

Hi! My name is Melanie Bengtson. Welcome to my portfolio!

Personal Mission Statement

Here at Minnesota State University, Mankato I plan to utilize what I have learned and what I will continue to learn throughout my life to grow and develop my leadership, research, and global citizenship skills through a variety of opportunities, experiences, and reflections. It is my mission to continue to set and achieve my goals, discover new knowledge, and explore my values as a future educator as well as a member of society.



A Little About Myself.

Hello there! My name is Melanie Bengtson and I am currently a 4th year student at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am pursuing a degree in Special Education, ABS. Upon graduating in the spring of 2020, I plan to become a Special Education teacher in a self-contained Autism Spectrum Disorder elementary classroom.

The Honors Program

Mission Statement

The mission of the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato is to create future leaders, researchers and global citizens by providing high ability and motivated students with exceptional learning opportunities, mentoring relationships, and a community of scholars that foster their development as future leaders in a global society.



Honors Retreat - Learning about the Global Citizenship Competency.
(Fall 2016)

Honors Program Competency Rubric

Below is a copy of the Honors Program rubric used to determine if the competencies have been met. These competency levels will be referenced throughout this portfolio.

Competency Assessment Rubric

The assessment of the individual student competency development is an important task for members of the Honors staff and council. Every summer, representatives of the Honors staff and faculty review students' electronic portfolios and learning plans to assess their development process. Based on guidelines created throughout the academic year, the staff and faculty evaluate the work of the student within each competency to determine which level the student has reached in their development. To gauge student development, the following competency rubrics are used during the reviewing process as guidelines. Competencies are demonstrated at the level indicated by the asterisks.

Leadership

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

Theme	Leadership Competency	Rubric			
		Emerging	Developing		Mastering
		<i>Level One</i>	<i>Level Two</i>	<i>Level Three</i>	<i>Level Four</i>

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Leadership

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

What makes an effective leader?

In regards to leadership, I have had a multitude of unique experiences that have helped me to attain the leadership competency. My beginning experiences have driven me towards creating a network of opportunities that have ultimately granted me a solid foundation in leadership.

As a leader, I value the importance of mentorship. After completing the Honors course: [Developing Your Mentor Philosophy](#), I learned about how relationships with others affect leadership experiences. Specifically in my [mentor philosophy paper](#), I reflect on John Dewey and his insightful words on relationships. These perspectives helped to shape my view on leadership, and how to be a conscious and intentional leader. After completing this course during my first year of college, I was able to implement these learnings while creating my leadership philosophy in the course [Leadership and Interpersonal Communication](#).

Taking [Leadership and Interpersonal Communication](#) prompted me to create a leadership philosophy that has helped me to reflect on previous experiences. For example, declaring a leadership philosophy helped me to determine aspects that I agreed with in regards to leadership when I was involved in the [National Residence Hall Honorary](#). I now have an appreciation for recognition and intentionally implement it in current experiences. It also helped me realize what I didn't agree with while in this organization and why I felt unsatisfied in the group. From this, I learned that I prefer to focus on leadership as a form of relationship building. I believe that when I build relationships, I am able to best understand how to act as a midwife of knowledge, as John Dewey implied.

Lastly, I recently have been able to reflect on when I participated in an [alternative spring break](#) where we volunteered around the United States. During this experience, I learned about vulnerability in leadership. Previously, I would get frustrated in team settings very easily. More recently, I have learned how to be more patient and acknowledge unknown barriers that people might be experiencing. Because of taking [Leadership and Interpersonal Communication](#), I have a better sense of how to effectively communicate in order to collaborate.

Overall, I have learned that collaborating with others to form relationships is what is most meaningful to me in regards to leadership. Moving forward as a Special Education teacher, leadership will help me to provide explicit instruction for a diverse group of learners by having the ability to advocate for my students and their needs. This will be done by effective collaboration with other professionals who will create a team that determines what is most appropriate for each student. The philosophies that I have created and reflected on throughout the years will help me to create the necessary relationships that will make for a meaningful educational experience for all.

Leadership Essay

I always welcome new opportunities to explore more about myself and how those experiences help me to develop into the way that I am today. Within those opportunities, every single one offers a way to display my leadership traits in some way. During the leadership unit in the Honors First Year Experience course I was able to explore and reflect on my past, present, and future in regards to leadership.

Research

"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."

How do we seek answers?

Research was the competency that I felt most unsure about when beginning the Honors Program. After a lot of practice and learning from my mistakes, I have been able to successfully become an ethical researcher and conduct original research. These experiences have helped me to learn and develop strategies in regards to research, as well as how the research process has impacted my life.

To start, I took the honors course called [Developing Leadership Through Social Change](#). I intentionally thought of this class as a way to work towards the leadership competency, but it ended up becoming part of my first exposures to college-level research. From this, I learned how to utilize the MNSU library database in order to find peer-reviewed research. This is a skill that I not only utilized for this assignment, but throughout the rest of my undergraduate career and into my future career. It was difficult to navigate this system at first, as there are many articles with a wide variety of information. This really taught me how to find relevant information that would help support my thesis.

After Leadership and Social Change, I was able to reflect on a class I took prior called [Sensitivity to Disabilities](#). For this class, we had a group project to present on a disability/disability category of our choice. From this, I learned how to organize group information to prevent plagiarism and find information from reliable researchers. In the past, I have made several mistakes with organizing information and this experience taught me how organization impacts the quality of my research.

Once I learned how to accurately access new information, I began practicing my synthesizing skills through creating a research paper for [Sex and Gender Worldwide](#). I found a wide variety of sources to use for this information as well as the novel we read in class, and I was able to gain a thorough understanding of women in the Afghan culture. This taught me how researching with a purpose of having a deeper sense of knowledge on a given subject motivates me to find reliable sources. This class really challenged me to be more critical about the world around me. I have a tendency to take things at face-value and completing this research challenged me to search deeper.

Most recently, I conducted an original research project called [Art Therapy and Autism Spectrum Disorders](#). This experience brought together all of my previous experiences in a way where I could apply my learning. As a Special Education major, the research process taught me how to find and synthesize "new knowledge" about something that I will be able to utilize on a daily basis. I also learned how to discover a community through disseminating my results in a relevant venue. Overall, I have learned strategies to access reliable information, synthesize that information to create meaning, and apply it in ways that helps me to have a deeper understanding of the world around me.

Global Citizenship

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

What if we always ask questions about the world around us?

To me, being globally competent is one of the first steps in working towards a global effort in advancing as a human kind. I strive to work towards my global citizenship skills through a variety of efforts to understand the differences among us and develop many skills that will help me to become globally competent. Before starting the Honors Program, I felt like I had a fairly good sense of global citizenship coming from a school that valued our high levels of ethnic diversity as well as a highly respected Special Education program. While I typically felt comfortable around differences, there was still a lot of knowledge that I lacked. I never felt like I truly understood these differences, I just merely accepted them. When joining the Honors Program, I sought to challenge myself to search below the surface and obtain more knowledge.

Global Citizenship can be best achieved by the ability to ask questions about the world around us. As Maya Angelou once said, "when you know better, you do better". My goal is to do better by being able to recognize my lack of knowledge in order to accept new knowledge with an open mind and heart. Taking [Sensitivity to Disabilities](#) helped to not only challenge others, but myself as well. When prompted to interview someone with a disability, we were taught how to be honest with our internal challenges. It can be difficult to admit discomfort, such as not knowing how to react to disability-related quirks or having a lack of clarity during communication; but in this class discomfort was encouraged in order to challenge us to learn.

Taking [Sensitivity to Disabilities](#) helped prepare me for learning [American Sign Language](#). Being fortunate enough to have been taught by deaf professors, there were definitely some moments where I felt uncomfortable with the lack of understanding through communication. Prior to taking these courses, I had never had the opportunity to be put in a situation where I didn't understand somebody, or they didn't understand me. I was challenged to be creative in order to communicate, which has helped me far beyond those classroom walls.

Working through these challenges have helped me immensely in my roles through [The Miracle League](#) and [Darby's Dancers](#). These experiences have allowed me to work with a very diverse group of people all with unique abilities. From these experiences, I have learned how to recognize my privilege being able-bodied, and use that recognition in order to help others who experience adversities in recreation. I have been given a new perspective on accessibility, which has prompted me to further question my community and how it can be improved to become more accessible for all.

All of these experiences have prepared me for my role as a [Community Advisor](#). In this role, I learned about the importance of being conscious about "micro-aggressions" and how they can impact others. I also learned how to create a positive community from a group of very diverse students with different backgrounds. I was placed in a residence community that was well known for its diversity, as we host the highest numbers of international students and first-generation students. My year as a Community Advisor challenged me every single day to question my actions and make sure that they align with my global citizenship philosophy of how I believe that communication helps us to know more, which allows us to become more globally competent.

Overall, these experiences have helped me to become more culturally aware and competent. I have learned how to accept discomfort, become critical about the world around me, and acknowledge differences. By learning about language and ability, I have been able to gain new perspectives on issues that I have never considered before. As a Special Educator, our classrooms are inevitably diverse. The things I have learned from reflecting on these experiences will help prepare me to create an inclusive classroom for all, as well as have the ability to work through difficult situations that are unfamiliar to me. When students feel comfortable and welcomed, they are significantly more likely to succeed, which is my ultimate goal as a teacher.

Global Citizenship Essay

Awards and Scholarships

Scholarships

- Davy Family Service Scholarship (Community Engagement Office - 2019)
- Vivian B. Rippin Scholarship (College of Education - 2019)
- Richard E. Murray Volunteerism Endowment (Community Engagement Office - 2018)
- College of Education Scholarship (2018)
- Agnes L. and Rhea M. McCarthy Scholarship (College of Education - 2017)

Awards

- Outstanding Youth Organization: Darby's Dancers - Spirit of The Youth Awards (Mankato Community Education and Recreation - 2019)
- Commitment to Cultural Responsiveness (Community Engagement Office - 2019)
- College of Education Dean's List (2016 - Present)
- Commitment to Service Award (Residential Life - 2017 and 2018)

Resume

Melanie Bengtson

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WORK EXPERIENCE

LIL BEE'S LEARNING CENTER
Assistant Teacher, January 2019 - Present

MAURICES
Stylist, Apr 2017 – March 2019

THE MIRACLE LEAGUE OF NORTH MANKATO
Assistant coach, May 2018 – August 2018

RESIDENTIAL LIFE
Community Advisor, Aug 2017 – May 2018

EDUCATION

Minnesota State University, Mankato
Special Education Major, Expected Graduation: May 2020

VOLUNTEER

YMCA Brother/Sister Program

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