

Honors College Celebrates 25th Anniversary

The Honors College developed because of faculty recognition that the best students at UIC were lacking the support and intellectual challenge necessary to keep them motivated. A group of faculty, led by John Curtis Johnson and Eric Gislason, pushed the university administration to provide such students with improved honors courses, programming and more comprehensive advising. Their proposal was to develop an honors 'college' which would more adequately address the needs of talented students.

The Honors College was approved in time to open in August 1982, with an enrollment of 410 students. It combined honors core classes and the James Scholars, who served as the foundation of the student body. These initiatives, combined with new faculty fellows and student programming, resulted in a community where students and faculty could interact and learn together.

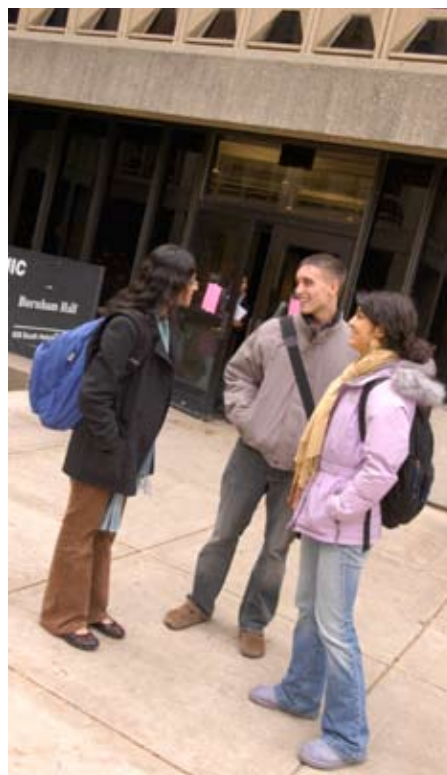
Today the Honors College enrolls more than 1,300 students. Recent developments include honors housing, upper-level honors seminars and a student leadership council. Test score and GPA requirements for admission have been eliminated. Instead, the college seeks all students who are active learners, interested in making a contribution to the honors community.

We will mark the 25th anniversary with a series of events during the 2007-2008 academic year, and invite you to re-connect with the Honors College to celebrate the students, faculty, staff and alumni who have made it a center for knowledge, innovation and community at UIC.

Contribute to UIC's 25th Anniversary Celebration

We want to hear about your favorite UIC Honors College memories. We welcome your recollections—and photos—of your time at UIC. Submit your memories to hcalumni@uic.edu.

Watch your mail for invitations to come back to campus and help us celebrate this milestone with the UIC community.



Keerthi Ranganath, Justin Fiala and Aisan Raisdana gather outside Burnham Hall. The Honors College moved into Burnham Hall after it was renovated in 1997.

Outstanding Students Recognized

FULBRIGHT FELLOWSHIP

Julia Geynisman, an Honors College senior majoring in biological sciences with a minor in Jewish studies, has received a Fulbright Fellowship to Israel. Geynisman was one of 10 students selected nationwide to research in Israel for nine months.

She was co-founder and served as president of the Jewish-Arab-Muslim Student Society and interned at the Jewish Community Relations Council Israel Initiative. She was also a research assistant for Andre Kajdacsy-Balla's anatomic pathology lab, and for professor Sandra Sufian in the humanities department, both at the UIC College of Medicine.

A Fulbright Fellowship grant winner receives round-trip transportation, book and research allowances and, if applicable, tuition for academic classes or language and orientation courses. Upon returning from Israel, Geynisman plans to attend medical school and complete a joint degree in medicine and health policy.



Julia Geynisman

RIDDLE PRIZE FOR OUTSTANDING GRADUATING SENIOR FROM UIC

Liat Shetret, an Honors College senior studying political science, earned the 2007 Donald and Leah Riddle Prize—awarded to the most outstanding senior at UIC each year.

Shetret is co-founder of the Jewish-Arab-Muslim Student Society, which encourages dialogue and friendship among Jewish and Muslim students at UIC. She is active in research, was a member of the Honors College Advisory Board, and a contributing writer for *The Ampersand*—the Honors College student newsletter. She is the winner of a Phi Kappa Phi Graduate Fellowship, The Young People for Fellowship and was an Honorable Mention on the 2007 *USA-Today* All Academic Team.

After graduation, Liat plans to pursue her master's degree in international affairs at Columbia University or her master's in public administration at New York University.



Liat Shetret



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Alumni News

SAMYUKT BAJAJ, Class of 2002

Graduated from DePaul University College of Law in December 2005 and was invited to join the Federal Trade Commission's Honors Attorney Program in Washington, D.C. He works in the Bureau of Competition's Mergers IV section.

SONYA KENKARE, Class of 2005

Won a Doris Duke Clinical Research Fellowship for the 2007-2008 academic year and will be studying pediatric plastic surgery at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

JORDAN PEKEVSKI, Class of 2005

Is currently a graduate student at the University of South Dakota in the clinical psychology doctorate program and is completing a specialization in Disaster Mental Health.

GARY L.C. RESCHAK, Class of 1977, James Scholar

Recently became a Certified Nephrology Nurse and has been in nursing administration at Northwestern Memorial Hospital since 1992. In March 2004, he returned to clinical practice as a staff nurse in the Inpatient Dialysis Unit.

MATTHEW ROSENBERG, Class of 1980, James Scholar

Is retired from a career as a plastic surgeon and now spends his time volunteering at his children's elementary school where he is also a substitute elementary teacher. He also coaches little league baseball.

MARK STREFNER, Class of 1994

Lives in Downers Grove, Illinois with his wife and two small children. He is a partner in a wealth management firm in South Barrington, Illinois.

J. MICHAEL WATT, Class of 1974, James Scholar

Lives in San Rafael, California and owns his own consulting firm which helps public hospitals, clinics and academic medical centers with strategic and program planning issues.

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UIC students sign a card with well wishes for the children of Uganda as a part of the Project: FOCUS exhibit.

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UIC HONORS COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

2007

HONORABLE MENTIONS

The Newsletter for Alumni and Friends of UIC's Honors College

Honors Students Focus On Ugandan Orphans

If a picture can describe what words can't convey, the photos in "Life Through the Eyes of Ugandan Youth" tell a poignant story of everyday life, family, community, struggle and joy in the face of adversity. The photo exhibit, held in February in UIC's Montgomery Ward Lounge was the first major display on behalf of Project: Focus.

"The photos tell the story of the youth of Mulago slum in Kampala" said Harish Patel, a senior in the Honors College.

Patel, classmate Daniel Yang, also a senior in the college, and graduate students Aura Brickler and Jennie Oberkrom spent last summer working with aid and charity groups in Uganda, where they helped young residents of Mulago describe—through photographs—their joys and sorrows.

"We weren't journalists trying to document anything," says Patel. "We let the kids tell us what they wanted to tell us."

The project started when Patel received a copy of the 2003 documentary "Invisible Children: Rough Cut," a film by California college students that focuses on child victims of

See **UGANDAN ORPHANS** inside

Honors Alumni Group Up and Running



UIC Honors College Alumni Group members (from left to right) Valerie Butron, Aaron Poe, Dorothy Mench, Andres Hernandez, John Erickson, Cyndi Schu, Yonna Alexander

www.hc.uic.edu/alumni or contact Kate Knicker at kknicker@uic.edu or (312) 413-4764.



Part of the Project:FOCUS exhibit, two boys from the Mulago slum in Uganda.



From the Dean

The past year in the Honors College could easily be referred to as a year of making connections. The most significant one has been the recognition of the Honors College and James Scholar alumni as a UIC Alumni Constituency Group. This has been a long time in the works and will help us to better serve you, our alumni.

As you read *Honorable Mentions* you will see that our alumni group is busy planning events to help keep you connected to the college. We're also developing an event in honor of the 25th anniversary of the college, and we want alumni to be a part of the celebration.

This year for the first time we have enjoyed the support of alumni in interviewing applicants to the college. Their experience and good sense has been a tremendous help and we look forward to increased participation next year.

It has been a true pleasure to meet many of you for the first time, to hear where you are in your lives, and to have a chance to show off our current facilities. Perhaps most important is that the current students, through interaction with you, get a glimpse of the future and a strong sense of pride.

We hope you will keep connecting with us.

Sincerely,

Lon S. Kaufman
Dean

Alumna Finds Her Passion With Teach For America

UIC Honors College alumna Joanne Lerman was selected for Teach for America shortly before she graduated from UIC in 2005. After completing an intensive summer training program, she has spent the last two years teaching high school social studies. Although she never considered teaching before applying to the program, she now feels that she found her calling.

"I was not really interested in teaching. I had applied to law school and saw Teach for America as a back-up plan. It really wasn't until my interview that I realized that I might have found exactly what I was looking for."

The goal of the Teach for America program is to place some of the best and brightest college graduates from around the U.S. in the classrooms of some of the most underserved communities in the country. While the purpose is to improve the quality of education in these underserved areas and attract bright students to the field of education, the program has developed a reputation as one of the most highly regarded experiences for graduating college students.

Based on her skill set, the needs of the school, and geographic preferences, Lerman was assigned to Miami Northwestern Senior High Community School in Miami, Florida. She has enjoyed her time in Miami, "I love it, mostly because of how active I am in my community and my school. Being young and fresh out of school allows me so much time to dedicate to my students. Whether it's a tournament, soccer game, or our countless after-school activities these kids constantly remind me why I'm here in Miami and why my job is so meaningful."

Lerman has seven other Teach for America corps members at her school and draws on them for instructional ideas or support on her tough days.

As she wraps up her two-year commitment with the Teach for American program, Lerman has decided that she will continue teaching—she accepted a teaching position at Noble Street Charter Schools in Chicago, and will continue to teach high school social studies for a few more years, until hopefully moving on to school leadership.

She highly recommends Teach for America to others. "I think that any organization that is capable of mobilizing youth and teaching us that we can make changes in the lives of others is phenomenal. I feel so incredibly blessed that I was selected for the program and given the opportunity because I have found my passion in life."

For more information on Teach for America, visit www.teachforamerca.org. To contact Lerman directly, e-mail her at joanne.lerman@corps2005.tfanet.org



Joanne Lerman poses with her student Kenneth Roberson and Rudolf F. Crew, the Superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools.



Joanne Lerman, far right, poses with the Northwestern Miami Youth Council Community Service Group.

Alumnus Sells His Soul On eBay, and Book On Amazon

Honors College alumnus Hemant Mehta (LAS 2004) wasn't trying to write a book, it just happened.

As a UIC student, Mehta, an atheist, founded the student group Students Without Religious Dogma. His interest in atheism, and the impact of the secular movement on the world around him, inspired him to embark on an interesting social experiment after graduation. What would happen if he sold his soul on eBay?

In January 2006 Mehta posted his auction on eBay, offering to attend the worship service of the winning bidder's choosing. The auction ended with a winning bid of \$504 from a former minister, Jim Henderson. A partnership developed, with Henderson asking Mehta to visit more churches. Mehta then posted his reflections on the experience on Henderson's Web site, www.off-the-map.org.

The auction brought on a flurry of coverage in the national media, and soon, a book deal. Mehta was approached by WaterBrook Press, a Christian book publisher and an imprint of Random House. With the addition of several more visits to prominent churches, his book was born.

"Considering that I never thought I would ever do something like this, it was an incredible experience starting from scratch ... to holding the final published copy of the book."

Mehta also writes about his time as a student at UIC and how he became an atheist. Now the chair of the board of directors for the Secular Student Alliance, Mehta speaks to various groups around the country about his conversion to atheism, his church-going experiences and the secular movement. He is currently pursuing his master's degree in math education at DePaul University.

Read more about Mehta by visiting his Web site www.friendlyathiest.org. His book is available for purchase at Amazon.com and in most major bookstores. Mehta's book launched in Chicago with a reading and signing at Barbara's bookstore on the UIC's south campus.

New Honors Housing To Open

UIC is creating a new generation of campus housing options for UIC students. Stukel Towers, a series of four attached towers, is the newest residence hall facility to be built on the UIC campus. Scheduled for completion this summer, the new complex will house 740 students, and includes state-of-the-art computing facilities, classrooms, a dining hall and a meeting and conference center.

The UIC Honors College is front and center in this new development with the third largest tower, designated as the future home of the honors housing community. Student response has been very positive, with dozens of students already applying for places in the new facility.

Students will live in cluster-style arrangements, with several individual or double rooms sharing a center common room with couches, televisions and study tables. The college will develop special programs for the students living in campus housing.

Watch the construction of Stukel Towers live—visit www.housing.uic.edu/news/jst.html for updated photography and live video of the construction process.



This rendering shows how the Stukel Towers complex will look upon completion in fall 2007.



Hemant Mehta

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Uganda's decades-long civil war in the north. The two decided they had to go to Uganda to help.

"The film started off a chain of questions about my own apathy, culture, conscious repression about thinking and acknowledging these things," said Yang. "It forced me either to consciously ignore what I'd just seen, or do something about it."

Both students chose to do something about what they saw. They spent time working with UIC faculty and conducting independent research to learn more about Uganda. They also raised more than \$9,000 for airfare to Uganda, primarily through what they called their



UIC students and faculty gather in the Montgomery Ward Lounge to view and discuss the photos on exhibit from Project: FOCUS

"Bear Hugs" campaign, during which they offered free hugs on Michigan Avenue.

Yang arrived in Uganda first, as part of a group conducting research on people with tuberculosis. Soon, the concept of the children taking photographs was born. Inspired by an Israeli photojournalist who shared a similar project from India entitled "Kids with Cameras," it seemed logical to allow the children of Uganda to

document their plight themselves. Yang emailed his colleagues who collected cameras and film, and brought the supplies with them to Uganda a few weeks later.

Working with an interdenominational Christian organization called Focus Uganda, which helps children in Kampala's Mulago slum, 16 young people aged 11 to 21 were selected to participate. More than 2,000 pictures were taken.

Upon returning to Chicago the students worked with friends with photography expertise to develop the photos and create a display. The students held receptions and interactive events to show off the photos, and captured the attention and imagination of the campus. The photographs were sold to raise the money to provide 16 students at Mulago with school uniforms and supplies.

Titling their initiative Project: FOCUS, the students are now moving beyond the exhibit to raise more money for students in Uganda. This summer, Project: FOCUS will be undertaking a new program as three of the original members, along with filmmakers, photographers, a sound engineer and other activists travel to Ssamanya Hill, an orphan center in Uganda where HIV/AIDS has left thousands of children without parents.

Working with Participatory Action for Rural Development Initiative, a local community-based organization, the team will facilitate a multi-media project to provide a creative outlet for these youth, with the long-term goal of establishing a comprehensive community center at Ssamanya Hill.

Patel, who plans a career in law or public administration, and Yang, who is considering medicine or public health, say this is the time of their life when they can follow their passion for adventure and the desire to make an impact on the lives of others.

"We're idealistic," said Yang, "but we've impressed upon a lot of people the power of our idealism and our intentions. We just knew what we wanted and were going to do it. And it happened."

For more information on Project: FOCUS, visit www.projectfocus.org

Update Your Information!

It's easier than ever to update your information. Send your contact information to hcalumni@uic.edu and be sure to include your news and updates which may be included in the next edition of *Honorable Mentions*.



New Web Site

The Honors College is pleased to announce a new and improved Web site.

Visit www.hc.uic.edu to find information on events, the alumni association, online giving, and more.



HONORS ALUMNI HELP SELECT CLASS OF 2011

The Honors College now invites all prospective freshmen to campus to interview for admission to the college. Nearly 600 students and their families come to the campus, which lets students connect with the campus and get a preview of Honors College life.

"We look for students that fit our ideal of intelligence, engagement and excitement about learning, but the students interview us as well," says Dean Lon Kaufman. "They use the meeting as a chance to see if the Honors College is a good fit for their goals."

Honors alumni are invited to help interview prospective high school seniors from around Illinois and identify scholarship candidates. It is a great opportunity for alumni to re-connect with the Honors College, and for James Scholars, to learn what honors life is like in 2007.

Volunteer Dorothy Mench, a 1972 James Scholar alumna, participated in the interviews. "It was interesting and fun to interview the students. In addition to each being very bright, I found them to be altruistic and very gracious. I enjoyed having the opportunity to give back to UIC."

If you are interested in participating in the interview process, contact the college at hcalumni@uic.edu.