

## **MU Honors Program: What We Are About** (Fall 2009)

In a sentence: We are a *community* of interested and interesting learners who, in integrated academic and social settings, generate a *living experience* of a liberal arts, humanities-based education grounded in more rigorous, interdisciplinary, and contemplative version of Marquette's own core curriculum.

How we do this: The Program develops the core curriculum to empower Honors students (drawn from all majors) to obtain the skills and insights characteristic of a liberal arts education, but at a deeper and more integrated level. With this deeper humanities focus, the Program is able to cultivate the habits of a thinking person seeking to act in the world: to interrogate, to research, to experiment, to experience analytically and to analyze experience. In doing so, the Program pursues the actual growth of a person to include a change of perspective, understanding, and value that will have an effect in both the student's personal and professional life. It does this through the Jesuit ideal of reflection on experience, both in the world and in our own individual interiority; these ideals find their way into the classroom via the smaller class sizes limited to the honors community, instructors chosen for their effectiveness in a honors enrichment setting, a focus on multi-disciplinarily approaches, and research and reflection built into the curriculum.

How we identify our students: In contrast to most honors programs that line students up by numbers (SAT, GPA, Zip code), our students are identified through *qualitative* means, including a challenging application essay, letters of recommendation, and a broad consideration of the applicant's life-experience. This means we find and recruit independent, intellectually adventurous, motivated students, who are excited by an integrated and experiential approach to knowledge and learning. This procedure has proven especially successful at uncovering students from underrepresented groups to enrich our honors community and students from all groups who will go on from Marquette to prominent graduate schools, professional programs and prestigious scholarships.

What the Program is not: The Program is not about more "hoops and hurdles." Achievement, measured by hoops jumped through and hurdles achieved, is not the kind we seek to provide for our students. Our curriculum is integrated into their major and core curriculum in a way that allows for more opportunity (in terms of time and occasion) to reflect on their experience.

The Honors Curriculum: The curriculum includes eight enhanced core courses and four innovative experiential academic seminars. These seminars are small, highly interactive, shared inquiries that are organized around a topic/question, which also allow for individualized and inter-disciplinary exploration and research.

In particular, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Year and Senior Full Circle Seminar incorporate contemplative and/or experiential learning. These non-traditional pedagogical techniques use subjective experiences to supplement objective knowledge, combining intellectual rigor and hands-on experience (i.e., practicing meditation for insights into Theology and Philosophy).

We also offer a unique Undergraduate Research opportunity that asks the students to spend a semester rigorously investigating fundamental questions about research, its value, and its structure from a multi-disciplinary liberal arts perspective. It culminates in an extraordinary opportunity for students to design a summer research project and compete for funds to implement it. Such projects have taken students around the globe and have launched graduate and professional careers.

The honors experience culminates in a Senior Full Circle Seminar that revisits text and/or questions encountered in their Honors Core and self-consciously considers what perspective change has resulted from both the core curriculum and various major disciplinary perspectives.

In our students' words: What the program seeks to do is best summed up by this graduating senior: "I have become aware of the layers of intricacy, delicacy, and complexity apparent in every intellectual pursuit and every action I take. The Honors Program's commitment to revealing the interdisciplinary nature of our lives is what has allowed me to come to grips with my own uncertainty. If I hadn't taken honors courses that combined philosophy, social justice, history, literature, and science, I would have remained blissfully ignorant of the profound interconnection that makes life so messy and so beautiful. Not only did the Honors Program help me make the jump between Kantian social ethics and the situation in Cameroon, it surrounded me with a level of discourse far above anything I'd ever experienced. I wasn't the smartest kid in the room at Marquette and that was a relief. My fellow students asked more from me in terms of sophisticated analysis and creative syntheses than I would have ever asked of myself. I am less clear now on what the answer is, but far more equipped to figure it out."