

## *-My Honors Experience-*



Thank you for taking the time to visit my Honors Portfolio. My name is Josephine Braaten. I will be graduating in May of 2019 from Minnesota State University Mankato with a BA in Creative Writing and a minor in theatre. I have been a member of the Honors Program at Minnesota State University Mankato since my admittance as a freshman student in the fall of 2015. Being a part of the Honors Program has enriched my undergraduate education in countless ways. In this portfolio I have striven to catalogue and reflect upon the experiences, in conjunction with the Honors Program, which have been instrumental in shaping me into the student I am today- ready to embrace whatever comes next.

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## Just a Bit About Me

I am the 3rd child in a family of 6 with three other siblings. I was born in Topeka Kansas, but my family made the 1,113 mile move to Glasgow Montana when I was six years old. The Big Sky state was my home until I came to Mankato in August of 2015 to begin college, although I still consider myself a Montanan at heart.

Ever since I realized I could, I have loved to write stories about anything imaginable. For years my parents questioned if I would ever joining the "real world," as I spent my days submerged in books, folders of stories I scratched onto printer paper, and roaming through the hills behind our house in one of my pretend lives. It came as no surprise then, when choosing what I wanted to study at college, that all I could think of was writing.



Four years later, I am only more in love with the act of writing and the possibilities that I want to pursue through it. It is my goal to someday earn my Master's of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing. However, before leaping into that chapter of my life, I am planning on teaching English as a foreign language in South Korea. Travel has always been another beloved interest of mine, and I cannot wait to experience the world in this new way.

In the free time that I currently do not have, I enjoy baking and cooking, reading, stretching, painting, watching theatre, and doing anything outside. Everything is better outside. I never feel more at connected to myself and at peace than when I'm under the sky- raining, sunny, or snowy.



## Pursuing Honors



Glasgow Montana is an extremely small town (3,000 people), so naturally many families in town were very close with each other. As a result, I attended many high school graduation ceremonies as a child. I was always enchanted by the aura of distinction that the Honors Graduates with the blue collars and braided ropes carried themselves with.

I was inducted in the National Honors Society at the end of my freshman year. Though pursuing the additional curriculum requirements that would allow me to graduate with Honors and staying in good standing in National Honors Society wasn't always easy, it was worth it, as it brought me into a tight-knit community with my like-minded peers who were in the same position.

Because of this incredibly positive experience, I knew that I wanted to be involved with the Honors Program at Minnesota State University Mankato.

Choosing to be a part of the Honors Program has been one of the best decisions I have made in regards to my undergraduate career.

Through the Honors Program I have had the opportunity and incentive to have enriching experiences that I would not have otherwise had. Beyond simply having these experiences though, fulfilling the requirements of the Honors Program have challenged me to reflect deeply on these experiences, thus strengthening their impact and turning them into useful tools that I can rely on as needed.

Finally, being a member of the Honors Program has allowed me to connect with incredible faculty, staff, and students. These are relationships, which I would otherwise not have been able to develop, will have a lasting positive impact on my development as a student, future career, and personal relationships.

## Leadership Competency

The Honors Program at MNSU requires that students fulfill 3 knowledge competencies in their four year period. These four competencies include Leadership, Research, and Global Citizenship. The ultimate goal of the leadership competency is for students to be able to put personal theories and values of leadership to use in their everyday lives.

*(Honors Handbook; pg.20)*

## Leadership Synthesis Essay

Going into college, I had a very narrow view of a true leader as an outspoken charismatic person in a highly visible social position. This was because these were the majority of leadership examples I was surrounded by in the various sports and extra-curricular activities I was involved with. Consequently, I did not view myself as a strong leader, because I did not have that sort of personality or feel in those situations or environments.

[HONR 201](#)- First Year Experience changed my perspective on leadership and my own leadership strengths. The Myers-Briggs Type Personality Indicator demonstrated that I am incredibly introverted. Consequently, the Strength Finder 2.0 showed that my leadership strengths (empathy, self-motivation, compromise, and ability to relate and problem solve) were far better suited to leading from within a group instead of from a separate, designated position of authority. This explained why I had never felt comfortable in the leadership positions I had held in high school. They were simply not the appropriate areas for my strengths to be best utilized. In addition, studying the assigned text (*Strength Based Leadership* by Rath and Cochie) helped me realize that it was possible to be an efficient leader as an introvert through providing strategies for maximizing one's leadership potential ,regardless of personality type.

[HONR 401](#)- Developing Your Mentor Philosophy built upon my developing leadership strengths and knowledge by providing the opportunity to serve as a mentor to a freshman honors student. This experience, in tandem with discussing the varying leadership philosophies of Plato and John Dewey, helped me understand that I identify most with a democratic style of mentorship. My personal philosophy of mentorship developed into one that embraced a cyclical sharing of knowledge between mentor and mentee and experience based discovery and reflection. With our varied developing mentor philosophies, my classmates and I did our best to help our first year honors mentees find their place in the Honors Program and MNSU in general.

I was hired as the [Social Media Relations Coordinator and Editor of the Honors Beacon](#) in the fall of 2017. Fulfilling the duties of the position proved challenging for me, as it was a quite public role which involved interaction with fellow honors students, honors program faculty and staff, and other departments and offices on campus. This was certainly not the ideal situation for my specific leadership skill set. However, unlike when I had held similar positions in high school, I now had the skills and knowledge, gained and developed in [HONR 201](#) and [HONR 401](#) to help me navigate the responsibilities of the position. In addition, having to work in such a dynamic environment, with the very concrete goal of publishing the Honors Beacon, forced me to develop a skill set for which there had been no need in my previous leadership experiences. I ended my first year as the Social Media Relations Coordinator, much more confident in my abilities to step out my leadership comfort zone with new leadership skills and techniques focused on professional communication, providing constructive critical feedback, and long term goal planning.

As a fourth year senior on the Maverick women's varsity cross country team, I hold a position of a [Senior Leader](#). This position involves working closely with the other seniors under the direction of our team captain, and consequently, is a strong match for my natural leadership tendencies and the skills I've developed in [HONR 201](#), [HONR 401](#), and as the Editor of the Honors Beacon. In this role I have had to navigate contention that has arisen as a certain team member debated ending her running career for personal reasons and help the under classmen (with a wide range of personality types) adjust to life as student athletes. These interactions have helped me to build on the communication skills I learned as [Editor of the Honors Beacon](#) through teaching me the importance of respectful honesty and emotional neutrality when acting as a liaison between parties with conflicting goals, as well as, emphasizing the necessity of intentional conversation and genuine empathy when trying to connect with a fellow group member.

## Research Competency

The Honors Program at MNSU requires that students fulfill 3 knowledge competencies in their four year period. These four competencies include Leadership, Research, and Global Citizenship. The ultimate goal of the research competency is for students to be able to provide examples of research works they have created/performed that have furthered their knowledge or skill in their specific field. They must also be able to analyze the results of their works.

*(Honors Handbook; pg. 21)*

## Research Synthesis Essay

I participated in a wide variety of research experiences while in high school through my science and math classes, involvement with community theatre, school plays, and a wide scope of research papers. At the time though, I didn't realize these activities (except the papers and science experiments) constituted research. However, I now understand that partaking in such a variety of activities was actually a sort of research process that helped me to determine what I wanted to study in college: Creative Writing and Theatre Arts.

In the spring of 2017 I took my first Creative Writing specific workshop course: [Forms and Techniques in Prose Writing](#) which expanded my knowledge of various literary styles and techniques and consequently challenged me to experiment with my own writing. Having to research, read, and analyze a variety of other styles of writing helped me to become much more aware and analytical of what elements were working strongly or not in my own pieces. In addition, partaking in weekly mini workshops with my class mates allowed me to experience the writing styles of my peers, helped me to become much more comfortable with taking critical feedback on my work, and more confident and effective at providing relevant critical feedback of my own- developments that would be absolutely crucial to my future academic and professional success as a writer. In addition, partaking in the workshop and revision process made me realize that I would like to do something, similar for my main research project.

In order to fulfill my final foreign language requirements, I took [Spanish 201](#) in the fall of 2017. One of our final assignments for the course was to write a research paper comparing an element of culture in a Spanish speaking country (Ecuador) with that same element in the United States. Having to research a societal element in a developing nation was difficult, because I had to be constantly aware of whether or not the information I was finding had been determined in an ethical way so as to provide accurate results. In addition, I had to be incredibly thorough when researching the United States to make sure that I was finding accurate information that represented a wide variety of people, instead of just perpetuating stereotypes. Having to synthesize my research results (both positive and negative) challenged me to present each culture in an honest and respectful way. This challenge of navigating a morally complex research and synthesis process made me more aware of how research results are obtained, what effect that has on the results of the research, and how the presentation of research influences one's perception of it.

In [Fundamentals of Directing](#) (fall of 2016) we spent the semester learning techniques to help us most effectively cultivate, organize, and channel our natural creative inspiration. Consequently, our final project involved putting these techniques to use in creating a director's portfolio for the play *Our Town* and directing a scene from *Our Town* for the rest of the class. Researching the various historical elements of the play itself and its production history, and then trying to incorporate them into my director's plan, helped me to become much more adept at incorporating synthesized information into a product. The process of having to put together the portfolio, pre-orchestrate my scene so that it was ready to be directed in class, and then being graded by the professor as I directed it in class challenged me to be much more organized in my creative process than I had ever been before, in order to effectively combine a variety of different elements into my final product. This project made me realize the value of both organization and thorough, varied research in the creative research and presentation process.

I began my [creative writing research project](#) under the direction of Professor Chris McCormick in the spring of 2018. In addition to working with Professor McCormick, I attended the Skidmore Summer Writers' Institute in the summer of 2018 where I had my research manuscript workshopped. Through these different feedback mechanisms I have received a variety of critiques and suggestions for my piece's improvement. Consequently, I have had to become much more adept at systematically analyzing each concern for its effectivity in helping my piece reach its full potential, while staying true to my original creative vision. Looking back at the progression of my manuscript, I am able to see how every round of revisions, workshops, and the additional literature I was reading at the time, influenced each draft of the story; all compounding on one another to create the current product. This evolution of my manuscript proves to me the utter importance of systematic process, collaboration, and constant revision in the creative research process in order to fully pursue one's creative vision.

## Research Essay

The following Essay details the research experiences I have had during my first semester at MNSU, what I learned from them, the questions I have, and what my research goals are for my upcoming semesters.



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# Global Citizenship

The Honors Program at MNSU requires that students fulfill 3 knowledge competencies in their four year period. These four competencies include Leadership, Research, and Global Citizenship. To fulfill their Global Citizenship Competency, students must display a tolerance towards ambiguity and be able to communicate effectively through language. They must also show competency at explaining the perspectives of a different culture. (*Honors Handbook; pg. 22*)

## Global Citizenship Synthesis Essay

My [freshman year](#) at Minnesota State University Mankato (MNSU) was a major lifestyle change. I was living away from my family for the first time, learning how to manage life as a college student athlete, and adjusting to living in Minnesota. In addition, because of MNSU's incredible international student population, I was experiencing more diversity on a daily basis on campus than I did in months in my rural Montana hometown. Through proximity to students of a different culture than myself, I was able to observe a variety of languages and communication styles which I had previously never witnessed. Being able to interact with a diverse population began to make me acutely aware of what was happening in the world, how countries were interacting, what other populations were experiencing, and the utter necessity of being informed on this information. This awareness led me, for the very first time, to seriously consider what place I was currently holding in the world and what I aspired to make happen in the future.

I was able to build on this developing awareness by volunteering at the [ECHO Food Shelf](#) as part of my service learning for HONR. 401: Exploring Leadership through Social Change in the fall of 2017. Volunteering at [ECHO](#) brought me into contact with a population of Mankato with whom I had never previously interacted. Through interactions with ECHO's clients, directors, and fellow volunteers, I began to learn more about the issue of community hunger. In addition, I also had the opportunity to volunteer with other students from MNSU, including multiple international students. It was fascinating to be able to speak with them in this environment, hear about how community hunger manifests in their own countries, and be able to learn about the steps being taken to combat. Because of these personal interactions and increasing knowledge of the issue of community hunger, I was able to overcome my own stereotypes about the problem and start to learn what it would legitimately take to remedy the issue.

To meet the final requirements of the language competency and compliment my maturing world-view, I was required to take [Spanish 201](#). This was the first Spanish course I had taken that truly focused on oral proficiency. Consequently, many of our assignments involved speaking and listening in addition to simply reading and writing. This was a great challenge for me, as I had had minimal previous experience with employing my Spanish in "practical" settings because of the rural, relatively cultural homogenous area where I grew up. However, being required to study Spanish in a more practical manner helped me to not only become more knowledgeable about the technicalities of the language itself, but also to see Spanish as more of a cultural tool than as an academic course. In addition, the course required research and exploration of a variety of Spanish speaking countries. This cultural exploration, in tandem with learning the language as a practical tool, helped me to develop a deeper and more authentic understanding of the cultures of Spanish speaking countries and how they were similar too or different from the culture I was raised in.

To help facilitate my progress in [Spanish 201](#), it was recommended that I attend [Spanish Club](#). [Spanish Club](#) was another challenge for me, because they encouraged us to only speak in Spanish at meetings. This was intimidating and frightening to me, as my Spanish language skills were elementary. Consequently, I was unable to express myself in an authentic way, because I lacked the language tools. Being in this position helped me to realize what it may be like to be an international student. This realization fortified in my mind the importance reaching out to and being empathetic towards those who are out of their cultural comfort zones.

With this realization and resolve, I became a [language partner](#) (as part of my development as a mentor) to three international students, two from Saudi Arabia and the other from Nigeria. As a [language partner](#) it was my responsibility to help them hone their practical English skills in preparation for their Test for English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exams. Over the course of the semester we did a variety of activities (focusing on sharing about our families, cultural traditions, day to day life in our countries, and our future academic and career goals) to help improve their English writing, speaking, and listening skills. Being able to learn about their lives in this way was an incredible experience and gave me new insight to how their traditional lifestyles were similar too or different than my own. Through learning about their lives and their learning about my own, we were able to come to see each other authentically instead of as pre-conceived notions or ideals.

Though our experiences were obviously on incredibly different levels, when working with my partners, I tried to keep in mind how I felt in [Spanish Club](#) when I did not speak the prevalent language and how that affected my interactions. Being able to genuinely empathize with their situation (even on just some small level) helped me to be more aware of how I was communicating with and instructing them, so that they could learn in the most efficient and comfortable way possible.

My journey at MNSU has helped me to become more aware of the role I am filling in the world and how exactly I am interacting with others. It is my hope to continue this journey of learning after I graduate as an English teacher in a Spanish-speaking country where I can share my own linguistic knowledge, while developing my Spanish skills and exploring a unique culture.