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Honors Capstone Portfolios

Honors Program

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Brian Swancutt Honors Portfolio

Brian Swancutt
Minnesota State University, Mankato

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Home Photo



Welcome

Activity Type Other

Hello! My name is Brian Swancutt, and I'm currently a junior at MSU-Mankato. Currently, I am pursuing a major in social work, with a minor in psychology. After finishing up here at MSU-Mankato, I am hoping to pursue a dual Master's in Public Policy/Juris Doctorate Program. I plan on finding a career where social work, public policy, and law overlap.

Mission Statement

As a student in the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato I will ensure to learn as much as I can so that I am able to effectively help as many people as I can in the future.

Resume

 [Resume.pdf](#)

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Honors Program Mission and Competencies

Mission

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

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 exhibit information literacy skills, synthesize and integrate ideas, produce original research or creative works, and contribute to knowledge.

Global Citizenship

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

Why Honors?

The Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato has had a huge overall positive impact on my undergraduate college education. Through the Honors Program, I have been able to take classes that I otherwise would not have been able to take. For instance, during my freshman year, I was able to take Exploring Personal Leadership with Professor Walters. In that class, I was able to identify what my personal leadership strengths were and how to effectively be a leader in communities in need of assistance through the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) model. Getting to learn about and explore the intricacies of the ABCD model of community development has greatly aided me in my social work studies and has caused me to look at the community and societal issues in a completely different light.

Additionally, the Honors Program has taught me how to effectively communicate with and resolve conflicts with those who see the world differently from me. During my sophomore year, I took the one credit Developing Your Mentorship Philosophy course with the then Honors Graduate Assistant Tomide. Tomide and I had a very hard time understanding each other and effectively communicating what we needed from each other, and it ended up escalating to a very contentious boiling point. After counseling from Leah, we were able to sit down, talk things out, and understand where the other was coming from. Looking back, this experience was extremely transformative for me in how I deal with interpersonal conflict with others in my life.

One last thing that the Honors Program has taught me is how to effectively express myself within leadership roles that I have been given. This year, I have had the chance to serve as Vice President of the Honors Student Body. One of the roles that I have through this position is serving on the Honors Council, which helps guide the Honors Program in the correct direction. This Council is rather large and full of very intelligent people, so it can be intimidating to express your opinion as an undergraduate student in a Zoom meeting full of PhDs. Luckily, Leah and Ginny have been very adamant in having us students make our voices heard in these meetings. It has built my confidence immensely.

Links to Leadership Subpages

[Brian Swancutt : Stonewall DFL \(myefolio.com\)](#)

[Brian Swancutt : DFL Environmental Caucus \(myefolio.com\)](#)

[Brian Swancutt : National Residence Hall Honorary \(myefolio.com\)](#)

[Brian Swancutt : Our Revolution Minnesota \(myefolio.com\)](#)

Links to Research Subpages

[Brian Swancutt : LGBTQ+ Research \(myefolio.com\)](#)

[Brian Swancutt : Undergraduate Research Symposium Experiences \(myefolio.com\)](#)

[Brian Swancutt : Honors 401: Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Research \(myefolio.com\)](#)

[Brian Swancutt : ORMN-Research \(myefolio.com\)](#)

Links to Global Citizenship Subpages

[Brian Swancutt : Stonewall DFL-Global Citizenship \(myefolio.com\)](#)

[Brian Swancutt : Global Citizenship- My Experiences \(myefolio.com\)](#)

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Leadership Experience Overview

Of all 3 competencies focused on by the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato, leadership is where I have the most experiences to reflect on. My journey in developing leadership competency started shortly after beginning my freshman year when I was elected to the Our Revolution Minnesota Board of Directors for the first time. I had previously been involved in a local chapter of Our Revolution in high school, and I was encouraged to take it a step farther by running for the non-female Congressional District 1 seat that had been left vacant.

Jumping into this role headfirst was a catalyst for further political activism leadership involvement. I learned a lot of very important lessons that first year on the board of ORMN, including how to conduct committee meetings, how to convince people to support your position, and how to accept that resistance to your idea was not a bad thing. I also learned how to conduct myself in surprising, unusual, or tough situations and how I fit into a large, complex team of other people.

These lessons were later applied in Stonewall DFL, where tough situations arose regarding a member allegedly sexually assaulting other members of the organization and how we should handle it. In this situation, I found that I could be the voice of encouragement to other board members to process how they felt about this situation and to take a position on what actions if any, we should take. This situation showed how teamwork is absolutely essential within organizations to get from processing and condemning actions to take actions to resolve the issue at hand. Many different roles are required in order for the group to process and heal to a point where we feel that we can address these accusations in a fair and reasonable way.

Teamwork has been a very prominent theme in the DFL Environmental Caucus as well. Within the DFLEC, I serve as Secretary and am in charge of writing our Weekly Update, which goes out to all members of the caucus. Getting this done required a lot of heavy lifting with other table officers, committee chairs and members, and the Board as a whole. The original plan then got thoroughly revised after some major bumps in the first rollout, thereby ensuring that I had to go through the whole process again! Thanks to all of the input and review, however, the Weekly Update has been a huge success and many caucus members are incredibly excited to see what they are doing and how they can help. After going through this process, the importance of feedback and buy-in from other people in pursuing ideas has become an incredibly important pillar of my leadership style. This theme has also been prominent within my role as VP of Service for the National Residence Hall Honorary. We often work very closely as a team and have had our fair share of emergencies to contend with because of the pandemic.

My leadership style has never been as important as it has been in the past few months since becoming the Chair of the Board of Directors for ORMN. I was elected to the chairmanship in a very hard time financially for the organization. We also have very little name recognition. This is something I have been striving to work on with some moderate success. This has required, however, some important lessons in how to lead an organization. I have found that as a leader I am very willing to take on tasks that I know that I can do and delegate other tasks to people that I know are much more capable than I am of completing them. This has been a great step forward for the organization, and much has gotten done because of it.

These four experiences have undoubtedly shaped my leadership philosophy in huge ways. As I head into graduate school and my future career, I will be equipped with the knowledge that I am a leader who is focused on finding solutions to the problems that plague my team or organization. I also very much enjoy feedback from people that I am working with and want them to be more involved in helping me solve these problems. I am looking forward to applying this leadership philosophy in future volunteer roles and in my career!

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Research Reflection

Research is not just conducted by people wearing goggles and a white lab coat; that is the most important lesson I have learned in regards to research during my time in the MNSU, Mankato Honors Program. Getting relevant experience in conducting original research and dissemination of results proved difficult, but not impossible- there are many opportunities in these areas if you know where to look!

Laying the foundation for conducting original research and disseminating your results goes through cultivating the ability to find information and synthesize the information you find into something useful and coherent. These skills are demonstrated in the creation of the [Our Revolution Minnesota Legislative Platform](#). Creating a legislative platform is a game of relevant information from trusted sources, citing where your information has come from and putting this information together to form something completely new and different in order to educate the members of your organization. Many of these skills are also demonstrated in the LGBTQ+ research projects that I have done since arriving at MNSU, Mankato.

After gaining the skills of information literacy and information synthesis, conducting your original research and disseminating your results is much easier. The skills required to conduct original research can be demonstrated through the Honors 401/499: [Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Research](#) class that I took during the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. The project that I worked on was entitled "Attitudes Towards Mask Usage Amongst the MNSU, Mankato Community." For this project, my group and I went through the steps of the research process (creating a hypothesis, conducting a literature review, submitting our project to the IRB, etc.) and were able to advance knowledge in an area that has not garnered much research interest until recently. We also presented this research at the MNSU, Mankato Undergraduate Research Symposium in the Spring of 2021.

This was not the first time I had presented at the Undergraduate Research Symposium, however. In the Spring of 2020, I took an independent study where I chose to look at the history of LGBTQ+ labor law in the United States. I conducted research, put together a presentation, and submitted it to the URS. In the reflection about this experience, I talk about what the differences have been presenting alone versus presenting with a group at a research conference. I have also been able to research many other LGBTQ+ issues during my time at MNSU, and all of these projects can be found [here](#).

Overall, I have learned that research is so much more than what it is made out to be. Research can embody more than mixing chemicals; it can be writing an original story, interviewing people to find common themes and problems among different groups, or creating and distributing surveys. In the future, I will apply this mindset to other areas in my life and remember that not everything is exactly what it seems to be; sometimes, you have to dig a little deeper.

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Global Citizenship Reflection

Throughout my life, diversity has been something that has often been treated as a normal, everyday part of my life. My extended family is quite racially diverse, and we happen to be very diverse when it comes to our sexual orientations and political affiliations as well. I was taught by my family to acknowledge that people come from different backgrounds and different cultures, but to still treat them as human beings.

The most impactful experience that I have had in terms of realizing the complex and diverse world that we live in comes through my experience with being involved on the Board of Directors for Stonewall DFL, the LGBTQ+ community caucus of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party. Stonewall DFL has taught me that if we are to remember anything from our diversity training after "Do not be (insert whatever -ist/phobic you desire), it is the concept of intersectionality. Examining the complex interplays between different forms and levels of oppression is something we must strive to better understand if we are to be better global citizens.

Additionally, my experience as a gay man has shaped how I view the world in drastic ways, considering how privileged I am within the LGBTQ+ community. It has been intriguing and heartbreaking to hear the stories of struggle within the LGBTQ+ community and how I cannot really relate to many of the struggles that most queer folks go through. This goes to show that people within groups can, and often do, have more differences than people from different groups.

Another powerful experience I have had is through the [Language Partner Program](#) here at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I was able to participate in this program during the first semester of my freshman year, and I was able to learn all about different cultures and meet different people all around the world. Comparing and contrasting different cultures was an eye-opening experience during my first semester of undergrad.

Lastly, I have gained an appreciation for different cultures through taking [American Sign Language](#). American Sign Language has taught me that you can speak without ever using your vocal cords and that there is a huge range of diversity in just how we communicate and interact with the rest of the world. ASL also shows that most of how we communicate truly is through our bodies, our faces, and how we decide to move (or not).

In the future, I hope to take these experiences and apply them to my career in public policy. Understanding how deeply one must think about how issues affect people facing multiple levels of oppression is certainly a skill that is needed in the area of public policy right now. Additionally, cultural sensitivity is something that needs to be considered in the public policy arena as well. I feel that these experiences have given me these skills in abundance so that I will be the best public policy practitioner that I can be.

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