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## Brooke Jones Honors Portfolio

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*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

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# Brooke Jones

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## Welcome!

My name is Brooke and I am a fifth year senior in the Biology Program at Minnesota State University (MNSU), Mankato, originally from Waterloo, Iowa. I am involved in the Honors Program, multiple student organizations, and student boards at MNSU, and I'm an avid runner, coach, and tutor. Upon graduation, I plan to attend graduate school to receive a Master's in Teaching, with an emphasis in Life Science.

## Mission Statement

To instill an excitement and passion for the sciences in young students as a post-secondary biology teacher, as well as aid students in developing skills in scientific writing, conducting research, and articulating published literature.



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## MNSU Honors Program Leadership Competency:

*Upon graduation, honors students will have demonstrated the ability to utilize personal leadership values and guide groups toward a common goal.*

### Synthesis of My Leadership

The Values Leadership Competency states Honors students will identify personal leadership values and reflect upon strengths and weaknesses. The StrengthsFinder Assessment concluded I am an achiever and learner with discipline, focus, and emphasis on the future; and I identified my weaknesses in leading with self-confidence and initiative. Additionally, development of my Mentor Philosophy allowed me to establish value in utilization of experience, inquiry, and reflection to generate knowledge.

Students must demonstrate capability of critiquing leadership styles within group contexts. As a Girls on the Run (GOTR) Assistant Coach for four seasons, I had the advantage of observing three coaches' leadership styles. One coach led autocratically; she conducted majority of group lessons and our girls treated her as the sole leader. The other two coaches were democratic leaders; they immersed assistant coaches in lessons, supported assistant coaches and the children in leading activities, and were incredibly encouraging and positive. My greatest lesson from GOTR was understanding my value for democratic and emergent leadership, as I emphasize their inclusive, adaptive, and group-oriented styles.

Students fulfill the Leadership Values area of the competency applying personal leadership theories/values in organizations. I applied my mentor philosophy in my job as a private tutor. My philosophy, which utilizes self-experiences, inquiry, and reflection to generate knowledge, proved successful in my ability to help my tutees learn. Becoming president of Tri-Beta Biology Honors Society (BBB) provided an opportunity to apply my strengths as determined by the StrengthsFinder in a large-group setting. Initially, I faced challenges because of BBB's historical autocratic leadership. I was expected to lead all meetings, recruit speakers, and handle all documents and reservations; I faced a great deal of stress and doubt in myself. Come second semester, I began employing a democratic leadership style, delegating responsibilities, acquiring input from members and officers, and attempting to immerse members in leadership opportunities on campus and in the community, all of which have alleviated my workload and enhanced our organization.

The Teams Competency requires identification of various types of roles within group and team settings. My first collegiate leadership role was in the Health Promotion Club at Iowa State. First as secretary, I observed the various roles that made our club, realized how much responsibility each person held, and understood how upholding their roles contributed to the overall functioning of the club. The challenges I faced took place in my second semester as president. I was not prepared to assume this role. I struggled with taking initiative and viewed leadership as needing to be in control of others, which I was uncomfortable with.

In developing team-leadership, students will reflect on group roles and abilities for groups to achieve common goals. My time in the Sexuality and Gender Equality (SAGE) organization, challenged our abilities to reach agreements, work together, and utilize member strengths. Our goal in 2017 was to convert all single stalled bathrooms on campus to gender neutral ones to promote gender inclusivity and acceptance. To name a few assignments, we had those who love writing and research create a proposal for the bathrooms; those interested in design created bathroom signs; and our more vocal students spoke publicly in the CSU about our project and its significance. As a result of our team efforts, we were successful in requesting and installing the bathrooms.

Students who master leading a team articulate a general leadership philosophy for future leadership. Because of my leadership roles throughout college, I evolved to hold new strengths, including individualization, developer, positivity, and empathy. These new strengths in addition to my previously identified ones will undoubtedly be applicable in my career as an educator. As an educator, I value giving children greater responsibility and control over their learning, stepping in when necessary; running an inclusive classroom; providing positive feedback to students and congratulating them on small and large successes; and adapting instruction to different students' needs. I will continue to process, expand, and improve my values and strengths in a Master's program in teaching and throughout my career.

Further descriptions and reflections of my leadership experiences can be explored in the tabs on the left-hand side of this page.

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## MNSU Honors Program Global Citizenship Competency

*Upon graduation, honors students will have demonstrated the ability to exhibit second language and communication competencies and exhibit cultural competency and awareness*

### Synthesis of My Global Citizenship Experiences

When joining the Honors Program, the Global Citizenship competency was intimidating for me. Not only was I concerned with how I would immerse myself within various cultural contexts, but also how I would recognize and reflect upon my own culture. I never placed myself within a cultural group, or viewed myself as having culture. I held the stereotype that an individual's culture was determined by their ethnicity, the language they spoke, and their religion. I saw myself as just a Caucasian, English-speaking American (what I thought was ordinary and insipid), who did not practice any religion. I broadened my knowledge of culture in both Introduction to Honors and the Honors Language Seminar, where I realized its definition does not rely on race, language, and beliefs. I began placing myself in different cultural contexts, while also recognizing that English-speaking, Caucasian identity, and not practicing religion all play a role in my cultural identity, despite my earlier ideology. The groups I now confidently identify with include: neuroscientists, teachers, students, lowans, human and animal rights activists, pilates enthusiasts, and many more. Each of these groups have a unique culture; as a result of each group, I hold values that guide daily actions and which shape my identity and future.

One significant takeaway from my membership of many cultural groups is awareness of each group's heterogeneity. For example, as a student neurobiologist I have met numerous other students and mentors who study and investigate neuroscience and have provided me with diverse perspectives in research methodologies, project approaches, learning methods, and experimental techniques. This revelation challenged my assumption that people can be lumped into a general category of individuals. I know that all neuroscientists do not share equal and identical perspectives and talents, and in the same way I can appreciate the differences that exist within ethnic, language, sports, regional, religious, and other groups.

There are numerous experiences I have had during my college career which have exposed me to various cultures, including medical mission work in Belize and Mexico, serving as an English tutor for a Japanese exchange student, and learning American Sign Language (ASL) from a Deaf instructor. One of the most surprising instances where I observed variety within cultural groups occurred while studying ASL. I learned that ASL was just a sub-language of signing, and that numerous forms of signing exists and is regionally determined. For example, individuals from California sign differently than individuals from the Midwest, and Hawaii has an entirely different form of sign language, called Hawaiian Sign Language. This further emphasized the variety that exists within Deaf culture.

Travelling to unfamiliar countries was something that stretched my comfort zone and challenged my intercultural skills. Never before had I fully immersed myself into another culture, forcing myself to adjust to the environment, language, and normal practices of that culture. The greatest struggle I faced in both countries was giving taking health information from people who did not speak English. I have learned in my studies the barriers which exist in healthcare, preventing 100% disclosure of information of a patient. Place a language barrier in the mix, I realized I was losing key pieces of patients' symptoms and could not provide them the empathy they needed to get them to trust me and share their condition with me. To try and solve this problem, I would use interpreters with many of my patients, keeping sure to maintain eye contact with the patient (not the interpreter), and use body language to try and convey my concern and care for them. After being in two countries where I could not speak the language and knew little about the culture, I can appreciate how difficult and sometimes scary it can be in a novel place.

Despite my improved cultural understanding and empathy and increased exposure to different groups, I still recognize my ignorance and innate bias. However, one thing I am capable of doing which I could not before is recognizing and accepting my ignorance and assumptions. One way I continue to try and improve my knowledge of culture is through meeting people of different groups, asking them questions about their culture as appropriate, and through self-education. For example, when I tutored the Japanese exchange student, I would ask numerous questions about her beliefs, values, what she did with her friends and family, how she celebrated certain holidays, her favorite foods, etc. This provided me with first-hand Japanese cultural information, however I also understand and can appreciate that her Japanese cultural practices are not identical to other people from Japan.

Studying ASL for three semesters taught me the challenges in learning a second language, while simultaneously trying to communicate in that language. My ASL professor was Deaf, so my only means of communicating with her was through signing; as a result, I had to pick up on the language quickly. This further opened my eyes to language development and socialization of an individual into a culture that is foreign to their own. Practicing ASL and using only sign to communicate with my professor resulted in the adoption of other characteristics of Deaf language while I interacted with my professor, including exaggerated facial expressions and body movements. Lastly, identity has been a recurring theme in my study of language, particularly in ASL. One way Deaf individuals demonstrate the role their language plays in their identity is through storytelling, as it allows for personal, familial, and cultural expression, and also serves as a symbol of Deaf identity. I had the opportunity through many ASL projects to tell my own stories, videos of which can be found in my Efolio Global Citizenship sub-pages.

After my experiences learning a second language, visiting other countries, and participating in the Honors Language Seminar, I have come to understand the significance of second language learning on personal, group, and global scales. Personally, learning ASL, being immersed in cultures where I struggled with the native language, and tutoring a Jaanese student in English all fostered recognition of the difficulties which surround language learning and assimilation, giving me the capacity to recognize self-bias. At the group level, learning ASL provided me with the necessary language tools to communicate with Deaf individuals, which in turn enabled me to get to know my Deaf professor through communicating in her language. Globally, I experienced how practicing languages of different countries could be useful in serving others and helping to improve other peoples' lives through empathizing with them and communicating in their own language.

Further descriptions and reflections of my global citizenship experiences can be explored in the tabs on the left-hand side of this page.

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## MNSU Honors Program Research Competency

*Upon graduation, honors students will have demonstrated the ability to exhibit information literacy skills, synthesize and integrate ideas, produce original research or creative works, and contribute to knowledge.*

### Synthesis of My Growth in Research

The information literacy component of the Research Competency expects Honors students to be capable of identifying, evaluating, and ethically utilizing others' primary research. Through my early college coursework in both the Honors and Nursing Programs, and a through nutrition course at Iowa State University (ISU), I acquired techniques for critiquing research sources, organizing findings into papers, and writing literature reviews. Introduction to Honors and ISU taught me how to determine research credibility based on author credentials, peer-review, the journal a paper came from, whether or not conflicts of interest were noted, and through critiquing research designs and claims. At ISU, I wrote my first literature review, learning how choose a topic, search widely for results on the topic, and organize the information found into a coherent paper.

These acquired skills additionally spurred my growth in the information synthesis component of the competency. They demonstrated my capacity to organize the ideas of others and to reflect upon how a project led to new knowledge. Writing literature reviews allowed me to draw conclusions on a specific topic and provide suggestions for future investigation. My Medical Ethics course at Minnesota State University (MNSU) enabled mastery in this area of the competency through the writings of three different research papers. In these papers I addressed different controversial topics in medicine, providing unbiased and factual perspectives which pulled from numerous sources. I also learned through writing these papers how to design a simple and clear, yet compelling thesis statement.

I satisfied the original research area of the competency through my projects at both MNSU and through the Amgen Scholars Program at Washington University in Saint Louis (WUSTL). Specifically at WUSTL I was given complete independence, designing my own research question and methodology and performing experiments on my own. My project at WUSTL along with my projects at MNSU were in the field of neurogenetics, and each contributed not only to the fields of neuroscience and genetics, but also to neurodegenerative medicine. My project at WUSTL was conducted in a translational medical research lab, meaning investigations are conducted in the lab with the hope they will be applicable clinically. My lab specifically was interested in Neurofibromatosis Type 1 (NF1), and I spent my summer trying to contribute to the explanation why the disease results in various symptom manifestations across patients. In contrast, my projects at MNSU extended knowledge of polyglutamine protein mutations, which are the known cause of degenerative brain diseases like Huntington's disease. I determined the existence of a novel polyglutamine protein, which I discovered exists in the brains of mice, and could thus have the potential to be linked to a yet-uncharacterized neurological disorder.

Each of my projects have been disseminated at numerous conferences at local, regional, and national levels, satisfying the final area of the competency. I presented at the Undergraduate Research Symposium (URS) and at the National Conference for Undergraduate Research (NCUR) two years in a row, as well as at the Midbrains Neuroscience conference. I additionally presented my WUSTL project at the end of my ten-week internship. NCUR was a wonderful opportunity, allowing me to meet researchers from across the country and observe their various projects and learn from their presentations. Midbrains was a unique experience in that it immersed me in an environment specific to my field of research, which was both intimidating and inspiring. The greatest skill I took from public presentations of my research was being able to describe my project in a way the average non-scientist could understand. For each conference I submitted an abstract and created poster presentations. Writing abstracts, as well as grants, taught me great responsibility, for they require attention to detail and the ability to convey the importance of a project to society. The above research accomplishments will be undoubtedly useful in my future as a graduate student when I carry out my Master's Thesis, and as an educator using evidence-based teaching methods.

Further descriptions and reflections of my research experiences can be explored in the tabs on the left-hand side of this page.