

FALL/WINTER 2021 | NO. 2

# CHC Alumni Newsletter

UPDATES FROM THE COOK HONORS COLLEGE

## Welcome Back!

DR. CHAUNA CRAIG, CHC DIRECTOR

Dear alumni,

Thank you for your responses to our first alumni newsletter! We had a 34% “open rate” (meaning a third of you looked at the email from us and hopefully read the newsletter), which is twice the average open rate



for other IUP alumni affiliations. This confirms what we’ve known all along: our alumni still care deeply about the Cook Honors College, for which I am very grateful. Many of you sent along personal and professional updates; we’ve included those in this edition of the newsletter and look forward to hearing more from you.

*continued on next page...*

## IN THIS ISSUE:

WELCOME BACK!	1
WORKSHOP & FALL FEST	3
STUDY ABROAD	4
NGHC & DISNEY	7
KENNETT SQUARE	9
ALUMNI UPDATES	9

## *Welcome Back! continued...*

---

Important updates affecting the Honors College: 1) the release for the director has been cut to a half-time position, meaning I will teach two courses (or the equivalent) both semesters while directing, and 2) the administration decided to relocate honors students from Whitmyre Hall to the suite-style residence halls again for the 2022-23 academic year (students are currently in Stephenson Hall). As you can imagine, I worry that these decisions may have a negative impact on student recruitment and retention, so we are refocusing our energies into community-building activities and emphasizing to prospective students the co-curricular benefits that still set our program apart from many others. Among those opportunities is our Cook Achievement Fund, which is why we've dedicated space in the newsletter to sharing stories of recent student trips and internships made possible by the Fund.

We are also focused on increasing alumni engagement with our students (see the brief article on a Wednesday Workshop in which alumni shared stories of their career path after graduation with our first-year students) and on the recruitment and retention of underrepresented student populations in the CHC. According to the data from Institutional Research, 23.7% of our current CHC first-year class self-identify as belonging to a racial/ethnic minority group, which is on par with IUP's overall demographic. Further, we retain students into their second year at IUP at a significantly higher rate than the general IUP population. We retained 88.7% of our Fall 2020 "COVID cohort," compared to IUP's 70%. The difference is even greater for minority populations; we retained 85% of Black students and 100% of Hispanic first-year students in the CHC, while only half of non-honors Black students and 59% of non-honors Hispanic students in IUP's Fall 2020 cohort returned this year.

We believe that the Cook Honors College provides a high-quality academic program and valuable co-curricular experiences at IUP, and we continue to do all we can to maintain and strengthen our position. We welcome your insights and suggestions too—just email me directly at [ccraig@iup.edu](mailto:ccraig@iup.edu).

Thank you for your continuing support of this program. May you and your families have a safe and enjoyable holiday season.



Director, Cook Honors College

## Extra-Special Wednesday Workshop

Dawn (Sadowski) Malone '03 and Kathryn (Deason) Lucas '12 co-presented, "You Can Get Any Job with Any Major!" a Wednesday Workshop offered to first year students in mid-November. Both expressed insights gathered from their years in the CHC, and the life lessons learned along the way that led them to their present careers.

Dawn, an English and theatre double major, is now a Vice President in the Corporate Trust Business Process and Control Management team at BNY Mellon. "What I hope the students took away from the presentation is that you don't have to have a specific plan, but the ability to recognize an opportunity is key. Getting comfortable with not knowing and make mistakes along the way is very helpful!"

Katie, a music education major, is a Senior Consultant at Strata Information Group. Her advice for students? "It's okay to shift career paths. The hard and soft skills they've gained at IUP and the HC will be transferable to a myriad of jobs and opportunities in the future. Learn from your failures - whether it's failing an exam or getting passed over for your dream job. Push your boundaries - try something new. Always look for opportunities that make you feel empowered and valued."

It is important that students hear lots of stories about how our alumni made their way into world beyond college. If you are interested in sharing yours, please email us at [kevinb@iup.edu](mailto:kevinb@iup.edu) to let us know.

*Written by Kevin Berezansky*

# Fall Fest!



THIS FALL, CURRENT HONORS COLLEGE STUDENTS JOINED TOGETHER FOR A DAY OF PUMPKIN CARVING, GAMES, AND TIME SPENT TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY.





# Travel the World

## STUDYING ABROAD WITH THE COOK ACHIEVEMENT FUND

---

When they graduated from high school, Mackenzie Anderson, Hannah Peterson-Banks, and Natasha Vinson had no idea they'd spend their college summers excavating bones, swimming with dolphins, and coming face-to-face with rhinos. Thanks to the Cook Achievement Fund, all of these experiences became a reality.

Over the summer, while COVID-19 continued to take the world by storm, Anderson, Peterson-Banks, and Vinson were still able to have the opportunities of a lifetime. Anderson, a sociology major with a women's and gender studies minor, traveled to Transylvania, Romania to help excavate the commingled remains of humans and other creatures. A day in the life of Anderson consisted of learning how to properly excavate, clean, document, and collect data from human remains. Pre-veterinary majors Peterson-Banks and Vinson (who is also completing a chemistry minor) traveled to Chintsa, South Africa to get hands-on experience working with animals. Besides the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to swim with dolphins, Peterson-Banks and Vinson got to study and care for rhinos, cattle, goats, dogs, penguins, lions, giraffes, and other South African creatures through the Intern Africa program, hosted by Safari4u.

Peterson-Banks and Vinson's journeys began with an advising conversation with Cook Honors College Associate Director, Kevin Berezansky. He suggested the study abroad experience--which the Achievement Fund later made possible--and kickstarted both students' experiences. Since all three traveled to regions where the spread of COVID-19 was minimal at the time, they were able to participate in these amazing experiences without much interruption (other than extra COVID-19 tests before and while traveling).

When Anderson arrived, the landscape and lifestyle of people living in Romania instantly caught her attention. According to Anderson, "The scenery in Europe is magical--simple, homey, and quiet. It's just so peaceful and happy." With window boxes full of flowers, historic buildings, outdoor merchants, and live music floating through the streets, Anderson says she'd move there in a heartbeat. Equally stunning were weekend trips that the group took to a massive salt mine with a rope course inside, visiting Bran castle, touring fortified churches from the 11th-16th centuries, and experiencing the palaces of famous Romanian rulers, which Anderson recalls as being unspeakably gorgeous: "I don't have the words to describe it--the most intricate details. Every single thing was pristine." On top of the beauty of the surrounding countryside and attractions that Anderson visited, she found the lifestyle of many locals extremely appealing. While the area is relatively poor, the local way of life is wholesome, homegrown, and highly sustainable. Many people in the area have gardens where they grow their own food, making for a clean, guilt-free way of living where people have what Anderson calls a "symbiotic relationship with the entire environment."

## *Travel the World (continued)...*

---

Peterson-Banks was similarly surprised by the landscape when her flight landed in Chintsa. It was winter in South Africa, so typical daily temperatures ranged from only 50-70 degrees Fahrenheit--much like a temperate day in the U.S. Peterson-Banks was also surprised by "how green it was. I wasn't expecting deserts, but the landscape was full of vast rolling hills and low lush bush life." Vinson's first thought: "I remember being completely engulfed by the culture and location. It was extraordinarily overwhelming. My brain was so scattered but in such a great way." The lifestyle they experienced was also one completely different from their own. Although they were able to travel South Africa completing various assignments, the community they primarily stayed in (in Chintsa) was struggling, which meant no electricity or running water for much of their trip.

Weekend excursions and immersion in the local lifestyle made a significant contribution to this memorable experience. Vinson recalls taking hikes with locals, learning traditional dances, eating homemade food from the township food halls, kayaking, relaxing at the beach right next to their lodge, and even getting stick-and-poke tattoos at the local tattoo shop. Peterson-Banks was excited to explore the area, visiting nearby cities and learning about local culture by going to museums and events in the area. She also learned how to surfboard, picked up some basic horseback riding skills, and went skydiving.

For Anderson, the friends she made made the trip even more enjoyable. Despite her sociology background, she had an easy time connecting and relating to the others involved in the dig, many of whom primarily study archaeology. The dig team also reconvened each evening at their hotel to have dinner together, bringing them even closer together. Anderson remembers that they were like-minded people who shared the same values. Further boosting morale, a faithful wild dog from the local area also stopped by the dig most days to eat food scraps from the team and take naps nearby.

Through visits to local animal sanctuaries and zoos, boat trips to study marine life, visits to veterinary clinics, and working directly in the local community and on game reserves, Peterson-Banks and Vinson treated local dogs and countless farm animals and were able to catch, sometimes sedate, treat, and release different large wildlife in Africa. These experiences taught them crucial veterinary skills like how to suture, give injections, and perform blood work and research on animals.

Studying abroad is bound to include its fair share of challenges to be overcome. Peterson-Banks remembers, "When I went out to help in the small town I was treated with a lot of hospitality and questions because I was the only black person in the group. They believed that I was one of the translators and would speak to me in a language I didn't understand and share their food with me. It was mostly challenging because of the language barrier, especially interacting with the children." Vinson recalls, "Many clients question certain treatments and are blinded by their love for their animal, and I saw many instances of this in South Africa." Vinson knows that she will face additional skepticism in her future as a female veterinarian. However, thanks to her experience in South Africa, she says, "When I have my own clinic, I will be able to handle any challenge thrown my way." In addition, Vinson struggled to travel when her grandmother was back home with terminal cancer. Her grandmother, however, encouraged her to make the journey, and the two were able to communicate every day through photos and phone calls.



**Mackenzie Anderson**  
**(Transylvania, Romania)**

## *Travel the World (continued)...*

For Anderson, her biggest discovery was finding a horse vertebrae, while a nearby partner on the dig unearthed a juvenile skeleton with a headstill intact. A big moment for Peterson-Banks was seeing hundreds of pods of dolphins, three different types of whales, thousands of birds diving into the water to feed, and a shark. In her words, "The best part was swimming with the dolphins and feeling their smooth cold body run against my legs." Vinson's most memorable experience was being charged by a cow rhino. Her team was darting the rhino to sedate it and apply a tracking collar, in hopes of helping prevent the species' extinction, when the rhino unexpectedly began charging out of the bush. The experience was a lasting memory that Vinson describes as "terrifying, but super exhilarating, and a once in a lifetime occurrence."

The bones Anderson uncovered reflected her sociology and gender studies background well. While observing the many lifestyle elements that the bones revealed through everything from their calcification and position in the ground to the wear and tear on individuals' teeth, Anderson noticed that women's skeletons were shorter and had differently shaped skulls. In the future, Anderson hopes to continue to mix the many disciplines that interest her into possibly pursuing a graduate degree and eventually fulfilling a hands-on career related to sociology. Much like her choice to apply to a trip outside of her major, Anderson says, "I still don't want to limit myself to one field of study. I love learning."

Peterson-Banks and Vinson also have big aspirations. Peterson-Banks hopes to continue to travel and try to find additional overseas internship opportunities. She plans to study abroad again while completing her honors thesis in Honduras. Vinson will continue to help run IUP's chapter of Habitat for Humanity and apply to veterinary schools as she strives to one day open her own clinic.

Surprisingly, none of these three adventurous students planned to travel to such far-off places when they began their college careers. Anderson, a sociology major, had no intention of participating in a month-long bio-archaeological dig until Nikki Wilcox, a friend who was already headed to the dig, began petitioning Anderson to apply for the Achievement Fund and take part as well. Anderson was surprised to find that the application was straightforward and she didn't need an archaeological background to get involved. In fact, all three students' advice to other students considering studying abroad was nearly the same: Don't feel boxed in by your major or intimidated by language barriers. Try something new. Go *somewhere* new. See other countries and expand your worldview while gaining valuable skills relating to other people, traveling, getting outside your comfort zone, overcoming challenges, or even living more sustainably.

When considering the opportunities available to students through the Achievement Fund, it can feel daunting to choose where to go or what to do. With infinitely many possible experiences in dozens of countries spanning six continents, how could any student be expected to choose? These three students exemplify that no one is on their own when deciding where, when, and how to use the Achievement Fund. Professors support students every step of the way, and friends invite friends to opportunities that will change them for a lifetime. The community of the Cook Honors College, paired with the gifts from countless generous Achievement Fund donors, are what make the Achievement Fund such an unparalleled resource for all CHC students. Without either factor, students would not graduate from the CHC as such a force of globally conscious, experienced, and confident individuals.

For current Cook Honors College students trying to decide whether to apply for the Achievement Fund, as well as anyone else who's afraid to try something new and unfamiliar, Anderson has the answer: "No matter what you're doing, if you're expanding your knowledge base, it's always a worthwhile opportunity."

To donate to the Achievement Fund, please visit this link and scroll down to "Support Our Students" at the bottom of the page: [www.iup.edu/honors/](http://www.iup.edu/honors/)

For more information on Achievement Fund opportunities for current CHC students, check out: [www.iup.edu/honors/scholarships/achievement-fund/index.html](http://www.iup.edu/honors/scholarships/achievement-fund/index.html)

# CHC Students at the Most Magical Place on Earth

Seven Cook Honors College students, accompanied by Dr. Chauna Craig, presented at the 56th National Collegiate Honors Council annual conference at the Walt Disney Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando, Florida, Oct.27-30, 2021.

The conference theme, *Reimagining Honors: Past, Present, Future*, invited students, faculty, and staff to consider best practices in honors education and co-curricular experiences in a post-pandemic environment. One central question posed was “How do we take the lessons learned from this time, personally, professionally and for our honors programs and colleges, to imagine a future we could not have envisioned just a few years ago?”

Mac Mead (Communications Media), Matt Tomlin (Human Resource Management), and Cierra Henderson (Biology) presented a panel, “Is Zoom Here to Stay?: Rethinking Honors and Technology,” detailing their online learning experiences during the 2020-2021 academic year and suggesting ways the technology can best be utilized from a student view. They were joined by Noah Rhea (Political Science) and Troy Florian (Human Resource Management) at a Saturday morning Idea Exchange focus, “So You’ve Lost Your Honors Housing...,” to discuss the effects of the university’s decision to relocate honors students from residence living in Whitmyre Hall.



Education majors Mariah Mauser (Music Education) and Gabrielle Probst (Early Childhood Education) presented “Play in the College Setting,” demonstrating games as methods to enhance learning and facilitating a discussion about the value of play in and outside the classroom. Additionally, senior Jeremy Galloza (Theater/Music), participated in a by-invitation master class in music with other honors students from around the U.S.

Dr. Craig, along with honors faculty from the University of New Mexico, facilitated a roundtable discussion, Everyday Arts: Experiential Art and Local Community Engagement in Honors, and attended the annual meeting of the NCHC’s Assessment & Evaluation Committee.

## *CHC Students at the Most Magical Place on Earth (continued)...*



This is the first time in several years that the CHC had student representation at the annual conference. Cierra Henderson noted, "I truly appreciated the opportunity to connect and share ideas with individuals outside of the IUP community," and Mac Mead affirmed, "During the conference, I gained public speaking experience and met other honors college students from across the nation. I am honored to have been accepted for this opportunity and am thankful the CHC helped me get there." Based on the magical experience we all had this year, we are already planning proposals for NCHC 2022 in Dallas. ■

*Written by Dr. Chauna Craig*

# Updates from CHC Alumni

Ashley (Carmo) Snyder (BS, Fashion Merchandising, 2013) married Dustan Snyder on Oct. 10, 2020. Currently a home life administrator at Milton Hershey School, she earned her master's in education in 2013.

Olivia Tarman (BA, English, 2020) is a paralegal at Klasko Immigration Law Partners, LLC in Philadelphia.

Elena Kapp (BS, International Business, 2016) is a marketing associate with National Association of Corporate Directors.

Hannah Frishberg (BA, Asian Studies, 2015) is the senior associate in charge of communications for the development department of New York University Shanghai. A music minor, she plays bassoon with student and faculty in the orchestra and says she is "still constantly trying to explain to people in China, where she lives, where and what IUP is," given that Indiana University in Bloomington is popular with Chinese students.

Jennifer Lopez (BA, Interdisciplinary Fine Arts, 2005) is a freelance editor with Mistress Editing, who works with self-published authors, including multiple USA Today and NYT bestselling authors, to edit their books prior to publication. Although she specializes in romance and erotica, she also has clients who write cozy mystery, paranormal, and more.

Kathryn Lucas (BS, Music Education, 2012) is a senior consultant with Strata Information Group specializing in CRM implementation. She recently visited the CHC to advise our current students on the many turns a career path can take after graduation.

Christie De Vito (BS, Safety Science, 2014) earned a masters degree in Industrial Hygiene at the University of Iowa and works as a Principal Environmental, Health and Safety Engineer at Northrop Grumman.

Alyssa (Ross) Ross (BA, Journalism/B.S. Communications Media, 2001) does public relations for the City of Alexandria Office of the Arts. She and her husband Jay welcomed their third child in March 2020. William Frederick is doted on by his big sisters Loretta (b. 2012) and Theresa (b. 2014).

Dr. Robert Arner (BA, Communications Media, 2003) earned his doctorate at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. He teaches theology and ethics and serves as the chief admissions and financial aid officer at the Reformed Episcopal Seminary in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania.

Sadie Kindt (BA, Anthropology, 2005) is a Prevention Section Chief with the Pennsylvania Department of Drug & Alcohol Programs

Alison (Matta) Smith (BS, Music Education, 2002) received her master's degree in education at Boston University and is employed as a music teacher.

On October 22nd of 2021, a special group of students from Kennett High School (located in Chester County, PA) came to visit IUP for a weekend. The group of students ranged from 9th to 12th grade and were all of Latino and Hispanic descent. This group of students are part of the Hermanitas and Walk In Knowledge Program directed by MS. Loretta Perna. They arrived on campus on Friday, November 22nd and stayed until November 23rd at 12pm. During the visit, they participated in a series of events in collaboration with the Robert E. Cooks Honors College, IUP Admissions, LaSO and the IUP Ambassadors. These events included a student panel with current IUP students who are from Kennett and are of Latino/Hispanic descent. They talked to the students about what college is and what a day in the life of a college student is. They then participated in a painting activity, which both the current students of IUP and the visiting students of KHS enjoyed. They then proceeded to attend an Anthropology Class which allowed them to have a better feel of what a common college class looks like and how the class runs. Towards the afternoon, they participated in a campus tour and a seminar by Giovanni Negron. Towards the evening, the participated in some fun events such as game nights hosted in Breezedale by the IUP Ambassadors and Open Mic Night held at the Honors College. Lastly, when they arrived on campus the next day (Saturday), they participated in the Honors College Fall Fest where they were able to make fall crafts, eat food, carve pumpkins, and have fun talking to current honors college staff, students and other individuals. This event was something that was truly fun and very memorable, and we hope to continue this for years to come.



## *Alumni Updates (continued)...*

Aaron Stunkard (BA, Political Science, 2006) is a Channel Partner Manager for Oracle. He lives in Colorado.

Tia (Kipp) Gamler (BS, Accounting, 2003) is the VP of Finance at Rotating Machinery Services in Bethlehem, PA.

Megan Henry (Art Ed & Spanish, 2014) is a high school art teacher for the Anchorage (Alaska) school district.

Brynne (Hamm) McCann (BA, Communication Media/Spanish, 2009) is an Account and Program Manager for GP Strategies.

Rebecca Galloway (BA, French for International Trade, 2006) is Marketing Communications Manager at Millipore Sigma.

Dawn Drake (BS, Social Science Secondary Education, 2002) earned a doctorate in Geography from University of Tennessee and is an associate professor at Missouri Western State University.

Dr. Neil Meredith (BA, Economics/Mathematics, 2006) is associate professor of economics at West Texas A&M University. He received his doctorate from University of Georgia in 2011.

Michael Bell is Director of Good Solutions at Benevity in Calgary.

Dr. Jennifer (Groucut) Robinette (BA, English, 2001) received her doctorate from University of North Dakota and is an online adjunct professor for Eastern Gateway Community College.

Dr. Michelle Taddie is a veterinarian at Community Veterinary Clinic in Connecticut.

Carissa Houser is a Behavioral Health Technician with Garner Behavioral Services.

David Hubbard is a criminal analyst with the U.S. Government.

Janelle (Helgand) Smith is a business analyst with Philips Respironics.

Dr. Larry Skillin (BA History, 2002) is professor of history at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa.

Whitney Simmons (BS, Chemistry 2009, Biology 2010) works in sales with EFCO USA, the US arm of EFCO Maschinenbau GmbH, a valve repair and testing equipment manufacturer.

Ignacio Alarcon (BA, Philosophy/Psychology, 2013) facilitates programming and student support for the first physical center for undocumented college students in the country at University of California, Davis.

B. Rose Huber (BA, Journalism/English, 2007) is a Communications Manager & Senior Writer at Princeton University. She received her MFA in Creative Writing and Publishing Arts in 2010 from the University of Baltimore.

William Harder (BA, Political Science/Journalism, 2007) received his doctorate from American University and is the Director of the Center for the Advancement of Scholarship & Teaching at Goucher College.

Emily Krause (BA, English/Writing Studies, 2012) earned her M.S. Ed. in Mental Health Counseling from University of Pennsylvania and is a school counselor with TECH Freire Charter High School.

Brandie Glessner (BA, English, 2002) is a secondary virtual school educator at Brevard Virtual School, a public school serving students in Brevard County, Florida. She also works part-time with Edgenuity, a subsidiary of Weld North Education, teaching students in both Pennsylvania and Florida.

Ashley Swenson (History/Pre-law, 2015) completed her law degree at University of North Texas at Dallas Law School and is currently a contract specialist with Defense Logistics Agency.

Jess Richards (Biology Education, 2010) was a Laboratory Manager for Yellowstone National Park's Wildlife Health Program from 2012-2020. She is currently a Budget Analyst for the Facilities Maintenance Division.



## *Alumni Updates (continued)...*

Kaitlin Hughes (BA, Music History and Literature, 2010) is an Academic Records Officer with Stanford Online High School.

Nicole Battestilli (Theater, 2012) is the marketing director for City Theatre Company in Pittsburgh.

Rosemary Tropeano (Psychology/International Relations/Economics, 2017) did her master's degree in Security Policy Studies at George Washington University and is a policy analyst with System Planning & Analysis, Inc

Natasha Dubinsky (Studio Art, 2012) earned a master's degree in professional counseling and art therapy from Drexel University. She married Andrew Koszarek in Indiana this past August and currently works for Leivity Brewing in Indiana.

Sean Bowling (BS, Chemistry, 2019) received his doctorate from Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Sydney Kominos (BA, Hospitality Management, 2018) is the Assistant Director of Guest Experience, managing the front office operations of Stevenson University's Admissions Office and planning, coordinating and hosting virtual and in-person events such as counselor workshops, student panels, and more.

Emily Weber-Wood (BA, English/Writing Studies, 2014) is the Digital Marketing Manager for Cabin Communications.

Valerie (Laughlin) Broody (Sociology/Women's Studies, 2003) is an adoption caseworker for Dauphin County Social Services for Children and Youth.

Harmony (Lesoken) Oppenheimer (Fashion Merchandising, 2015) received her certification as a paralegal from Villanova University.

Dr. Melanie (Revers) Lang (BA, English; 2003) is an Emergency and Critical Care Veterinarian at Red Bank Veterinary Hospital.

Kenneth Sosnick (BS, Accounting, 2003) is Managing Director Economic & Financial Consulting, FTI Consulting in Boston.

Emily (Walter) Wertz (BA, Journalism, 2013) serves as Director of Admissions for the Master of Science in Computational Finance program at Carnegie Mellon University.

---

*Want your update included in an upcoming issue of the official CHC Alumni newsletter? Fill out this form to let us know any news you want to share--career, promotion, or personal achievement. We'd love to hear from you!*

[http://www.alumni.iup.edu/  
chcalumnicontract](http://www.alumni.iup.edu/chcalumnicontract)

*Layout by Amy Kukula*