Honors Takes Recruiting To A New Level

University Honors Program Associate Director Chris Wiles does not have to imagine very hard what it is like to be in a prospective Honors student’s shoes – because he has been there himself.

Chris, who heads up recruitment for the Honors Program, was a high-achieving Kansas high school student, like many prospective Honors students. He had good test scores and a high GPA, and a strong desire to go to the best possible college. Like many prospective Honors students, Chris thought his college search would lead him out of state, but after a long and thorough search, he was convinced KU offered everything he was looking for. When Chris talks to prospective Honors students and their parents, he knows where they are coming from, both literally and figuratively.

With a recent Rhodes Scholar, a Truman Scholar, and multiple Goldwater Scholars, it is easy for students to see what they can achieve at KU.

“All you have to do is show prospective students what they can be. It’s very honest advertising,” he says.

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The extent of involvement by our Honors students is impressive. Emma Halling, former Student Body Vice President, was recently called on to serve as interim Student Body President after the spring 2014 election results were invalidated. (See the story about Emma on page 3.) In the September elections, Miranda Wagner was voted in as Student Body Vice President; in this role, she will preside over the University Student Senate. Jake Doerr and Emma Halling were recently asked to serve as the two undergraduate student representatives on the KU Sexual Assault Task Force; they will work with members of the administration to review both policy implementation and assault prevention. Seven of this year’s 10 ExCEL award nominees and both award recipients, Ellie Eastes and Graham Naasz, are KU Honors students.

Honors students continue to achieve at the highest level and are deeply involved at KU and beyond. Over the past year, Ryan Limbocker won a prestigious Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship thanks in part to his research contributions to the field of neurodegenerative diseases; KU’s three other nominees received Honorable Mentions. KU also put forth four nominees for the Harry S. Truman Scholarship, all of whom were selected as finalists. Among the Truman finalists were Leigh Loving, who founded the Jayhawk Health Initiative at KU, and Micah Melia, the current executive director of the KU Center for Community Outreach.

The University Honors Program continues to grow toward our goal of serving 1,600 students. In this planned growth, we have not lowered our high standards for admission. In fact, we have redoubled our recruiting efforts and have been able to attract more extremely bright and talented students from across the state and around the world. (For more about recruitment, see the story about Chris Wiles on page 6.) Increased funding from the Provost’s Office and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has made it possible to support this growth with additional staff, faculty fellows and seminar instructors.

We are working hard to extend the incredible academic enrichment that has been central to the University Honors Program for decades to our expanding student population. As part of this effort, we are making sure we have the depth and breadth of Honors courses to meet the needs of our student base. We are also carefully coordinating Honors advising to ensure we help students make the absolute most of their KU education, expanding co-curricular offerings with timely and engaging presentations and discussions, and increasing opportunities for transformative experiences.

This past year, we were able to make such experiences possible for 166 students through Honors Opportunity Awards. These grants typically range from $250 to $1,000, and they often make the difference between a student studying abroad, attending a conference, engaging in service...or not. One of my primary goals is to expand the amount and number of opportunity awards to match the growth in our student body. Please consider using the enclosed envelope to help students reach their goals, or contribute online at www.honors.ku.edu. Your support could help send a student to Bolivia to improve sanitary facilities, to Panama to serve in a medical clinic, or to one of the other thirty countries that were destinations over this past year.

BRYAN YOUNG
Having moved away from Kansas before she started high school, KU was not on Emma Halling’s list of potential colleges – nor was any other public university, for that matter.

It wasn’t until her mother “guilted” her into a visit to KU that she even gave it a second thought. But after learning what the University Honors Program had to offer, she decided then and there to choose KU.

“I’m a ferocious planner, so to change my mind like that doesn’t ever happen. I didn’t even finish my other applications,” she says.

Now a senior majoring in American Studies and Women’s Studies while serving as acting student body president, Emma has never looked back. She says that her advisers and fellow students in the Honors Program have pushed her and inspired her.

“Every time I’ve had an idea, I’ve had the support of people connecting me with opportunities to make it happen. I never felt like I shouldn’t pursue something I wanted to pursue,” she says.

Emma’s first impressions of the Honors Program have been validated. “I liked the ability to go to a big campus and that being in the Honors Program would mean I would get personal, private attention for the things I wanted to do,” she says.

“Every time I’ve had an idea, I’ve had support and people connecting me with making that happen. Emma became involved with student government her sophomore year, and she has cajoled many other Honors students to run for office and be involved. She was elected student body vice president for her junior year. This fall, she was appointed acting student body president after an election scandal in the spring resulted in nullified results.

She has been outspoken within the University community about her desire to make student safety a priority, both on and off campus.

“I had people around me who also had a sense of civic duty and participation, so that rubbed off on me. Now, I see my role as doing that for the underclassmen,” she says.

This fall, Emma is taking the LSAT with plans to pursue a master’s degree in public policy and a J.D. She also is a KU nominee for the prestigious Rhodes, Marshall and Mitchell scholarships.

Although she doesn’t know exactly how she wants to work with reproductive health care rights, she is considering work in non-profit advocacy or litigation.

Emma certainly has left her imprint on KU with her leadership, and she will continue to blaze a strong academic trail with the foundation of her Honors Program experiences.
MEET RYAN ENDRES

Ryan Endres, far right, with fellow interns at NASA’s Jet-Propulsion Laboratory in Los Angeles, California.

Look! Up in the sky! It’s a bird, it’s a plane…it’s maybe one of the top-secret projects Honors student Ryan Endres has been working on. Ryan is a University Honors Program senior aerospace engineering major and SELF Engineering Fellow from DeSoto who has soared above other aerospace engineers with his achievements—not just at KU, but nationwide.

In 2013, Ryan was named one of Aviation Week’s Twenty20s, one of 20 top aerospace engineering students in the United States. His internship at NASA’s jet-propulsion lab and his work with Engineers Without Borders, including a mission trip to Bolivia, helped set him apart.

This past summer, he had an internship at Boeing Phantom Works, the advanced military side of the company, where he worked alongside MIT and Cornell students and Boeing engineers on top-secret projects with advanced missile systems.

Ryan credits the Honors Program with propelling him to great learning experiences, both in and outside of the classroom.

“I did well in high school and had a good ACT, but I went to those Honors classes and all of a sudden, I probably was the dumbest person in those classes,” he says. “I was in a new territory where the people were the best of the best. It made me push myself.”

He looked at many other colleges thinking KU was just too close to home. After attending KU’s summer engineering program, though, he learned KU’s engineering program can match any across the country—which spoke to his pocketbook.

“KU is a top-flight academic institution, and yet I don’t have to pay an arm and a leg to get a degree,” he says. “I applied for the Honors Program because I wanted the opportunity to have experiences that would push me to learn as much as possible and give me the opportunity to be successful.”

Ryan says his experience with the Honors Program and mission trip to Bolivia helped him land his summer 2013 internship in the jet-propulsion lab at NASA in Los Angeles. He worked with the Mars Curiosity Rover team doing data analysis and created a database where the researchers could access data streams more efficiently. In the fall of his junior year, an eye infection from the previous spring flared up and Ryan underwent a corneal transplant in his left eye. Luckily, that did not prevent him from being able to pursue his favorite pastime: running. He trained and ran an ultra-marathon, 45 miles, this past April.

“I was in a new territory where the people were the best of the best. It made me push myself.

Now, Ryan hardly has time to run as he pursues long- and short-term projects ahead of his graduation next spring. He serves on Student Senate and was elected CEO for his Engineering 510 project. He hopes to study abroad in the Netherlands this spring—ideally using an Honors Program Opportunity Award—and, with the support and guidance of Honors Program’s Anne Wallen, he is applying for several national scholarships.

“KU’s Honors Program has allowed me to be in the right position at the right time, and good things are happening,” he says.

He already has multiple job offers on hold while he awaits word on the national scholarships. So either way, he is cleared for take-off from KU.

Even the sky might not be the limit for Ryan.
One of the opportunities on this page can be the spark that ignites an Honors student’s passion and life’s work. Honors students rely on private gifts to fund these transformative experiences.

More than 160 students received Opportunity Awards in 2013. Please help even more Honors students discover and realize their ambitions.

Kindly use the enclosed envelope to mail your gift, or give online at honors.ku.edu.

Honors students of today and tomorrow thank you for your support!
How has Chris enticed all of these high-caliber students to KU with the Honors Program? With personal attention, lots of data, and show-and-tell opportunities.

He begins recruiting students when they are sophomores and juniors in high school, aiming for as many one-on-one meetings as possible. He arranges for them to come to campus, meet faculty and tour research labs. Whatever they might be interested in, Chris works to connect them.

In the meantime, he works closely with KU’s Office of Admissions to reach high schools all across the state and the region. He has a database that tracks every high school and its past, present and prospective Honors students.

“We’re the most data-driven office in recruitment, outside of Admissions,” he says.

Even with the one-on-one meetings with Chris or Honors Admissions Representative, Natasha Kothari, often it is the achievements of current and former Honors students that seal the deal for prospective students.

“There is no doubt successful students lead others here,” he says. Many prospective students know of a fellow high school alumnus/a who came to the Honors Program and did great things, like performing at Carnegie Hall or starring on a championship debate team. Those prospective students know what Honors students are capable of.

All you have to do is show prospective students what they can be. It’s very honest advertising.

Other prospective students want to find out. Chris has expanded a recruitment event specifically for admitted Honors students. The event is attended by many KU Honors faculty and students, who give prospective students and their families a chance to see and hear what awaits them in the Honors Program. The first such event drew 250 prospective students and family members. The event has grown so successful that it was split into separate fall and spring receptions. In 2014, nearly 1,000 prospective students and family members attended.

Once a student has committed to KU – ideally relatively early in his or her senior year in high school – Chris works to involve them in college academics or research before they even start classes.

“I’m very excited to see a student that applies early. We’ve got their entire senior year to explore and get acclimated. We end up having dozens of students placed in labs for research their senior year; some work in labs the summer before classes start. I think we give our students a huge jump,” he says.

Although it is hard to believe, Chris stays in close contact with the students once they are enrolled. He connects many of them with faculty and advisers in their fields of interest and pushes them to seek out new experiences. Because he has spent time with them during the recruiting process, he has a knack for knowing what they might benefit from or want to do.

“So many students discover an interest that they didn’t even know...
Honors Program student Leigh Loving received the inaugural Kathleen McCluskey-Fawcett Outstanding Contribution Award last spring. She is pictured above with the award’s namesake, McCluskey-Fawcett, and KU College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Dean Danny Anderson. Loving, now a senior pre-med major, founded the Jayhawk Health Initiative, which has conducted medical missions to South America for both KU undergraduates and medical students. The award, established by the University Honors Program Advisory Board in honor of McCluskey-Fawcett, who retired as director in January, recognizes students who demonstrate leadership, innovation and engagement in the Honors Program. To contribute to the award fund, return the enclosed envelope or donate online at www.honors.ku.edu.

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they had,” he says. “That is an advantage we have at KU over other places – we use our network to help them build their network.”

When he is not recruiting, advising or otherwise helping Honors students find their passions, Chris works on the 20 acres of land he and his wife, Amy Reif, own outside of Lawrence. They designed and built a house two years ago and are in the process of restoring the land to natural prairie. He also enjoys rebuilding and restoring old cars.
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The leaders of the future thank you.