



HONORS PROGRAM
ANNUAL REPORT
2023- 2024

THE
UNIVERSITY
OF RHODE ISLAND

Dear Friends of Honors,

A word that characterizes this past year in Honors is “energetic.” Whether to describe the work of our students, staff or faculty, this word describes a quality that has traversed the incredible projects, initiatives and ongoing support undertaken by all within the Honors Program. It is heartening to feel such energy buoy the decision we made last year to chart a new, transformative path for Honors.

As you will read in this report, students showed their energy through introductory and advanced-level projects that ran the gamut. For example, freshmen worked on RISE UP innovation challenges in our new on-boarding course “Welcome to Planet Honors.” Students in our Colloquium courses were challenged with thinking of ways to do business for the common good. In a course focused on Rhode Island rivers, students drove support for a Rhode Island Bottle Bill. Upper-level students worked on Honors projects ranging from empowering people to stop life-threatening bleeding to the creation of a physical homage to Venetian Gondoliers. And, continuing the tradition of the past, an impressive array of students received prestigious national fellowships such as the Fulbright Award, the Boren Scholarship and the NOAA Hollings Scholarship, and were admitted to top graduate programs and medical schools.

In this report, you will also meet four new Honors team members who have helped us turn the ship. Karl Aspelund, our new associate director, has brought joyous energy, a design eye, an anthropologist’s spirit of inquiry, and a magician’s touch to all aspects of the program. He also



Students share their work at the 2024 Honors Project Showcase. From left to right: Lina Altaan Al Hariri, Kyle Zalabowski, Leloo Blunt and Grace Lavallee. Photograph by Kristen Curry.

designed a 400-level policy course that led to the creation of the Rhode Island Future Textiles Council. Cynthia Taylor, our new Assistant Teaching Professor of Honors, is a strategic and energetic builder of courses, community and curriculum. She launched the foundation course “Welcome to Planet Honors” to universal student acclaim. Aysha Moreino joined us this year as the new Honors/pre-health advisor. Her talent at relating to students coupled with her deep knowledge of student affairs and energetic commitment to student success have made it such that she is the most sought after person on the

third floor of Lippitt Hall. Lastly, “Honors projects are my jam,” Heather Johnson, our new Honors Project Advisor, said to me this year. She has been remarkably effective at creating new energy around Honors Projects through a new Honors Showcase, and, more importantly, at supporting both students and faculty mentors throughout the Honors-project process.

While new energy is important, the Honors Program owes its continued success to the steady, reliable and adaptable energy of its existing staff. As Coordinator, Anna Blake moves mountains for the Honors Program while carrying volumes of valuable institutional knowledge. Kathleen Maher, Director of the Office of National Fellowships and Academic Opportunities, continues to launch students into original, life-changing opportunities through her highly effective fellowship and scholarship advising. Melissa Stevens, our Honors Specialist, brought her corporate marketing and communications expertise to our program and, over one year, overhauled and expanded our visual presence, built student community, and systematized a number of our operations. Finally, Andrew Simmons, director of Pre-health Programs Advising, continued to support countless students in their pursuit to gain entrance into graduate programs in the health professions.

As this report highlights, the collective dynamism and dedication of our team have propelled the Honors Program to new heights this year. Our transformative initiatives and the remarkable achievements of our students are a testament to the boundless energy and creativity that drive us forward. I thank the Provost, the wider university, and our vibrant community for their steadfast support and I look forward to reporting on our bright future!

Sincerely,
Karen de Bruin,
Director of the URI Honors Program



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PROGRAM GOALS

The URI Honors Program is comprised of three overlapping units that support student growth: the Honors Program, which includes the Honors Colloquium; the Office of National Fellowships and Academic Opportunities; and the Pre-Health Professions Advising Program.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, our primary goals were to:

1

Begin the strategic transformation of Honors by submitting a proposal for a new URI Honors Institute, by bringing on board new talent, by piloting new curricular initiatives, and by creating community.

2

Uphold the tradition of the Honors Colloquium, our crown jewel event that reached its 60th anniversary in 2023.

3

Support student outcomes academically and socially through course offerings and experiences that are unique to the Honors Program, and that prepare our students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers.

4

Offer guidance and support to students and recent alumni applying for prestigious external fellowships and scholarships.

5

Support students and recent alumni preparing to apply for admission to medical, dental, optometry, physician assistant, and other health profession training programs that require a degree beyond the baccalaureate.

NEW FACES

In 2024, we welcomed several new faces to the Honors Team.

Learn more about our team [here](#).

Karl Aspelund is Associate Director of the Honors Program, Associate Professor in URI's TMD Department, and Visiting Associate Professor of Ethnology and Museum Studies at the University of Iceland. He holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology and Material Culture from Boston University and a degree in Theater Design from The Wimbledon School of Art. Karl has authored several textbooks and been involved in cross-disciplinary research on nationalistic culture-creation as well as textile needs and human factors in long-duration space exploration.



Heather Johnson is a multifaceted educator, teaching across the Departments of English, Professional and Public Writing, and the Honors Program, where she also serves as the advisor for Honors Projects. With a diverse educational background, including degrees from Edinburgh University, Trinity College Dublin, and UC Berkeley, she brings a wealth of knowledge to her favorite courses: Travel Writing, Creative Nonfiction, Women Writers, and experiential offerings like River Stories and Immigrant Voices. She supports faculty and student writers in her role as director of Writing Across URI.



Aysha Moreino, the Honors Advisor at URI, holds two Bachelor's Degrees in Human Development/Family Studies and Textiles, Merchandising, and Design from URI. As an undergraduate, she competed on the URI Women's Track & Field team and served as a URI 101 mentor. She later worked as an Academic Support Specialist for URI Student Athletes and earned a Master's Degree in College Student Personnel in 2021. Aysha also coordinated the URI Multicultural Student Services Center and co-founded the award-winning Blue Table Talk series.



Cynthia Taylor is an Assistant Teaching Professor of Honors in the Department of Marine Affairs. Her research and teaching are informed by her combined training in anthropology, biology, and STEM education, and center on the social dimensions of scientific knowledge, public engagement with environmental issues, and inclusive science communication. She received her PhD through URI's Science Education and Society Program in the Department of Biology in 2020, and currently teaches HPR 100: Planet Honors.



HONORS PROGRAM REFLECTIONS

Honors Transformation: Strategic Direction Development

In the Spring of 2023, the Honors staff successfully completed a formal self study and brought on two external reviewers for an assessment by the NCHC. The findings of these reviews are now guiding the new direction in which we are heading. You can find details of our self- study and our external review [here](#).



During the 2023 AY, our dedicated staff submitted a proposal to create an Honors Institute at URI, which would continue to house the Honors Program, the Honors Colloquium, the Office of National Fellowships and Academic Opportunities and Pre-Health Advising, but would provide more structured support for the entity within the university system. We are still awaiting feedback on this proposal which currently sits with the Faculty Senate pending approval.

Honors Colloquium: Not Business as Usual, Business for the Common Good

The 2023 Honors Colloquium was coordinated by Christy Ashley, Doug Creed, and Seray Ergene, all professors in the College of Business. This event brought together eleven different speakers who led nine lectures delving into the potential of applying business acumen to tackle the pressing challenges of climate change and societal inequalities, including racial and gender disparities.



On-demand recordings of the colloquium events are available on our website [here](#).

Curricular & Student Outcomes

Welcome to Planet Honors

This year, the Honors Program was pleased to unveil our new foundation course, HPR 100: Welcome to Planet Honors, taught by Cynthia Taylor. This is a course that all incoming honors students will take to help set their path through the program and prepare them for life at URI. It focuses on teaching collaborative problem solving and helping students find their identities as agents of change. You can read more about this exciting new course [here](#).

The Faces of Honors

In 2023 we also revealed a new art project completed by URI Alum AGonza '16 which featured portraits for four Honors students: Lohith Chatragadda '26, Lina Altaan Al Hariri '24, Stephen Coutu '24 and Thelma Iheanacho '27. View the portraits and the story of their unveiling [here](#).

Honors Students Drive Support for RI Bottle Bill

Students in Heather Johnson's [HPR 412 River Stories](#) course developed a love of rivers that inspired them to action. After spending a semester visiting local waterways, students found themselves shocked by plastic pollution and designed a project to do something about it. In early December, students assembled thousands of plastic bottles on the Quad and petitioned for signatures in support of a RI Bottle Bill. Their efforts soon led them to the state house where they turned over their signatures and spoke in support of clean waterways. Read more about their change-making project [here](#).

Showcase

Our annual Honors Showcase featured the work of more than forty students who successfully completed the honors program this year. Students presented the results of their personal research projects which included the development of wearable technologies to support the health of athletes, an investigation into funding sources for augmentative and alternative communication devices for school aged children, the stigmas associated with mental



Students in HPR 100 Welcome to Planet Honors explore the North Woods as part of their studies on conservation. Photo by Nora Lewis.



Lucas Kisiel '24 presents his Honors Project on Community Farming at the Annual Honors Showcase this spring.

health issues in nursing, and more. Explore student abstracts [here](#) and read these articles to learn more about projects by [Caleb Gross](#), [Emily Lefebvre](#) and [Maya Galeano](#).

Kimball Foundation

In the spring of 2024, the Honors Program was pleased to receive an award from the Horace A. and S. Ella Kimball Foundation. The Foundation awarded a \$100,000 gift to establish the Thomas F. Black Jr. Scholarship to support a junior in the URI Honors Program who takes an interest in the nonprofit sector. Read more about the award [here](#).

Rise Up Challenge

Through a new initiative sponsored by the 401 Tech Bridge, URI students were invited to participate in the inaugural Innovation and Entrepreneurship Challenge which consisted of several challenges focused on sustainability. The Honors Program hosted a challenge called “Imagining Your Own Utopia: Green Rooftop Design” and was pleased to find that Honors students also competed in other interdisciplinary challenges hosted by other campus entities. Several Honors students placed as finalists and thanks to the support of Honors Lecturer Cynthia Taylor, who is also a [Rise Up Faculty Fellow](#), this program will continue to be closely connected to the Honors Program in the future. Read more about the challenge [here](#).

Honors Ambassadors

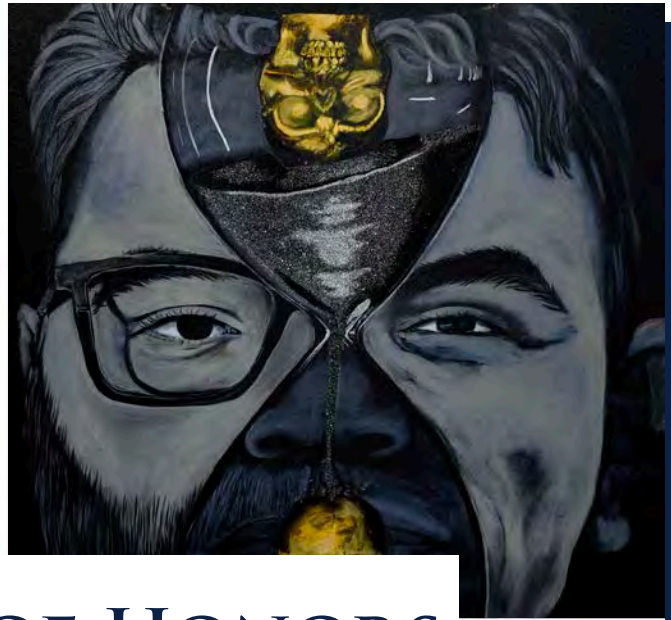
This reflection would not be complete without mentioning the community-building efforts of our Honors Ambassadors. In addition to volunteering at Welcome Days, Rhody Fest, Open Houses and more, these engaged students also planned a number of events for their peers. Student events included a game night with Honors alum Jack Myer '22 who led students through several rounds of the game he created as his Honors Project and then brought to market, Draw 3, as well as a movie night, Gingerbread House contest, Flower Pot Design and de-stress events around midterms and finals. Meet our ambassadors [here](#).



Students in HPR 412 River Stories collect signatures on the quad to show support for a RI Bottle Bill. Photo by Kristen Curry.



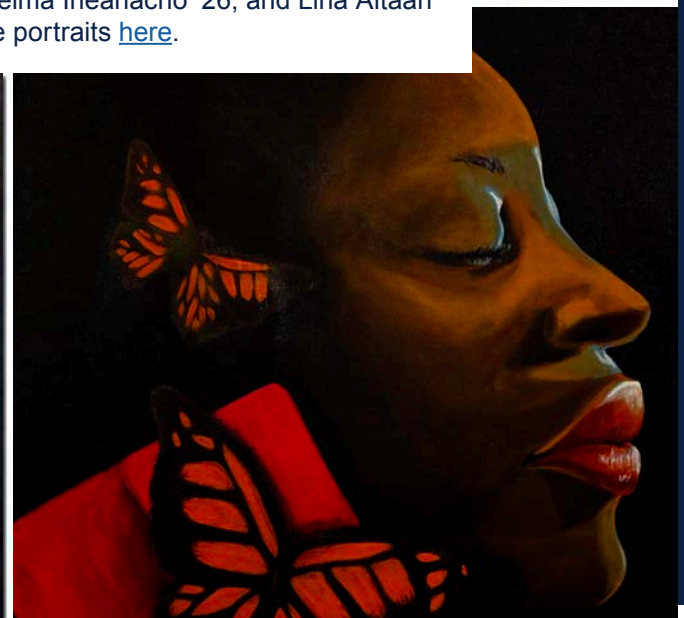
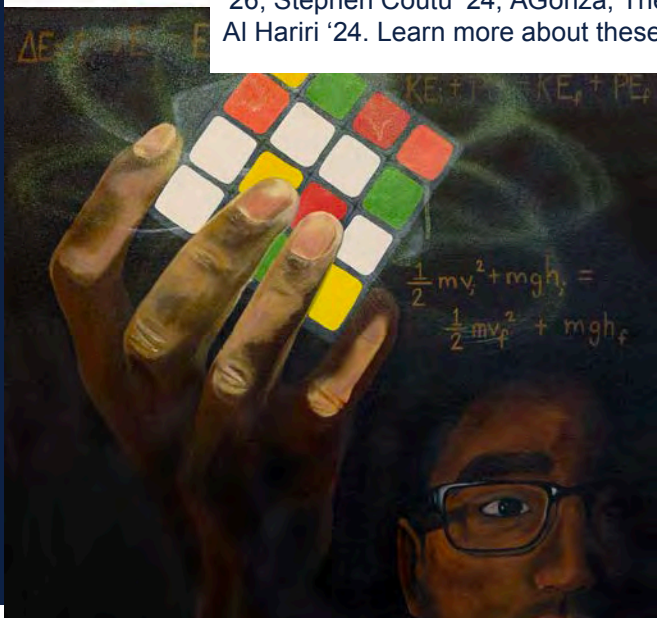
Ambassadors Sophie Herrman '26 and Lohith Chatragadda '26 are photographed working on their gingerbread houses at an Honors student event.



THE FACES OF HONORS



Portraits by AGonza '16 were unveiled at the Faces of Honors event held in Lippitt Hall on October 18, 2023. Pictured left to right Lohith Chatragadda '26, Stephen Coutu '24, AGonza, Thelma Iheanacho '26, and Lina Altaan Al Hariri '24. Learn more about these portraits [here](#).





HONORS BY THE NUMBERS

963

URI Students took Honors courses in 2023-2024.

46%

of Honors students are in their first-year at URI.



71% of students identify as female.



61% of students are out-of-state residents

42

University faculty members teaching courses in the Honors Program.

44

Faculty members who sponsored students' Honors Projects.

47

Honors Capstone Projects completed in 2023-2024.

52

Students who completed the Honors Program in 2023-2024.

STUDENT STORIES

Caleb Gross, '24 English, Honors Program

Born in South Kingstown, R.I., Caleb worked on local oyster farms and explored diverse subjects at URI. Inspired by an Italian class, his honors capstone project involved hand-building a Venetian oar, paying homage to the traditional craftsmen. He learned some of these skills in Vermont where, with support of a Rhode Island Foundation Metcalf Grant, he practiced woodworking. Gross hopes his project promotes appreciation for this woodworking tradition and its connection to climate change. Read more [here](#) and [here](#).



Lina Altaan Al Hariri '24, Political Science, Global Language and Area Studies, and Gender and Women's Studies, Honors Program

Lina was awarded the prestigious Harry S. Truman Scholarship, a US Department of State Gilman Scholarship for study abroad in Jordan, and was selected for the US Foreign Service Internship Program (USFSIP). She then went on to be named a finalist for the Marshall and Rhodes Scholarships, and an alternate for a Fulbright to the UK. This fall Lina will head to the University of Oxford to pursue a Masters of Science in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, with full financial support from Oxford's Dr. Peggie Rimmer Sanctuary Scholarship. Lina was also the recipient of this year's Donald H. DeHayes Provost Honors Excellence Award and also received the Undergraduate Academic Excellence Award in Gender and women's studies. Read more [here](#).



Aria Mia Loberti '20, Communications Studies, Political Science, and Philosophy, Honors Program

Since graduation, Aria has completed a master's degree in rhetoric at Royal Holloway University of London as a Fulbright US Student grantee and began work towards her Ph.D. at Penn State. She is also an advocate for people with disabilities, becoming the first legally blind United Nations Youth Delegate, and serving as a UNICEF ambassador. Most notably, Aria landed the lead role in Netflix's adaptation of "All the Light We Cannot See," her first acting role, and will soon appear in The Spiderwick Chronicles. Read more [here](#).





Ahmed Azmari '23 presents his project at the Honors Fall Showcase. Azmari worked with the URI Cyber Seniors to create literacy and training tools to keep senior citizens safe online.



Nicole Jones '24, presents her Honors Project at the Spring Showcase. Jones developed a wearable technology to benchmark athletic performance and was also a presenter at URI TedX.



Dean Libutti, Associate VP for Enrollment Management and Student Success and Honors Program Director Karen de Bruin acknowledge graduates of the Honors Program at the 2024 Awards Ceremony.

OFFICE OF NATIONAL FELLOWSHIPS & ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES



Led by Honors Assistant Director Kathleen Maher, the Office of National Fellowships and Academic Opportunities (ONFAO) offers guidance and support to students applying for prestigious external fellowships and scholarships. These opportunities are not restricted to Honors Program students; the office works with students from any student background who meet the eligibility requirements. This includes graduate students for certain international awards, as well as recent alumni. During the academic year 2023-2024 over 125 applications were supported, over 300 1-1 meetings and 20 workshops and information sessions were held.

URI students and alums continue to shine in national competitions, which the infographic on the following page emphasizes, however, this is not the only outcome by which to measure our success.

Those who apply but do not win or place in these competitions still derive a great deal of value from the campus process. Each year students tell us of how this deep, guided reflection on their accomplishments, goals, and aspirations, has led them to discover other opportunities, or perhaps to realize a better professional path. It aids them in identifying their mentors and in realizing the extent of their accomplishments, as well as any gaps that they need to address to successfully pursue their goals.

These successes would not have been possible without dedicated faculty mentors who go above and beyond to support their students. From letter writing to serving on interview committees, we wish to heartily thank the faculty who put in that time, and in so doing launch their mentees into opportunities which are often transformative personally, professionally and intellectually.

More details on our 2023-2024 nominees, finalists and awardees can be found [here](#).



ONFAO BY THE NUMBERS

\$1.4M+

Amount of external funding garnered through ONFAO-supported fellowship applications (to support URI students and recent alumni).



For awards requiring formal institutional nomination or endorsement, the percent of 2024 nominees who advanced beyond the first round (i.e. awardees, alternates, and finalists.)



With six sophomores selected in 2024, URI has been the top producing institution of NOAA Hollings Scholars in the nation twice in the past three years.



URI was the only public institution represented among the fourteen Rhodes finalists in District One in the fall 2023 competition. Each of the 14 Rhodes districts selects 2 U.S. Rhodes Scholars.



A URI rising junior has been selected in each of the first two 100-student cohorts of the new Obama Chesky Voyager Scholarship for Public Service.

STUDENT STORIES

Faith Simonini, '24, Education & English

Faith Simonini recently graduated with degrees in education and English. As a student, she worked with ONFAO to apply for a Fulbright Award. As a recipient, she will spend a year teaching English in Athens. While at URI, Simonini taught yoga, served as a residential academic mentor, and completed student-teaching. Simonini, who loves Greek culture, aims to pursue a master's in TESOL and advocate for social justice in education. [Read More.](#)



Juliana Nguyen, '25, Computer Science

majoring in computer science with a minor in business. This past year, she was awarded a prestigious Boren Scholarship worth up to \$25,000 to study Vietnamese in Vietnam. Her interest in honing her Vietnamese language skills was sparked by a previous internship in South Korea, where she utilized her skills for a company's Vietnamese market outreach. In addition to her studies, Juliana was a facilitator in the URI Innovation Lab, educating patrons on using digital fabricating machines including 3D Printers, Laser Engravers, Virtual Reality Equipment, and more. [Read More.](#)



Mary Brantley, '26, Marine Biology & Marine Affairs, Honors Program

Mary Brantley '26, a sophomore from Charlotte, North Carolina, is an honors student majoring in Marine Biology and Marine Affairs. She is one of six URI students selected this year for the prestigious NOAA Hollings Scholarship, aimed at increasing undergraduate training in oceanic and atmospheric science, and preparing students for careers in public service. Beyond her studies, Mary demonstrated leadership by founding the URI chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, organizing beach cleanups and advocating for coastal policy. Her involvement in both academic and extracurricular activities showcases her passion for marine conservation and her potential as a future leader in the field. [Read More.](#)





While on their Fulbright grants in Belgium and the UK respectively, URI alums Annabelle Leahy '23 and Timothy Berard '20 were two of a small group of current Fulbright grantees nominated to participate in a special Seminar on the EU and NATO hosted by the Fulbright Commission in Belgium.



URI's 2024 Boren Scholars at the Convocation event in Washington, D.C. this past May. Pictured left to right: Paula Porro-Vasquez, Si Ying Chen, Juliana Nguyen, and Tyler Dion.



The 6 2024 URI NOAA Hollings recipients pictured at NOAA headquarters. From left to right: Grace Dandeneau, Mary Brantley, Carolina Brooklyn Mitchell, Grace First, Nicole Kobasa, and Alec Duffy.

PRE-HEALTH PROFESSIONS ADVISING PROGRAM

The Pre-Health Program supports student and recent alumni preparing to apply for admission to medical, dental, optometry, physician assistant, and other health profession training programs that require a degree beyond the baccalaureate. Though housed in the Honors Program, Pre-Health Advising is open to all URI students.

The program is guided by four goals: Knowledge, Planning, Reflection, and Application. Each of these goals is addressed through workshops, events, web and print resources, outreach, and individual advising. In AY 2023-2024, the Pre-Health Program implemented 25 workshops, meetings, and events. Around 1,000 students and recent alumni interested in health careers are registered with the program.



Students and recent alumni receive comprehensive support for their applications through the Application Prep Program, which consists of two tracks:

- Track A supports students and recent graduates applying for admission to medical, dental, optometry, or podiatry school.
- Track B supports students applying for admission to physician assistant schools.

Additionally, Pre-Health Advising supports students on special admission routes through the Brown Early Identification Program and the URI-Johnson and Wales Master of Physician Assistant Studies Linkage Agreement.

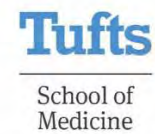
All applicants receive comprehensive support throughout the year-long admission processes. This includes on-going advising on a range of issues (e.g., selecting schools, wait lists, multiple acceptances, etc.), personal statement writing, standardized test-prep strategies, and admission interview preparation. For Track A, significant support for students is provided by the Health Professions Advisory Committee (HPAC), which consists of faculty from multiple colleges. We are thankful for the time and effort given by HPAC members for our students and graduates; the Committee has been integral to the success of our applicants to medical, dental, optometry, and podiatry school over a number of years.



Outcomes, Applicants for 2024 Admission Supported by the Pre-Health Program

	Admitted	Not Admitted	Waitlisted	Total
MD & DO Programs	13	3	0	16
Dental	5	1	1	7
Optom	1	0	0	1
PA	16	2	3	21
Other	2	0	0	2
All Supported Applicants	36	6	5	47

Our students have entered nationally recognized programs at schools, including:



More information on student outcomes can be found on our website at <https://web.uri.edu/prehealth/where-do-our-students-go/>

STUDENT STORIES

Joey Confessore '25, Biomedical Engineering, Honors Program

Joey Confessore is a dedicated pre-health student at the University of Rhode Island, majoring in Biomedical Engineering with a minor in Chemistry. As a member of the Honors Program and a pre-health student ambassador, he is actively preparing for a career in medicine. Confessore is involved in various academic and extracurricular activities that enhance his understanding of the healthcare field. [Read more.](#)



Abby Doster, '24, Neuroscience

Abby Doster, a recent grad, has made significant contributions to Alzheimer's research at Butler's Alber Lab, completing a manuscript on retinal proteins as pre-clinical biomarkers. She continues her work in the Manuel Lab, focusing on diazepam experiments with mouse models. Abby is currently taking a gap year, using this time to pursue clinical research opportunities while applying to medical schools. Abby's ultimate goal is a career in medicine, with a particular interest in serving underserved patient populations. [Read more.](#)



Arianne Parvaresh-Rizi, '25, Biomedical Engineering

Arianne Parvaresh-Rizi is a pre-medical student at the University of Rhode Island, pursuing a degree in biomedical engineering. She has actively engaged in both clinical and research environments, volunteering at Rhode Island Hospital and conducting research on nanoparticle delivery methods for pulmonary fibrosis. Arianne's commitment to problem-solving and patient care drives her ambition to attend medical school, where she aims to integrate her engineering expertise with medical practice to enhance healthcare outcomes. [Read more.](#)





Students are pictured at Verdi Productions, one of the sites visited during the J-Term course HPR 344 Experiencing Film in Rhode Island taught by Professor Tom Zorabedian.



Students in HPR 100: Welcome to Planet Honors are pictured working on prototypes for their presentations.



HPR 412 River Stories students are photographed delivering signatures supporting the RI Bottle Bill to representative Carol McEntee.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The external review of March 2023 highlighted that the existing course for Honors was not sustainable. Retention rates were low; Honors was not well integrated into the larger university; it lacked prominence; the curriculum did not meet national best practices; and the funding of Honors was not in line with national norms. We immediately set to work to build a more sustainable and successful Honors Program.

Retention

Over this past year, we put into place new retention mechanisms that we will build upon and that will begin to bear fruit over the next few years. Beginning in Fall 2025, all incoming Honors students will be required to take our cohort-building foundational course, HPR 100 “Welcome to Planet Honors.” Research has shown that foundational courses increase retention because they create community, provide students with tools and knowledge to be successful in their first year, and introduce students in a meaningful and systematic way to the Honors Program.

Students will no longer have to change advisors as they advance through the program as we have now appointed our first full-time Honors Advisor, Aysha Moreino. Additionally, Aysha, with all of her experience in student affairs, is planning creative ways to connect students into the larger University for this upcoming year and is working closely with our student ambassadors.

We have also transformed the energy of the student lounge over this past year, from a place that had become all but abandoned after the pandemic to a hang out space where students are present all of the time. Our student ambassadors will continue to plan fun events both in the lounge and out in the broader community that will be held over this upcoming year. These events will promote greater community among students, thereby helping with student retention.

The new buzz around Honors Projects and the Honors Showcases has increased interest campus wide. Freshmen from the HPR 100 course are invited to attend the Showcases thereby demystifying the honors project and giving them a taste of the excitement and reward felt by accomplishing one.

A new retention mechanism that is currently awaiting approval in the Faculty Senate workflow is the Honors Contract. The Honors Contract will allow third- and fourth-year students to gain Honors credit for a non-Honors advanced-level course by completing a 20-hour independent research project in the subject area of the course. The Honors Contract will help with retention because advanced Honors

students will no longer be restricted to our 300- and 400-level offerings; Honors contracts will give students much more flexibility and control over the course topics and work they would like to complete for Honors credit.

Finally, we will be overhauling our admissions process so that the program is more selective. Rather than admit 700+ freshmen into the program only to see the majority not complete the program, we will admit just over 300 and we will work to achieve an 80% retention rate, in line with a key performance indicator for retention for the University.

Integration into the University and greater prominence

In March 2024, following the recommendation of our external reviewers, we proposed the creation of a new Honors Institute to house the Honors Program, the Honors Colloquium and the Office of National Fellowships and Academic Opportunities. The proposal is under review in the Faculty Senate. As per national norms, the Pre-health Professions Advising Program will no longer fall under Honors education and will move to University College.

We submitted a proposal for an Honors Institute because the “Honors” ecosystem at URI lacks a formal institutional structure, impeding its development and causing delays and inefficiencies. Additionally, Honors at URI is minimally competitive with Honors education at peer flagship institutions because it does not meet national best practices and standards both within the “Honors” ecosystem and in terms of University-wide integration, visibility and support. The proposed Honors Institute will solve these problems as it will be agile, competitive, fully integrated into the University, and more prominent. With the increased attraction, retention and post-graduate success of uniquely able and highly motivated students, external reviewers affirm that the success of this Honors Institute “could have ripple effects that launch the University of Rhode Island toward the highest tier of institutions in the Northeast.”

The curriculum

As we mentioned in our past annual report, the new direction of Honors is focused on equipping the changemakers who we believe hold the power to save our world. Many of us in Honors are parents, and we are reminded every day that we are at a critical juncture when it comes to our planet and our current way of life. We see the Honors Program as a place where students can learn about these challenges and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to confront them. Instead of letting our children enter the world full of fear and anxiety about their futures, we want to equip our students with the agency and tools to become influential changemakers.

We have designed a thirty-credit program to replace our current eighteen-credit program, to better align with national norms in Honors education. This program has a nine-credit “engaged citizenry/ changemaker” component, an Honors project requirement, and a requirement to complete up to eighteen additional credits in Honors electives, including the possibility of doing 1-3 Honors Contracts.

Given that our “crown jewel” is the Honors Colloquium, and that the Colloquium spawned the Honors Program, we aim to return to our roots by organizing the “engaged citizenry/changemaker” component of the program around it. Consequently, students will engage with three different Colloquia at three touch points in their Honors studies. This organization will allow students, regardless of their majors, to obtain a knowledge base in the most pressing issues of our times — the historic leaning of our Colloquia. The skills that students will obtain especially through these focused courses and experiences as well as the Honors Project will be rooted in four new programmatic goals: creative problem solving, social innovation, interconnection, and policy advocacy. And in their Honors-level elective work that students will presumably complete in their majors, students will delve into their specializations with more depth, breadth, and complexity, in line with the national guiding principles of Honors education. Once the Honors Institute is approved, we will be able to submit formally the newly designed curriculum for approval by the Faculty Senate.

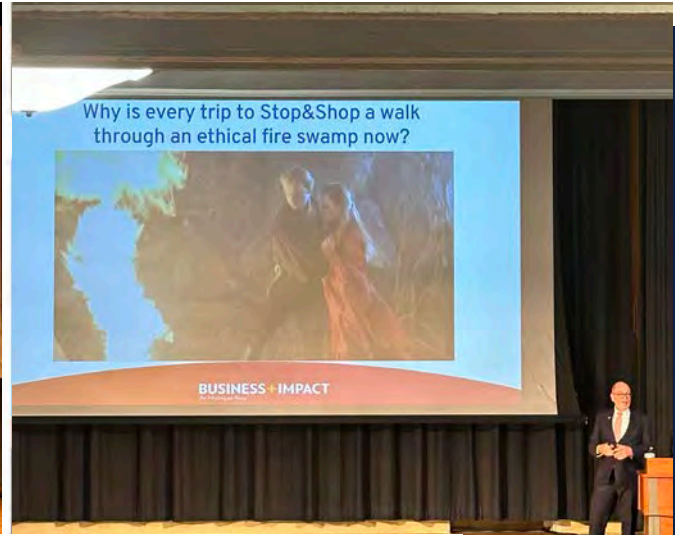
Funding

The University is moving to a new incentive-based budget model that should allow for greater transparency in terms of tracking funding for Honors. The Provost has already shown commitment to steadily bringing Honors funding in line with national norms by modestly increasing our annual budget and engaging the URI Foundation in conversations to prioritize fundraising for Honors. With the approval of the Honors Institute, we anticipate greater visibility for fundraising by the URI Foundation as well as continued increased investment by the University.

HOW TO SUPPORT HONORS

At this stage, Honors seeks support from our friends in a number of ways!

- We are always in need of financial support which is used to fund student enrichment programs, inclusive of scholarships, community-building events, academic opportunities, technology and materials to support learning experiences, and interview travel for our fellowship candidates. You can make a gift at any time by visiting the [RhodyNow funding page](#) and offering your support.
- We also welcome the support of faculty and staff who wish to play a role in helping Honors establish new relationships on campus and in the broader community. As we embark on this journey, with sustainability and social equity at its core, we appreciate introductions and shared connections that will help us drive deeper collaboration and experiences for our students. If you have an idea or introduction you'd like to make please email annablake@uri.edu.



A sampling of speakers from the 2023 Honors Colloquium, clockwise from top left: [Idris "Lanre" Ajakaiye](#), [Jerry Davis](#), [Amy Hall](#) and co-panelists [Rachel Calomeni](#) and [Richard Vevers](#) with moderator Jessica Strubel. Learn about the Fall 2024 Colloquium [here](#).



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We would like to thank the faculty & staff members across the university who have supported Honors by teaching courses, sponsoring student projects, mentoring and nominating award applicants, and serving on committees for review prep cycles. Our students and our program could not be successful without your support!

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Donors have the power to transform our Honors Program by funding scholarships and research grants, attracting top talent, and fostering a culture of innovation and discovery. Their support helps create exciting new courses, global learning opportunities, and state-of-the-art facilities, ensuring students receive the best and most comprehensive education. Additionally, by funding internships, career services, and mentorship programs, they can help students gain invaluable practical experience and professional guidance, setting them on a path to success. These contributions make a lasting impact on the future leaders and changemakers of tomorrow. We offer our most sincere thanks to the sustaining donors and Rhody Now donors below.

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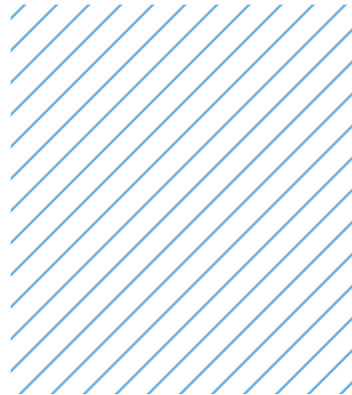
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Honors Ambassadors Hollie Johnson '24 and Mary Brantley '26 help promote attendance for the Honors Colloquium at the annual College of Business Block Party in September 2023.



Two honors students are photographed participating in the Earth Day "Paint a Pot Event" where students were invited to decorate their own clay flower pot and create starter pollinator gardens.



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