

# HONORS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER



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Greetings, Honors Alumni,



This fall we send news about a couple of innovations happening in Honors: a new class on urban issues in our own city of Milwaukee, required for all Honors sophomores and developed by some of Marquette's most innovative and committed teachers; and a new Honors admissions process in which current students take the lead. We hope you enjoy these stories. If you'd like to learn more about what Honors is up to, we would wholeheartedly welcome your interest and engagement – email or call anytime. And please, reciprocate with your own news!

With best wishes,

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## INNOVATION IN HONORS

New Honors 'Engaging the City' class explores Milwaukee



FROM RIGHT: Clare Urbanski, Biluge Ntabala, Abbey Kuborn

One of Core Honors' central goals is service to our urban Milwaukee community. This orientation toward Milwaukee, a fundamental part of Marquette's Jesuit mission, also helps students develop crucial skills for their lives post-graduation. To meet this goal more fully, a team of faculty has designed a new Honors course, required of all sophomores, called "Engaging the City." The Marquette Core Curriculum, taken by all undergraduates at Marquette, includes a "Social Systems and Values" requirement in which students study systemic inequity and learn how to foster inclusivity and collaboration, both personally and professionally. The new Honors course asks students to meet that requirement specifically through engagement in Milwaukee.



Rob Smith

Honors “Engaging the City,” piloting this fall, was designed by faculty affiliated with Marquette’s Center for Urban Research, Teaching, and Outreach (CURTO), including CURTO Director (and Harry G. John Professor of History) Rob Smith, Sergio Gonzalez (History), and Sam Harshner (History and Political Science). In learning about midwestern cities’ complex political and economic history, students have engaged in both traditional classroom learning and experiential learning outside the classroom, including a bus tour of some of the most significant sites of Milwaukee’s immigrant and civil rights history as well as projects with the ACLU and other community partners. As he participated in designing the course, Harshner’s hope was that it would help students experience

Marquette “not as a cloistered community set apart from its neighbors, but, for better or worse, as a part of the social, economic, and political fabric of the City of Milwaukee.” Marquette is “a symbol of Milwaukee’s promise,” but also “complicit in the ways our city fails its black, brown and poverty-stricken residents,” says Harshner, and “as such it can serve as a perfect vantage point for teaching students about the contradictions and injustices endemic to life in contemporary America.”

Thus far, Honors students have responded with enthusiasm. Clare Urbanski, an Arts and Sciences sophomore from northern Illinois majoring in Physics and Philosophy, finds herself “pleasantly surprised with how much I enjoy this course. I had very little knowledge of the city I live in prior to taking this course, and now I feel, not only informed, but well-equipped to become an active member in my community to challenge problems within it.” For her experiential project, she and a handful of other students in her class are partnering with the ACLU to create a speakers’ bureau for formerly incarcerated Milwaukee residents to tell their stories. “Through this class,” says Urbanski, “I have found a new topic that I am passionate about and I have been given the tools to act on this passion. I am grateful to have taken this section with Dr. Smith, as I know I never would have come across this topic on my own.”

Biluge Ntabala, an Arts and Sciences sophomore from Milwaukee studying Political Science, has recently become a CURTO undergraduate intern. “HOPR 2656H is the best class I have taken this year,” says Ntabala. “I have learned about Black businesses in the city, housing disparities, mass incarceration, probation, media, felonies, education...If it was up to me, every Marquette student should take this class to understand the history of Milwaukee.”

Rob Smith, too, is pleased with the way the course is unfolding, and with his students’ engagement. So far, he says, “the students are conducting interviews with local grassroots leaders, they are building curricula and digital resources with local organizations engaged in carceral reform, they are developing ways to engage constitutional rights with local high school and college students. This group of students exhibits all the habits and intellectual curiosity we welcome from Honors students.” Next semester Honors will run new sections of Honors Engaging the City with Bryan Rindfleisch (History) on Indigenous Milwaukee; Monica Unda-Gutierrez (Political Science) on comparative challenges facing Milwaukee and Guadalajara, where much of Unda-Gutierrez’s research is located; and Theresa Tobin (Philosophy), on mass incarceration in Milwaukee. Tobin will

develop her course as a larger precursor to her longstanding and, for many students, life-changing Honors seminar on incarceration, in which a handful of Honors students learn alongside incarcerated and formerly Milwaukee women.

## Students take the lead in new Honors admissions process



In recent years a national conversation has bubbled up about the stress the college admissions process puts on high school students, as they scramble to polish and package their records in hope of winning acceptance – and enough financial aid – at the college of their dreams. Along with creating anxiety, the process sometimes feels, in the words of Honors senior Devin McCowan, “deeply inauthentic” for applicants, who struggle to tell admissions committees what they think those committees want to hear even as they don’t know yet what college entails or who they will come to be there.

Last summer, a group of Honors students met to talk about how Core Honors admissions at Marquette could be different. They identified two goals for the Honors admissions process: to recruit students who understand and embrace the Honors emphasis on breadth of learning, open-mindedness, and inclusivity; and to start building community from prospective students’ very first contact with Honors. To that end, the group decided to offer applicants two more options in addition to a traditional admissions essay: an interview with a current student, or the submission of something significant they have made that exemplifies Honors values. Not only are current Honors students doing the applicant interviews by phone and Skype, with a script they’ve developed, but they will also review applicants’ submissions. It’s early in the admissions season, but so far about a third of applicants have chosen the interview, and another third have submitted something polished that they’ve made. These submissions include a set of original illustrations for a children’s book in Spanish, a speech given to a group of veterans, a poem about autism, and a podcast showcasing high school students’ voices on sexual harassment. A team of 15 current students has volunteered

and been trained to do the interviews, and another group of 20 will be reviewing materials and sending out personal emails inviting students to apply.

“Student-led admissions is a big experiment,” says Honors Director Amelia Zurcher, “without much national precedent. I’m thankful to Marquette Dean of Admissions Brian Troyer for being willing to entertain it, and for helping us make it work. We don’t really know if our usual metrics will apply, if we’ll get more applications or fewer, or what our yield of admitted students will be. So we’ll have to play things by ear as the admissions season progresses. But we’re all excited to give applicants this new chance to show us who they are, and to communicate to applicants that our process isn’t about gatekeeping but about demonstrating possibilities. I am delighted by, and very grateful for, Honors students’ leadership and professionalism with this process – they are making Honors their own.”

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