Introductions and Farewells

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Bengford is a double major in Political Science and English along with a minor in History. Bengford plans to work towards earning a Juris Doctorate after graduation. He served as Senior Patrol Leader of his Boy Scout troop and has earned his eagle. Bengford is participating in the NIU Mock Trial Team, is a reporter for the Northern Star, and is a part of Sunrise DeKalb. This summer he will start helping Dr. Andzik do research into the evolution of the portrayal of disabilities in film in the past two decades. Outside of his vocational interests, Bengford enjoys hiking, camping, watching films, and playing video games. He sees the McKearn Fellows program as a way to heighten not only his academic skills, but also more tangible skills that will make a difference on the world that people can feel. He hopes to do this through involvement in internship programs, learning skills directly from the source.

Hensley majors in Actuarial Science with a minor in Finance. She was the treasurer of the NIU Actuary Club and a member of the NIU Financial Management Association. Outside of academics, Hensley enjoys playing volleyball, going boating, and spending time with her friends and family. After graduating, she plans to become an actuary. She has always wanted to pursue a career that built on her love of mathematics. As a McKearn Fellow, Hensley hopes to advance her academic career as well as to be able to give back to the community.
Khan is a Marketing major and also on the Pre-Medicine track. After graduation he plans to attend medical school and pursue a career in psychiatry. Khan participated in Research Rookies, where he researched the appearance of tonic immobility in fish. Additionally, Khan is involved with OHANA, New Hall Community Council, an Orientation Leader, and on the e-board of the Pre-Professional Association. Khan is passionate about multicultural dialogue as well as addressing health disparities. As a McKearn Fellow, he hopes to participate in research regarding equitable access to mental health services. Additionally, he is excited to contribute to the NIU community and have opportunities for professional development.

Emily Herbert

Herbert is majoring in Biomedical Engineering with a double minor in Public Health and Music. She is a member of the Society of Women Engineers and the Biomedical Engineering Society. Outside of engineering, she is involved in the music program as a pianist and can’t wait to play in concert and jazz ensembles. In the past, she participated as a researcher in the International Student Science Fair in Thailand and hopes to get involved in more research through the Research Rookies program. She looks forward to joining the McKearn Fellows and utilizing all of the opportunities it opens.

Yousuf Khan

Yousuf Khan is a Marketing major and also on the Pre-Medicine track. After graduation he plans to attend medical school and pursue a career in psychiatry. Khan participated in Research Rookies, where he researched the appearance of tonic immobility in fish. Additionally, Khan is involved with OHANA, New Hall Community Council, an Orientation Leader, and on the e-board of the Pre-Professional Association. Khan is passionate about multicultural dialogue as well as addressing health disparities. As a McKearn Fellow, he hopes to participate in research regarding equitable access to mental health services. Additionally, he is excited to contribute to the NIU community and have opportunities for professional development.
Muyizere is a student with a double major in Biology and French. Her goal is to attend medical school after college with hopes of becoming a surgeon one day. Muyizere was part of the NIU Research Rookies this past year where she studied the ecosystem impact of native and non-native plants, and she volunteered a lot in hospitals and organizations such as Batavia Food Pantry. Muyizere fell in love with the NIU community and decided to engage in activities such as student health organization and the Alpha Omega Epsilon sorority. Her hobbies include learning languages such as Japanese, Chinese and Korean, and she also likes to play the guitar in her free time. Muyizere has always loved helping people and hopes to become a missionary surgeon one day after her studies.

Merveille "Yvette" Muyizere

Welcome to our new fellows!

And goodbye to our graduating fellows!
Best of Luck to our Graduating Fellows!

Todd Durham
B.S. Mechanical Engineering
University Honors
Durham plans to work after graduation and is looking for a position in the additive manufacturing industry.

Alexandra Karnuth
B.S. Nursing
University Honors
Karnuth is relocating to Chicago after graduation and hopes to work in pediatrics and pursue travel nursing in the future.

Matthew McCoy
B.S. Mechanical Engineering
University Honors
McCoy was acknowledged as the First Finalist for the Lincoln Laureate Award, and after graduation, will be a PhD candidate at Georgia Institute of Technology while working as an R&D Engineer at Formlabs.

Kylie Zawisza
B.S. Chemistry – Biochemistry
University Honors
After graduation, Zawisza will be starting her biochemistry PhD program at UW Madison in the fall.

Kenneth Barnett
Doctorate of Physical Therapy
Barnett was previously a McKearn Fellow at NIU in the summer of 2014 where he majored in pre-physical therapy. During NIU’s graduation in 2021, he was able to walk the stage for his doctorate of physical therapy. He is currently working as a physical therapist at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago.
After two years of participation on Stonehouse Academic Journal’s board of editors, Cameron Simpson took over the role of editor-in-chief for the publication’s 2020-2021 year. Simpson, an English and History double major with a minor in Communication Studies, is graduating in December 2021.

Her involvement with Stonehouse began her freshman year, with positions as an editor and copy editor, as well as her first published article. She read and evaluated undergraduate student work and evaluated grammar and formatting. In the 2019-2020 school year, Simpson was involved again in an increased capacity, taking on the role of managing editor with three other students. Her duties in the new position walked Volume II of Stonehouse through the entire publication process under the editor-in-chief’s management, even through the instability and unexpected challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. With this progression through the ranks of the journal over time, it made perfect sense to step up as editor-in-chief during her last full year at NIU.

In a year entirely devoted to online education for herself and many of her peers, Simpson has been extraordinarily impressed—dare she say amazed—by the dedication and caliber of her collaborators on the journal. Her crew was small, with two managing editors and three editors and copy editors, as compared to the much larger staff rosters of the past, with half a dozen managing editors and a dozen or more on the editing staff, but they were mighty. Even though the isolation and new demands of the pandemic, the staff, she says, has been consistent and communicative.

Due to COVID-related difficulties in the spring and summer of 2020, Volume II of Stonehouse did not see the light of day until the start of the 2020-2021 school year. However, Volume III was released on April 25th, 2021 and is available for purchase here. Rather than focusing on expansion and major growth, Simpson’s philosophy for Volume III was simple: build a firm foundation. This meant stabilizing norms, fostering relationships with major contributing departments, and ensuring Stonehouse will live on past the first generation of contributing students. In addition to those infrastructure goals, Simpson also has grown significantly in her leadership capabilities. She has grown more skilled at juggling the many pieces that need to fall into place for a publication of any size, modest though Stonehouse may be, as well as knowing when too much is too much and delegating to the people that are available to help her.

Overall, this publication has been a significant and ever-present aspect of Simpson’s life since the first months of her time at NIU, and she is very proud to see what it has become. With a new editor-in-chief selected for Volume IV, there was nothing left to do but wait for release, then to watch with admiration and see what her peers can do next.
Grant Goral — Political Science and Economics double major — had the opportunity this academic year to establish a new group in the NIU Honors Program known as the Honors Advocacy Initiative (HAI). Beginning in August of 2020, Goral worked closely with Honors Director Andrea Radasaniu to formulate a new slate of civic engagement activities for honors students at NIU.

HAI grew out of the idea that students should be able to work collaboratively on finding solutions to university issues at the local and state levels. From that, it has been a major piece of the Honors Advocacy Initiative to invite professional advocates to come and prepare their members for advocacy in a formal setting. Past speakers have included Dr. Anna Quider, Assistant Vice President for Federal Relations for NIU, and Dr. Matthew Streb, Chief of Staff to President Lisa Freeman.

Goral, who has been leading the group since its creation, believes that when students are given the right tools and training, they can be the best advocates for NIU in any setting. The culmination of HAI was centered on bringing its members down to Springfield on NIU Advocacy Day to speak with legislators on the issues that matter most to the university. While COVID-19 has changed that, Goral wants HAI to keep moving forward — “It wasn’t easy to start HAI this year with COVID-19, but that hasn’t stopped us from pursuing our goal of representing NIU as the top tier university it is.”

Through McKearn Fellows, Goral had the opportunity to virtually present the concepts of HAI at the Honors Council of the Illinois Region Student Symposium this spring. It has been his goal to share the idea that student advocates can be effective representatives to government officials, and he wants to see others take interest in it as well. Goral hopes to present this project again at the National Collegiate Honors Council in the fall of this year.
During the 2020-2021 academic year, the McKearn program helped fund some of Matt McCoy’s research with Dr. John Shelton and Dr. Nicholas Pohlman, as well as his senior capstone project and mechatronics engineering course. With funds provided by the McKearn Fund, he was able to purchase a Formlabs Form 3, which is a stereolithography (SLA) 3D printer. The reason this printer was desired over more common 3D printing methods such as fused filament fabrication (FFF) primarily revolved around material selection and surface finish. SLA 3D printers use a UV laser (405 nm wavelength) and a UV curable resin, in which the liquid resin solidifies when struck by the laser. This allows for much more precise parts and a smoother surface finish when compared to deposition-based printers in which a set thickness of plastic is placed down on a surface. When using an FFF printer, the layer is deposited on top of the preceding layers, which means that gaps will be found along the surface of the part, leading to a less desirable surface finish. With the Form 3, very few surface imperfections can be found which leads to better mechanical properties and fluid flow characteristics if a fluid is flowing either around the external geometry of the part or within the internal cavities of it.

Using the Form 3 also allows for much greater material selection. The McKearn funds allowed McCoy to purchase both a high temperature material as well as a high strength material. Because UV curing resins used in SLA printers are not thermoplastics (the parts are not formed using heat as the driving mechanism, but rather UV light), the materials can be tweaked to have different mechanical properties. He was able to use the high temperature resin to create jigs and fixtures for his research with metal 3D printers as those printers are temperature-driven processes that require extremely high temperatures. Below is an image of one of the high temperature fixtures McCoy created that helped monitor metal powder flow distribution as the main goal of his research with Dr. Pohlman was to control powder flow and create even distribution amongst all of the nozzles.

(continued on the next two pages)
He was also able to use the printer for a mechatronics engineering course (MEE 426) in the fall in which he and his group mates (Todd Durham, Kyle Matthews) had to create a mechatronics system. A mechatronics system is an assembly of electronic and mechanical elements that work in parallel to complete a task. A vacuum cleaner robot, for example, is a mechatronics system. McCoy and his team decided to create something that they had not seen executed anywhere on the internet: a specific impulse bottle opener. Rather than opening a bottle using a lever, they decided to open it using extremely high force over a very short period of time. This relates to the concept of conservation of momentum, in which the force is high enough and over a short enough time period, that the force knocks the cap off while the bottle stays still. The team ended up creating an extremely complex system of mechanical systems with a lot of sensor integration that allowed for a bottle to be placed on a platform and the system was able to sense the bottle weight, bring it into the system, and pop the cap off with over 50 pounds of force. The Form 3 was critical in fully realizing this project, and as a result, the project was not only featured on the Hackaday Blog (one of the most popular engineering blogs), but it was also selected to be featured on their hundredth podcast episode. While a lot of hard work went into the project, McCoy and the team knew that it was not at all practical, but they wanted to see if it was even possible to build a mechatronics system that could open a bottle using the specific impulse method. The bottle opener can be seen below, and links to the video, blog and podcast can be found here: Video, Blog, Podcast.

Lastly, the Formlabs Form 3 that was purchased using McKearn funds was able to help McCoy's senior capstone project as 3D printing components from high strength materials was very helpful in ensuring that the project would be successful. Both Todd Durham and McCoy worked on the same capstone in which they are developing a carbon fiber monocoque chassis for the NIU Supermileage Team. They have been able to use the Form 3 to print high detail models of the vehicle that help with body design inspection as a result of the precise surface finish of the parts. They have also been able to use it to print structural components that will act as a failsafe in case any of the materials, such as the carbon fiber, delaminate during use. The computer aided design (CAD) model can be seen on the next page.
In regard to McCoy’s future upon graduating from NIU, he has been fortunate to receive two exciting offers: an R&D Engineer offer at his dream company (Formlabs), and the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (NSF GRFP). At Formlabs, McCoy was given the offer to develop the next generation prototypes of Formlabs’ selective laser sintering (SLS) 3D printers and was also given a fast track to project management. Formlabs just released their first SLS 3D printer, the Fuse 1, which can be seen in the image below. He will be working to create the next version of that printer. McCoy has always wanted to work in product design and development in addition to his background in additive manufacturing, so this was his dream offer. Shortly after receiving this offer though, he was notified that he was a recipient of the NSF GRFP, which is considered one of the most prestigious graduate fellowships in the nation. He has decided to accept the position with Formlabs as an R&D Engineer and will work on their Fuse SLS 3D printer team prototyping core printing systems for their next generation devices.
Motivations for the Creation of Civil War Monuments

Jeremy Knoll

Over the past year, Jeremy Knoll has busied himself with work on an undergraduate research project in history. This was Knoll’s second research project completed through the Research Rookies program, and concerned the motivations behind the creation of Civil War monuments in Illinois from the end of the Civil War to the beginning of the Great Depression. Knoll based his research on dedicatory addresses from monument dedications published in local newspapers, which required him to consult both online newspaper databases and the microfilm collections at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. After investigating the circumstances surrounding the creation of Civil War monuments in nearly forty Illinois communities, Knoll found that the themes associated with commemoration changed drastically in the decades following the Civil War due to the role played by contemporary events in shaping the nation’s recollections of the war.

In addition to completing the research project, Knoll had the opportunity to present his research at conferences on multiple occasions. The first of these was a poster presentation at NIU’s Undergraduate Research and Artistry Day in April 2020, which was held virtually due to the pandemic. Knoll also presented his research as a conference paper at the 22nd Annual Conference on Illinois History, which took place online in October 2020 and was attended by professors, students, and independent scholars studying topics related to the history of Illinois. He gave his presentation as part of the conference’s session on “The Civil War and Remembrance in Illinois,” which concerned research on both post-Civil War remembrance in Illinois in general and on specific monuments dedicated to Illinois’s Civil War veterans.

Beyond presenting his research at conferences, Knoll also adapted his research into an article, entitled “Remembering the Fallen: The Creation of Civil War Monuments in Illinois, 1865-1929.” This article was accepted for publication in the Summer 2021 issue of the Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, and Knoll’s research was profiled in an article on the NIU Newsroom website in February. The experience Knoll gained in both conducting research and presenting his findings as a result of this project was invaluable, and he hopes to put these skills to good use during an upcoming summer internship at Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania. After completing his undergraduate work, Knoll plans to pursue a PhD in history and become a history professor specializing in the Civil War.
Synthesis and Characterization of Polymer-Protein Core-Shell Nanoparticles

Rebekah Gonzalez

This year Rebekah Gonzalez had the privilege of working with Dr. Tao Li’s group of the Chemistry Department on the Synthesis and Characterization of Polymer-Protein Core-Shell Nanoparticles.

Polymer-Protein Core-Shell Nanoparticles (PPCS-NPs) are structured with an inner polymer core and an outer protein shell. These nanoparticles and other molecules of the like that are also high in bioactivity and functionality are utilized in drug/gene delivery applications. These PPCS-NPs are created by synthesizing a polymer/DMF solution with a protein/buffer solution to create the desired polymer/protein solution. Gonzalez learned how to utilize the equipment available in lab Dynamic Light Scattering (DLS), Circular Dichroism (CD), freeze-drying, etc. and in the future will have the opportunity to use Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM) equipment in collaboration with Argonne National Laboratory. With proper characterization and analysis of these particles Gonzalez and the group will be able to determine which polymer-protein combinations form PPCS-NPs and determine what applications these particles may have in the protein/gene delivery, bio-imaging, energy conversion, and storage applications.

Gonzalez participated in two student symposiums, the Honors Council of the Illinois Region’s Student Symposia and NIU’s Conference on Undergraduate Research and Engagement (CURE), this semester and presented her project entitled the “Synthesis and Characterization of Polymer-Protein Core-Shell Nanoparticles”. Gonzalez’s presentation at the CURE student symposium can be located here: https://youtu.be/DHgWAUSIEIQ.

Other research the group is doing as well as group members can be found here: https://www.taoliniu.com/
**Fruit Flies and Mars Rovers**

Leif Verace

In the fall 2020 semester into the spring 2021 semester, Leif Verace conducted research in the Devergne lab within the Department of Biological Sciences. His research utilizes the fruit fly, or Drosophila melanogaster, as a model organism; specifically, the development of the Drosophila egg chamber provides a model system for studying collective cell migration (the directed movement of a group of cells).

Verace’s research has largely involved the selective knockdown or overexpression of a specific gene/protein implicated to be involved in cell migration. By altering the level of gene expression in distinct regions of the egg chamber, its role can be better understood and characterized. Preliminary results were presented at the HCIR Student Symposium and NIU’s CURE. The project is entering an exciting phase in which a novel mutant for the gene of interest will be generated with the CRISPR gene-editing technique.

At the same time, Verace also attended the 62nd Annual Drosophila Research Conference hosted by the Genetics Society of America. The conference contained countless fascinating talks discussing Drosophila research from around the globe, such as the movement of cardioblasts in heart development, or the characterizing of proteins involved in circadian rhythms. Such discussions not only spur collaboration and the sharing of ideas, but also help cultivate a stronger passion for research.

At the same time, Verace also served as Secretary for NIU’s Mars Rover team. The club’s goal is to construct a rover which can autonomously navigate, perform precise mechanical tasks, and investigate the presence of life/habitability of a given environment. Inherently difficult, the challenge level was only amplified with the club having to work remotely. Nonetheless, the club moved forward and made progress on all fronts; Verace contributed to a life-detection assay unit for detecting organic compounds aboard the rover. Recently elected Vice President of the organization, he hopes to become an even stronger member and leader of the team in the following year.
Research on Gender Disparities
Kyle Thadani

Kyle Thadani has spent the past few months researching gender disparities in Introductory Physics courses. Thadani used statistics about students enrolled in Physics 253, Introduction to Physics with Calculus, that were compiled by NIU, and the results for every student on a standard exam called the Force Concept Inventory. The Force Concept Inventory, commonly referred to as FCI, is a commonly used exam that tests a student's basic proficiency in certain key Physics concepts involving forces and motion. Students usually take this exam twice, once as a pretest before class and once as a post test to determine what they learned. Thadani compared the students' results for males and females on the Force Concept Inventory.

Thadani's analysis of the Force Concept Inventory revealed there are certain problems and concepts that females and males at NIU performed differently on. His research revealed that there may be differences in studying habits that allow female students to perform better on small concepts like independent mass problems but causes them to perform worse on larger concepts like kinematics problems. Thadani used a statistical analysis technique in order to dig deeper into the research revealing that many female students who came to NIU with a strong proficiency in Physics had more growth than other students.

Thadani has presented his research multiple times. His first presentation was at HCIR, the Honors Council of the Illinois Region, an event that allowed honors students such as myself to share the results of their research. He did a poster presentation in which he spoke about his research for five minutes to a live audience over Zoom. The only recording of this presentation is a five minute video that Thadani recorded himself with his phone. This was his first time presenting his research to a large audience and his presentation went well. However, Thadani had much more in store for later in the semester.

Later in the semester Thadani recorded a presentation for URAD/CURE. This presentation utilized feedback from his former presentations to create his greatest research presentation yet.

The graphs and statistics compiled by Thadani will be used as a starting point for future analysis and enable him to further explore gender differences in Introductory Physics courses with Calculus.

Thadani learned a lot about performing research. This was the first time he had done any research outside of a classroom. Thadani felt honored to be able to practice speaking in front of a crowd and hone his presentation skills.
Throughout her junior year, Amanda Pollock spent time volunteering for an organization called Dance Marathon through NIU’s sector, the Huskiethon. Her position was in the Morale Committee where she helped to raise funds for Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago and to brainstorm ideas for the virtual event. By the end of the event, thousands of dollars were raised by NIU students alone, and millions were raised by all of the participating universities and organizations across North America.

Pollock felt very compelled to participate in the Huskiethon for a few reasons. First, she is planning to go to graduate school to become a Physician Assistant and thought it would be a great experience to volunteer in the medical field. In addition, she loved that the funding went toward research and training for healthcare workers, medical equipment for the hospital, and pay for care that some patients are unable to afford. Perhaps the biggest reason she wanted to be a part of Dance Marathon, however, was because Pollock was a former patient at Lurie’s and had to stay there on numerous occasions. She felt like this would be a great way to give back to the hospital that helped her through such a difficult time.

This service project also brings up a significant issue of equity that was discussed during this semester’s Conversations on Diversity and Equity (CODE) workshops. Inequities in healthcare often stem from systemic racism. The socioeconomic gap has been around for years in the United States, and income disparities between Black households and White households continues to increase. Because income and wealth are considerable determinants of the insurance and healthcare a person is able to receive, there are many people from lower income communities who cannot afford necessary treatment. With these issues present in the medical field, Dance Marathon’s funding is a small way to help these individuals.
Volunteering with COVID-19 Vaccinations

Sara Plettau

In the spring 2021 semester Sara Plettau volunteered at a COVID-19 vaccine clinic in Kane County. She attended this clinic with the NIU School of Nursing in order to learn more about how to give vaccines and to see more of the public health side of health care. As a nursing major and a public health minor, Plettau was interested and excited to explore this different area of healthcare and how it intersects with nursing. At this clinic Plettau was able to utilize the information learned in her nursing classes along with her nursing skills to give vaccines effectively and efficiently alongside experienced health care workers.

This is Plettau’s second semester in the nursing program at NIU. While she finds the classes to be difficult, this experience giving vaccines was a great opportunity to communicate with other nurses and community members. Volunteering not only enhanced Plettau’s practical nursing skills, but this also made her more comfortable in a health care setting engaging with diverse members of the community. After volunteering at the clinic, Plettau was eligible to receive a vaccine. She is very grateful to the other volunteers, health care workers, and other vaccine recipients for doing their part to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This historic opportunity gave Plettau invaluable experience and knowledge to carry with her into her nursing practice. Plettau just passed her Certified Nursing Assistant exam and in the future hopes to continue to help others in healthcare settings.
Rebekah Gonzalez is involved in the NIU Penguin Players. The Penguin Players is a theater group for individuals with disabilities where artists, the individual with the disability, and their mentors work to practice and perform a musical at the end of each semester. Due to COVID-19, the Penguin Players program has been run virtually since the summer of 2020. In the Fall 2020 semester, the group rehearsed and performed Santa’s Workshops Got Talent, a virtual musical that took place over Zoom. Artists played all the main roles in the musical while their mentors learned all their artist’s lines and songs in order to be able to support their artist if needed. Gonzalez and the rest of the Creative Team were very involved in the musical this semester as they all assumed the roles of Santa’s reindeer. The musical was recorded in scenes and then stitched together by Professor Randy Caspersen to create a video that would be played on show day. The Penguin Players performed their show on December 5th for a Zoom audience!

The group chose to take a step back from the theater side of the Penguin Players to focus on establishing and maintaining communication between mentors and artists during these unusual times. This past spring semester, the group still had “rehearsals” every week, but engaged in online games, wellness activities, and other similar things through Zoom. Along with the Zoom sessions came the creation of a Discord that allowed artists and mentors the opportunity to chat while not on a call. Discord also has text-to-speech functions as well as voice channels to help accommodate those who are unable to read or write. Gonzalez and the group are also investigating other applications and programs that will help to facilitate conversation between the members of the Penguin Players.

The Penguin Players will be taking a break for the summer semester but will return in the fall to bring Penguin Magic back to the stage!
Alison Kramer is a junior double majoring in Accounting and Social Entrepreneurship. She has a passion for traveling and, after her study abroad to The Netherlands this past summer was cancelled, she knew she had to find a new program. She found out that the International Business Seminar was doing virtual study abroad programs to Australia during winter break.

During the seminar she got to hear from many different international companies from Australia. Those companies include the U.S. Commercial Service, the Reserve Bank of Australia, and ATEME. The U.S. Commercial Service has locations in Australia that help U.S. businesses start selling abroad. The Reserve Bank of Australia is Australia’s central bank that has many functions to support the economic growth of Australia. ATEME is an advanced video delivery infrastructure. She also heard from two different speakers, Kwong Yue Yang and Chris Durden. Kwong Yue Yang is an executive coach and spoke on ways to improve virtual presentation skills. Chris Durden is from James Cook University and gave an overview on Australia during the first week of the seminar.

In addition to the speakers, there were also cultural sessions and virtual tours of Australia. Some of those places include the Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Harbour, Cairns, Tropical Rain Forest, and the Great Barrier Reef. There were also cultural sessions on Aussie slang and the Aboriginals. These sessions were Kramer’s favorite because she was able to explore Australia from her home.

Throughout the seminar she attended different sessions with speakers and virtual tours. After each session, the small group met together to go over some of the topics that were discussed. This allowed the students from different universities to get to know each other better and also discuss material for their final paper. Overall this was a great experience and Kramer was able to learn a lot from the seminar and added Australia to her bucket list for traveling.
The Conference on Undergraduate Research and Engagement (CURE) allows NIU students to formally showcase research or engagement projects that they have undertaken throughout the academic year. This year’s conference was held virtually on Symposium by ForagerOne and took place though the week of April 19-23, 2021. Participating students created posters to present their projects and a 3-5 minute recorded video presentation to accompany their posters. Posters and presentations were judged and the top three presentations in each category of the conference were recognized. The following McKearn Fellows were recognized with awards for their outstanding presentations.

Amanda Pollock
Language Contact Data: Weekly vs End of Semester Reporting
1st place in Education and Humanities category
Link: https://symposium.foragerone.com/cure/presentations/19920

Kyle Thadani
Exploring Gender Disparities in Introductory Physics Courses
3rd place in Education and Humanities category
Link: https://symposium.foragerone.com/cure/presentations/17430

Leif Verace
Study of a Kinesin-like Protein in Drosophila Border Cell Migration
3rd place in Biology and Chemistry Studies category
Link: https://symposium.foragerone.com/cure/presentations/19903
GET TO KNOW THE FELLOWS: Q&A

If you could give your younger self a piece of advice, what would it be?

Choose getting involved and participating in all available activities over staying at home. Embrace the awkward and go outside your comfort zone.
- Cassandra Kamp

Don’t get caught up in the details of life. Don’t be stressed about everything. Life is all about happiness.
- Emmett Rogman

Don’t be afraid to be the first one to talk.
- Grant Goral

Please, for the love of God, calm down. You’re allowed to have a social life in high school.
- Cameron Simpson

Make more connections and follow-up on them every once in a while to keep them in your network.
- Alison Kramer

What is your favorite memory at NIU?

Hanging out with my friends in my first week of school.
- Kyle Thadani

My favorite memory at NIU so far was when I went to Six Flags Fright Fest with some of my clustermates on the Honors House trip! It was so much fun! I love Halloween and getting to spend time with some of my favorite people always makes me so happy!
- Rebekah Gonzalez

Countless times seeing Mission and Mini Mish.
- Amanda Pollock

Presenting my first Research Rookies project at URAD.
- Jeremy Knoll

My freshman year of marching band we got to go to Detroit for the MAC championship and it was the most intense game I have ever seen. I’ve never been so proud to be a part of NIU and the band to support the football team in their shocking win.
- Sara Plettau
GET TO KNOW THE FELLOWS: BY THE NUMBERS

WOULD YOU RATHER?

- Watch a movie: 50%
- Read a book: 50%
- Speak any language: 60%
- Be able to communicate with animals: 40%
- Speak any language: 60%
GET TO KNOW THE FELLOWS: BY THE NUMBERS

What superpower would you want?

What is your favorite season?
Thank you for reading!