NAKELIA TAYLOR | AURA

“When I first started research, I was scared. I was shaking just trying to hold a pipette inside the sterile hood. Over time I grew into someone more confident like a bear that can move through its environment with instinct and purpose. Being part of an Honors research project has been a very meaningful experience for me. I am currently working on a project that focuses on drug delivery for triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC) using an injectable hydrogel system. At first doing research on breast cancer cells felt unreal to be as close as I was to the lifelong thing that bleeds the earth dry even with advanced skills, experiments and technology. I also found it fascinating and interesting to be so closely involved in research that has such a strong impact on people’s lives. I went from learning basic lab equipment to applying more advanced techniques, and, over time, I developed confidence in my abilities. One of the most impactful experiences I had through this opportunity was attending the Society for Biomaterials conference in Atlanta. I went with another student, which made the experience even more meaningful because it showed me the importance of being part of a team. This was a four-day conference that was fully funded, which made it an incredible opportunity as an undergraduate student researcher. Attending during spring break made it both academically enriching and personally enjoyable, and it helped me see how my work connects to a larger global community. Overall, this experience has helped me grow both academically and personally.”



JENNIFER EWKA | EURO

“I first joined my mentor’s research lab through the Undergraduate Summer Research Fellowship (USRF), where I started a project on synthesizing functionally diverse heterocycles. What began as a completely new and unfamiliar experience that summer has since grown into my ongoing work through AURA, where I began focusing on the synthesis of antimicrobial pyrazine-pyrrolidine molecules. The goal of my research is to help bridge the gap in the antibiotic discovery pipeline by contributing to the broader effort to combat antibiotic resistance through the exploration of new molecular structures. My research brings chemistry and biology together, allowing me to apply synthetic chemistry to a pressing biological and medical challenge. Participating in undergraduate research has been one of the most impactful experiences of my academic journey. When I first started my research, I had almost no background in organic synthesis, and everything felt overwhelming. I had to learn new techniques, set up reactions, and work with unfamiliar equipment. Beyond technical skills, research has helped me grow in patience, resilience, and independence, while also teaching me when to seek guidance. Overall, this experience has strengthened my interests and encouraged me to consider pursuing research in the future, possibly at the M.D.-Ph.D. level.”



Alumni Spotlight: Ted Mallwitz ('10, '12, '15)

“PARDON MY VERBOSITY”

As the old adage goes, “it takes a village to raise a child”. That statement is powerful, yet it doesn't always capture the full impact that the said village or community has on that one individual. Sometimes, to fully capture the impact, we have to be verbose.

Ted Mallwitz is a three-time graduate of SUNY Buffalo State University who has worked at Buffalo State, the University at Buffalo, Hilbert College, SUNY Niagara, and now SUNY Empire State University where he serves as Assistant Director of EOP. Mallwitz attributes much of his personal and professional success to the faculty and staff here who supported him. So please, pardon Mallwitz's verbosity, as he eagerly talks about his village.

“I was a non-traditional student who took five years off from my education after high school. When I returned, I was passionate and committed to accomplishing as much as I could as a student, so I was very persistent in getting into the All-College Honors Program (now MAH Honors Program). Given that this was traditionally done by invitation, I sought out the director of the program Dr. Andrea Guiati, who was by far one of the most brilliant, kind, supportive, and inspirational educators that I ever had the privilege to work with. After my first successful semester at Buffalo State as a history major, I was granted acceptance into the honors program.

The honors program provided unique curriculum and educational opportunities that not every student had. Dr. Michael Johnson's values and ethics course was one of the most impactful experiences I have ever had. Each week he brought in a guest speaker to discuss their professional field as it relates to values and ethics. They came from a wide variety of professions, and this course forced us to reflect deeply on our own sense of personal and professional values and ethics. This experience was formative to my own sense of self and the values and ethics that have guided me throughout my life both personally and professionally. I am truly grateful for Dr. Johnson and his course.

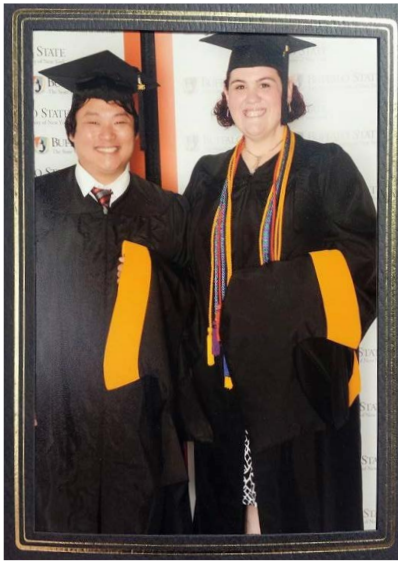
I would be remiss if I did not also thank Dr. Patrick McGovern who taught an honors course about Democracy. I still have a copy of *On Democracy* by Robert A. Dahl from his class. At first, I found him difficult and honestly struggled in his course until I realized why he was pushing us so hard. Then one day it finally hit me: he knew how intelligent we all were because we were all Honors students and he was pushing us to do better and to reach our full potential as students!

He was critical because he knew what we were capable of, and he wanted to help us develop our abilities to their furthest extent. I am a better writer and scholar because of his course. He also taught me what true democracy is, and I forever will remember that “how a civilization fights will tell you a lot about how they organize politically”. I am a better-informed citizen because of Dr. McGovern.

There are far too many individuals to shout out, but I must make sure to include: Dr. Amy Wilson, Dr. Kim Kline, Dr. Gerard Puccio, Dr. Martin Ederer, Dr. York Norman, Dr. Cyndi Burnett, Dr. Jo Yudess, Dr. Sue Keller-Mathers, Dr. Bonita Durand, and the truly one-of-a-kind Professor Mike Fox.

I must also thank the innovative change agents from the Center for Applied Imagination (then called the International Center for Studies in Creativity) for the great impact they had on my life and my education. It was because of the faculty in Creative Studies connecting me with the Educational Opportunity Program, that I ended up working in that office at Buffalo State as a work study/grad assistant under Abdi Hajikandi. Initially I was a tutor in their tutoring center, but I eventually had the opportunity to write a SUNY IITG grant to create a creative problem solving and college success skills course based upon both my M.S. in Creative Studies and the two semesters at Buffalo State in their post-bachelor's social studies education teacher certification program (shout out to Professor Olczek!), which ultimately I did not choose to complete, which is a whole other story because I decided to instead pursue a second master's degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration (HESAA).





Mallwitz posing with fellow HESAA graduate Andrea Gustafson in 2015.

My best advice to current students in the Muriel A. Howard Honors Program is to give yourself grace and try to do at least as much listening as you do talking! It has never been more important to create safe spaces for actual dialogue to happen instead of everyone just trying to be the loudest voice in the room. Lean into people with viewpoints different from your own! Actively listen so you can learn more about others and ultimately you may learn something about yourself.

Ask questions, be inquisitive, try to find out the why behind people's values, ethics, convictions, and opinions. Be patient and go easy on yourself because we are truly our own worst self-critics. It can be difficult in adolescence to know and accept that things take time. Developing the ability to see beyond your feelings in the moment is an invaluable skill. It took me six months to get my first job out of grad school, and at the time it was gut wrenching and beyond discouraging but now looking back, it honestly doesn't seem so bad. I had to learn 'this too shall pass' the hard way. Also, do not fear failure: fear not learning from failure because that is what can teach you the most valuable lessons in life.

Lastly, don't give up on your passions outside of academics or your career. I am very grateful for the balance I have found, and I still play guitar in a local emo and pop punk cover band in Buffalo, and we have even played Buffalo Sabres games. You can't be your best self if you aren't taking good care of your physical and mental health."

Are you a graduate of the Honors Program? We would love to feature you in our Alumni Spotlight next year! Send an email to honors@buffalostate.edu to share about your career and recent accomplishments.





THE QUEEN CITY: UNDERSTANDING PLACE IN BUFFALO, NY

Honors students in HON189 became urban investigators this spring as they worked to understand the City of Buffalo through its people, architecture, and complex history. This experiential learning course taught by Assistant Director Matt Baran featured six off-campus explorations across the Queen City that brought students to places both familiar and unknown. Through these explorations and in-class discussions, students uncovered a series of dichotomies hidden in plain sight around the city, such as public vs. private, old vs. new, economic prosperity vs. economic hardship, tourists vs. residents, and more.

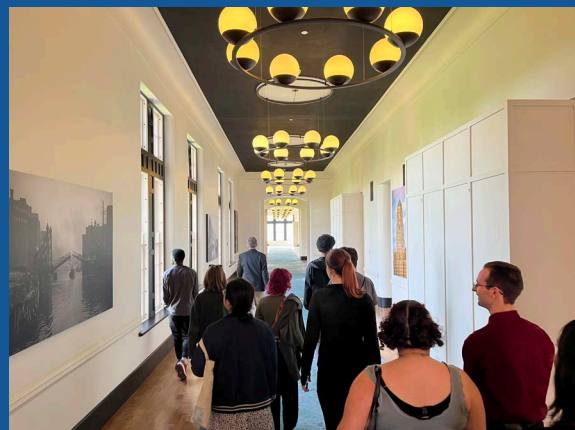
The semester began with a trip to various West Side neighborhoods to develop noticing skills (and to practice safely navigating snowy

sidewalks!). Next, students visited three local culinary hubs—Lexington Co-op, Chandler St. Kitchens, and the West Side Bazaar—to explore the relationships between small food businesses and the neighborhoods they serve. The class then traveled downtown to destinations including the Theatre District, Canalside Waterfront, and Niagara Square.

After spring break, Matt brought students to the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood to experience two important symbols of Buffalo's population shifts over time: the historic Broadway Market and the vacant Central Terminal train station (above). Exploration #5, a favorite by most, gave students a rare opportunity to explore the abandoned Richardson Olmsted Complex (bottom left)

as well as the redeveloped portion that is now the Richardson Hotel (bottom right). The class spent the final exploration walking to the nearby Olmsted Parks and parkways, focused on the interplay between the public green spaces and the private, high-valued residential properties that border them.

For their final projects, students created neighborhood walking guides, billboards, video ads, and other marketing materials informed by their explorations and course readings. The project built on Visit Buffalo's 2025 branding campaign **That's Buffalo For You** that markets the city using contradictory phrases such as *Casually Iconic*, *Historically New*, and *Polished Grit*.





Imani Perry: Giving “Sound to the World’s Favorite Color”

On Thursday, April 23rd, the Honors Program, as part of the inaugural Honors Book Club, attended a Just Buffalo Literary Center BABEL talk with MacArthur genius and National Book Award winner Imani Perry.

Perry graced the stage with a down-to-earth warmth that was a breath of fresh air. Her soft-spoken voice was reminiscent of Billie Holiday, which tied into her discussion on blues.

Her book, *Black in Blues: How a Color Tells the Story of my People*, explores the intertwined history of the color blue and Black people, through poetic prose. Perry focused on the question, “why blue?” Her answer was “because of the blues (music)...my people [Black People] gave a sound to the world’s favorite color.”

Perry focused the first part of her talk on not just the struggles faced by the Black community, but on how Black people have been able to create “beauty at the very site of [the] wound”. Her discussion was not exclusive, but inclusive, trying to unite the “mixed company” present, Black and white. Perry said, “I don’t want white people to feel guilty”. Perry wanted all in the audience to feel comfortable and to just “be honest” with themselves and others.

Perry concluded by saying that her purpose behind writing *Black in Blues: How a Color Tells the Story of my People*, was to “help all people to sing their own blues or to tell their own stories”. Instead of this book being an ending, it’s an invitation to all. Her talk was not to divide and conquer, but to uplift and unite all the people in the crowd—both the BABEL community and Buffalo overall.



HONORS
ICE CREAM
SOCIAL



EVENTS

A HINT OF ORANGE
A CAPELLA
PERFORMANCE



PANIC ABOARD THE
B.S.U. BISHOP:
HONORS ESCAPE ROOM

RECENT



SPRING CRAFTS
WITH HONORS LEADER SOFIKA HUDAK & MS. STEVENS

Message from the Honors Director



As the semester comes to a close, I want to take a moment to express my gratitude to our incredible community. I have thoroughly enjoyed my first year as Director of the Muriel A. Howard Honors program, and as I attended Buffalo State's first annual Student Showcase last week, I was reminded why: the persistence, bravery, creativity, and curiosity of our Honors students. From the research posters and oral presentations in just about every discipline, to the Global Studies Institute Symposium presentations, to the Mock Trial demonstration, to the Anne Frank Project student play *The Seed*, to the art, performances, and other creative works throughout the day, I could not be more impressed by and proud of our students—not just for your intelligence and talents, but for the people you are.

At the beginning of the 2025/26 academic year, I encouraged you all to embrace our program theme for the year and *let curiosity lead*. You adeptly met that challenge this year, both in and out of the classroom.

To our graduating seniors: congratulations! I hope you are proud of your achievements—your hard work and growth are deserving of much celebration. I have no doubt that you all will carry the same curiosity and community-oriented spirit into whatever comes next.

To all our students continuing on: I am so glad you're here, and I look forward to the year ahead, which will bring with it change but also opportunities to grow, explore, and make your mark. Be sure to save the date for our 9th Annual Honors BBQ on Friday, September 11th at 4:00 pm—I look forward to seeing you there!

- Dr. Maggie Herb

Thank you to our
Spring 2026 Honors
Student Interns:

Arie Dorsey
Ava Fletch
Zeinab Keita



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