

## **The Value of High Impact Undergraduate Research As Developed in Disciplinary Honors in the Humanities**

### **Overview of the Program:**

**The Disciplinary Honors in the Humanities program, lovingly referred to as HiH, is a high-impact student-driven undergraduate research program.** The program gathers undergraduates from Marquette's five humanities departments into research cohorts that begin in the sophomore year, and these students grow and learn together over the next three years. The program is unique in its emphasis on individual research development; all students build skills and apply them to a project of their own choosing. While the emphasis of the program is on individual research, it also stresses the importance of team building, collegiality, and the ability to talk across disciplines. Humanists take these skills, skills that are marketable across post-graduate professional choices, and find themselves better prepared for their lives after Marquette.

**The program has already seen extraordinary personal and professional results in its first three years.** Looking at the reflections that follow, one begins to see how these students found their voices and gained confidence in their abilities as researchers, writers, problem solvers, collaborators and communicators. Because it allows for project development over more than one semester, the program has proven instrumental in placing students in competitive graduate and professional programs. HiH has already built bridges with the MU4Gold undergraduate research program and the McNair Scholars program. And, like the other Disciplinary Honors programs across campus, HiH allows for recruiting beyond Core Honors and thus attracts students who were either uncertain about or unaware of the Core Honors program before they arrived at Marquette. It is an inherently inclusive program, relying on student motivation and curiosity. Using summer fellowships, HiH students have travelled to Ireland and Germany for their research. They have studied the literature of Charles Dickens, examined rabbits in children's literature, looked at the unique role of creole women in early nineteenth-century New Orleans, tracked the growth of Latina activism in Milwaukee, and celebrated Milwaukee's mural art among other things. They are writing historical fiction, poetry, personal essays, traditional theses, and one is building a curriculum and in-service day for inclusive teaching methods. They are a collective wonder. **While we cannot always see or know the impact that research programs have on our students, we invite you to look at the reflections below from our first three cohorts of HiH students. These attest to the fact that having the time, space, and responsibility to develop a project is personally and intellectually transformational.**

Thank you for allowing me to share these stories with you.

A. Kristen Foster  
Associate Professor of History  
Director, Disciplinary Honors in the Humanities

## **Class of 2019:**

### **Alexis Garcia (History and Secondary Education Majors):**

My name is Alexis Garcia and I graduated with a degree in Secondary Education and History from Marquette University in 2019. I am writing this to discuss how my experiences studying the Humanities, in particular, being a graduate of the Honors in the Humanities program, has greatly benefited me as a person in both my personal and professional career.

Let's begin with the personal. As a woman of color, my story is often hidden in the margins of history books. When you learn about any great women's movement, the narrative is always focused on white women and how these movements benefited other white women. As a Mexican-American, the narratives are even further cut short only highlighting people like Cesar Chavez (if you're lucky). My personal experiences helped inform my decision to major in history to learn more about the forgotten stories of minorities. Taking classes such as Women's History with Dr. Kristen Foster and Native American History with Dr. Bryan Rindfleisch helped to not only enlighten me on perspectives that are often overlooked, it also helped to prepare me as an educator. My pedagogy as a social studies teacher is to make minority perspectives a part of the historical narrative and not simply an afterthought. Especially as an educator that teaches students of color, the work I do in my classroom is even more important. My students get to leave my classroom having a better understanding of the unique experiences of minorities in this country and how those histories affect their experiences today.

While at Marquette I was given the very fortunate opportunity to be part of the piloted Honors in the Humanities Program. It is through this program that I was given the freedom and resources to explore certain subjects that were not taught to me when I was younger. I was given the free range to learn about the history I was interested in and what I thought was valuable to my personal education. I was able to investigate the experiences of Mexicans during Post World War II America by comparing the experiences of Braceros, Mexican national men that were sent to the US as laborers, and Pachucos, Mexican-American youth. The thesis that I developed through this program was accepted to be presented at not just one, but two separate Humanities Conferences at Marquette during my senior year. I was able to share my research with my peers, professors, and even my family. My studies focused on sharing stories that are often forgotten or overlooked to take center stage in academic conversations. Ironically, Marquette's decision to cut back and defund Humanities programs across the campus show that those stories are even more at risk of being even further forgotten.

Humanities programs are always the first to be cut when faced with economic hardships because they are seen as "unworthy" or "lacking in professional development" and yet, here I stand, a testament that those fears are wrong. Being part of the Honors in the Humanities program allowed me to be part of a cohort of educated individuals who are committed to setting the world on fire. Every single member of my cohort was either hired before graduation or were accepted into post-secondary programs. Is that not what we want for all that attend this institution? To take what they learned in our undergraduate careers and use that in our respective post-secondary life? The relationships that I created with my professors both in the College of Education (another program that is being targeted by these cuts) as well as the History Department are professional relationships that have continued to benefit my life even after graduation. Last year in November of 2019, I was able to present alongside Dr. Melisa Gibson, Dr. Terry Burant, and Jaquelin Schram at the National Association for Multicultural Education, an organization that advances and advocates for equity and social justice through multicultural education. I was 22 years old and not even a full semester into my teaching career, and yet, there I was alongside experienced educators presenting on the importance of revamping the Teacher Education Program at Marquette to better fulfill the needs of Act 31. An issue that I addressed with Dr. Burant while still a student in the College of Education.

This letter is not to bash or shame Marquette University. It is meant to shine light on the benefits that Humanities has on its students and faculty. Especially in the world we live in today where African Americans are constantly having to prove that their lives matter, where Indigenous peoples are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19, and where women are once again having to question their right to take control of their own bodies, we need more people who advocate *for* humanity. Cutting these programs is not just an economic decision, it is a decision that will dictate the future of this institution and what it stands for.

### **Yazmin Gomez (History and Psychology Majors)**

I participated in the first cohort of the Honors in Humanities program in fall 2018. My time in the seminar was instrumental in preparing me for my current graduate studies. The emphasis on developing research questions, learning relevant historiography, and exploring primary sources felt like a crash course in essential grad school strategies. For example, I distinctly remember the session dedicated to “gutting” a book that taught us to read a large amount of material effectively. I still use these skills every day.

In addition to working with faculty advisors, the program stressed student support and feedback across disciplines. Throughout the seminar, Dr. Foster created an atmosphere of comradery, collaboration, and scholarly support that made this possible. This collaboration is not something I experienced in my other undergraduate courses. HiH created an open, equal environment where students’ intellect was as equally valued as that of experienced faculty. For instance, when anyone hit a dead end in their research, the feedback from cohort members across subjects or disciplines often revealed new fruitful areas of exploration. This also taught me creative problem-solving. Our cohort often shared drafts, tips on applications, and interesting sources with one another. This is an attitude I now carry in my graduate studies as I often turn to my colleagues for advice and feedback. I found it essential to succeeding in my first semesters.

The work I produced during this semester in 2018 is the basis of my dissertation and served as my writing sample for graduate school applications. I was accepted into five fully funded programs, including the top program in my field. The rest of my cohort was also extremely successful with everyone gaining teaching positions or entry to funded graduate programs prior to graduation. Ultimately, HiH helped me solidify my research interests, gain confidence in my expertise, and prepared me for success in my current Ph.D. program. It was easily one of the best experiences of my undergraduate education. I hope future students can continue to reap its endless benefits.

Yazmin Gomez  
History Ph.D. Student, Rutgers University  
History and Psychology, Marquette ’19

### **Oscar Guzman (English and Education Major):**

There is just so much for me to be grateful about. After reflecting, I realize how HiH helped spark and ignite the work I do at Vanderbilt with diversity and inclusion and the work I aspire to do in the near future as I have just finished applying to a few PhD programs in educational policy. I did my best to keep my words succinct and my praise persuasive:

Participating in the Honors in the Humanities program at Marquette afforded me the opportunity to share my resilience with others as we engaged in interdisciplinary dialogue and research addressing themes of diversity and community. With Dr. Kristen Foster’s leadership and Dr.

Sarah Wadsworth's mentorship, I found a passion for and purpose in being inquisitive and bringing my whole self into the work that I do. From searching for community as a gay Latino at a predominately White, Jesuit university to making meaning of my living with obsessive-compulsive disorder, my commitment to HiH was far more than accomplishing a senior thesis, and instead it was an opportunity to be vulnerable and explore how my unique experiences and identities inform my devotion to research. For example, after sharing with Dr. Wadsworth how living with OCD has and can manifest in my academics, her compassion and care encouraged me to create discipline so that I could learn to confront, cope, and manage my obsessions and compulsions instead of suppressing and ignoring them. Getting to study alongside my friends and peers as a cohort through HiH was an important opportunity to consider how I could start taking pride in my living with OCD and displaying it as a strength, and it's true that I did not get this opportunity elsewhere at Marquette. In addition, participating in HiH enhanced my passion for the art of storytelling and would later propel me into the counseling profession. I have found that the science of counseling tells us how to assess and treat clients, but the art of counseling explains why clients are seeking our support and guidance in the first place, and I have HiH to credit for my ability to cultivate with my clients the meaning making of their why. Following my engagement with HiH, my relationship with research transcends academic advancement and instead cultivates personal and social commitment, placing me on a trajectory to reason how I can transform research into action as an educator.

*Best (Saludos),*



**Oscar A. Guzmán**

Vanderbilt University '21, M.Ed. | Human Development Counseling  
[Office of the Provost and Inclusive Excellence](#) | Graduate Assistant

### **Brigid Nannenhorn (History Major)**

It was not until I joined the Honors in Humanities Program that I knew, without a doubt, I was at Marquette for a reason – that someone or something bigger than I, had led me here. In HiH, I joined a cohort of enthusiastic young scholars who eagerly craved knowledge. This may not seem all together important in today's day and age, but my goodness it should be. Now more than ever. How rare is it to have a space where you can sit with an idea, discuss it, critique it, and help it grow? With an emphasis on individual research, we took learning into our own hands. We went into the world, past, and present, to search for meaning. We tussled with ideas of power, identity, and inequality and found answers in art, literature, and history. We refused to accept the world as it is and endeavored to be the difference.

My personal research led me to early-nineteenth-century New Orleans where I examined the intersection of race and sex in the lives of creole women. I am not sure I would have completed

my senior thesis without the unyielding support from my peers and mentor in the HiH program. Research can be an alienating experience – images arise in my mind of hours spent in the basement of Memorial Library pouring over old diaries and newspaper clippings. With HiH, we bonded over our research. We celebrated each other's success and pulled each other out of our ruts. I have never before or since experienced such academic camaraderie. It was something truly special. HiH led me to pursue a Ph.D. in History. I am writing to you from the University of Wisconsin, Madison where I am currently studying women and politics in the early Republic. I have no doubt in my mind that I would not be here without this program. In HiH, I had a taste of academia: research, writing, and conferences. Additionally, having already done original research made my transition to graduate school much easier.

But to return to my original point, even if HiH did not lead me to graduate school, it still would have served a fundamental purpose. It gave me a home at Marquette. It gave roots to a driftless student who constantly wondered, am I where I should be? Today, a cynic may view the university as nothing more than a degree factory – pay only \$44,000 a year and you now can have access to white-collar jobs and the middle class. There is something to be said for this criticism. However, I dare any cynic to walk into a class of HiH students earnestly discussing *Walden* and say the university has lost its heart.

Brigid Nannenhorn  
PhD Student in History,  
The University of Wisconsin, Madison

**Katherine Stein (History and English Major, Dance Minor):**

I graduated from Marquette in 2019 with a Comprehensive Honors Bachelor of Arts in Honors Literature & History, Summa cum Laude. In addition to double majoring in literature and history, I also earned a minor in dance. In addition to my involvement in the University Honors Program, I was also a member of the first cohort of the Honors in the Humanities program. Today, I am a second-year PhD student studying English literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Honors in the Humanities (HiH) is a program that I had advocated for, sought out, and hoped for since I first came to Marquette. I find it difficult to describe my excitement or how much it meant to me when the program first got off the ground in 2018 and when I learned that I could be a part of it. It is even more true now than it was then that there exist a critically low number of programs dedicated to supporting the humanities at Marquette, and even fewer that are designed to advocate for and support undergraduate research in the humanities. Honors in the Humanities is the only space at Marquette for the kind of independently driven, immersive, original, experiential, faculty-mentored research in the humanities that got me where I am today. If it is Marquette's aim to continue to attract strong and well-rounded students with diverse interests, this is a deficiency that will not (and should not) go unnoticed and undecried. The Honors in the Humanities program was not only an integral part of my Marquette experience, but it also secured my admission into UNC-Chapel Hill's PhD program.

This would not have been possible without the Honors in the Humanities program or without the close mentorship and support of faculty members like Dr. Timothy McMahon, like Dr. Leah Flack, like Dr. Kristen Foster, like Dr. Amelia Zurcher—to name just a few. I learned a great deal about myself as a scholar, as a student, and as a human being in my own independent work; in my weekly meetings with my mentor, Dr. McMahon; in my meetings and get-togethers with my HiH cohort; and in my encounters with other faculty, friends, staff members, and graduate students who were there to support me along the way. In reality, it was the help, support, guidance, and model of countless others across Marquette’s humanities departments who got me where I am today and helped shape me as an independent, critical, and creative thinker and as a conscious and ethical actor within a global community.

To the extent that graduate placement reflects well on Marquette as a prestigious institution, I know with certainty that I would not have been admitted to UNC if it were not for HiH. When I visited UNC’s campus to interview, few people were familiar with Marquette, but what did stand out to them was the way in which I was able to articulate the original research I was conducting for my thesis. Relatively few people in my PhD cohort at UNC came in directly from an undergraduate degree (5 of about 14, including me), and my work in the Honors in the Humanities program helped set my application apart. In fact, I was not immediately accepted into UNC, but was originally invited to come to campus as a waitlisted student. It was not until I visited Carolina’s campus and interviewed that my offer of admission was extended; because of this process, I know with certainty that it was my honors thesis and my work in the Honors in the Humanities program that ensured my place at UNC.

When I sat down to speak with the UNC professor who is now my advisor, our conversation dwelled the longest on the work that I was in the middle of completing for my HiH thesis, and I remember her being impressed as I described the kind and caliber of the research that I was doing as a part of this program. As we talked, we not only spoke of the project as it was currently, but also the project as it began. Our conversation ranged from a discussion of my research process, to how my project had evolved, to the ease with which one can get lost in the perusal of primary sources, to the scope of my project and the logic of its interdisciplinarity, to the ways in which my current project had inspired further venues of research and sparked new interests, to the ways that it had helped me understand myself as a scholar, and more. I remember that she remarked explicitly about how immersive my project was and expressed surprise that such an intensive, exploratory, self-directed, extended level of research was a part of an undergraduate thesis. In short, it was clear from our conversation that it was in large part my work in Honors in the Humanities that gave me the credentials to be competitive as a PhD applicant with only a Bachelor of Arts to my name.

In the program, I was able to embark upon humanistic work and scholarship in its true form. I met with my advisor, Dr. Timothy McMahon, once every week—beginning with very little idea of what I wanted my project to be. I believe my starting point was almost comically vague; I remember telling him that I wanted to study “something about Ireland and Victorian literature.” Nevertheless, after weekly meetings with Dr. McMahon; after many research rabbit holes that I hurtled down headlong; after many, many emails and false starts and rough drafts and dead ends; after the support of a cohort of peers conducting their own original humanistic scholarship; and after the guidance of a network of professors eager to support, assist, and guide me, I ended my

senior year at 11:59pm on the last night of finals with a bibliography more than 85 entries long and a 90-page thesis in hand entitled “Legacies of Empire and Tides of Reform: The Perplexing Popularity of Charles Dickens in Nineteenth-Century Ireland.” One week later, I presented my work to a room full of my brilliant friends and peers with whom I worked, my supportive professors whom I so deeply admire, and my family in what I still hold as one of my most treasured memories of my time at Marquette.

There is no question that my experience in Honors in the Humanities—and the chance it gave me to work closely with members of Marquette’s phenomenal Humanities faculty and to produce original scholarship of my own—was one of the crowning experiences of my time at Marquette. Without it, I would not be where I am today: as a person or as a professional.

It was the arts and humanities that made my Marquette experience great. And it is those humanities programs, graduate students, and faculty that, to me, make Marquette *Marquette*. To cut funding from the humanities is to cut out a central pillar of Marquette’s excellence and a central pillar of Marquette’s character. The arts and humanities are the beating heart of our university.

The humanities are essential and transformative and necessary—particularly for our present moment and in our present climate. In the end, what is a Jesuit education without the Humanities? How can one truly develop a deep and holistic and true sense of *cura personalis* without the Humanities? The answer is simple: one cannot.

Katherine Stein  
PhD Candidate in English Literature  
UNC, Chapel Hill

**Abby Vakulskas (English and Psychology Major):**

As a student who graduated in 2019 with two degrees--psychology and English--I've always deeply valued an interdisciplinary approach to learning. I had a variety of interests during my time at Marquette, and nothing helped me mesh those together better than the Honors in Humanities program that I took part in during my senior year. Dr. Zurcher, Dr. Foster, and Dr. Dempsey, who served as my advisor, were incredibly supportive and flexible in helping me create a unique thesis project. With their assistance, I researched the history of murals in Milwaukee, their production, and their impact today. The richness of the humanities field allowed me to use and practice several different research methods, such as reviewing scholarship and interviewing actual muralists, and gave me the chance to create a digital product that mixed photography and graphic design.

The project was exciting in itself and provided me with other opportunities after it was completed. Professionally, I was invited to guest-lecture on the topic in a first-year honors seminar, my research was cited in an article of the Encyclopedia of Milwaukee, and the digital product is something I consistently keep on my résumé. Personally, I made viable connections with artists in my community and learned a great deal more about the city where I lived. Most importantly, however, I felt that the Honors in Humanities program gave me the freedom and resources to study whatever I was most interested in, purely for the sake of learning more about

it. These days, when there's so much pressure to specialize, that's a rare and special thing. On a broader scale, my experience with the program connected strongly to the Jesuit values in Marquette's mission--namely, the fostering of curiosity and holistic development and the commitment to the greater Milwaukee community. I've taken those lessons with me to Chicago, where I'm finishing an MFA in creative writing and publishing at DePaul University. Whenever I see a mural here, I'm reminded of the many ways research and learning can take place, as well as the importance of getting to know my new community.

Abby Vakulskas  
GA | University Center for Writing-Based Learning  
Masters in Writing and Publishing  
DePaul University '21

### **Class of 2020:**

#### **Andrew Himmelberg (History and Philosophy Major):**

The Honors in the Humanities program was something I came to awkwardly and a tad late, but I am extremely grateful that I embraced this opportunity, as it offered me access to more personal supervision for my research, grant funding for my project, and a network of similarly-motivated students with whom I could develop my ideas. After some thought, I've realized that the thing that was most valuable to me in this program was the community it offered.

In my final few semesters at Marquette, despite progressing into the higher-level courses of my history and philosophy degrees, I found it increasingly difficult to find peers who were passionate about doing academic work. However, when I got involved with the Honors in the Humanities program, I quickly discovered a small cohort of exactly these individuals. Not only were they interested in doing research that they cared about, they had different types of expertise. While this might seem unhelpful, interdisciplinary communities like these are highly valued in the broader academic community (my current academic home has a well-endowed interdisciplinary humanities graduate program that is highly competitive), and I found that feedback from my peers with different training and perspectives helped me reframe my research in a way that made it accessible to more than just the niche Irish history community. Further, because we were all so passionate, we frequently pushed each other to ask tougher questions and pursue new channels of research. I firmly believe that I would never have had an experience like this at Marquette absent the Honors in the Humanities program, as the structure of the university does not promote such organic academic discourse.

But beyond the purely academic benefits of the program, my membership in this community offered me a valuable support network of peers and mentors in all aspects of my life. I am still in touch with several of the people who participated in the program (despite the fact that we are several thousand miles apart currently) and the same is true of the professors I had as part of the course, some of whom wrote me letters of recommendation for my graduate application process. These are people who I consider friends, and who supported me through some difficult times (both personal and academic). I would be deeply saddened if other students were denied the privilege of such a great community.



Ultimately, the work I did as part of this program has formed the basis of my current dissertation, and it was this dissertation that got me a spot on my current graduate program. Honors in the Humanities is one of the major reasons I was a competitive applicant for the top graduate programs in my field. The combination of community, time, space, and money offered by this program is of immeasurable value, and I would recommend it to anyone interested in taking their studies at Marquette to the next level.

Andrew Himmelberg  
St. Antony's College, University of Oxford

**Jack Moore (English and Economics Majors):**

Hello, my name is Jack Moore. I graduated from Marquette last spring with a double major in Writing Intensive English and Economics and I am currently a first-year law student at the Loyola University in Chicago. I was an early member of the Honors in the Humanities (HiH) program and was eager to write on its behalf when Dr. Foster gave me the opportunity.

I am very proud of my Marquette education. I believe I am well prepared for law school and a future career because of my time at Marquette. I think the quality of my education was greatly amplified and would not have been complete without being supplemented by a program like HiH. The structure of an undergraduate education generally is very similar to that of high school, in my opinion, but with harder and more focused material. I believe that what made my college education a higher education was HiH.

HiH elevated my education and prepared me for the career in two primary ways, that is, it presented me with a unique challenge, and it gave me a sense of ownership over my college work. HiH was unique in that it lasted four years and it made me part of a team. These benefits are more of a real-world experience than any test, term paper, or group project can provide. HiH had me engaged with the same material and pursuing the same goal for most of my college experience, allowing me to question and challenge the work I was doing. It taught me a number of lessons about time management, long-term planning, and dealing with setbacks and the pressure of such a commitment. Moreover, the team-oriented set-up of the program was unique. As part of a group, all were faced with the same challenges and yet we had a vested interest in each other's work. While we each had our own individual project, it was important that we all succeeded. Much of the working world operates through teams. And then there were the mentors. Working with an expert in the field is an invaluable experience in that learning from them was, in itself, a skill and finding out you are capable of working on that level of scholarship is an incredible confidence builder. These were benefits and lessons that I would never have been exposed to if it weren't for the uniqueness of the HiH program.

The other way HiH elevated my education was through ownership. I wrote my thesis on the justice of observation and panopticism in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*. This thesis was *my* idea, *my* writing, produced from *my* research, and it arrived at *my* conclusion. The direction of the project was guided by my interests. I think structure is healthy in a college education. I certainly needed to be guided through my English and economics studies. At the same time, for Marquette to be able to offer a student the freedom to pursue their interests like HiH does is something special. Not only did it provide me with a great experience, but it also motivated me to pursue a career where I have control over the type of work I want to do, as I did in this

program. As a university that wants to produce alumni who will “Be the Difference,” I believe this would be a crucial lesson and motivator.

I believe that Honors in the Humanities is an invaluable program whose benefits are as limitless as the topics that its students will write about and work through. I think that the freedom and real-world applicability that it offers a college student on the threshold of their career is something that is unmatched at other universities. It would be a serious mistake not to offer this program to future Marquette students.

Jack Moore ‘19  
Loyola University Law School

### **Michael Powell (History Major):**

As a prior member of the Honors in Humanities (HiH) and a graduate student perusing a humanities-based degree, it is disheartening to hear of plans to possibly withdraw funds to such an enormously impactful program. The Honors in the Humanities program could very well be the most important program for preparing undergraduates, who are studying humanities, for their future. While under the mentorship of Dr. Peter Staudenmaier, I was taught: time management skills, how to accept constructive criticism, and to strive for excellence in my writing.

An undergraduate research program such as the Honors in Humanities (HiH) has been instrumental in placing students into top tier universities and programs of study. For example, one of my fellow graduates from the Honors in Humanities is attending Oxford University for his graduate studies. As for myself; I am also an example of what this brilliantly conceived program can do for our students at Marquette University.

While working on my honors undergraduate thesis, *Social Dynamics in the Dachau Concentration Camp*, and with the additional guidance of Dr. Kristen Foster and Dr. Jennifer Finn, I was awarded the 2019 College of Arts and Sciences Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship. For one month, I stayed in Munich, Germany and conducted first hand research in the archive located at the Dachau concentration camp’s memorial site. Without the Honors in the Humanities program and its intensive research project, I would not have had the opportunity for such a life changing experience.

After graduating with the class of 2020, I have moved onto the University of Oklahoma as a graduate student: being awarded a full tuition waiver as well as a teacher’s assistant position. Additionally, I am part of the Schusterman Center for Judaic and Israel Studies at the University of Oklahoma. The research I conducted with the Honors in the Humanities program and my mentor Dr. Staudenmaier elevated my standing as a graduate student candidate, which was invaluable and most certainly assisted in my acceptance to the University of Oklahoma’s program. After working with numerous faculty members in the history department (Dr. Kirsten Foster, Dr. Peter Staudenmaier, Dr. Jennifer Finn, Dr. Patrick Mullins, Dr. Bryan Rindfleisch, Dr. James Martin, and Dr. Laura Matthew), I can personally attest to their vigor and determination to the students’ success at Marquette University.

Michael Powell  
Marquette University’s Class of 2020  
Graduate Teaching Assistant  
Schusterman Center for Judaic and Israeli Studies, University of Oklahoma

## **Class of 2021:**

### **Ben Aquino (Senior, Writing Intensive English Major):**

My name is Ben Aquino, and I am a senior majoring in Writing intensive English. I was first informed of HiH by my advisor during my freshman year, and she encouraged me to apply because she knew I had an interest and penchant for creative writing but did not necessarily have an immediate academic platform for putting it into practice. The prospect of a multi-year research project that integrated creative writing was very appealing to me, and after I began the program and informed my advisors of the approach I would be taking, they mentioned that a creative writing project would be a welcome new addition, despite it being mostly uncharted territory. My project changed forms a few times, and I was unsure of the exact form it would take by the end. I think eventually choosing to write a series of poems that were informed by my research of the Woodstock Festival in 1969 was an acceptance of a challenge to both myself, and the current state of research here at Marquette.

In taking a creative approach to my research, that was based in poetry, I am forging a path that has been difficult to understand or even discuss with many of my peers, as it is a somewhat unconventional process. However, I am fully aware of the challenges I have set for myself, and I truly believe in the work I am doing, and the importance of that work to my peers, my advisors and professors and to myself. I am proud that I have been able to fully work within a forum, poetry, that is personal to me and also produce important work that is both meaningful to me, and hopefully any others who may come into contact with it.

In taking on this project, I have not only refined my own writing and reading skills, but also have been exposed to some great work by my other peers in the program, who have exceptional ability. Their work has both inspired me to persevere in my own project, and allowed me to appreciate the diversity and wealth of knowledge and experience in such a small group that represents the ambition of humanities students university-wide.

### **Tom Besold (Senior, History Major):**

Research at Marquette, specifically in the HiH program, has been an invaluable part of my experience here. HiH has given me the reins to do a project entirely of my own conception, a rare, thrilling thing for a student. This offers a real challenge — most of my academic career, I've been assigned standard, stock assignments, not forcing me to do anything new. There is nothing necessarily bad about this, but ultimately, the true test of learning comes when one has to apply their skills in fresh, unique ways.

Post-graduation life is a scary prospect for many, but it would be undeniably scarier for me if I didn't have research experience. I'm much more confident in my ability to function in the "real world" than I was prior to doing research. Knowing how to formulate arguments, to sift through huge chunks of information, to self-teach, all are broadly applicable and immensely valuable skills that are explicit elements of research.

Fundamentally, college is four years of one's life. Getting a degree is all well and good, but if those four years are filled with nothing but stress and labor, how can it all be worth it? Not even regarding social life, the college experience should be enriching and enjoyable. There is not

a worse feeling than the dread that comes with going to a class you hate — having to endure four years of that would be tortuous. HiH is the standard for what the classroom should be like in college. It is an exceedingly supportive, engaging environment, one where we're encouraged to be learners rather than rote transcribers. HiH has never been a chore. Beyond all that, the cohort has grown very close. I value the relationships I've made in it dearly.

**Chris Ibitoye (Senior, History and Political Science Major):**

My research journey at Marquette University has been one of discovery, and I don't just mean of historical knowledge, historiography, or academia. In many ways, every piece of research I have done has led to the project I am currently working on. My time in research started my freshman year in MU4Gold. I went in not sure what I was going to do, as humanities' majors hardly sit in a lab and make calculations. In addition, while I loved history at the time, I had no real grasp of how historians actually did their jobs. The MU4Gold program changed that. As I fumbled and bumbled my way through the program, I got to see sides of history and my professors' work I would not have otherwise. While I did not walk away with a completed project, I did get a better understanding of historiography and what my interests were: namely, Abraham Lincoln and popular culture's relationship with history and academia in general. As I joined the Honors in the Humanities Program, outside events (namely the fight over the memory of the Civil War and the Trump presidency) and political science classes further shaped what I wanted to do. By the beginning of this year, I found my niche, political science commentary based in history with academic research and colloquial language. Currently, I am working on a 30-page paper that will use the rival presidential careers of Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis to create a sort of rubric for grading the military leadership of the Presidents of the United States. Without MU4Gold and Honors in the Humanities, I would not have been able to even contemplate such a large project, and yet here I am.

**Marcella Michalek (Senior, History Major):**

As I was in the midst of college applications my senior year of high school, my email inbox was a mess every single day with different schools and programs. When I was accepted as a MU4Gold Scholar at Marquette, I thus did not think much of it. Honestly, I did not understand what "undergraduate research" even was. I thought maybe they had mistaken me for a "Marcella Michalek" who an incoming Biology major—not the incoming History major that I was.

The first week of my freshman year at Marquette, I nonetheless decided to go to the MU4Gold seminar that was listed on my schedule. It was actually exactly where I needed to be. Each week I began to learn more and more about the possibilities of undergraduate research and what those specifically looked like for a History major like myself. The seminar focused on helping all eight of us finding a research mentor, and I started to work with Dr. Foster in the History Department. My eyes were opened to what happened behind the scenes of the history books I was reading for classes as I helped research census data on the free Black population in 1790 Pennsylvania. It made me excited to be uncovering the stories of these people – rather than passively taking in the information that was told to me – and think critically about what I found.

My sophomore year I started the Honors in the Humanities Program, which has given me the ability to apply the research skills I developed as a MU4Gold Scholar in a creative context. I have been able to dive into research on gender and sexuality in 19<sup>th</sup> century Macao and reflect

that within a piece of historical fiction. The freedom this program has given me to grow as a writer and researcher has been the best capstone I could ever imagine. Writing creatively has pushed me to think even more outside of the box, which I have seen reflected in the work for the rest of my classes and will carry with me the rest of my life. My research journey has been one of the highlights of my time at Marquette, something I would have never expected when I first got my acceptance email to MU4Gold my senior year of high school.

**Lily Regan (Senior, English and Education Major):**

My name is Lily Regan, and I am a senior majoring in Secondary Education and English. With this pairing of majors, I am naturally very interested in both English *and* Education not only as stand-alone areas of study but also as intersecting concepts. In my first couple of years at Marquette, while I was writing about English in my English courses and learning about Education in my Education courses, the two disciplines unfortunately remained relatively disconnected. I wanted to find a place where I could research English and Education as they would be interconnected in my own future as an English teacher.

HiH was the perfect place for me to explore my interests in both of these areas and has connected me with a network of people that are truly supportive of my work. Through this program, I have been able to partake in intensive research that I simply would not have time for in any other course, and hopefully as a result of this research I will be a better teacher to my future students. This is one of those rare projects where I feel passionate about the procedure and the outcome and can clearly see a correlation to my future. HiH has allowed me to think deeply about my role as an educator over the course of multiple semesters, and it is this time for introspection and reflection and the ability to craft a project that is uniquely suited to my needs that make this program invaluable.

**Betsy Richards (Senior, Writing Intensive English Major):**

As a Literature major and a Creative Writing and Theology minor, the Honors in the Humanities program has given me (as well as my classmates) an important space to research, collaborate, and combine our academic disciplines into a project of our choosing. For me specifically, this program has opened my eyes as to what a research endeavor can take the form of. All of us have undertaken different avenues of media (traditional research papers, short stories, poetry, etc.), but together we have worked to create an environment in which we feed off of each other's ideas and energy.

When I came into the program, I assumed that I had to pursue a standard research project – a 20-page paper on a literary figure of my choosing, maybe working in some theology here and there. However, when I saw that my classmates were taking risks with their content and how they chose to deliver it, it inspired me to write a collection of essays instead. HiH has opened me up to the possibility of writing as a profession and writing outside of the walls of academia. Had I not been a part of this group and atmosphere, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to explore this facet of my writing, nor would I have been able to combine the intersections of literature, creative writing, and theology into one passion project.