



Honors Annual Report

2024-2025



EKU Honors Students as National Leaders

Kyle Smith, NCHC Portz Scholar

EKU Honors' very own Kyle Smith was one of only four students nationwide to receive this year's prestigious Portz Scholar Award from the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). The Portz Scholar Award goes each year to the top four undergraduate research projects in the nation at NCHC member institutions. Kyle won the award for his honors thesis, titled "Writing Boleyn Ballads: Exploring Constraints on Sexuality Within the Henrician Court Through a Historical Graphic Novel." Along with the other three winners, Kyle presented his project again and received his award on last November at the

2024 annual conference of the NCHC in Kansas City. A May 2024 EKU Honors Scholar graduate from the EKU Honors Program with a major in English, he is currently pursuing a master's degree in creative writing through EKU's Bluegrass Writers Studio. This was only the second time (and the first since 2014) that a student from EKU Honors was recognized as an NCHC Portz Scholar.



Katelyn Walker, Student Representative on the NCHC Executive Board



EKU Honors Program junior Graphic Design major Katelyn (Kat) Walker continued this year serving in her two-year term as one of only five nationally elected student representatives on the Executive Board of the NCHC. In this role, she serves alongside deans, directors, students, and faculty from honors colleges and programs all across the United States to oversee the functions of the NCHC (the nation's largest and most important organization of honors educators and students) and to plan and carry out the annual NCHC conference. First nominated to this position at the 2023 NCHC annual meeting in Chicago, Kat has since attended members-only board

meetings in Kansas City, New York City, and San Diego. For last fall's NCHC annual conference in Kansas City, Kat was among the key leaders in planning all student programming. At the NCHC awards ceremony in Kansas City, with more than 1,000 conference-goers in attendance, Kat served as presenter for one of the NCHC National Honors Student of the Year Awards.

EKU Honors Cultural Trip 2025: New York City



EKU Honors partnered again this year with EKU's Center for Inclusive Excellence and Global Engagement (CIEGE) to offer a January Cultural Trip. This year's EKU Honors Cultural Trip took 33 students from EKU Honors and 8 students from CIEGE on a three-day learning adventure to New York City. The trip was organized with a "menu" approach, with each student choosing from a variety of faculty/staff-led cultural and historical site tours. Options included the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the 9/11 Memorial, the Statue of Liberty, the New York Public Library, the United Nations, the

Cloisters Museum of Medieval Art, the Tenement Museum, the Chelsea High Line, the American Museum of Natural History, a Brooklyn Bridge night walk (under light snowfall), and much more.

Trip leaders included Dr. Tom Butler, Dr. Rae Loftis, Dr. Karen Peavler, and Martina Jackson. EKU alumna and longtime career US diplomat (and fabulous friend of EKU Honors) Dr. Deborah Alexander also traveled with the group. Dr. Alexander led the United Nations tour, sharing stories and lessons from her professional work there over the years. She also shared special insights while our students visited the 9/11 Museum and memorial, since she was in New York on that fateful day back in 2001.

As always, the cost of the trip was heavily subsidized above all by our EKU Honors Alumni group's "Bonnie Gray Society Endowment Fund." Named for Founding Director of EKU Honors Dr. Bonnie Gray and established at the time of her retirement in 2008, this fund has been built up gradually over the years by honors alumni donations, such that it now is sufficient to fund nearly half of the total cost of the EKU Honors January Cultural Trip in most years, keeping expenses relatively low for each student.



Honors Launch Welcomes New First-Year Honors Students



Our third annual "Honors Launch" in August 2024 welcomed 104 of our new, incoming first-year honors students to campus on the Sunday preceding Big E Welcome for three days of leadership development and community-building activities. Our first-year students were led by 22 of our sophomore, junior, and senior honors student "Peer Mentors," each of whom "co-shepherded" a team of our new students. Activities included a marshmallow tower challenge, a scavenger hunt, a team song-and-dance skit night, an impromptu speech activity, and a trip to EKU's low-ropes challenge course. Honors Launch closed with a banquet attended by 16 of our fabulous honors alumni, each of whom sat at a table with a group of our new students to share memories of their time in EKU Honors along with some words of wisdom. The event has quickly become a treasured fixture and emergent tradition in the EKU Honors calendar.



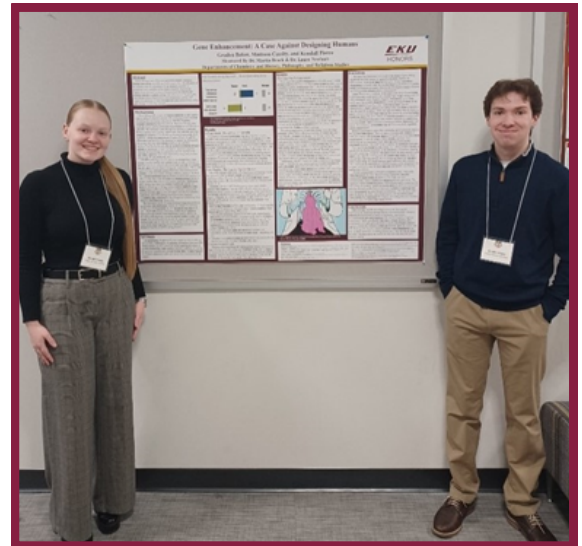
Honors Conferences

EKU Honors has long been a national leader in sending students to honors conferences to present their research. Since 1990, more than 1,100 students from EKU Honors have presented their work at the annual conference of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC)—more than any other honors college or honors program in the entire USA over that time.

This year, eight EKU Honors Program students built further on this tradition by presenting research projects or creative/artistic work at the annual meeting of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) October 30–November 3, 2024 in Kansas City, MO. Then at the start of the spring semester, eighteen EKU Honors Program students presented research or creative/artistic work at the spring 2025 meeting of the Kentucky Honors Roundtable (KHR) at the University of Louisville, January 31–February 1, 2025. Finally, fourteen EKU Honors Program students made research or creative/artistic presentations at the annual meeting of the Southern Regional Honors Council (SRHC) March 26–29, 2025, in Chattanooga, TN.

We are also aware of at least eight more honors students who presented at other national, regional, or state-level scholarly conferences: three at the annual conference of the Kentucky Academy of Sciences (November 2024 at Kentucky State University), one at the annual meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology in Portland, Oregon in March 2025, one at the

American Academy of Forensic Science in Baltimore, Maryland in February 2025, and three at the National McNair Scholars Research Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico in January 2025. The travel and presentation opportunities for nearly all of these students were supported in whole or in part by EKU Honors.



By the Numbers

414

**FALL 2024 TOTAL
NUMBER OF
STUDENTS IN ECU
HONORS**

130

**INCOMING FIRST-YEAR
HONORS STUDENTS
FALL 2024
(OUR LARGEST CLASS
EVER)**

1,100+

**STUDENT PRESENTERS AT
NCHC SINCE 1990 (ECU
HONORS LEADS THE
NATION IN THIS
CATEGORY)**

31%

**Of ECU Honors Program
Students are
First-Generation College
Students (Spring 2025 Data)**



306

**Number of students since 2010 who
have participated in ECU Honors'
annual January "Cultural Trip" and/or
"Sidewalk U." study/travel adventures
to cities across the United States (and
even occasionally into Mexico or
Canada). All have been supported
financially by the "Bonnie Gray
Society" endowment established by
ECU Honors alumni in 2008 on the
occasion of the retirement of
founding ECU Honors Director Dr.
Bonnie Gray.**

EKU Honors Around the World



Forty students from ECU Honors participated in study abroad programs between summer 2024 and spring 2025 (up from thirty-five last year). Although students in ECU Honors comprise only about 3 percent of the ECU undergraduate student body as a whole, honors students accounted for a little over 22 percent of all ECU student study-abroad experiences (40 out of 178 total) over the past twelve months.

Sixteen of these students were supported by Trailblazer Study Abroad grants (ranging from \$1500 to \$2500) from ECU Honors.



Eastern Honors Association (EHA)

The Eastern Honors Association (EHA) is our honors student governance organization. EHA organizes social events and student community service outreach programs. They also assist at honors recruiting events and build relationships between current students in ECU Honors and our wonderful honors alumni. This year, EHA had a particularly busy and productive year.



At Homecoming last fall, ECU Honors was (for the second straight year) the feature academic unit for publicity all week, culminating in the homecoming football game. Not only did our students have the chance to take the field to throw T-shirts to the crowd, but they were also again featured in a new brief video about ECU Honors that aired on the stadium jumbotron. That video can be viewed at this link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eiwVMYhR_CXi6r_P5KZXAVPuQIA4X9yN/view?usp=sharing

EHA also put together again this year a fabulous winter ball—this time themed “Winter in Paris.” More than 160 honors students attended and enjoyed a fun evening of music, dance, and lights.



Honoring Academic Excellence

The ECU Library's Research Award for Undergraduates

The ECU Library's Research Award for Undergraduates competition each spring recognizes the very best research projects produced by ECU students campus-wide over the preceding year. Over the twelve years that these awards have been given, the overwhelming majority of student winners have come from ECU Honors. Such was the case again this year, as students from ECU Honors swept these awards. First place in this year's competition went to senior Communications Sciences and Disorders major (and English minor) Lauren Kelley for her honors thesis "The Gendered Room

and the Lock on the Door: Women Writers and the Patriarchy in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*." The runner up was ECU Honors senior Business major Sarah Morris for her honors thesis titled "Independent Mediation: A Restorative Justice Approach to Conflict Resolution among College Roommates." This was the seventh time that students from ECU Honors swept all awards given in this competition.



Dean's Award: Malina Gaworski

At the spring 2025 ECU Scholars Assembly award ceremony, ECU Honors senior Malina Gaworski received the ECU College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences Dean's Award, recognizing her as the college's top graduate for the year. Malina is a Spanish and Psychology major from Lexington, KY.

Honors Celebration Day

For the third consecutive year, we held our "Honors Celebration Day" on Thursday April 24, 2025. Honors Celebration Day serves as the culmination of our recently (since 2022) restructured ECU Honors First-Year Experience. The event involved a showcase of research posters and presentations in Keen Johnson Building from all of our



first-year students in our new HON 104 "Learning Community" seminars, alongside a sampling of posters from 300-level HON seminars as well as selected posters that had been presented at SRHC this year. This year, Honors Celebration Day was held in conjunction with the ECU Office of Alumni Affairs' and ECU Foundation Board's ECU Donor Appreciation Night. Major donors to ECU all had a chance to meet and talk with our students about their research.

The showcase was followed by the annual Donor Appreciation Supper, to which our first-year student showcase presenters were also invited. Finally, our Honors Celebration culminated in the evening with a remarkable art and performances show from our HON 104 "Creative Imagination: Life and Death" HON 104 Learning Community students in O'Donnell Auditorium Theater.



Building Opportunity

Give to ECU Honors

You can directly support students in ECU Honors by giving to the Bonnie Gray Society Endowment. Established by alumni at the time of founding director Dr. Bonnie Gray's retirement in 2008, this endowment provides a permanent source of financial assistance for students who attend our Cultural Trips and/or "Sidewalk U." study away programs each year. These trips take students on learning adventures to locales across America and even into Canada and Mexico. Lives are changed and horizons broadened by these cultural odysseys, and the Bonnie Gray Society Endowment helps make them possible each year.

Visit go.eku.edu/give-GraySociety to make a gift to the Bonnie Gray Society Endowment.





EKU HONORS PROGRAM

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