New Honors Study Lounge Opens in Hume Hall

The UF Honors Program is pleased to announce the opening of a new study lounge in the old Honors office suite in 118 Hume Hall. The newly renovated space includes 40 individual study chairs with laptop desks and cup holders, two small group study rooms, and a conference room that student groups can reserve for meetings. The lounge was furnished with the support of the UF Libraries and the Honors Parents Fund. All Honors students have 24-hour access to the lounge, whether or not they live in Hume Hall.

The Honors Program and the UF Libraries have also arranged for a reference librarian to be on duty in the lounge three nights per week. Students may come for help researching any topic. Library staff are able to show students how to access incredible amounts of information available through the UF Libraries’ databases. We encourage our students to visit and find out just how valuable a good librarian can be.

The Honors Program is proud to be able to offer this exceptional upgrade to the intellectual environment at Hume Hall. We invite you to stop by and have a look the next time you are on campus.
Greetings from Gainesville, where it has been a busy semester. The Honors Program staff is finally settled into our new offices on the third floor of the Infirmary. This central location on campus is much more convenient for us, but it has also worked out well for our students, especially those who do not live in Hume Hall. It is much simpler to drop by now and we have noticed a marked increase in walk-in traffic. With the conversion of our old office suite in Hume to a new Honors study lounge (see page 1), we are moving forward toward our goal of building the premier Honors Program in the region.

This fall I convened an Honors advisory committee. It is comprised of faculty from various departments on campus along with a few current Honors students. My question to the committee was this: what should the Honors Program look like? I concede that this is a broad question, but I did not want to place limitations on where the conversation might go.

Here is what the program looks like now: students are encouraged to do lots of things, but not required to do much of anything. This flexibility has its advantages, but it seems to me (and the advisory committee appears to agree) that there should be some common experiences that students in the Honors Program share. The residential college at Hume Hall provides some commonality, but not every Honors student lives there, and indeed we have heard from students who live elsewhere that they sometimes feel left out (despite our best efforts to reach out to everyone). The Honors Professional Development course helps hundreds of our students prepare for their futures by introducing tips for resume writing and interviewing, helping students find internship and research opportunities, and engaging students in community service activities (see page 3). We do not require this course, however. Our students participate in innumerable enrichment programs; one fantastic example is the Partners in the Parks Program organized by Southern Utah University in cooperation with the National Collegiate Honors Council (see pages 4—5). We are able to help students take advantage of such activities through the Wentworth Scholarship Fund, and dozens take advantage each year.

The residential, professional development, and extramural aspects of the Honors Program are well-established and thriving. My focus as director, and what we are working on in the advisory committee, is designing a common academic experience for Honors students at UF. We have students in every major on campus, but there are certain themes that all students should encounter—critical thinking, ethics studies, social responsibility, to name a few. The faculty and students on the committee are examining many options and models for how to address these issues, and I am excited by the prospects. All of this is very much a work in progress, but I believe in the importance of setting goals and moving toward their completion. Stay tuned.

As we approach the end of the year and look forward to the beginning of a new one, please accept my sincere wishes for a safe and happy holiday season for you, your family, and friends.
Honors Students Supporting the Community

Each year, incoming freshmen in the Honors Program are invited to participate in a one-credit course designed to introduce new students to resources and opportunities available on campus and in our community. Students enrolled in Honors Introduction to Professional Development learn about internships, study abroad programs, research opportunities, and leadership. This fall, the over 160 students enrolled in six sections of this course provided support and donations to the Ronald McDonald House Charities of North Central Florida to satisfy the service component of their curriculum. Students and advisors served as “Visiting Chefs” on eight occasions, during which they spent a weeknight preparing dinner for families staying at the RMH. Two Saturday mornings were also devoted to cleaning up the grounds of the RMH – students pulled weeds, raked, painted a playground set, and organized the children’s toy room. Finally, on the afternoon of Sunday November 22 each section of Introduction to Professional Development competed in the fifth annual “Honors Superchallenge” philanthropy to further benefit the RMH. A field day with events including a three-legged race and tug-of-war afforded points to each team, in addition to a category for donations to the RMH. Students collected hundreds of dollars in gift cards for distribution to families, dozens of boxes of laundry detergent and garbage bags, piles of personal toiletry items, and much more in support of the cause. The Honors Program looks forward to partnering with another worthy local organization next year!

Preparing dinner for families at Ronald McDonald House

Landscaping at RMH
Honors in the Desert: Academic Adventure in Zion National Park

By Justin Fisch

Just one week removed from the stresses of everyday classes, final exams, and an intensive semester internship, I was given the tremendous opportunity to fly out to the American West and discover one of our country’s most beautiful treasures, Zion National Park. Through generous financial support from the Wentworth Scholarship Fund and the Florida Collegiate Honors Council Imgard Bocchino Scholarship, I was able to embark on a weeklong journey to learn more about the inner workings of the National Park Service with fellow Honors student Jarryd Reed.

Partners in the Parks, an academic learning experience, strives to reintroduce American students to the beauty of our country through six days of sightseeing, backcountry hiking, interaction with park rangers, and constant education. Sponsored by Southern Utah University in cooperation with the National Collegiate Honors Council and the National Park Service, the program facilitates up to seven projects per year at locations throughout the country hosted by select Honors programs at a local partnering university.

The Zion 2010 project on which we embarked was hosted by Southern Utah University based in Cedar City, UT, less than fifty miles from the park’s boundaries. Despite receiving over six million visitors per year, Zion National Park boasts thousands of acres of backcountry canyons, forests, and rivers where visitors can find solace and relaxation. This part of the park turned out to be the perfect location from which to embark on our overnight backpacking journey.
As leaders in UF’s student-run Travel and Recreation Program (TRiP), Jarryd and I had previously undergone extensive field training as outdoor guides and are keen outdoorsmen. Our PITP group of eight, however, did not all fit this build, and this made for a unique start to the trip at SUU’s Outdoor Recreation office. Our leaders, Joy and Eric, began the expedition with a valuable lesson on packing skills and food needs in the backcountry, where we would spend the first two days of our adventure. Shortly thereafter, we embarked on our hike in the Kolob Canyons section of Zion, where we encountered very few tourists, and learned a great deal about the geography of the park. The second-day, we awoke to a mix of rainfall and snow, in May nonetheless. We enjoyed a breathtaking yet challenging hike through rivers, fields, canyons, and desert forests to our take-out point, all the while in awe at the stunning snowfall gracing the landscape.

Upon reaching our vans, we loaded up for the drive to the park’s main canyon, where we would be spending the next four days in a front country campground, interacting with park visitors and staff each and every day. The front country experience was quite different from the beginning of the trip, as we were treated to restrooms, picnic tables, and even a fire pit. Throughout the week, we engaged in seminars conducted by NPS rangers teaching us about everything from archaeology to GIS mapping to peregrine falcon conservation. These invaluable colloquiums, unique to PITP programs, constitute the backbone of the program. They served to spark a series of thought-provoking discussions every evening amongst ourselves regarding park management, backcountry versus front country experiences, and even the overarching purpose of our National Parks System.

The primary purpose of the Partners in the Parks program had been achieved with our group, as students from diverse backgrounds learned to appreciate our country’s beauty and the work that goes into preserving it. As Director of TRiP, I have channeled my PITP experience into efforts to further improve UF’s outdoor recreation program. Through partnerships with the Sierra Club and UF’s Florida Alternative Breaks, as well as our relationship with the UF Honors Program, TRiP will continue to provide outstanding outdoor experiences for students seeking unique exploration and adventure. The PITP experience that gave root to all of these ideas would not have been possible without the generous support of the UF Honors program. Students interested in participating in a PITP program in Summer 2011 should check their Honors Daily Opportunity List emails through the spring and visit www.partnersintheparks.org for more information.

Justin Fisch is an Honors student studying Political Science and Geography in his junior year. He participated in the Zion Partners in the Parks program from May 10-15, 2010. He can be contacted at jgfisch@ufl.edu.

Editor’s note: Honors students participated in PITP programs all across the country, including Cape Hatteras, NC; Ellis Island, NY; and Denali, AK; see the photos on these pages.
I applied to UF’s Lombardi Scholarship program as a senior in high school because of my desire to interact with foreign cultures. The program’s offerings at the time, four summer study abroad trips to Mexico, Greece, Japan and South Africa, were amazing opportunities to do just that. Soon after I was accepted, UF administration was unexpectedly forced to change two of the trips due to school wide budget cuts. Although at first I lamented losing the extra travel, their replacements actually strengthened the range of skills and experiences offered by the scholarship.

The first of the four enrichment programs started the summer before my freshman year. Our Lombardi class joined with the “UF in Yucatan” program where we studied Spanish and anthropology during the weekday and hopped on a bus every weekend to learn about the region’s Mayan cultural heritage. Towards the end of the summer, our anthropology professor informed us that we must each conduct a cultural investigation of Yucatan life. The assignment emphasized the central goal of our Lombardi trips abroad: Observe local culture and interact with local people, then critically reflect on those experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the host country.

By the time we reached our South Africa study abroad two years later, we were much more confident travelers and “social researchers”. We prepared ourselves for our excursions with readings about the country’s historical and political background on topics such as the Boer War, diamond mining, and apartheid. As we interacted with locals, visited museums and historic sites, and made our way through the more impoverished areas, we gained a strong sense of the country’s inequalities and tensions and how people there felt about them.

In contrast to our previous focus on social observation, the first new Lombardi trip focused much more on self-discovery.
Leadershape, a national leadership training program, stressed the importance of leading with integrity and believing that one could achieve any goal. By the end of the week, each of us had generated a personal social action project to pursue in the future. Additionally, the institute helped us recognize our style of leadership and showed strategies which would help us work more successfully with our peers in the future.

The second new addition to the Lombardi program was a week of community service in Peru. Like previous study abroad experiences it inserted us into a new cultural milieu; however its community service focus opened our eyes in a much more direct way to the health concerns of people in developing countries. Our project, organized by ProWorld Peru, was to build new stoves with chimneys to alleviate the smoke related illnesses affecting the women of a small town outside of Cusco. At the end of our workweek we had built about 40 stoves but more importantly we had transcended just learning about the world’s issues and actually helped to resolve them.

Just like I had imagined four years ago, I have now visited many foreign countries, gaining an understanding of how they function as well as their most salient political and social issues. However, with the addition of the Leadershape and Peru community service programs, the Lombardi program offered me not only the opportunity to partake in study abroad and social investigation but community service experience and leadership training as well. I thus will leave UF not only a worldly graduate but also a more concerned citizen with greater ability to lead positive social change.

Building a stove in Peru

Scholars shopping in a Merida market

Scholars enjoy dinner in Merida, Mexico
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