



# NEWS & NOTES

branching out

*Fall* || 2024

Cover by: Caroline Emerick

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# N&N

News + Notes

Ball State University  
Honors College

Instagram: @news.and.notes

## Theme & Cover Note

*"Branching out" means more than just the limbs on a tree in the Ball State Honors College. Branching out looks like trying new experiences, balancing new opportunities, and finding future opportunities. Whether this is through Ball State Athletics, joining the ROTC Troop, or even being a first generation student, Honors College students are branching out now more than ever in their college careers.*

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# EDITORIAL

As a current third-year pursuing a degree in HR, relationships built during college are key to success, and those relationships are best built through being involved. Students are furthering their academic and personal development, and studies are showing increased odds of success rates for those who involve themselves in multiple activities throughout college. I can even attest to this as my college resume doubles in length year by year, my network of connections from branching out reflects this well.

By looking at how this involvement benefits those who pursue honors and various other commitments in the community, we hope this edition of News & Notes showcases the dualities of current Honors students, as well as the impact their balanced schedules have on their education and flight path to success.

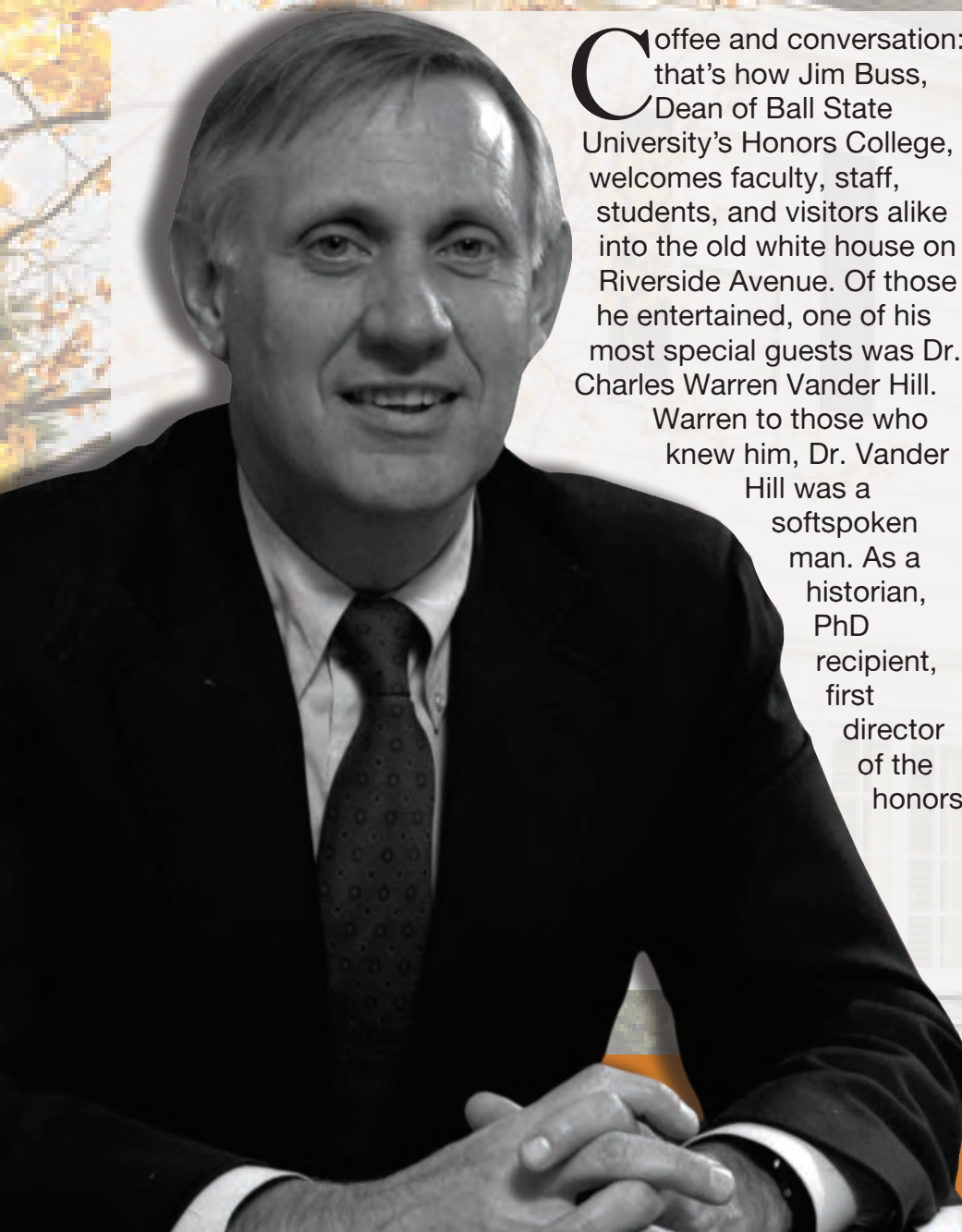
Chirp Chirp!

*Caroline*



# AN *HONORABLE* LIFE

## *how one man changed the trajectory of Ball State University*



Coffee and conversation: that's how Jim Buss, Dean of Ball State University's Honors College, welcomes faculty, staff, students, and visitors alike into the old white house on Riverside Avenue. Of those he entertained, one of his most special guests was Dr. Charles Warren Vander Hill.

Warren to those who knew him, Dr. Vander Hill was a softspoken man. As a historian, PhD recipient, first director of the honors

college, and founder of the Whiting Scholars program, he was detail-oriented and apt to tell stories, careful to include even the smallest anecdotes to ensure his listeners had the most accurate perspective.

A product of a long line of academics, Dr. Vander Hill had not one, not two, but three degrees to his name as well. In fact, his 36-year career at Ball State University began in the Department of History in 1968, where he taught both American and world history to future storytellers. In 1979, Dr. Vander Hill went on to establish the Ball State Honors College, making it the first of its kind in the state of Indiana.

"Dr. Vander Hill and I shared a common understanding of the power of the Honors bers," Dr. Buss said. "In addition, he and I both believe that the Honors College

Warren Vander Hill, then Provost, poses for a photo at his desk in 1987. Photo acquired from Ball State Digital Media Repository.

Design by: Natalie Walker

Story by: Sarah Olsen

# Two of Vander Hill's major milestones in the Honors College

Source: Ball State Honors College

curriculum is designed to help students see the world beyond their own life or career experiences and to help students make connections that transcend their disciplines and majors.”

Though his founding of the college was a major point of joy, Dr. Vander Hill cemented one of his proudest accomplishments three years prior when he began the Whitinger Scholarship Program in 1976. This is still the most prestigious scholarship awarded by Ball State, and it is only given to eight outstanding incoming honors freshman per year. The Whitinger Scholarship gives recipients a full ride to Ball State University.

Mazie Wathen, class of 2025, is a fourth-year student majoring in political science and Spanish with minors in French and peace and conflict studies. She was awarded the Whitinger Scholarship in 2021, which has let her challenge herself throughout her subsequent four years at BSU.

“The Whitinger Scholarship has enabled me to attend college and allowed me to focus on academics with my full

attention. The privilege to hold this scholarship has permitted me to be more ambitious when selecting majors and minors and motivated me to excel in my courses,” Wathen explained. “My academic career without the Whitinger Scholarship would be a total change. I likely would have never chosen to select two majors and two minors. Without this opportunity, I feel I would have slipped into complacency and lost drive.”

Though Dr. Vander Hill passed away on July 1, 2024, at 86 years of age, his memory lives on in Dr. Buss, Wathen, and every other BSU honors student and faculty member. To extend his memory, the new Vander Hill Student Opportunity Grant was established by alumni in March 2024, and it will serve as a way for students to fund non-tuition related costs, such as internships, research opportunities, studying abroad, and more. For those interested, the first call for applicants will be the next semester, in the spring of 2025.

Thank you, Dr. Vander Hill, for all you did, and all your memory will do.

## 1970

Dr. Warren Vander Hill took over for Sandy MacGibon as director of the Honors Program. To expand the Honors core curriculum, Vander Hill added HONR 199, Inquiries in Contemporary American Civilization in 1974. A few years later, in 1977, BIO 199, Human Genetics and Bio-ethical Decision Making, was also added to the curriculum.

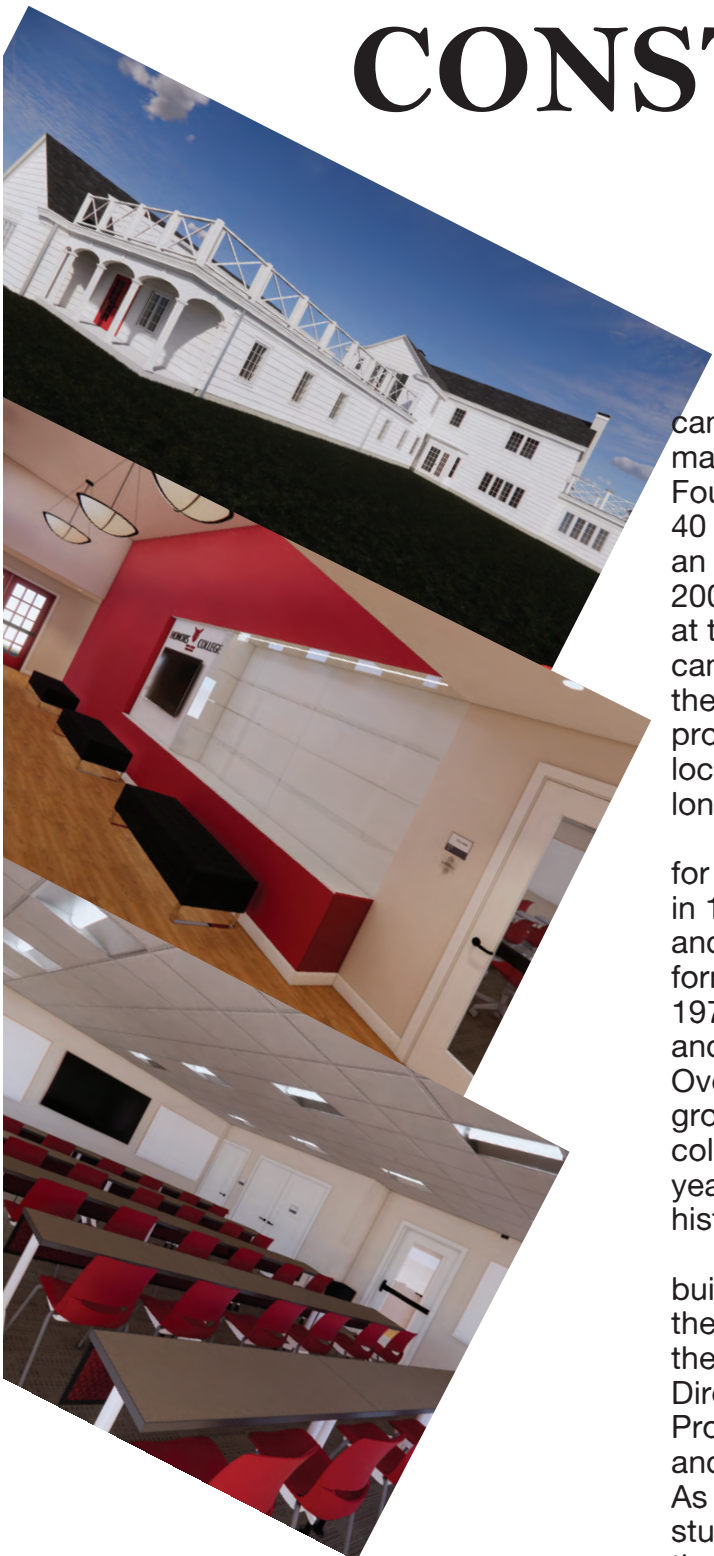
## 1979

With a core curriculum and honors housing fully a part of honors education at Ball State, Dr. Vander Hill proposed a change to university administration and the University Senate. The Senate approved the change and the Board of Trustees approved the change in 1979 to create the Honors College.

To view the full timeline of the Honors College, visit the Honors College Website.

# HONORS HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

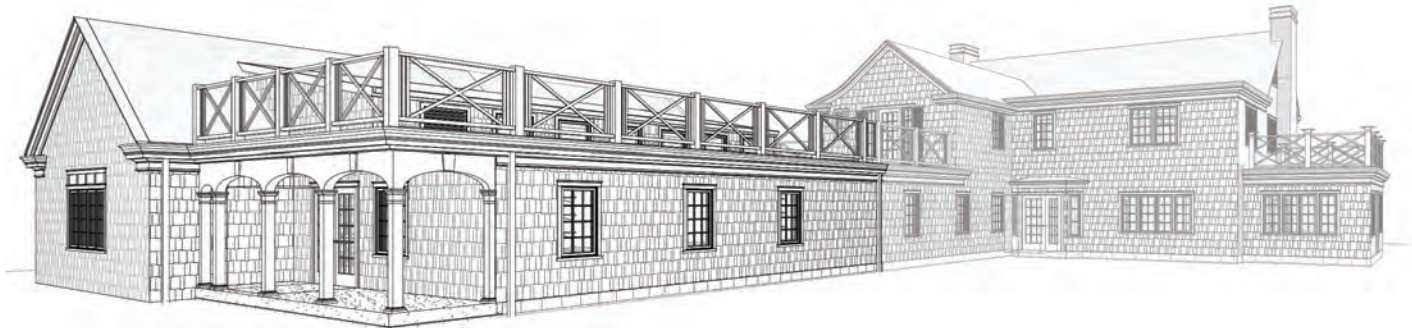
*preliminary plans in  
the works*



Following Virginia Ball's death in 2003, the university took possession of the historic colonial white house in the middle of campus that Ed and Virginia Ball called home for many years. With gifts from the Ed and Virginia Ball Foundation, the Ball Brothers Foundation, and nearly 40 other individuals, the home was transformed into an academic learning space for honors students in 2009. For the past fifteen years, the house has been at the center of honors education on Ball State's campus. Prior to calling the Ball Honors House home, the Honors College (and the honors program that preceded it) had been housed in many different locations, some of which, like Carmichael Hall, no longer exist.

Ball State has been offering honors education for as long as any university in the country. Beginning in 1959, Ball State University offered honors courses and an honors curriculum to students. When the former program transitioned to the Honors College in 1979, it became the first Honors College in Indiana and among the first Honors Colleges in the nation. Over the past 65 years, honors education has certainly grown at Ball State. This past fall semester, the college welcomed more than 600 new incoming first-year students, including the most diverse class in the history of honors at BSU.

Alongside classrooms and faculty offices, the building also houses advisors for honors students, the Office of Nationally Competitive Scholarships, the Virginia Ball Center for Creative Inquiry, the Director for Student Success and Honors First-Year Programs, the Coordinator for Honors Recruitment and Retention, and many honors student workers. As the Honors College grew in recent years—both in students and faculty-- discussions began to expand the Ball Honors House in order to accommodate this growth and serve more students. Since 2018, donors at many levels have committed more than \$1.2 million toward the project. To complete the expansion, the Honors College continues to raise funds to ensure that



the project fully addresses the needs of honors students. There has yet to be a set date for the start of the expansion, but the hope is to have the work finished by next fall. However, according to Dean Buss, the construction plan is “flexible” when considering all of the current construction in The Village.

The expansion plan began prior to the Pandemic, and in recent years, planning has been ongoing for the next phase of the project. Architects and designers have gone to great lengths to bring contemporary building and technology elements to the interior of the house, while maintaining a 1930s design aesthetic to the building’s exterior. The new grand entryway will have a contemporary feel with abundant natural light. If done right, the changes will be indistinguishable when looking at the front of the house. While professional architects are involved in the final design of the project, students from Ball State’s Landscape Architecture program helped inspire some of the exterior landscaping. Over the course of two semesters, students in Landscape Architecture provided design ideas and concept drawings as part of their studio projects. Some of those elements made it into the final designs.

The finished project will include an outdoor paved labyrinth, a new entryway, a studio classroom, and offices for some of the Honors College’s most publicly facing offices. It will also provide space in the grand entryway to recognize donors, individuals with significant contributions to honors at BSU, and awards received by students in honors and Virginia Ball Center projects.

“It’s been a cool project,” Dean Buss said, “which has been the work of many people over the past several years, including previous deans and directors. Even though I only walked in toward the end, and I’m excited about what a renovated Ball Honors House holds for the future of the Honors College. I think students, faculty, staff, and guests will be excited when it’s done.”



# A NEW CONNECTION

## *the director of student success and honors first year programs*

**M**eeet Ashanti Figures, who is a new addition to the Honors College. She was recently hired as the college's first Director of Student Success and Honors First Year Programs. She attended Ball State as an undergraduate student, majoring in psychology with a minor in interpersonal relations. Subsequently, Figures obtained her Master's of Education in Student Affairs Administration at the University of North Carolina. While a student at Ball State, Figures was an orientation leader, which sparked her interest in student affairs. She was also part of Alpha Phi Omega, a community service organization, and became its president in her senior year.

Figures sees a lot of potential in her new position, and she trusts the rest of the Honors College faculty and staff to challenge and support her to make the most out of her new role.

Overseeing the Honors Peer Mentor Program and organizing first year programs in the college are some of Figures' responsibilities.

To promote the future career success of honors students, she is working with the Honors College on the Alumni Connections Program. This program is set to launch in Spring 2025, and it will be an opportunity for honors alumni, from different career paths, to be paired with honors students who are interested in similar careers. This connection creates a "stepping-off point" for students to receive advice as well as hear how the Honors College helped honors alumni prepare for their career.

**Her main goal is to create programs that "contribute to the Honors College first year identity."**

In regards to the Honors Peer Mentor Program, Figures intends to implement leadership development material to add to the Honors 100 curriculum. This will further enrich the program for students and their mentors as they will begin building valuable interpersonal skills.

In addition to her own responsibilities, Figures works alongside Amanda Huynh, the new Coordinator for Recruitment and Retention at the Honors College.



Director of Student Success and First Year Programs, Ashanti Figures.

Figures supports Huynh's efforts to plan events such as Honors College Preview Day as well as honors involvement in campus-wide admissions events.

Figures, the Director for Student Success and First Year Programs, is excited to be a part of the Honors College, and is ready to "get the ball rolling and make an impact." She looks forward to getting to know the Honors College population, seeing the potential of the new position fulfilled, and getting to support Honors College students.



# CELEBRATING CREATIVITY

## ***“Pop of Culture” radio show thrives with Indiana Arts Commission Grant***



**B**all State Public Media has received a grant from the Indiana Arts Commission for the continuation of the radio station show “Pop Culture.” The show has been running since February 2023 through Indiana Public Radio (IPR), leaving a tremendous impact on the listening community.

Before being awarded the grant, Dr. Phil Hoffman, the Assistant Dean of Media and General Manager of BSU Public Media, needed to get the idea of what people from East Central Indiana wanted to hear more of on the radio. He quickly decided on small local artists.

For the past two years, Hoffman has written the grant application and, both years, it has been awarded. The written application requires pieces relating to “Pop of Culture” and how it affects the region. “Pop of Culture” highlights local artists: dancers, painters and actors.

“We wanted to be able to talk about the things happening in the community,” Hoffman said. “But then it kind of grew from there as we started working on the production, and we started thinking about what the show could be.”

While a variety of people work together to create “Pop of Culture,” Ball State students are able to assist with IPR on projects. Dr. Jennifer

Blackmer, a cohost on “Pop of Culture,” specifically the show “Conversations Between Coasts,” expresses how much she loves the program and how it helps the community get involved.

“I like to talk to people like me,” Blackmer said. “But we talk about the importance of art to all kinds of communities.”

The show promotes a variety of different artists. Blackmer aims to showcase people from across the Midwest, including cross-state coverage from Wisconsin, Ohio, Tennessee, and Illinois in order to get the word out about amazing regional artists.

“We talk with professional artists who have chosen to make their homes in places that are not urban and that are not typically seen as art centers,” Blackmer said.

To check out “Pop of Culture,” go to <https://indianapublicradio.org/popofculture/> or tune in to WBSB for Anderson, WBSW for Marian County, WBSH for Hagerstown, and WBST 92.1 for Muncie, also known as Delaware County. Shows air on Friday and Saturday at noon.





# Reaching Out and Strengthening a Community

## *increased inclusivity for honors organizations*



In the past, all Honors College organizations on campus were strictly for honors students only. Now that some of those organizations have been opened to everyone, there are more opportunities to build a bigger and stronger community, especially within the Honors College.

One of the goals of the Honors College at Ball State has always been to build and maintain a community that valued collaboration, critical thinking, and the presence of multiple perspectives. Having organizations that were open exclusively to honors students was a way to build this community.

Recently, restrictions for some these organizations have lessened, and now many organizations that were previously Honors-only, such as HACE, HOPE, Cardinal Classics, and News & Notes, have opened to everyone.

As a result of this change, the communities created within these clubs are now stronger than ever.

According to Em Allen, the President of the Honors Association for Community Engagement (HACE), having students outside of the Honors College has been insightful in many ways, especially during the club’s cross-cultural discussions.

“They add a lot to the discussions,” Allen said, “I feel as if I don’t have to facilitate the discussion as much anymore and I can just sit back and listen to what they are saying.”



In addition to building community, allowing non-honors students to be a part of honors organizations ensures an opportunity for students to remain a part of the community if, for one reason or another, they leave the Honors College.

“There are people who leave the Honors College because it conflicts with their major, their classes, or their plans to graduate early,” Allen said, “It’s helpful if they have already made that connection and want to stay in honors organizations.”

Rowan Hartje, the Vice President of Cardinal Classics, believes opening the club to all students also helped combat the idea that honors clubs were more rigorous or intimidating than other clubs.

“Having that ‘honors-only’ label attached to it did make it sound like it was an academic setting,” Hartje said, “Saying

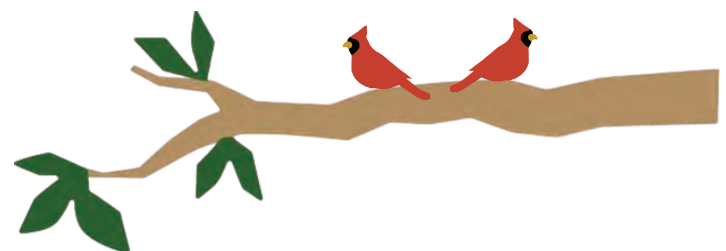
that we are a book club, and we read books for fun is a much more inclusive and better sounding environment as opposed to the ‘honors-only’ label.”

Not only does making a club available only to honors students make the club seem more academic and intimidating, but Hartje

also believes that it could lead to a feeling of isolation if honors students participate exclusively in honors-only clubs.

“The honors community makes up a very small portion of everyone that goes to a college campus,” Hartje said, “When honors students only do honors-only

clubs, they are not going to meet people that they would really enjoy spending time with and would be interested in those same activities.”



# DUALITIES OF AN HONORS STUDENT

*what branching out looks like for student athletes and ROTC cadets*

Ball State's Honors College is full of diversity, whether that be through academic fields, personalities, backgrounds, hobbies, and activities outside of academics. Branching out from the books, the Honors College is lucky to have a number of student

athletes and ROTC members who love what they do and are more than willing to share their experiences.

Joshua Miller, an honors student majoring in computer science with a concentration in cyber security, as well as a minor in military science, is a member of Ball State's ROTC. Miller is a First Sergeant and co-coach for the ROTC Ranger Challenge, an event where the top cadets compete with other schools in programs such as

marksmanship, weapons assembly, and the Army physical fitness test. Along with this training, Miller takes one weekend every semester to go to Camp Atterbury for training, practice, and drills. Part of what drew him to the Honors College and keeps him involved is the growth that the courses have offered him, both as a person and as a student. His honors courses have allowed him to develop an appreciation for art and for motivational skills. ROTC is hard work, no doubt, but Miller does not see it or the Honors College as being anything too extra. Miller's belief is that, if you can balance your tasks and visualize what you want to achieve, and what's important to you, then that makes it worth the effort.

Junior Gwenyth Porod poses for photo with her horse. Photo contributed by Gwenyth Porod.



Junior Joshua Miller gestures to a computer screen with a colleague. Photo contributed by Joshua Miller.

Student Gwenyth Porod, a third-year studying biology with concentrations in wildlife biology and zoology, sees combining her two academic paths as the best choice in uniting both interests of hers. While being involved with the STEM program track, she serves as the Vice President of the Ball State Hunter-Jumper Equestrian team. This responsibility is a time commitment of a considerable amount, with equestrian shows taking place several hours away from campus over weekends, Porod believes her commitment to staying involved with the Honors College, while balancing this duty is critical to self-development. “I believe it’s really important that all of these different majors can come together and coexist, and it really helps formulate yourself because you are surrounded with so many different people, with so many different ideas,” Porod said. “It helps me practice those skills you might not necessarily practice in your [academic] pathway.” Embracing the benefit of the honors curriculum in attribution to being a well rounded student, Porod sees the Honors College as a great opportunity: “The interactive discussion based classes, especially in the humanities, it enables me to have that break, to let me not focus on STEM and pursue learning more about other areas I might not necessarily learn about.”

Along with our ROTC members, our student athletes put in hours of hard



Senior Aaron Hernandez, member of the Men’s Volleyball team stands by a colosseum on his study abroad trip in Rome. Photo contributed by Aaron Hernandez.

work as both academics and competitors. Student athlete senior Aaron Hernandez, a right side hitter for the Men’s Volleyball Team, sees the Honors College as his path towards staying connected with Ball State. “I love volleyball, but I really think honors is a different group that I don’t get to interact with often; it’s a whole other world that I truly want to stay in touch with because it helps me stay less closed off to the rest of campus outside of athletics and my major.” Being involved in both programs since his freshman year, Hernandez has succeeded in being a student athlete. As well as taking advantage of the Honors College study abroad program, Hernandez has recently spent a summer abroad in Spain. The honors curriculum, which is focused around discussion based

courses, impacts students with stoutly transferable skills. “After taking [honors courses] I noticed how the skills translated to so much of my other classes. The courses honestly helped change the way I think about things,” Hernandez said. “The Honors College really alters your way of thinking. Nothing is straightforward anymore. It’s looking at every angle, every perspective, [and] it changes the way you kind of think about life.”

The Honors College is a big commitment, as are athletics, club sports, and ROTC, but our students find balance and a sense of accomplishment through their involvement. Our students are more than just academics; they branch out and are champions in everything they do.

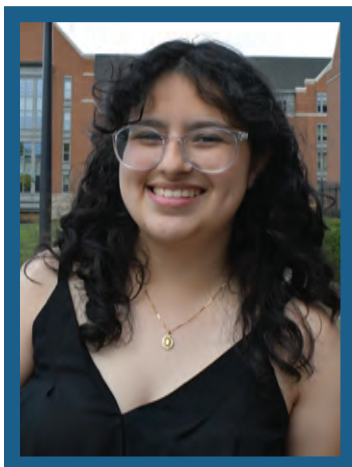
# AN HONORABLE JOURNEY

## *first-generation honors students share their experiences for navigating college life*

**F**irst-generation students, students whose parents did not earn Bachelor's degrees, fill Ball State's campus, adding a diverse perspective and experience to our community. College is already such a new experience and, on top of being first-generation, some of these students branch out to join the Honors College.

Why might first-generation college students take on this additional challenge? Honors student Cindy Ramos remarks that her parents "left everything they knew for us, and I want to repay what they put forth for me by putting in my best effort to make them proud." Ramos' parents moved to the U.S. from Mexico in 2001, and she helped them learn English while acquiring it as a second language herself. Ramos joined the Honors College after learning about the opportunities for scholarships and study abroad. Ramos has found life in the honors Living Learning Community in DeHority residence hall especially rewarding.

Community is a cornerstone of the Honors College, something DeHority Resident Assistant and honors student Noah White emphasizes: "When you make friends with and



Pictured: Cindy Ramos.  
Photo taken by Elle Kennedy.

talk to these stand-out individuals, there's an understanding that they are more than just a student, they are Honors students." While pursuing an architecture degree, he credits his parents with encouraging him to set high standards. "While they both live a content and

happy life, they always told me and my siblings of their hope that we follow our career paths to the best of our ability," White explains. White adds that, "being in the Honors

College allows me to hold myself accountable while also providing experiences and opportunities." "I was nervous that I wouldn't fit in at all because neither one of my parents went to college, so I had no real expectation for what it was going to be like," Ramos said. After arriving at Ball State, however, Ramos quickly found genuine friends whom she calls her second family.

White expressed similar initial worries stating, "Most of my friends chose a school based off of what they wanted to study, but also from influences of where their parents or family went to school. I was unable to have that insight." This anxiety was quickly weathered when he found friends in the CAP program, on-campus jobs, and various organizations. White's advice for future first-generation honors students? "This is the time to make connections that are going to last the rest of your life. [...] Don't let these years pass you by, because they go so quick. Say yes to all opportunities and go make memories."

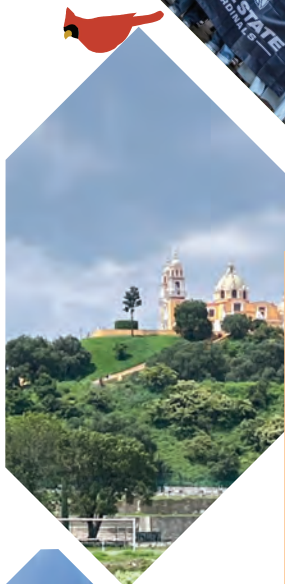
Pictured: Noah White  
Photo Submitted.





# A TRIP TO REMEMBER

*the trip that gifted students new perspectives*



There are many fantastic opportunities to travel abroad offered at Ball State. Currently, Dr. Obed Frausto Gatica is leading and teaching classes at Universidad de las Américas Puebla (UDLAP), a private university in Cholula, Mexico. With twenty-six in attendance, students have the opportunity to learn about Mexican culture. While the students' majors range from Pre-Med to Wildlife Biology and Conservation, all the students are enjoying their time.

The students from Ball State enjoy making friends with other UDLAP students, seeing the beautiful architecture, and experiencing the regional culture. The group has visited such places as the Great Pyramid of Cholula and Salon Los Angeles, a concert hall in Mexico City. Dr. Frausto grew up in Mexico City, and students with him on this trip have the pleasure to experience the place in which he grew up.

While they are situated in Choulua for this academic opportunity, the students get to travel around Mexico to experience the country and culture. In particular, students were able to see Chinampa near Xochimilco, a floating island that roots into

the waterway that is used for farming. Students even had the opportunity to take part in volunteer work on the island.

Many students have had their own unique academic experiences on this study abroad trip. Improving linguistic skills was one of the many reasons participants chose to apply for this opportunity. Many students reported how they came in with intermediate Spanish speaking abilities, or a Spanish minor, and now have improved beyond what they thought was possible.

“What I really enjoy about this was being able to apply my skills I’ve learned, and being able to help people with daily tasks like ordering food, and getting information,” said Junior Gabriel Minichiello.

Students are enjoying their experiences, and many are glad they were able to be given such a wonderful opportunity to study in Cholula, Mexico.

“My worldview has changed so much since coming here,” said Junior Kerri Sasser. “I’ll never regret taking the opportunity, and it has only made me more dedicated to my career path and traveling the world.”

Ball State Honors House  
Ball State University  
Muncie, IN 47306-0185

## Donations

If you would like to make a gift to Ball State or the Honors College, please use the QR code linked to the Ball State Foundation website. There is a drop down menu that will allow you to select the Honors College.

You can also visit the Alumni & Friends page on the Honors College website to update your contact information or get involved with the Honors College from the comfort of your community.

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