

Marissa Swenson

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Welcome to my online portfolio!

Hello, my name is Marissa Swenson and this is my online portfolio! I graduated from Minnesota State University, Mankato in the Spring of 2020 with an undergraduate degree in biomedical sciences with minors in chemistry as well as family studies and child development. This portfolio is the story of my time in the Honors Program at MNSU to show my progression in leadership, research, and global citizenship.



Mission Statement:

I desire to strive to use every day for the betterment of myself and others. I will look to continuously improve upon myself through dedication, hard work, compassion, love for what I am doing, and respect for those who are around me.

Honors Program



Leadership

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



Research

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



Global Citizenship

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

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This website is created for the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato to show progress in the three Honor's competencies: leadership, research, and global citizenship.

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About Me



I am finishing my final semester at Minnesota State University, Mankato studying biomedical sciences with minors in chemistry and family studies and child development. My goals for the future include being accepted into and attending a medical school, learning how to be a competent and caring physician, and becoming a pediatrician.

I grew up in Mankato, Minnesota and attended Mankato West High School. I am the oldest of four kids. My siblings and I all grew up playing hockey and tennis and I love both sports. I have spent my time in college volunteering as a youth hockey coach, as a mentor for the YMCA Big Brother/Sister Program, and as a hospice and hospital volunteer. I have worked as a nanny for three and a half years and now work as a child care assistant at a local elementary school for after school care. I enjoy reading, spending time with friends, and being outdoors. The most important value in my life is learning. I want to use every day to learn more about the world, myself, and those around me.

[Contact Me](#)

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Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato

"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."

Competencies of the Honors Program

Leadership

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Research

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Global Citizenship

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Why Honors?

Read the short essay below detailing the importance of my Honors Program experience!

I believe that the unique aspect of the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato is the encouragement for students to take their university education beyond the typical. The three competencies of leadership, research, and global citizenship give students a framework to find activities that help them further their learning in these areas and a rubric to reflect on how these activities allowed them to progress. Being involved in the Honors Program pushed me to try to events and experiences, gave me a platform to deeply reflect over these experiences, and prepared me for my future beyond undergraduate education.

From the first semester in the Honors Program, I felt supported in endeavors and interests I am passionate about yet provided the encouragement to leave my comfort zone to participate in new things. The Honors First Year Experience class first introduced me to the goals of the program and models of how other students fulfilled them. For example, I had never considered undergraduate research prior to the class or known of the different opportunities for students on campus. Other activities I participated in because of a desire to grow in Honors competencies are helping with the Honors retreat as a student leader, taking a class on Somali literature and arts, and attending cultural events on campus. Beyond a desire to participate in activities to advance in the Honors Program competencies, the Honors program helped me to see meaning in the activities that I participated in on campus and in the community.

In addition to encouraging participation in extracurricular activities, the Honors Program gave me the means to reflect on those experiences. It can be easy as a student to neglect to take the time to reflect on how the world and my experiences have changed me, but it is through contemplation that personal and professional growth happens. Reflection is an opportunity to find meaning and assess personal qualities and experiences. Because I was given the tools to learn to reflect on my time at Minnesota State University, Mankato and not just live through them, I have greater self-awareness. The Honors Program rubric gave me both goals for my learning experiences and the questions to reflect upon during and after. It is through the experiences and reflections that I was able to grow into a better leader, researcher, and global citizen and be able to explain why and how this development occurred.

Through activities and reflections pertaining to the three honors competencies, I feel better prepared for a future beyond my undergraduate education. Going to an undergraduate institution with an Honors Program like this one allowed me to see how the classes I take and the activities I participate in shape my beliefs about myself and others. One of my greatest goals is to be committed to continual growth. While this goal is broad, the Honors Program has taught me to desire growth both personally and professionally. Each is accomplished through active participation in life and a sincere desire to find meaning beyond the surface.

To sum the impact of the Honors Program on my university experience is difficult because in many ways the Honors Program itself isn't most memorable as an experience, but as a lens through which to see all other experiences. The Honors Program has been instrumental in my growth and ability to learn about the world through my participation in it. The ability to reflect will no doubt be a valuable tool to continue my mission statement of striving to use each day to the betterment of myself and the service of others.

Leadership

Research

Global Citizenship

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Leadership Competency

[Leadership Essay](#)

[Hockey Coach](#)

[Navigators](#)

[YMCA Mentor](#)

[Mayo Volunteer](#)

For much of my life, leadership had often been this word describing something for which I should aspire and strive. Leadership was far away and required me to fit a checklist of characteristics that teachers, coaches, or peers wished to see in me. Throughout college and with the help of the Honors Program, I have come to see leadership as using my strengths in my everyday life and in the situations I am in, not an unchanging paradigm to mold myself into. During Honors First-Year Experience, I outlined my personal leadership values in my [Leadership Essay](#) allowing me to explore how my tendencies, values, and strengths can help me to define a personal leadership style.

Through discovering my leadership strengths such as responsibility, relator, learner, achiever, and developer from the StrengthsFinder Inventory, I began to see my natural leadership tendencies. I utilized these as a [Youth Hockey Coach](#) in the local hockey association and further developed my values as a leader. As a coach, I was able to very specifically use my strength as a developer to see potential in young players and help them find success. I began to define my leadership values in this context as service, displaying positivity, having a growth mindset, and being a role model for the next generation. On [Navigators Leadership Team](#), I also developed personal leadership values such as truly listening to others, trusting team members, and having an open mind. In addition, both experiences helped me to reflect on my personal strengths and weaknesses as a leader and identify roles within the group and the team settings. For example, I was able to see how my StrengthsFinder qualities allowed me to fill roles in the team that was unique from others. On the other hand, weaknesses such as being afraid of failure prevented me from trying to do things in both contexts, but by identifying both strengths and weaknesses, I was able to grow to utilize those strengths and work to minimize weaknesses.

By identifying and reflecting upon leadership qualities in different contexts, I began to practice team member skills and abilities to work toward common goals. On the [Navigators Leadership Team](#), I began helping to plan events and lead different areas of ministry. In [Clinical Volunteering](#), I learned to see how volunteers help to strive toward the goal of patient care and as a [Youth Hockey Coach](#), I worked with other coaches to facilitate player improvement. Through these experiences, I learned to reflect on effective and ineffective leadership styles within group contexts and roles within the group. As a coach, I saw many types of leaders but learned that effective leadership involved compassion and respect for others above all else and a willingness to learn from personal mistakes.

Finally, I utilized personal theories and values to shape my continued involvement on campus and in the community. As a [Youth Hockey Coach](#), a member of the [Navigators Leadership Team](#), and as a [Clinical Volunteer](#), I was able to use my reflections on leadership to direct my experiences and grow as a leader. Taking on the role of head coach allowed me to put theories and reflections into practice as I led a team of my own. In addition to continuing leadership in many activities, I applied theories and values developed in these activities to my experience as a [YMCA Brother/ Sister Mentor](#), putting into action values developed earlier such as a commitment to service and being a role model. I used my team experiences to articulate a general leadership philosophy to guide future collaboration within groups.

As an aspiring medical professional, working on teams will be vital to the wellbeing of others. I will need to be able to work with a variety of individuals from different backgrounds and different life experiences to help patients and their families. I hope to approach my fellow medical students, patients, members of the health care team, and really anyone in my life with respect, a willingness to learn, and a desire to serve. In order to be an effective leader wherever I find myself I know that those around me deserve to be heard, validated, and have someone believe in them.

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Research Competency

[Research Essay](#)

[Undergraduate Research](#)

[ENG271W Proposal](#)

[Honors 401](#)

[Conferences](#)

Before entering college, I always thought of research as reserved for those with elite intellect diving headfirst into the world of science. It was not until taking the Honors First Year Experience (FYEX) class that I saw research as accessible to me during undergrad. Through class discussions and writing an [Honors Research Essay](#) in FYEX, I began to see the diverse opportunities available to students to explore research or a creative project. Throughout my time at Minnesota State University, Mankato I came to see that research underlies all academic fields and the knowledge attained in them by reflecting on class projects and participating in undergraduate research.

Research requires the ability to access information efficiently, effectively, and critically. It also requires ethical use of information and learning to think critically about that information before incorporating it into personal knowledge. I applied these concepts by supporting a thesis statement that proposes a community center in the Mankato area, specifically with the addition of new ice rinks. In this [ENG271W proposal](#), I used a variety of examples from the surrounding area of similar projects and developmental models for youth hockey players to support my argument, requiring sources to support different aspects of supporting claims. After learning how to access and use information to accomplish a goal, I then worked on synthesizing ideas to create a project and integrating sources to develop a hypothesis.

The ability to access and assess information is critical to integrate ideas from multiple sources and perspectives. As the final project in the Honors seminar I took spring semester of 2019, the class created an [Honors 401 Website](#) to synthesize the information and stories we had learned during class. We spent the semester reading novels, biographies, poetry, and primary literature. We learned about culture and interacted with different stories of Somali Americans in diaspora. Creating this website required the synthesis of the diverse learning experiences of all the students in class as well as their interpretations to design a cohesive website.

The skills used to create the previous two projects aided me as I developed an integrated hypothesis with a faculty mentor and research partners for [Undergraduate Research Projects](#) that drew upon primary literature presented in lab meetings. Reading related papers for lab meeting and connecting primary literature to concepts taught in classes helped me to visualize the additive nature of research, with each publication piecing together to explain larger concepts. Having the opportunity to participate in undergraduate research allowed me to experience the science learned in the classroom and apply and expand it in the pursuit of knowledge in a specific field. Much of what I have learned is how research tells a story, from introduction to discussion, and how this story is created by effectively and ethically pursuing a research goal. This includes proper lab procedures, meticulous data collection, and accurate statistical analysis. My research experience is meaningful not only for physical laboratory work but also for learning how to integrate the data gathered for interpretation and explain what was performed to others. Using data and interpretation to create posters for presentations at conferences helped me to visualize my project better and learn to organize data for display. Presentations of papers in lab meetings allowed me to practice thinking critically about research performed by others. Attending [Conferences](#) and presenting at poster sessions have improved my ability to verbally communicate findings to others. I believe that participating in research will improve my ability to be a competent physician who can participate in research and take information presented, discern its credibility, and implement it into practice.

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Global Citizenship Competency

[Global Citizenship Essay](#)

[Honors FYEX](#)

[Spanish Experiences](#)

[Work Experiences](#)

[Mayo Volunteer](#)

[Honors 401](#)

[FCS 400](#)

Everyone has a background; a story that is their own. A person's story is influenced by many things, including where they grew up, the culture in which they were raised, and the decisions they make. However, this is just one story. There are so many stories out there, people whose lives are both alike and different from our own. Being a global citizen, to me, has two components: knowing ourselves and learning about others. This includes seeing how our own stories influence how we live, the prejudices that we hold, our outlook on life, and being willing to understand and acknowledge the stories of others.

I began to better understand my own story in [Honors FYEX](#), where we were encouraged to explore our background and biases and begin to ask questions about other cultures. At the end of the global citizenship unit, I wrote a [Global Citizenship Paper](#) expressing how I would pursue this competency. One way that I explored other cultures throughout college was working as a [Nanny](#). Both parents moved to the United States to practice medicine, and much of their family life was impacted by the culture and family they left behind. I learned not only about Indian culture, but also saw the impact being in a place other than "home" can have on private or public cultural practices.

Another experience I had learning about another culture was the [Honors Seminar on Somali and Somali American literature, art, and culture](#). During the course of the class, we read novels, biographies, and primary literature about the experience of Somali immigrants and refugees after migrating or being displaced. We also had the opportunity to interact with Somali artists when they visited campus and we went to see the Somali Museum in Minneapolis. These experiences helped me to better understand another culture that is especially prevalent in Minnesota and develop a greater understanding of the immigrant experience. I was able to see my privilege and see just some of the difficulties that people face as they try to adjust to a new life, a new culture, and the scars that they have after leaving. I learned to better predict and respect cultural differences by taking [FCS 400 Culturally Diverse Family Systems](#). Going through common cultures in the US and common practices and beliefs helped me to better predict and have tools to learn and understand culture when working with diverse people.

Beyond exploring culture, I also had the opportunity to work with people in different life stages from myself including children, the elderly, and the dying. I have come to see diversity as not just ethnic and cultural differences, but also the experiences that bond together people in the same stages of life. Through volunteering as a [Hospice and Hospital Volunteer](#), I made connections with older generations, especially through serving patients in their final months and being with my grandma as she passed. These experiences helped me to see how all our stories will end eventually. It is something we can't escape and something that transcends cultures and generations in its sorrow. Elderly individuals have great stories to tell us if we are willing to listen.

Through my [Spanish Experiences](#), I developed a greater understanding of the Spanish language and how language and culture are intertwined. I learned more about Spanish speaking cultures through projects such as my Spanish 201 projects on Honduras and watching the projects presented by other students in the class. Through class experiences and talking to Hispanic individuals, I have come to understand some of the hardships that individuals face after immigrating and when raising their family to have an awareness of their heritage and culture in a different place. In [FCS 400](#), we discussed some common cultural expectations placed on family members and ways to overcome cultural barriers as a service provider.

All of these experiences have helped me to understand those around me better, as well as myself. I feel that I look to understand the stories of others better and am more willing to uncover the whys in their lives. Being open-minded to the backgrounds of others will help me in the future to learn from my coworkers who have experiences from my own and to treat patients with greater cultural awareness.

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