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Honors Program at Minnesota State University,
Mankato

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Alana StCyr Honors Portfolio

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Minnesota State University, Mankato

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Alana StCyr

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WELCOME TO MY PORTFOLIO!



My name is Alana StCyr and I am from Woodbury, MN. Currently, I am a senior at Minnesota State University, Mankato. My major is Psychology with a minor in Athletic Coaching. After graduation in May of 2020, I will be attending the University of Central Arkansas pursuing my Masters in College Student Personnel Administration. During my time there, I will be holding a Graduate Assistantship in Housing and Residence Life.

MISSION STATEMENT

I strive to act on the values of authenticity, transparency, and leadership to positively impact the personal and professional growth of myself and those around me.

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A LITTLE MORE ABOUT ME

I was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, but I have lived in Woodbury, Minnesota for most of my life. Before attending Minnesota State University, Mankato, I attended Tartan Senior High School. I am very dedicated to my academics and am dreaming big for my future. I have multiple jobs and am very involved on campus. Although I am always busy, I know that in the end it will be worth it to achieve success in my future. I am doing my best to get as many experiences as I can in college to build myself the best future possible. You are the only one that can determine your success, so go out and get it!



HONORS PROGRAM: MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MANKATO

I initially joined the honors program because I had been involved in high school and wanted to continue that involvement in college. The honors program was the first opportunity that was advertised to me and I hoped to be a part of this group of students. When I got accepted and began to learn more about the program, I learned that it is much more than just a group to be involved in. This program is about pushing students to be more well-rounded and developed in areas of leadership, research and global citizenship. I can honestly say that without this program I would not have developed as much in the research or global citizenship aspect while I was on the Mankato campus. The honors program helped me develop personally and professionally by providing quality staff, smaller class sizes, and pushing students out of their comfort zones.

One of the most valuable things that I have been able to do since joining the honors program is getting to know some of the best staff and faculty on our campus. The drive that honors staff and professors have to push students and create a community setting is inspiring and welcoming to any student. These people have allowed me to feel comfortable enough to push myself academically and ask critical questions of myself and others. These staff members truly care about the students and are passionate about the content being taught. They have also pushed me professionally by helping me develop skills that I need to apply research, leadership and global citizenship to my daily life and the workplace.

Next, the small class sizes that the honors program holds has really helped me as a student. This has held me accountable to be prepared and reflective when it comes to in class discussions or projects. It has also allowed to build positive academic relationships with other honors students. Having smaller class sizes has also allowed for the assignments and projects to be more personalized to the students interest which helps with class engagement. It also becomes easier for students to make connections between course content and the real world.

Lastly, the honors program allows students to push themselves to new levels when it comes to the three competencies. As a student, I was very strong in the leadership competency, but lacked development in the other areas. Developing the other competencies has been a challenge to me because a lot of it is out of my initial comfort zone. As I grew as a student and a person through my college experience, it became easier to push my boundaries in developing myself. I also think that as busy college students, reflection can also be something that is hard. Especially as honors students always being busy, there is not much time to reflect unless you make the time through your college career. Having the reflection component alongside the portfolio is also a way that the honors program has pushed me to think about the bigger picture and how that impacts daily life.

Overall, my experience at Minnesota State University, Mankato has been enhanced by participating in the honors program. Personally, I have become more open and explorative of mine and other identities and the stories that other people have to share. Professionally, it has helped me distinguish the "so what" portion of a reflection. Everyone has experiences to talk about but, but not everyone can articulate the purpose and outcome of those activities. The clear and concise real-life application makes you stand out amongst your peers especially in things like job interviews and grad school search processes. The honors program at Minnesota State University, Mankato has made a large impact in my college experience and I will forever be grateful of how much I have grown and learned from being an honors student.

RESEARCH

Research allows people to gain further knowledge on the world and how it functions. Two essential skills in the realm of research are conducting original research and ethically integrating others' findings with your own ideas. I have gotten the opportunity to develop my understanding of the research process and find techniques that fit into my areas of interest. Overall, I have come to view research in the aspects of accumulation of background knowledge, methodology, and sharing conclusions.

Accumulating and understanding knowledge of past research is essential to doing quality research. Two experiences in which I have been able to synthesize other's research in with my own ideas are an **essay** I wrote on Stuart Davis and my **narrative journalism** essay. In these pieces, I was able to access scholarly sources, conduct in person interviews, reflect on my personal opinions, and synthesize information to support my arguments. While writing both essays, it was important to evaluate the credibility of sources to increase the credibility within my writing. With the collection of background information being the first step in research, it is important that this step is executed effectively and efficiently.

Once the researcher has an idea of the past findings on the subject matter, research can be conducted. Making sure that the methodology of research is fully planned out is important for the quality of the project. One project in which I focused on customizing the methodology to my objectives is in my **honors 401 research proposal**. The way I proposed to collect data for this project was to conduct before and after surveys of first-generation college students attending orientation. While writing this proposal, I realized that the methods you use in your study are customizable based on the subject of your study, the objectives of your study, and your audience. Before college, I always viewed research as the stereotypical scientist testing rats in a lab, which never interested me. Having my own research experiences has helped me realize that research is anything you want it to be and anything that interests you.

Research has lots of steps and barriers that one must face before being able to draw conclusions from their data. Although some may view the conclusion as the most exciting part, it is the things that led you to the conclusion that makes the experience significant. This proved true within the **critical thinking** study I worked on with a faculty advisor. I learned a lot about the research process by pushing myself out of my comfort zone and immersing myself in this research project. Writing a proposal for this project showed me how I can effectively present information and conclusions to people who have never heard of the project by telling them why it is important to them and why they should care. Writing the research proposal and presenting this project at the Undergraduate Research Symposium has been a fun and unique experience for me. Due to COVID-19 it has taught me how to be adaptable to any situation and preserve through any challenges that come my way. Also, it has still allowed me to understand how to create an effective research poster that will catch the eye of the general public and give information catered to my audience while showing my conclusions.

Research is something that will be prevalent within my daily life, academic career, and occupation within the student affairs field. I hope to always push myself further within my knowledge and create breakthroughs within the field of student affairs in learning how to better serve students. The experiences I have had with research in my undergraduate career have opened up a wide range of opportunities to pursue research further in an efficient, ethical and unique manner.

LEADERSHIP

Exploring leadership is similar to one's journey through life. People learn, make mistakes, grow, and create connections that last a lifetime. Learning about leadership and how I implement that into my daily life is something that I have achieved through being a part of the Honors program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. During my undergraduate experiences, I have utilized my individual leadership values and teamwork skills with other student leaders to work towards a common objective.

To build one's leadership, it is important to identify the values that they utilize in their practice and how they view roles in a team setting. I was given the opportunity to explore my own leadership through writing a **leadership essay** in an introductory Honors class. I utilized my results from strengths assessments and past leadership experiences to find that my main leadership values are inspiring others, harmony and individualization. While I bring these strengths to the table, other leaders can complement the skills that I am lacking. The role of leaders in a team is to bring their strengths to complement the weaknesses of other leaders, which creates a stronger team.

I was provided with the opportunity for teamwork when joining the **National Residence Hall Honorary**. The purpose of this student organization is to bring recognition, leadership and service to the residence halls through activities planned by the group. Working as a team was not always easy but remembering that the entire team had a similar goal made it easier to listen and compromise.

After working with a team that brought me challenges, it was refreshing to work with a new team that positively challenged me as a person. As a **Student Ambassador** at Minnesota State University, Mankato, I served as the Vice President for two academic years. With this team, we each had very distinct roles and tasks within our positions. This led to a structure and strength that held our team together through the semester. We were able to hold one another accountable with these designated tasks but assist one another when team members were struggling to achieve a task. Due to serving in this position for two academic years, I was able to reflect during the first year in understanding my strengths and weaknesses as a leader. Luckily, I had a second year to address my weaknesses of things like being overly critical of my abilities.

As leadership within a team is valuable, one's personal leadership journey is equally as important. I utilized a mixture of team and individual values when serving as a **Community Advisor** in the residence halls. This experience exposed me to positive and negative leadership in professional staff that I could utilize when being a mentor and resource to the students on my floor. Some positive skills that I have now implemented are transparency and supportiveness. Not only did I have staff as an example for my leadership, but also my past experiences to guide me along the way. The relationships I built with my mentors and my student mentees help me create a **mentor philosophy** for myself. The baseline of the philosophy is that a mentor should always be supportive of the mentee's goals, mentors should challenge mentees in a healthy way, and there should be a strong focus on relationship building.

Overall, I want to consistently advance my leadership to positively influence others and create self-discovery in simple tasks. All of these experiences have allowed me to reflect on my initial leadership style, evaluate others leadership, and learn how to be a better leader along the way. Leadership is something that can continuously evolve to push people farther within their personal and professional lives. Within my future, I foresee this helping me within my student affairs profession. I hope to hold a mixture of supervisory, advisory, and leadership roles throughout my experience. I plan for these experiences to range across departments like residential life, academic advising, and career development. Within these roles I hope to continue expanding my leadership skills and reflecting on my experiences so that I can positively impact other leaders in a meaningful way.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Individuals have the opportunity to see the world from their own eyes, gain knowledge through their experiences, and hear stories from the second they enter this world. These experiences contribute to one's perspective of the world, but what makes someone a global citizen? What truly helps someone understand a part of the world that they have not been exposed to yet? These are questions that I asked in the beginning of my time in the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. My undergraduate experience has helped me gain a deeper understanding of the world and people who hold different experiences, perspectives, and identities than myself.

Self-awareness and open-mindedness are two qualities of a good global citizen. Taking time to evaluate one's own role in a cultural society, while also being able to ask questions about the less familiar things is a good starting point to developing one's cultural competence. I started to reflect on my identities, privileges, and biases when writing my **Global Citizenship Essay**. Being able to recognize more about myself in a increasingly global society motivated me to understand people and experiences to which I had not been exposed.

Another quality that enhances global citizenship is curiosity. As I became curious about other peoples' stories, I got involved in the **Language Partners Program**. This experience allowed me to hear about the cultural norms that people experience in other areas of the world and how that differs from my home. It taught me about the highs and lows of acclimating to another culture and immersing oneself in a completely unfamiliar place.

Being vulnerable plays a big role in understanding something that you don't know. One instance in which I was vulnerable was holding an event about privileges and identities on my floor as a community advisor. **Paint a Stroke** was an eye-opening event when thinking about my views on societal norms and how those differed from my residents. This challenged me to ask myself why I had perceptions of my residents that may not have aligned with their true values. This realization allowed me to open my heart and my mind to my residents so that I could get to know them for who they really are, not what my personal biases or experiences indicated.

Increasing global awareness and understanding comes with vulnerability. Learning the French Language in **French 201** made me vulnerable. This class taught me the norms of verbal and nonverbal communication in French while challenging myself to compare and contrast French culture to my own. This challenged me greatly while learning sentence structure, articulation, and cultural vocabulary. As I gained these communication skills, I pushed myself to the next level by performing a French Poem called *Nuits De Juin* at a **Poetry Recital**. This was an unfamiliar situation as it was on a stage and in front of many students and faculty that I did not know. I did my best to perform this poem in a culturally appropriate manner. My goal was to embrace the culture and authenticity of the poem when performing.

A rewarding aspect of cultural competence is being able to communicate and understand people from other regions and identities. Having a **foreign exchange student from France** on my floor and helping her through the process of being in the United States for the first time was a great experience. Being able to communicate with her in French allowed me to understand more about the French culture and how she has developed into the young woman that she is now. Overall, embracing unfamiliar experiences and cultures helps one learn about themselves and the world around them on a deeper level. While striving to be a student affairs professional, the skills and values that I have learned in this experience will allow me to better serve students of various identities.

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