

Eryn Zuiker

Biomedical Sciences
Honors Program



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Welcome to my Honors Portfolio!

Thank you for taking the time to look through my portfolio. Your support means so much to me!

My Mission

Through the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato, I will work to develop my strengths in the three competencies of the program: Leadership, Research, and Global Citizenship. I aspire to be the best I can be and to make the most of all the opportunities that are presented to me.



About Me

Hello, I'm Eryn!

Originally, I am from Woodbury, Minnesota and I graduated from Woodbury High School in 2016. Throughout my childhood and adolescent years, I participated in many activities such as choir, theatre, speech, marching band, Girl Scouts, and soccer.

Currently, I am a fourth year student at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am majoring in Biomedical Sciences and minoring in Chemistry. After I graduate, I plan to continue my studies in a biomedical sciences PhD program. Along with the Honors Program, I am involved in Beta Beta Beta National Biological Honors Society, Alpha Sigma Alpha Sorority, and Order of Omega. Currently, I am the 2019-2020 President the Pi Psi Chapter of TriBeta.

Outside of school (when I have time) I enjoy crafting, reading (my favorites are the Harry Potter books), and anything/everything Disney (I have a Disney quote for just about every situation).

If you have any questions or want to reach out, please fill out my "contact me" form below. You can also check out my CV on the button and pictures from my time at MNSU!



[View CV](#)



Honors Program at MNSU

THE MISSION OF THE HONORS PROGRAM

"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" (MNSU Honors Program, n.d., para. 1).

Students in the Honors Program will be proficient in three competencies by the time they graduate: [Leadership](#), [Research](#) and [Global Citizenship](#).

MY PERSONAL HONORS MISSION

Through the [Honors Program at MNSU Mankato](#), I will work to develop my strengths in the three competencies of the program: Leadership, Research, and Global Citizenship. I aspire to be the best I can be and to make the most of all the opportunities that are presented to me.

LEARNING PLANS

Each year a honors student will put together a learning plan that reflects upon how that student will work towards the program's competencies.

2019-2020

2018-2019

2017-2018

2016-2017



Leadership

Through Girl Scouts, sports, theatre, and music, my leadership identity began to form at the beginning of my childhood and continued to develop through high school and into college. While I had begun to define my own style of leadership before entering the Honors Program, I was not able to define key aspects of a leader until taking the **First Year Experience (FYEX)** course and starting my journey in the Honors Program. At the end of the leadership unit of the FYEX course, I wrote an essay on leadership that reflects on my personal leadership values. I learned how to identify the roles each of us play on a leadership team. For example, I need to internalize and review information presented to me before I discuss with a larger group. My classmates were diverse in their leadership styles and abilities; from them, I learned how to work with others whom have different styles of leadership from my own. Identifying my personal leadership style, and strengths and weaknesses, helped me translate my skills to campus organizations.

One of the first leadership roles I was able to test my strengths and weaknesses on was the mentorship role I had with **my first sorority little sister**. As I became a big sister, I reflected on the leadership style of my sorority big sister; I realized what worked for our relationship may not work for the relationship I was establishing with my new little sister. This process helped me practice and reflect on my roles in group settings. I learned how to use my strengths to support the strengths of others. As I advanced in positions of leadership, this skill has helped me lead more efficiently. I continued to reflect on my roles in group settings when I became the **Vice President of Membership Education** for the Zeta Kappa Chapter of Alpha Sigma Alpha. This experience allowed me to identify several key components about my leadership style. For example, I used my strengths, such as learning and input, when collaborating with the rest of the Executive Board to work towards and complete our common goal of running a well-functioning chapter. During my time as VP of Membership Education, I developed a personal philosophy of leadership and practiced it when planning and carrying through with the events I planned, such as Bid Day activities and chapter retreats. Experiencing the leadership styles of each of each of the executive board members helped me refine my style of leadership and how I applied my philosophy of leadership to leadership positions I held in the Pi Psi Chapter of **Beta Beta Beta National Biological Honors Society** (TriBeta).

I have served on the officer board for the Pi Psi chapter for almost two years. Even though I had multiple leadership positions in campus organizations by this point, I learned more about my strengths and how they work with others' skills. I also learned that an experienced leader can still doubt their abilities from time to time. This does not make the leader weak; I was able to reflect on what I felt I was doing wrong and changed how I lead to better the group. For example, communication is a large part of my personal philosophy of leadership. Everyone communicates differently, so I adjusted the frequency and type of communication aids I used when contacting the chapter and officer board. Because TriBeta is a group of young scientists, I was able to identify what part I may play in leadership roles in my professional future. My experiences at Minnesota State University, Mankato have given me a "tool box" of leadership skills that will help me long after I graduate. In my professional career I will be presented with many opportunities to lead and be a part of teams, and I am confident that I will be able to lead effectively in these roles because I built up many leadership skills in my undergraduate career.

Research

When I first joined the program, the thought of doing research freaked me out. Information about the competencies was being thrown at us and I had no clue about how I was going to start or join an undergraduate research project. Research was something I knew I needed to do, but I was not sure where to start. In **FYEX** and other undergraduate courses, such as the **Honors 401 Critical Thinking** course, I learned how to gather and evaluate information for effectiveness, and I developed the skills I would need to conduct original research.

Dr. Michael Bentley's lab focuses on finding a more biocompatible solutions to surgical implants. When I joined the lab, I happened to be in the right spot at the right time: I knew someone who was working on the project and they just happened to have an opening for another student to join. By conducting research, I saw overlaps between phenomena in the lab and what I was learning in class. Our lab is very hands-on; since day one, I was trained to complete surgeries, complete procedures, and use the Scanning Electron and Confocal microscopes.

After completing two years on the implants project, I decided to seek other experiences in undergraduate research. During the summer of 2019, I worked in Dr. Lichun Lu's lab in the Department of Orthopedic Surgery, and the Department of Biomedical Engineering and Physiology as a part of the **Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) program** at Mayo Clinic. This was my first "big girl" job, and while I was familiar with working in a lab, I was not sure what would be expected of me in a professional lab. The summer program experience helped my lab skills stay sharp over the summer and I learned how to use many different instruments to achieve a variety of research goals. Over the summer, I gained an appreciation for research in a professional setting and the experience helped me realize that I want to continue "wet-lab" research in my professional career.

Research is not just about carrying out experiments; it is also about spreading scientific knowledge. My work in Dr. Bentley's lab has introduced me to the process of grant writing and submitting abstracts for conferences. With the implants project, I have co-authored three successful grants and many successful abstracts. I have presented this research at the 2018 Health and Biomedical Sciences Summit at MNSU, 2018 and 2019 MNSU Undergraduate Research Symposiums, 2019 Posters in St. Paul, 2019 North Central Region 3 Beta Beta Beta Annual Meeting, and the 2019 National Collegiate Honors Council Conference. This spring, I will present the same research at the National Conference of Undergraduate Research in Montana, and at Posters on the Hill in Washington, D.C. Through the project at Mayo Clinic, I have been introduced to writing scientific papers, and I will be a co-author on a paper that will be published later this year. Each of these skills are important in research and I will carry them into my professional career.

Life is not about checking boxes in a carefully thought-out plan, instead it's about finding out who you are and what you are passionate about. I would encourage anyone who is thinking about their future career path to step outside their comfort zone and experience as much as you can. Through my experiences at Mayo Clinic and Minnesota State University, Mankato, (completing over 900 hours in the lab) I became more confident in my abilities as a student and as a researcher.

Global Citizenship

As I was growing up, it was important to my parents that I knew where we came from. On my dad's side of the family, I am Irish, Belgian, Dutch, and Lithuanian; on my mom's side I am Hispanic, with our roots being in Spain and Mexico. I started learning Spanish as a small child. My elementary school didn't offer language courses as part of the curriculum (while I was a student), but around the time I was in second grade, afterschool programs became available. In middle school, we were able to choose our language and I chose to stick with Spanish throughout high school and into college. Learning how to communicate in Spanish is important to me because it connects me to my living family as well as my ancestors.

I am proud of my **Spanish heritage**, but as I grew older, I began to feel out of place. Often, when I would bring up my heritage, my peers would not believe that I could be Hispanic; I have fair skin and hair, so I can see where they were coming from. I started to question my cultural identity further when I was applying for colleges. I was heavily recruited by other universities and invited to recruitment dinners specifically for Latinx students. It was then, listening to the stories of mainly first-generation college students, that I felt the most insecure about my cultural identity. I did not have the same background to which others in the room were relating: I am not the first in my family to attend a four-year university and while I grew up learning Spanish, it is not the primary language spoken in my home.

In the **Honors First Year Experience course**, I learned that being globally aware meant that I needed to understand my own experiences and their biases before I could relate to others with different cultural identities. I could examine my biases through my coursework in Spanish. I took my first two courses through the **College in the Schools** program with the University of Minnesota and I completed my language requirement through **Spanish 201** at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Through this coursework, I was able to see differences in culture as well as language barriers. For example, the Spanish being taught in classrooms is "formal" Spanish, whereas the Spanish that my family speaks is more colloquial. My mom likes the duolingo app to keep her language skills fresh but gets mad when the app tells her she's wrong. After taking Spanish coursework, I realized that while she was technically right in her answers, the app wanted her to answer more formally.

I wanted to expand my experiences in cultures outside of my own, so I took the **Honors 401 Seminar Somali and Somali American Literature, Art, and Music**. I thought this course was especially important because a large part of Minnesota's population is Somali. I did not have much experience with the Somali culture before taking this course besides limited knowledge from a high school course. This class helped me increase my interactions with those in other cultures. Almost everything we read was written by a Somali author in diaspora. The pieces we read gave me more insight about the belief and value differences between the United States and Somalia. I also learned more about our immigration process and the welfare programs or lack thereof for immigrants once they arrive in the United States. For example, in Somalia, families don't need a formal childcare facility because their family is around and supports working parents and there are few services that help immigrants find affordable childcare in the United States.

Global citizenship is becoming increasingly important in an age where everyone is connected through social networks and the media. I believe our nation, and others, has much to learn. The first way we can learn more about other cultures is to ask questions and research answers. In a global world, we need to be more aware of other groups of people. I believe I can use the viewpoints I learned from my own experiences and what I learned in class to be a global citizen in my future career. I think being culturally aware will help me be a better teammate in the lab setting and will improve my interactions with coworkers.