

6-2015

Ellen Ahlness Honors Portfolio

Ellen Ann Ahlness

Minnesota State University - Mankato

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Recommended Citation

Ahlness, Ellen Ann, "Ellen Ahlness Honors Portfolio" (2015). *Honors Capstone Portfolios*. Paper 6.
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Ellen Ahlness



Resume

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Welcome!

Welcome to my eFolio site, and thank you for your interest. My name is Ellen Ahlness. I am from White Bear Lake, Minnesota, and am currently a senior at MSU Mankato. I am pursuing a double major in Scandinavian Studies and International Relations, with an emphasis in Regional Studies. I will continue my studies this fall of 2015 at the University of Washington's Political Science Graduate Program.

My goal is to become a professor in Political Science, and to develop my passions for the Scandinavian and Central Asian languages and cultures while researching. I have already have obtained experience with intercultural connections and research through my long involvement with the annual Norwegian-Minnesotan Reciprocal Exchange Program (NOREX) with the Minnesota National Guard, my internship with the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, and my yearlong study abroad in Telemark, Norway.

I urge you to browse through my portfolio, including my artifacts, each of which connects to my academic and personal interests. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me.

Personal Mission Statement

In everything I do, strive to perform to the best of my ability. I strive to be a moral leader and researcher. I have been blessed with a passion for knowledge, and strive to maintain that passion so that I may be a lifelong learner. I desire to use what I learn to serve and make an impact on the lives of others.

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Exchange Year: Høgskole i Telemark



During my college senior year, I studied abroad in Bø i Telemark, Norway. By participating in this exchange, I brought myself closer to becoming a global citizen by working to assimilate myself into Norwegian society during this year-long experience in Bø. A fascinating thing about Norwegian universities is that the students are given huge amounts of freedom within their classes to pursue their interests. Classes meet once or twice a week for lectures, and students are expected to continue discussions in groups after. Individuals are not 'guided' through assignments—the entirety of a class's grade may rest on a midterm, final paper/project, and a final exam (which could account for up to 70% of the final grade). Students are expected to use their own time and resources to dive deeper into their subjects, finding the topics within that interest them and incorporate these specifics into their projects and essays. This mindset prepares me for graduate school this fall, acting as a transition into further research independence and responsibility.

Bø is a town of about 5,000 residents, with an additional 1,500 students during the academic year. Of these students, about 150 are international students seeking to complete their bachelors, masters, or language degrees. Because international students share so many classes together, as well as with Norwegian students, every day is a practice in working together with others. Each class is a balance of molding to Norwegian practices, while keeping in mind our diverse backgrounds and traditions.

Bachelor of Arts Degree: Minnesota State University-Mankato

Degree In Progress

I will be graduating in May 2015 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in both International Relations and Scandinavian Studies.

I am studying International Relations because our



global world is becoming increasingly interconnected, and this degree heavily emphasizes both current events and a deep historical

understanding. Based on my desire to be involved in Far North issues, I am emphasizing in Regional Studies to gain a greater understanding of the five countries that hold a claim to Arctic: The United States, Canada, Norway, Denmark, and Russia.

Scandinavian Studies is another area where I can look both to the past *and* the future to find what interests me. My ancestors came to the U.S. from Norway, and I am deeply involved in studying the culture and language because of my heritage. Norway is also a fascinating country to study in terms of peace studies and international aid. I plan to study in Norway during the 2014-15 academic year, which will further my ability to adapt between cultures and develop a 'code-shifting' philosophy as I interact abroad.

Associate of Arts Degree: Century College



August, 2011- May 2013

During my junior and senior years of high school, I participated in Minnesota's Post Secondary Enrollment Option, which allowed me to take all my classes at Century College. During these two years, I earned my Associate of Arts degree and graduated high honors on the Dean's List with a 4.0 GPA.

High School Diploma: White Bear Lake Area High School



September, 2009 - June, 2013

I attended White Bear Lake Area High School, which is rated one of the top high schools in Minnesota and offers many AP and CIS classes.

There are over 2,500 students enrolled annually. I graduated as a member of the National Honor Society, and also received the Superintendent's Core Values Scholarship. I graduated in the top 5% of my class of 637 students with a 4.0 GPA.

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Why Choose Norway?

During the 2014-15 academic year, I studied in Bø, Norway. This was a one year program focusing on Telemark regional identity and wider Scandinavian heritage. My ancestry is Norwegian, and I've been raised in a family that values sustaining cultural traditions, keeping in touch with relatives overseas, and encouraging discovery through education. My time in Norway was a year of discovery. I uncovered new interests, skills, and ways to communicate across cultures. The international community in Bø was very tight-knit, and I place a lot of value on the friendships and connections I made with other students during my year abroad. My memories will certainly involve Telemark University College, but the travels that I undertook with friends and projects we completed together will always be at the forefront of my thoughts.

When I look back on my year in Bø, I know I will reflect on the times I spent away from it as well. I enjoy travelling, and have been blessed with the opportunity to travel to many countries during my studies. I thrive on new experiences, and love using them as opportunities to practice skills, discover new places and things with others, and test myself in new and foreign environments. During my time studying abroad I have travelled within Norway to Bergen, Stavanger, and Oslo. I have also taken advantage of the cheap plane tickets and open travel policies in Europe and have travelled to Sweden, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, France, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. Each country represents a new experience, and each trip is an opportunity to share memories, challenges, and deepen connections with my group.

International Class Fall 2014**Preikestolen, August 2014****Copenhagen, October 2014****Budapest, November 2014****Dublin, February 2015****Riga, March 2015**

International Class, Spring 2015



Tallin, March 2015



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MSU Honors Program

The Honors program at Minnesota State University-Mankato focuses on three main competencies: leadership, research, and global citizenship. The program involves taking courses that directly relate to these three areas, and students are encouraged to reach out in their communities and University to continue to build onto these competencies.

Please feel free to browse through the competency tabs. I believe each category effectively demonstrates how my college and work experiences, both in and out of the classroom, have allowed me to develop as a student and a researcher.

Web Links

Explore the Honors Program website to see what the program is all about!

 [Honors Program Official Website](#)

Spring at MSU Mankato



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Communication and Confidence: My Leadership Philosophy

Through my undergraduate career, I have been in many positions of leadership, where I have experienced different styles of collaboration and communication. During my junior year, though, I was called upon to reflect on how these experiences defined my definition of a leader, and how they highlighted and shaped my own leadership strengths. I now have a greater understanding of what I value in a leader and a plan of how I can use past experiences to guide my leadership in the future. Essentially, using these experiences as illustrations, I have developed my leadership philosophy to see a leader as someone who projects expertise in what they know, who has the confidence to admit what they do not, and who draws upon other's strengths and skills to broaden the group's knowledge base.

The ability to demonstrate confidence to your group is essential for the group to reach its end goal. Due to my younger age, in comparison with classmates, I used to have difficulty projecting confidence. As I became involved in more organizations, though, I saw the importance of self-assurance. Once this confidence is established, a leader must extend it to their group. As a junior counselor at a Norwegian summer camp, I learned that many of the children had no knowledge of Norwegian, and were afraid to make mistakes. Rather than try, they would stay silent. To urge the campers to take risks, I had demonstrate confidence in them, showing them that whether they were right or wrong, they were succeeding by learning something new. When I practiced this, I saw tremendous changes in the skills and confidence of the children. It made me reflect on my own time as a camper-I had also been scared to fail, yet with the confidence of myself and others, I had grown to the point I am now. This experience served as an example that a real leadership philosophy is flexible-it is applicable to all situations and audiences, regardless of the capabilities of those in the group.

While confidence and communication are important components of leadership, my philosophy would suffer if I were not able to discuss these values in a group setting. In my Growing the Leader in You honors course we discussed how to critique leadership styles. I learned that those I respected most as leaders were those who made each member feel valued and important to the success of the group. They demonstrated the importance of demonstrating confidence and that leadership is not only identifying goals, but also accomplishing them using group strengths.

The skills I learned from my leadership experiences show a common theme in terms of communication. It is not solely "what" a leader says that is important, but also "how" they communicate it. Above all, a leader uses past experiences and influences to shape their values and leadership philosophy in the future. With this in mind, I know that I will always seek to develop myself as a more competent leader.

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Research in a Community

As an undergraduate, I have a burgeoning publications resume, yet I count my successes not in how many articles are accepted to peer-reviewed journals, but in the lessons learned from each individual research project. Since my first year at university, my understanding of research has developed from end-focused to means-centric. With this in mind, my experiences each year have highlighted the research experience as a community-minded process. In an increasing global community, knowledge is key. Once I learn about a region, I can take that new knowledge and develop it into an appreciation, and make evaluations back to my own region and culture.

In one of my Political science courses I learned how much research highlights knowledge gaps as it illuminates new discoveries. For a Political Science term paper, I had to complete a 20 page research paper on an area of my interest. I chose Central Asia, an area I did not know much about, but sought to develop into a new passion. Each revision forced me to critically look at my information and foci, and evaluate whether each was necessary and beneficial to my overall paper. These revisions also revealed insight into my new research focus. Being involved in research contributed to new understanding, whether it is through reading the work of others, or conducting your own work. Even independent work draws on the existing research of others. In this way, research is never done alone.

From receiving peer reviews and presenting results, input of others is an essential component of research. My Janteloven and Social Conformity paper illustrated the importance of making changes to my work based on critique. Upon completion, this paper was accepted to the NCUR's national proceedings, which fulfills a major goal of my research philosophy: to ultimately benefit the academic community as a whole by contributing my field of study. Disseminating my results, whether in a University Journal or peer-reviewed proceedings, is a major step in becoming a scholar. The knowledge I gained from this project will serve as a springboard for new research projects-whether my own, or that of others. My greatest revelation in research, therefore, is the transformation of the concept as an individual project to an event that takes place in an interconnected community of knowledge. Once I finish a project, I know I am expected to take this newfound knowledge and develop it further, finding its context, its application, or its conditionality. I plan to carry this mindset into graduate school, where I will study political science. In this field, it is necessary to take lessons learned from the behavior of one state and carry it onto applicable situations around the globe.

Research is challenging, perhaps because it requires a lot more intentionality than developing leadership or global citizenship skills. Once a passion is brought to light through research, like my passion for regional studies in Political Science, academic work becomes an adventure. Research, therefore, is a challenge for the scholarly community that develops the individual.

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 - [GEOG 1031: World Regional Geography](#)
 - [REHB 110W: Sensitivity to Disability](#)

Global Citizenship and Communication

Of all the skills that I've learned during my undergraduate career, I believe there is none so important to my ability to connect with others -nor one so difficult to measure-than the process of becoming a competent global citizen. To be a global citizen, I seek to learn about different cultures, take that knowledge and combine it with a passion for research to immerse myself in a culture and become richer for it. Global citizenship is a necessary component of the problem-solving process. It is the recognition of other cultures and the developed appreciation for these different viewpoints and values, culminating with the application of these differences leading to increased communication.

A series of courses that has given me insight into a culture for me is my progression of Norwegian language courses, starting with Elementary Norwegian I, and culminating with Advanced Norwegian 2063, the highest language course offered during my study abroad to Bø, Norway. Through language, I have gained appreciation for these values. Language skills are crucial in being able to explain the perspective of another society, since culture is dependent on communication. The spoken word shapes culture and passes it on. I have grown in my citizenship skills, as I've not only learned how to speak Norwegian in a classroom, but also experience it in my day-to-day life as I engage others in the small-town community of Bø.

In addition to language, I continue to develop is my ability to analyze problems, taking into account different cultural values and how they shape the decision making process. My honors course Sensitivity to Disability illustrated how different cultures view those who have disability, and how much responsibility society has to take address the needs of this community. National values shape the way states behave. During my travels in Sweden, I saw that nearly every building was handicap accessible, fitting in with the well-known "Nordic Model" of welfare state and social policy, which emphasizes equality of opportunity and of accessibility. The Nordic states are extremely egalitarian, which is something that is expressed through their student grant program, welfare policies, and "similar thoughts" assimilation program in elementary schools.

Global citizenship is heavily dependent on culture, which is both a repeated practice of the past, as well as importance of the event established in the present. To become a global citizen, then, I must both become knowledgeable on the region I am focusing on, looking at history, politics, religion, and art, as well as become able to understand the national psychology of that culture. The way people process information and approach the decision making process is not universal-in fact, it differs within a single culture as well. Yet by understanding people's values, I receive insight into how these influence the way they make choices. This is especially important as I look at my interests in state building. I plan to expand my analytical and lingual skills as I examine global issues in graduate school. To understand what motivates a people to develop different government systems, I must become a knowledgeable global citizen and researcher.

International Students, Bø 2014



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Scholarships

As an incoming student, I have been blessed with several academic scholarships, which have supported my academic and research pursuits. Through these financial supports, I am able to continue to study to the best of my ability. These scholarships are an investment in me and my future, and I will demonstrate my gratefulness by being involved both through academics and my extracurricular activities.

Scholarships and Awards

- Folds of Honor Scholarship. Folds of Honor Foundation. May 2014.
- Myrtle Beinhauer Fund. Sons of Norway. May 2014.
- Women Who Swim Against the Current Scholarship. Lakselaget Foundation. April 2014.
- Outstanding Collegian Leader Award. Minnesota State University-Mankato. April 2014.
- Honors Program Student Research Grant. Minnesota State University- Mankato. Dec 2013.
- Superintendent's Core Values Scholarship. White Bear Lake Area High School. May 2013.
- Sons of the American Revolution Good Citizenship Award. Saint Paul Chapter. May 2013.
- Army War College Scholarship. United States War College Alumni Association. May 2013.
- MSU Mankato Presidential Scholarship. Minnesota State University- Mankato. March 2013.
- AmVets Scholarship. American Legion. February 2013.
- MSU Maverick Scholarship. Minnesota State University- Mankato. Nov 2012.
- Educational Enhancement Scholarship. WBL Education Foundation. Jan 2011.
- Tove Irene Dahl Scholarship. Skogfjorden. Jan 2011.
- Norske Torske Foundation Scholarship. Norske Torske Klubben. June 2011, 2010.

Academic Publications and Presentations

The State Partnership Program: States as Global Actors. MSU-Mankato Journal of Undergraduate Research. 2014.

The Handshake that Made History: The Norwegian-Minnesotan Troop Exchange. Cross Section Journal of Undergraduate Scandinavian Studies. 2014. On record at Norwegian Home Guard National Archives.

Lapp. Cross Section Journal of Undergraduate Scandinavian Studies. 2014.

Janteloven and Social Conformity in Thorbørn Egner's Literature. NCUR Proceedings. November 2014.

Poster: National Conference of Undergraduate Research, Lexington KY. April 2014.

Paper: Midwest Scandinavian Studies Conference, Eau Claire, WS. Feb 2014, MSU Undergraduate Research Symposium, Mankato MN, April 2014, Upper Midwest Regional Honors Conference, Waverly IA. April 2014.

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