The Honors Program, like everything else these last few months, has been greatly affected by the Covid-19 crisis. We were unable to hold our annual Honors Colloquium and Reception this year, students were unable to present at spring conferences, Honors Distinction graduates did not get the opportunity to wear their hard-earned medals at commencement, and the Biology Honors students were unable to complete their hands-on research. However, the Honors Program is alive and well, and we are all grateful to be safe. During the 2019-2020 academic year, students have completed Honors projects across several disciplines, including American Sign Language, Anthropology, Biology, Comparative Literature, English, History, Humanities, Math, Music, Philosophy, and Psychology.

The centerpiece of our program remains the academic relationships between Honors faculty and students engaged in creative scholarship within General Education Courses and/or through independent study. We welcome and are ready to meet the challenges of the multiple delivery modalities necessary to continue moving forward in a post-Covid setting. The Cochise College Honors Program is made possible by the generous support of the Cochise College Governing Board, The Foundation, The Friends of the Honors Program, and the Administration, especially our President, Dr. J.D. Rottweiler and our Executive Vice President/Provost, Dr. Verlyn Fick. With their support, and the commitment and expertise of the Honors Faculty and the Honors Advisory Board, the Honors Program continues to change lives.
Boldness, heart, and perseverance have always been a part of Honors Faculty member Jesse Smith’s life. Now she teaches those same qualities to students four classes a semester. While Jesse hadn’t ever intended to be a teacher, it is one of the most rewarding experiences imaginable for her. “I fell in love with meeting and teaching new students and quickly realized this is what I wanted to do,” Jesse said.

Jesse’s journey to becoming a popular teacher among students at Cochise College began when she was young. Although she was born into a hearing family, by the age of seven, her hearing began to worsen. Her parents took her to an audiologist, who diagnosed a hearing loss in Jesse. However, being young, she refused to use hearing aids. Her hearing declined all through high school. Fortunately, she was able to pick up social cues to get through situations. Jesse explained, “I often missed homework and test assignments announced verbally in class. In high school, I was asked out on a date, but did not hear the invitation and just walked away. To disguise my ‘loss,’ I would read the social cues of others just to know when to laugh or when to look serious, not really understanding what the situation was in the first place.”

Halfway through her senior year of high school, her family moved from Orlando to Bisbee. Jesse dropped out of school. With the few skills she had, she found work as a busser in Bisbee. She was good at her job – so good that her boss offered to buy her a hearing aid and promote her to a lunch server. A few years later, she qualified for a program through the state that provided two hearing aids. A year later, Jesse gave birth to her child.

As time passed, her hearing continually deteriorated. One day, though, her child gave her the spark she needed to take the
next steps in life, by asking her why she hadn’t gone to college. Jesse asked herself, “Did I want to wait tables for the rest of my life? Or did I want to do something else?”

In 2000 she enrolled in Cochise College to pursue an Associate of Arts in Elementary Education. One of her degree requirements was classes in a foreign language. She chose ASL, since as a visual language it offered new means of expression. It was a life-changing experience. “After taking up ASL classes, I no longer felt the awkwardness and shame of not fully fitting into the hearing world; I was Deaf and proud!” Jesse states.

In 2009 Jesse’s former ASL instructor gave her the opportunity of a lifetime. She asked Jesse if she wanted to teach an ASL class with her. She fell in love with it. She pursued her Bachelor of Arts in Deaf Studies, graduating Magna Cum Laude. In 2016 she obtained her Master of Arts in Teaching ASL. Teaching has become her life’s work, her passion. Jesse cares deeply for her students: “Seeing them acquire skills and flourish really warms the heart. I always sob when I watch them walk for graduation.”

Through her personal life and career, Jesse has explored the many varied facets of Deaf culture. She shares every new venture with students. Being hard of hearing is not a hindrance; she has turned it into a strength. She connects with people on a personal level. Although there are thousands of languages in the world, Jesse believes it is the language of shared experiences that truly unites cultures and brings people closer together.

Uncovering the past can be the key to understanding the present. Through archeology we can look at the physical remains of a society and learn about who the people were and how they lived.

Last summer, Honors student and Honors Program Distinction graduate Esteban Jasso uncovered artifacts from an archeological site at the Gila River Farm site in Cliff, New Mexico, about a half hour northwest of Silver City. Later in the year, he presented these previously unseen artifacts and his original research at a conference hosted by the Society for Historical Archeology in Boston, Massachusetts. The Society for Historical Archeology is the largest academic group in the world specializing in historical archeology, the archeological study of the modern world, focusing on the last 500-600 years.

Archeology professor Becky Orozco encouraged Esteban to apply for a summer field school sponsored by Archeology Southwest, a private non-profit preservation archeology organization partnered with the University of Arizona. There he would spend time in the field uncovering artifacts
left by previous European American settlements from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For the final research project at the field school, participants chose to present on a variety of topics concerning archeology. In choosing his project, Esteban explained, “I wanted to home in on a site-specific project that would be both challenging and original to get the most out of my experience.” He was accepted to the field school, and he spent his summer uncovering metal and leather fragments and glass ceramic shards dating between 1880-1920 – a date range considered incredibly precise by professional standards.

Esteban paired the information he gathered in the field with long hours of poring over books and past research to reach conclusions about his artifacts. The work paid off when he went to Boston, but his presentation at the conference was not without its challenges. Esteban said, “I was nervous, and I felt out of my element.” However, Esteban reminded himself of advice he received from Dr. Karen Schollmeyer, his field school project advisor, “You will know more about [the Gila River Farm] site than anyone else there.”

In Boston, he stayed with PhD candidates and with professional archeologists – quite the group of companions for a sophomore from a community college. If presenting original research was not intimidating enough, he would be spending his free time around experts who had spent years specializing in various aspects of archeology. Through his hard work and intellectual curiosity, though, Esteban established himself as an authority on this archeological dig at the conference.

One of the most important skills taught by the Cochise College Honors Program is sharing research with other scholars. Classes taken for Honors credit often involve an academic presentation, and so Esteban was no stranger to talking about his work. He describes preparing for his presentation: “Months of intense research finally led to this moment in which I would present the Gila River Farm to the world. I was proud to represent Cochise College, the Honors Program, and Archaeology Southwest at the largest historical archaeology conference in the world.”

Using his presentation skills, he was able to tailor what he said to his audience. Only a short while into the presentation, Esteban captured the attention of renowned professors and graduate students from around the country. Esteban said that it was an incredible experience to tell people about his project as they stopped by to learn more. More importantly, his time as an Honors student taught him the value of creative scholarship and collaboration. He used his time in Boston to discuss his project with everyone who showed an interest in his presentation: “I was able to receive constructive feedback and insights that would help me expand upon future research.”

As students, it can be easy to think that we aren’t qualified to conduct original research, that we only repeat what others have done before. Esteban and the Honors Program prove that’s not the case. Curiosity and perseverance can lead students and anyone, really, to personal success and professional advancement.
For Josh Novinger, the first steps in resuming his academic career were more difficult than usual. It had been ten years since he was in school. The very idea of going back filled him with fear – fear of not belonging, fear of falling behind, of not being able to keep up, fear of new demands. However, being back in a classroom alleviated those fears. In an instant, he knew he was in the right place.

In his time away from school, Josh discovered what was important to him. He ministered to his community through his church. He filled some time with sports and recreation. Ultimate Frisbee was a favorite of his. Just before he went back to school, he was working long hours in retail. Through all of it, though, Josh was missing something. No matter where he turned, his mind wandered back to school. He knew where he had to go.

The academic year came, and classes began. Josh hit the ground running, majoring in English. He had taken the easy route before: “I was a kid, fresh out of high school, completely uncertain about what I wanted to do. I was wasting time and money on classes I was only loosely interested in.” Now he was determined to do better, to be a better student. In his own words, “I didn’t procrastinate on projects that needed doing. I did the reading for my classes. I tried to be the kind of student I someday hope to have.”

His aspirations of teaching literature at the college level drove him forward. Every nerve-wracking test was an opportunity to prove that he was in the right place and doing the right thing. The papers were especially challenging, and, for an English major splitting his time between literature, creative writing, and philosophy classes, the papers were inescapable. Josh remained dedicated to his goals, though.

In the following spring semester, Gary Lawrence, a creative writing teacher, off-handedly mentioned taking his class for Honors, a proposition that intrigued Josh. He then met with the Honors Chair, Mary Coyle, who assisted in enrolling Josh in the Cochise College Honors Program.

His world was about to change. Doors he didn’t know existed were going to open. He was introduced to the Writing Lab on the Sierra Vista campus, where he went to work as a tutor. He joined the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society. His dedication to his schoolwork earned him the Cochise College Honors Program Distinction and the All Arizona Academic Scholarship, a full ride to any state school in Arizona. The rest of his sophomore year was a blur of challenge and fulfillment. Josh knew that if he put in the work, he would see the rewards through the Honors Program.

His tremendous effort paid off when he was admitted to Barrett, The Honors College at Arizona State University. The college is a school located within ASU, complete with student services, like dorms and classrooms, specifically for its students. It even boasts the highest number of National Merit Scholars in the country.

The real challenge has just begun. Josh is still studying literature. His professors are helping him every step of the way. “Feedback I’ve received from my professors has definitely been helpful to tighten up my writing, helping me to see things from a different perspective and sharpen my analysis of a given work,” Josh said. He recently submitted his prospectus, an outline for his Honors thesis, which he will present next year. The project is a study of American war veteran authors and how they write about their experiences in various conflicts. He plans to spend all his free time, “reading so, so, so many books, looking up poems, scavenging for interviews, and digging around for articles.”
In addition to its academic rigor, the Cochise College Honors Program encourages interest in different cultures. In the summer of 2019, Honors student and Honors Program Distinction graduate Quinton Willis experienced a different culture when he traveled to Japan. There he gained firsthand experience of a new culture and an incredibly unique language, Shuwa, Japanese sign language.

Quinton has been an ASL student for a few semesters now. Although he was uninterested in the classes at first, they quickly grew on him. He became genuinely interested in Deaf culture. Under the guidance of ASL instructor Jesse Smith, Quinton developed an appreciation of the language and the people who speak it. An opportunity to utilize his appreciation of language arose when a friend invited Quinton to Japan.

Quinton intends to be a youth pastor in Japan, and so he jumped at the opportunity to visit the country. Although an Associate degree in English and a planned degree in education will be helpful in his ministry, nothing is better than experience with the people he wants to serve. A week before his departure, Quinton learned that the church he’d be staying near had a growing Deaf ministry. He also discussed doing an Honors project with Jesse Smith, who provided him with an opportunity to do research and share it with his class.

Although he spoke a little Japanese before the trip, it was nowhere near enough to be conversational with the members of the church. He knew a little bit of their language, and they only knew a little bit of his. It was actually his love of ASL that opened the door to communicate with his new friends. Using his understanding of ASL and Japanese, Quinton began learning Shuwa, the Japanese sign language.

Quinton said, “Going in, I already knew the signs weren’t going to be the same. Almost every language has its own signs. Even British sign language is different than ours. What I didn’t know, however, is what other differences there are between ASL and Shuwa. More specifically, how the Deaf culture sees itself.” He discovered that deafness in Japan is often an essential aspect of individual identity. For example, someone born deaf would identify themselves as Deaf before identifying themselves as Japanese.

Although the whole trip was memorable for Quinton, his favorite part came towards the end of his stay. After a late night at the church’s youth group, he helped with the cleanup. As he sat with the others disinfecting the children’s toys, he exchanged signs with some of the members of the church. In recounting his adventure to his friends back home, he said, “I am not an expert on Shuwa, nor was I exposed to every aspect of their culture. It was eye-opening, though.”

The Cochise College Honors Program gave Quinton a platform to share his experience and use it to further his academic career. More importantly, it instilled the intellectual curiosity that led Quinton to begin learning two foreign languages, Shuwa and Japanese, and use them to communicate across cultures.
Because we were unable to hold our annual Honors Colloquium this year, and students were unable to present in a university setting as they customarily do during the spring semester, the community missed out on some great presentations. Below is one of the projects that would have been presented at Honors Colloquium and was accepted for presentation at Northern Arizona University’s 2020 Undergraduate Research Symposium.

**The Flawed Hero Across Cultures**

Honors Presentation Proposal

By Julian Olsen for ENG 260, Irish Literature, Spring 2020

This presentation is a survey of comparative mythology and folklore through the lens of archetypal heroes. It will explore the concept of the flawed hero, a figure who embodies the conflict between personal desires and the duties and obligations pertaining to the larger culture. These archetypes developed separately at different points in history, yet they reflect similar themes. This will be referred to as the Cú Chulainn Archetype as reflected in Old Irish Literature/Celtic Mythology. Beginning with an evaluation of the Irish/Celtic hero Cú Chulainn, who desired to prove himself on the battlefield for glory despite his renowned superhuman strength, the presentation will establish the pattern for the Cú Chulainn Archetype as seen in many heroes, including those from Greek, Hindu, and Chinese mythology/folklore. In Greek mythology, the Cú Chulainn Archetype is seen in the hero Achilles. His choice in the *Iliad* is between living to old age in obscurity or dying gloriously as a young man. Next, Karna in Hindu mythology fulfills the Cú Chulainn Archetype. In the *Mahabharata*, Karna remains loyal to those who adopted him instead of following the path of Krishna’s righteousness. Lastly, Yue Fei represents the elements of the Cú Chulainn Archetype in Chinese legend/folklore. The Chinese general remained loyal to a corrupt and dying dynasty, despite his friendships with members of the invading forces. The presentation will conclude with an exploration of the Cú Chulainn Archetype in contemporary society.