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Honors Capstone Portfolios

Honors Program at Minnesota State University,  
Mankato

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## Rebecca Peterson Honors Portfolio

Rebecca Peterson  
*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

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# Rebecca Peterson



## About Me

My name is Rebecca Peterson, and I grew up in Lino Lakes, Minnesota. I graduated from Centennial High School in 2016. I now attend Minnesota State University, Mankato and hope to graduate in the summer of 2020. I am studying Exercise Science and Pre-Physical Therapy with a minor in Psychology. I am involved in the honors program, the Pre-PT/OT club, and a cultural competency research team. Throughout my college experience I have worked at group home with individuals who have cognitive and physical disabilities.

## Mission Statement

As a lifelong learner and community member, I hope to use the skills and information that I have learned to spread kindness and be an advocate for those who cannot fight for themselves. I hope to better the lives of others through my work as a physical therapist.

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## 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.

## Learning Plan

The learning plan is an outline of the skills that a student would like to develop, or competencies that they would like to meet in a given period of time.

2016-2017  
2019-2020



2017-2018



2018-2019



# Global Citizenship

## Synthesis Essay

Given the ever-increasing diversity in the United States, it is becoming more important to be a global citizen because you encounter people who are different than yourself in every aspect of your life. It is important to understand not only your own culture but the cultures of those around you so you can make meaningful interactions. Letting go of personal prejudices and realizing the biases that you hold is an integral part of this process.

During my [Honors FYEX](#) class we had a unit that focused on global citizenship and our first task was realizing the different facets of our own culture. Realizing your own culture can help you to recognize the biases that you hold and their origins. Throughout my FYEX class, I started to seek out opportunities that allowed me to interact with people from cultures different from my own. At first this included going to cultural nights and then expanded to being involved in the [Intensive English Program \(IEP\) tutoring](#). These experiences not only allowed me to learn more about cultures from all around the world with which I was previously unfamiliar with, it made me consider my own culture and how it is different from the new cultures that I was learning about.

During my time as an IEP tutor, I was fortunate to work with students from Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, and Japan. These are three cultures that I had some background knowledge on but did not know a great amount about. During our meetings, we would ask each other questions regarding our cultures, and this allowed me to use the information about my culture that I considered during my FYEX class and inform another person about my culture. Learning how to be open and perceptive to cultures that are different from my own was another important lesson I had during my IEP tutoring experience. This was a valuable lesson that I utilized when I went on a volunteering trip to [South Africa](#). During this trip, we worked in a Zulu village and got to learn more about their cultural practices. I noticed differences in many aspects of our cultures, such as how we dress, our religious practices, and our family dynamics. One difference that made me uncomfortable to begin with was what kinds of clothing we wore. Zulu women wear clothing during traditional ceremonies that shows their breasts, and this made me uncomfortable but after some reflection, I realized my own biases and prejudices that I held regarding modesty and clothing from my own upbringing. Although their culture is different from my own, it does not make it any less important or valuable.

After spending two weeks in South Africa and learning more about the rich history of their country, I got a much better understanding of how tightly culture is tied to language. In South Africa, there are numerous different tribes, each with their own language. Differences between these tribes were part of the reason that Apartheid was so detrimental to South African society because it pitted these tribes against one another. In order to make a person fit the norms of what a successful person in South Africa is, the person had to speak a different language and act in a different way. This deep tie between culture and language is also found in the Deaf community among people who use American Sign Language. During my time in three different [ASL classes](#), I learned more about the importance of the tie between language and culture. For the Deaf community, using ASL creates a sense of unity and identity. Although there are many different traits that form a culture, language is often one of the most important.

Not only did ASL classes teach me more about the importance of language in a culture, it also helped me to understand the value of non-verbal communication in different languages. In ASL, having different facial expressions can change the meaning of a sign whereas in English your facial expressions tells someone how you are feeling. I experienced this when I attended [Deaf Church](#). This was my first experience seeing many Deaf people interacting and I was amazed at how expressive they were. This was completely different from my own experiences attending church with people there are far less expressive.

In the future, I hope to continue learning more about cultures around the world so I can become a more culturally competent citizen. I would also like to keep learning more about my own culture and the different biases that I have based on my cultural upbringing. Sharing my experiences and knowledge about different cultures as well as my own culture is something I hope to continue doing in the future.

# Leadership

## Synthesis Essay

Throughout my life, I have always had an idea in my mind of what a good leader looks like. I always thought it was someone who was very outgoing and who could make an immediate connection with any person they met. This was still my mindset going into college, but I have come to realize through my own leadership experiences that this is not always the case. A good leader can also be someone who, like myself, is rather introverted and has a hard time putting themselves out there. During our honors first year experience (FYEX) class, we learned more about different kinds of leaders and more specifically, our individual leadership styles. This culminated in our [Leadership Essay](#) which is a reflection on what we believe a good leader looks like and how we will use what we have learned to develop our own leadership skills.

My understanding of what it meant to be a leader continued to evolve when I enrolled in a class called [Developing Your Mentor Philosophy](#). In this course we studied literature to learn more about the philosophy behind leadership. We then put what we were learning into practice by having a mentoring relationship with a first semester student in the honors program. I soon realized that I was someone who could help guide another person's future by sharing with them my own experiences and communicating what I had learned to empower other students. Connecting with other students is something that comes naturally for me. This is supported by my Strengths Based Leadership Assessment that I took during my FYEX class which listed relating as one of my top five strengths. I realized through this class that I enjoyed mentoring leadership and I wanted to continue seeking opportunities that allowed me to work in this kind of role.

I was able to continue practicing my leadership skills when I was asked to be a [Honors Fall Retreat Leader](#). This retreat allowed me to experience leadership in a new environment which pushed me to continue developing different facets of my leadership skills. It was through this experience, along with my time as part of the [Residential Hall Community Council](#), that I learned more about the group dynamics in a team setting and how my own leadership style fit into this. I am someone who tends to shy away from conflict and always wants to find harmony within a group, which is something that I learned from my FYEX class and my leadership essay. These experiences helped me to realize that there isn't always peace between members of a team, and it is my job as a leader to make sure issues get resolved so that the group can keep working efficiently. During my time as a fall retreat leader, and also as a mentor, I realized that I find great joy in developing connections with students and working with them one-on-one.

My greatest growth in leadership came through my experience as the [Cultural Competency Research Team Leader](#) studying students in the College of Allied Health and Nursing at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU). I was given more responsibility and independence during this experience that I had ever had before, and it truly allowed me to analyze the effectiveness of my leadership style. I soon realized that one of my weaknesses is my tendency to shy away from taking an authority role. As I mentioned before, I tend to avoid conflict, but in this situation, I was unable to do that. Although it was uncomfortable, I was able to deal with the issue and it helped me to grow more confidence in my leadership skills. It was also through this experience that I saw both effective and ineffective leadership styles and I was able to learn from these observations so I could apply that to my own leadership techniques. I also learned more about how your role in a team can shift. When we were working in our teams, I took on a greater leadership role that required more responsibility. However, when all the different college groups came together, I was able to step back and work with the other team leaders collectively.

Throughout my time at MNSU, there were many different encounters that I had which allowed me to learn more about leadership and then put that into practice as I refined my own leadership skills. I have gained more confidence in myself as a leader and I know that in the future I can be successful in different situations if I continue to adapt and develop.

# Research

## Synthesis Essay

When I first began my time as an honors student, the research competency was the one that I found most intimidating. I was unsure how to begin a project and I was nervous about the idea of approaching a professor to be part of their research team. Once I began to learn more about the competency from other students and various honors courses, I realized that it wasn't as daunting as I had initially believed it to be. During my time in college, I have conducted research in various different contexts and ways. With each experience, I found myself learning more about the process and I gained more confidence in my ability to research effectively.

Throughout high school, the only experience that I had with research was writing informative papers. After I started college, I quickly learned that there is much more to research than looking at online sources and writing a paper. My first experience that differed from what I had learned in high school was during a class called **Honors 401: Social Change in the 21st Century**. Our final project in that class was a campaign to create social change in our community. Before beginning our project, we were tasked with finding several sources of diverse backgrounds and creating an annotated bibliography to learn more about our topic. Creating this bibliography helped me to learn more about finding sources, analyzing them and relating them to the topic that I am researching.

I put the research skills I gained in Honors 401 to the test when I enrolled in **Biology 105** and **Biology 106**. During these classes, we had to write a scientific report after finishing labs related to Osmosis and T-DNA. Similar to the Honors 401 class, before we started these labs, we had to do background research on the topics we would be testing. However, this time we learned about more in-depth ways of finding scholarly sources related to our labs by using MavScholar and more specifically, the Biological Science Database. In order to create a hypothesis for our lab, we had to draw on our knowledge that we gained from the additional research that we conducted. After finishing our lab, we were able to compare our own results to those found in our articles to help determine the success of our experiment. The exposure that I received throughout my time in Honors 401, Biology 105, and Biology 106 gave me a base of knowledge regarding the research process and skills that I will continue to use throughout not only my academic career, but my professional one as well.

I was able to build upon the skills that I gained through my previous experiences when I was asked to be part of Dr. Sandell's **Cultural Competency Research Team**. As part of this team, I worked alongside other undergraduate students, as well as Dr. Engeswick, to measure the change in cultural competency of students in an Introduction to Dental Hygiene course. Similar to my previous experience, before starting to gather data we found articles related to our study on the importance of culturally competent healthcare professionals. Gaining this background knowledge and studying Dr. Sandell's previous research helped us to develop our research questions. After collecting our initial data, we analyzed the results and formulated ways professors could include cultural competency related activities into their curriculum. We then created a presentation detailing our results which I was fortunate enough to present at both the **Undergraduate Research Symposium and the National Conference for Undergraduate Research**. Gaining more experience with writing grant proposals and abstracts to submit for conferences are skills that I am confident I will continue to utilize as I continue my academic career.

As I look to the future, I will continue conducting research and look forward to presenting my findings again at the URS and NCUR in 2020. Through my involvement in the honors program, I was pushed to seek out research opportunities that helped me evolve my abilities. In the future, I will continue to refine my skills as a researcher and a lifelong learner.

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