HONORS TODAY

INTERNSHIPS

How to dive deep into your passion, literally.
Introducing the Class of 2021!
The fall semester is the perfect time to celebrate new beginnings, and this issue of Honors Today is no exception. We welcomed our UB Honors Class of 2021 with a redesigned kickoff event on the North Campus — featuring icebreakers, UB food trucks and “Meet your Advisor” sessions — the Friday before classes began. (See photo, left and our back cover.) We are also excited to introduce our new director, Dr. Dalia Muller, who brings her dynamic leadership style and a unique twist on an old tradition to the Honors College (pages 10 and 11). We would love for you to become involved in some of our newest alumni initiatives — perhaps by hosting an alumni “Coffee and Conversation” with current students in our Don Schack Student Lounge, or by speaking with prospective students and parents at one of UB’s 360° Open Houses, or even by sharing your story or news in a future edition of Honors Today. Drop me a line at jseabury@buffalo.edu if you’d like to share in the future happenings of the Honors College!
Honors Scholars Compete on NBC's "Spartan Challenge"

A team of four UB math students, including two Honors Scholars, made a heroic run to the semifinals of NBC’s “Spartan: Ultimate Team Challenge,” which aired this past July.

Dubbed the Mathletes, the team included sophomore math major Trevor Bernard; Chris Komin, a senior majoring in math and film study; Zoe Herrick, a junior Honors Scholar majoring in math and biomedical engineering; and Ellen Lutnick, a junior Honors Scholar who switched her major from math to exercise science. The team was led by elite Spartan athlete Kyle “Wooch” Graf.

The team of four UB math students fell short of winning the $250,000 prize after being eliminated from the competition during a semifinal round that was decided in the closing seconds. Despite the loss, the Mathletes have plenty of reasons to hold their heads high. The youngest team in the competition with an average age of 20, the students were billed as the underdogs at the start of the show’s second season.

The competition series emphasizes teamwork, often requiring contestants to work together to problem-solve instead of relying on individual strength and athleticism.

“We went in as friends but we came out as family,” said Herrick. “You don’t go through an experience like that without doing some major bonding. There is so much trust involved in being a team and working through the obstacles.”

The team’s bond was tested before the semifinals, when Lutnick dislocated her shoulder during the second round of the series. Doctors cleared Lutnick to compete on race night, but participating at less than full strength might have placed her team at a disadvantage.

Lutnick offered to sit the round out, allowing the Mathletes to substitute in another player. Her teammates refused.

“We weren’t going to break up the family. Even if she wasn’t 100 percent, for better or for worse, we finish as a team,” Herrick said.

After crossing the finish line, the Mathletes locked arms for one final huddle.

During the embrace, Herrick told her team, the UB community and the millions of people watching around the nation: “We didn’t beat them, but we showed them exactly who we are.”

>> Marcene Robinson

Alumni Memories

I loved living in Roosevelt while at UB. So many fun times! Before exams it was definitely “Geek City” with nonstop studying. After that, it was back to the good times.

Karen Kraeger, 1988
In the summer of 2008, I packed up my car after graduation and headed west to Montana. I grew up in upstate New York and while I was an undergraduate at UB, my mom had moved to Montana. It seemed like a nice enough place and I was ready for a change of scenery. I already had a position lined up from my junior-year internship and that job security gave me the courage to make the move.

Fast forward four years, and I was married and traveling in Ireland and Italy with my husband, Adam. We are fascinated by old things and so these places appealed to us; in hindsight I think we were also both searching for a new career direction. My aunt, who lives in Italy, kept insisting that we “needed to do something with barley.” Adam grew up on a 1,200-acre crop farm in Montana and in fact we had already started “doing something with barley” on a very small scale in our home brewing beer experiments.

Fast forward another five years to today: My husband and I are living in Montana, brewing beer at our own microbrewery (nanobrewery if we’re being specific), Dunluce Brewing, and we have two beautiful sons.

There are many factors that got us to this point. Certainly, our trip to Ireland and Italy sparked our interest in turning our home brewing into a business. More importantly, when we bought our house in 2011 it turned out that there was a winery tucked off the road across the street. The owners of the winery became our friends and we thought, “This looks good.” We agreed to start small and stay centered on what we were passionate about. Our mission became “Family. Farm. Fermented.”

Even before we had our children, we knew that we did not want to commit to anything that gave us less time with our family. We were fortunate because my mother and stepfather offered us space at their farm to brew. In 2015, we welcomed our first son, Caleb, to our family and sixteen months later (May 2017) our second son, Noland, was born. Being able to farm and grow barley in this family-centered setting is ultimately what keeps us most motivated.

From the outset, barley has been the cornerstone of our business. Tradition and history are very important to me and Adam, so we became interested in a heritage variety of barley used in the Czech Republic. When we started in 2013, we thought it would be simple to buy seeds and plant them. After much research we discovered that this particular seed was only available from the USDA and only in quantities of approximately 100 seeds. Undeterred and with the help of family, we planted a 4x4 plot of barley that is now an 8-acre parcel. We expanded our farming efforts to include hops and planted seven varieties. Even though there are dozens of types of hops, we craft our beer recipes using only these seven homegrown varieties. We believe that these limitations on our ingredients force us to be creative in our beer making. The “fermented” part of our guiding statement is fairly obvious: We like beer and it is fun to make it!
Our business and our family are constantly evolving. We are still learning about fermentation science and farming. Many times we have gotten accustomed to one type of equipment, only to realize that there’s some other more effective setup that will allow us to better keep up with demand. Our community in Mineral County, Montana, is small but we have been supported by a lot of great people in the last few years.

People say that you should find your passion and work to be great at it. I like this advice, although I do think that it’s harder to find your passion than it is to become great at it. My life experiences have taught me that it is critical to be persistent in that search, even when what you thought you were passionate about changes. In the fall of my senior year at UB, I decided to drop my accounting major. While I was doing well in accounting, I came to realize that I didn’t even like it, let alone feel passionate about it. I talked to my Honors College advisor, and it was equally clear to him that this was the right decision for me. He helped me figure out what I needed to do for my final year at UB and sent me on my way feeling supported and headed in a better direction. This assistance is one of the things I most appreciate about my time at UB.

Ultimately, I graduated with a BS in business administration, finance and a BA in social sciences interdisciplinary, legal studies. I felt fortunate that I had selected a school with so many academic options and, after hearing multiple stories of student loan debt, I am particularly grateful for the affordable education that the UB Honors College provided to me.

If you find yourself traveling cross-country on the Interstate 90 — the trusty road that dropped us off at our campus and now passes by our brewery — stop by and have a pint and we can reminisce about UB together.

> Lauren O’Shea-Hauge, Class of 2008

---

A Practice with Deception

When people think of a psychiatrist, they might think of a tweedy older gentleman with a beard and glasses, or a maternal woman, hair half up in a bun, wearing a warm smile, sitting in a neat, calm office with a Scandinavian-looking chair from Design Within Reach — a couch, the place where one’s deepest fears are divulged and the therapeutic magic happens. Where I practice psychiatry could not be further from this old-fashioned (but still prevalent) setup.

I spend my days running around a general hospital with over a thousand beds, treating patients and supervising residents on the medical wards, in the emergency room and in the outpatient clinic. On the day I’m writing this article, some of my patients have included a woman who developed postpartum psychosis two weeks after giving birth to her third child; a woman with renal cancer who was prescribed a steroid that caused her to become paranoid; a man who attempted to hang himself shortly before he was to go to prison; a woman who, after flying to Boston, was apprehended at the airport after she was noted to be self-dialoguing; and a man who unintentionally overdosed on heroin and fentanyl and who now wants assistance with opioid detox and long-term addiction treatment. No two days are the same.

While a psychiatrist becomes an expert diagnostician and learns a wide range of therapeutic modalities, one of the less advertised skills I didn’t realize I’d be developing is the ability to “think dirty.” Some colleagues and I have co-authored a series of articles on working with patients who deceive. Now, most patients lie — not about truly important details, like whether they’re allergic to a medication — but usually about subtler things that may or may not be relevant, like whether they missed a dose of medication, or whether they really exercise four times per week. They might lie due to shame, fear, stigma or any number of reasons. One of the less savory aspects of my job is constantly being attuned to when a patient might have hidden motivations, or even pathologic reasons to withhold information or actively deceive their
physicians. Does this patient really want to kill himself, or is he just saying this to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital and temporarily escape homelessness? Does this patient truly have an infection stemming from a dental abscess, or did she just rub her saliva into her needle? It’s safe to say that most people go to medical school because they want to help people. Part of my job is showing residents how to see all of the shades of gray in their patients. The residents must decide whether they should provide empathy and support or set a firm boundary, whether they should confront a patient, or even eject that patient from the hospital, where he might find means to worsen his condition. Residents quickly see that being a good psychiatrist requires accessing unpleasant feelings.

I never would have guessed that I would find a niche writing about patients who deceive. During my time at UB, I wrote about Shakespeare with Barbara Bono and contemporary fiction with Joseph Conte and Stefan Fleischer. After graduating from the UB Honors College as an English and psychology major I stayed at UB and completed a combined MD/MBA in 2009. I matched into a residency in psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital/McLean Hospital, an affiliate of Harvard Medical School. I then completed a fellowship at MGH in psychosomatic medicine — a subspecialty within psychiatry that focuses on providing psychiatric care to the medically ill. This means treating psychiatric complications of medical illnesses and treatments, as well as providing high quality care to psychiatric patients who are admitted to a general hospital with medical problems.

Now that I’ve finished training, I work at MGH in a variety of roles: as a staff psychiatrist on the inpatient consultation service and the Acute Psychiatry Service (our psychiatric emergency department), as a supervising psychiatrist for residents and fellows, and as an assistant training director of the MGH/McLean psychiatry residency and associate director of the MGH Psychosomatic Medicine Fellowship.

Evaluating whether the person you’re talking to is a reliable narrator — or, realizing that everyone is, to some degree, an unreliable narrator — might be a surprising bedrock skill for a physician. Teaching it is not easy. But when residents realize it is OK to say out loud that something is amiss, it’s usually accompanied by a sense of relief. Naming these unsavory feelings, hypothesizing their origins and working with them allows a psychiatrist — or any physician — to be better at their job. Even though I’m not analyzing patients on that old-fashioned stereotypical couch, I’m still searching the depths of the psyche for unconscious motivations.

>> John Taylor, Class of 2004
I have always been drawn to the ocean. My interest, like the tides, has ebbed and flowed, but it remained ever-present.

Recently I realized I could no longer ignore it. I’ve always marveled that so much of our own planet is still unexplored; I want to pursue a career in marine science and immerse myself in the mysteries of the sea.

I was accepted into the University at Buffalo’s Advanced Honors Program in the middle of my sophomore year, and took the Advanced Honors Colloquium course that spring. It was this class that encouraged me to not only explore my options early, but to jump into my chosen field as soon as I could. I examined many different internships in the discipline of marine science, and finally settled on one that combined my love for the sea with my interests in biology and psychology.

I chose the marine mammal training internship at the Aquarium of Niagara so that I could get some hands-on experience, as well as gain a broader understanding of marine life. The aquarium is home to three types of marine mammals: gray seals, harbor seals and California sea lions. On my first day, I was surprised to learn about the amount of work that went on behind the scenes. Trainers, interns and volunteers alike spend their days running around from task to task. Whether it was preparing the 60-plus pounds of fish that the seals and sea lions eat every day or cleaning up afterwards, there was always something to be done. The ocean provides the many resources that an animal needs to survive, and replicating that environment in an aquarium setting is not an easy task.

A big portion of a marine mammal trainer’s job is ensuring that the animals have a safe home that meets USDA standards. The bond that the trainers have with the animals they work with is incredible to witness. To form this strong relationship, trainers need to work for many months to build a solid foundation of trust. The animals trust that the trainers will take care of them and not cause them harm, while the trainers must trust that the animal will be willing to work with them. Trainers are not only psychologists, but also have to act as dieticians, doctors and chemists. They handle every aspect of their animals’ lives and learn whatever is necessary to provide the best possible care.

I soon came to realize how much faith these trainers had in me. They trusted me to help take care of their animals, like a mother leaving her child in the care of someone else for the first time. I started out with simple daily tasks to keep the system running, such as preparing buckets of fish and cleaning the kitchen. I threw myself into my work and slowly earned more privileges. As I learned about the marine mammals, I started speaking with guests and was able to tell them about our animals and the challenges they had overcome.

My favorite task was running the animals’ daily enrichment, which is a vital part of the animals’ care because it provides them with the physical exercise and mental stimulation they would normally find in their natural environment.
environment. Each morning I would check the schedule, and when time permitted, I would give the animals whatever toy, treat or stimulus was listed. I watched as they interacted with the new objects in their environment, noting how much or how little they were interested in the activity. It was amazing to see the animals approach or interact with a toy in a new way. One can learn so much from these creatures just by watching them.

There is a lot of negative stigma attached to aquariums, but it wasn’t until I started working at one that I realized how harmful this misinformation can be. All of the marine mammals that I had the honor of working with at the Aquarium of Niagara were rescued and could not survive life on their own in the ocean. Our facility is a nonprofit organization, and all of the money patrons spend on admission or souvenirs goes directly back to caring for our animals. Some people boycott aquariums because they assume that the animals must be mistreated or were collected from the wild, but by boycotting the aquarium people are actually hurting the animals they claim to care about. Without revenue from visitors the aquarium could not remain open, and without facilities like the Aquarium of Niagara these rescued animals would have nowhere to go.

Della, our 27-year-old gray seal, is a great example of why our animals are deemed non-releasable. Della was rescued as a beach stranded pup, unable to take care of herself, and later developed cataracts underneath the lens of her eye that left her completely blind. In our outdoor pool you can find Della swimming around or floating in the water upright like a bottle with her eyes and ears above the surface. Even though Della can no longer see, the trainers still have many ways to communicate with her and provide her with a healthy and interesting life. Della is able to perform various husbandry behaviors such as allowing trainers to brush her teeth, trim her nails or even give her an ultrasound to ensure she is healthy. Della’s ability to cooperate with her trainers allows her to live a healthier life.

I began this internship with the goal of narrowing down my field of interest, but the opposite happened instead. The love I have for marine science only grew, and I discovered new areas of the field that I didn’t even know existed. The experience did confirm that I am on the right career path. If I was having a bad day, one look at the animals would make it all better. One of my goals is to do something I love and the internship allow me to see just what my future could hold.

>> Elizabeth Kaplan, Class of 2018

Cover photo: Meredith Forrest Kulwicki.

During the 2016-17 school year, Honors Scholars completed 571 internship credit hours.
Faculty Profile

“The Honors College is such an incredible institution, and yet has so much room to grow.”

Meet Dr. Dalia A. Muller

Anyone who pays a visit to the Honors College knows that sometimes what happens here can only be described as “an Honors thing.” Inside these hallowed halls are ambitious students, primed to exceed expectations. Students who continually push the needle come together to collaborate, debate and dialogue, fueled by their common commitment to academics and coffee—lots of coffee. With the arrival of Dr. Dalia A. Muller, you can add quenepas to that list.

Quenepas, commonly known as Spanish limes, are small rounded fruits native to Central America and parts of the Caribbean; but perhaps what’s more interesting is how you eat them. Bite open the tough, green peel to reveal a slightly sour orange flesh. Pop the whole thing in your mouth, suck and discard the pit. At least, that’s what Dr. Muller explained over a container of quenepas during a recent interview. Leave it to the new director to bring this kind of unique cultural experience to Honors.

Dr. Muller was appointed director of the Honors College and associate dean of undergraduate education in the summer of 2017. A scholar of Latin American and Caribbean history, Muller’s work focuses on the movement of people throughout Cuba, Mexico and the United States—a region she calls the “Gulf World.” Muller is a prominent voice in Latin American and Caribbean scholarship, demonstrated by a lengthy CV that details numerous talks, conference presentations, publications and books, including her most recent work, “Cuban Émigrés and Independence in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf World,” published in 2017 by the University of North Carolina Press as part of its “Envisioning Cuba” series.

But before all that, Muller’s passion for history began in a ninth grade classroom with a fantastic teacher who “made history come alive in all of its complexity.” Muller’s quest for a deeper understanding of the past led her to Yale University, where she earned a BA in history (with honors), and then on to UC Berkeley for her master’s and PhD. After a time teaching at a small, private university in Los Angeles, she returned to New York State for a professorship at UB—an exciting opportunity for someone who had always imagined herself teaching at a large public institution.

While Muller is a new face around the Honors College, students may recognize her as a longtime UB faculty member who served as an assistant professor of history and associate director of UB’s Caribbean and Latin/o American Studies (CLAS) program. In her six years with CLAS, she helped to restructure and double it in size. “I’ve always loved program building,” she says, and considers the successes in recruitment and retention of master’s students as well as the program’s expansion among her proudest accomplishments. It was in this capacity that Muller gained experience as an administrator and as a professor, and she points to it as the critical preparation needed for her new role as director of the Honors College.
Did You Know?

During the 2016-17 academic year there were over 15,000 student visits to the Don Schack Student Lounge — 4,788 cups of coffee were consumed here.

Tasked with the responsibility of leading the future of Honors, Dr. Muller started where she knew best: the past. Her inner researcher came to life as she gathered insights from students, Honors alumni and faculty to gain a broad perspective of their experiences. Muller performed extensive research on peer programs, excavated the history of the program itself, and is now identifying model programs in order to develop a plan that builds upon the unique and stellar offerings already in place. “The Honors College is such an incredible institution, and yet has so much room to grow,” Muller remarks.

That growth may first come in the form of building upon a foundation of the Honors College experience: its unique commitment to civic engagement and experiential learning. “[Freshman Honors Colloquium] is an incredibly strong pillar of the College,” she says. “And there’s so much exciting potential here. One thing I am really keen on is serving the Buffalo community better and serving our students better through that course.” Driven by Muller’s interest in better serving urban communities, the course promises to be truly transformative for students while also serving the communities they work with in more meaningful and beneficial ways. According to Muller, it’s something that can be accomplished by being even more selective and intentional in the relationships with the College’s partners, really listening to their needs and ensuring that students are properly trained for the experience.

Through this approach, students will be able to triangulate between their research and professional interests, UB’s Communities of Excellence and external community organizations.

Drawing these connections is something Muller identifies as the key to showing students how one might accomplish their own academic and career goals while clearly seeing the larger purpose of community engagement. “It would be really powerful to give students this experience [while they’re] young,” says Muller.

As she steps into her new roles, Muller will take a deeper dive into the culture of Honors as well as the university at large. She sees a trend toward integrating undergraduate and graduate education, enabling students to weave together multidisciplinary areas of thinking while cultivating rich experiences through access to higher levels of education. Rich experiences promise to also be found in Muller’s dedication to inclusive excellence and commitment to working with her staff to diversify the Honors College: “I understand diversity as a tremendous strength that will enhance the experiences of all Honors students,” she says.

Muller hopes the university and the Honors College can continue to show students the rewards that come from embracing new perspectives: “I see the Honors College as a place where high achieving students of many backgrounds come together in a community founded on the principles of excellence, inclusion, integrity and engagement to pursue their academic goals, cultivate leadership and engage the worlds around them.”

Muller acknowledges implementing these broad strokes takes time, but shares an exciting update that can begin right away. Once a week, Honors students gather in the Honors College space for coffee, tea and conversation, with a unique touch added by previous directors. While former director Andy Stott provided a British perspective on the event through his Elevenses tea times, Muller is taking hers globally. The Honors International Café will be a weekly trip to a different country right inside the Honors College Don Schack Student Lounge. Through serving coffees and teas unique to a specific culture (think: Brazilian Caipirinha, Mexican chocolate or Taiwanese bubble tea), accompanied by carefully curated music and slideshows, the Honors International Café will create a sense of place — and cultural awareness — inside UB. Building on the tradition of this signature gathering, the newest version will still offer a space to come together, converse, share ideas, and most importantly, walk away with new perspectives.

“Students will leave knowing something more about the world,” Muller says. Whether Latin American quenepas will make another appearance inside the Honors College remains to be seen, but with Muller at the helm, the Honors College is sure to charter an abundance of equally fascinating territories.

Get to Know Dr. Muller

What is your favorite place ever in the world? San Pedro de Atacama, a town in the northern desert region of Chile. One of the driest places on Earth with incredible landscapes. It challenged fundamental things I thought I understood like space, time and distance. It was otherworldly.

Where in the world do you need to go? Machu Picchu and Asia (especially Hong Kong).

Where do you take visitors to eat in Buffalo? The West Side Bazaar on Grant Street.

What’s next on your reading list? “Between the World and Me” by Ta-Nehisi Coates.

What’s something interesting in your office? A small painting of Yemayá, a powerful goddess in Santeria, who in this depiction displays many elements of Afro-Syncretic culture.
Abby LaPlaca (’15) and Kayleigh Reed (’18) would be exceptional UB Honors students even if they were not writing their own stories on the power of global scholarship.

Called the “epitome” of a Fulbright winner before she left, LaPlaca was an award-winning Latin dancer, UB Presidential Scholar and student speaker at the 2015 University Commencement. Boren Scholarship winner Kayleigh Reed’s university success story grew from the time a high school guidance counselor told her she wasn’t cut out for the academic big-time. Since then, she has compiled a 3.878 GPA, become a pathfinder in UB’s Asian Studies Program and earned the distinction of “rising star” in UB’s Classics Department.

Consider their latest incarnations. Returning from international fellowships — LaPlaca in January and Reed in May, each with stories of challenges as well as pleasant memories — they are vivid examples of the transforming powers of a Fulbright, Boren, Marshall or any of a number of prestigious awards championed by UB’s Office of Fellowships and Scholarships.

It’s a road that brings an academic adventure that can change lives, refocus how students see themselves, their country and the world, and give them experiences other UB students can only imagine. As LaPlaca and Reed make clear, the impact it leaves is as individual as the scholar.

From daytrips to Canada to a year in India

“Oh yeah, I would do it again,” says Reed, who will start her senior year this fall majoring in English, Asian studies and classics. Reed, who just turned 21, will tell you straight away her Boren voyage launched her on an unlikely transition from a life of “day trips to Canada to 12 months in India.”

“I learned so much from it,” she says. “I learned so much from other people who led lives that were completely different from mine, and that was so refreshing. I feel like so many people from Buffalo are living in a bubble. And for a long time, I did as well.

“I wanted to go abroad because I felt it was important to see the world.” Reed spent most of those 12 months in the Indian cities of Delhi, Lucknow and Calcutta. She also spent many hours sitting at Sufi shrines on the outskirts of Varanasi, where she interviewed rural women who had come to pray, some staying with their families as long as 40 days. Many clearly had never seen an American before. They were puzzled when Reed told them there was no caste system in the U.S. They would not talk to her without the permission of the male head of household.

Reed said she had been nervous going to Madison, Wisconsin, for the pre-fellowship training. So it came as no surprise that there were times when she looked around her surroundings in India and asked herself, “Oh God, what have I done?”

“I had never seen poverty, really,” Reed says. “I’m talking about people
Kayleigh Reed in front of the Qutb Minar.

living on the street their whole lives. Not like children walking around on the streets. These were people defecating into gutters because that was all they had. Where else? Out in the open in front of everybody. Women walked around barefoot because they didn’t have money for shoes."

Reed spent several days in a hospital after suffering a painful, debilitating gastrointestinal problem triggered by the water. She drank a customary drink called Rooh Afza that Indians mix to recognize Ramzan, the Urdu name for Ramadan. While visiting a Muslim teacher’s home, a child offered Reed and a friend a homemade version of the ceremonial drink. To refuse would have been a major insult. She quickly got very sick. She spent hours in a hospital surrounded by people who did not speak English, an experience that left her feeling “isolated.” Yet, she felt fortunate to have been in a private hospital where she received very good care.

Most others in India aren’t so privileged, she says. When she was teaching English to children in Calcutta, an epidemic broke out. "I would hear about someone’s mother being sick,” she says, “and then that child is gone. ‘His mother is sick,’ they would tell me. ‘He has to take care of her.’”

"The child is 10 years old and is now taking care of his mother. For a year, sometimes two, because his mother is dying of tuberculosis."

Reed, who studies intercultural communication, also remembers how her host mother in Varanasi would not touch the servants in her home. When giving them money, she would hold it over their hands and drop it. If anything fell to the floor, the servants picked it up.

All those experiences are only part of the story. As jarring and formative as India’s renowned poverty and enduring religious customs were, Reed took away a deep appreciation of the spiritual joy and deep family commitment of many she met.

“I think the most joyful moments arose from spending time with my host family, new Indian and American friends, and my teachers,” Reed says. “Getting chaat with my program staff, exploring temples, mosques and monasteries, going to dinner parties and practicing my Urdu, that kind of thing.”

Chai breaks, sometimes as many as five or six a day, gave her opportunities to "slow down, talk to the people around me and enjoy life.”

“I grew up a lot,” Reed says. "A friend of mine compared it to the story of the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama. The legend about him is that he lived in his castle his whole childhood and young adult life. His father, as the king, would not let him leave so that he wouldn’t see poverty, suffering, illness and death.

The Alumni Memories

The Honors Seminar program was amazing — I ended up changing majors because I was so inspired by one of them!

Madeline Zachac, 2008

“One day he decided, ‘I’m going to leave. I’m going to leave the castle and my father can’t stop me.’ He left the castle, and then he realized all the suffering that was in the world. I think that kind of happened to me.”

A Turning Point in the Jungle

LaPlaca, 24, could recount awe-inspiring exploratory experiences before she won her Fulbright Scholarship and spent 12 months teaching English to students and teachers in Panama City. But where does she start now? She climbed Volcan Baru, an active volcano and the highest peak in Panama. After 12 hours of hiking, she stood at one of the few places in the world you can see both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans in the same view.

She flew to Uruguay, near the tip of South America, where she encouraged other Fulbright scholars to have the courage and faith to “say yes” to life, even when something sounds off the beaten path. You never know where it will lead or whom you will meet, she told her colleagues.

It took time to build relationships with the teachers who could invite her into their classrooms, and to earn the trust of the teachers she wanted in her seminars. She didn’t have a job description: Fulbright scholars are given the challenge and the opportunity to determine their own path.

But there was a distinct turning point when she started to feel like she belonged. It started on her first trip into the jungle, and really came together when she went back, this time deeper into the jungle.
LaPlaca met a young Panamanian man who worked for a U.S. nonprofit called Courts for Kids that builds basketball courts or soccer fields for small, indigenous Panamanian communities. She went with him for the weekend, staying with his family, riding around in motorized canoes and watching the elaborate and painstaking body painting customary for the native Embera people. She loved it. It spoke to something basic inside her about being needed and accepted, and earning that acceptance.

Soon there was another opportunity to go back into the jungle, this time even further, toward an area in Colombia where U.S. Embassy officials told her she should not go. She was two and a half months into her fellowship and still feeling like she was not accomplishing what she wanted.

This was a Peace Corps project “completely off the grid.” She took a bus to the end of a road in Panama and walked down to the water. A boat took her along the coast and then a pickup truck took her further into the jungle. She got out and walked down to a river, which she forded with her bag over her head.

“It was incredible,” LaPlaca says. “It was this little community of maybe 250 people in the middle of the jungle. Their houses were these traditional houses made of thatched roofs and completely open wooden planks. They bathed in the river. In general, the women went topless, and they had this beautiful body paint, which I learned how to make and use. It was amazing to help with that. They cooked plantains and sardines and other fish they caught in the river. We stayed in their houses. And we helped them build this basketball court. There was no cell service, obviously no internet. There wasn’t even any electricity.”

LaPlaca was supposed to leave after only a few days, but she got very sick — too sick to take the boat back to Panama City.

“My host mother there made me this herbal tea. And I drank it and took a nap, and two hours later I was completely healthy. After throwing up all day and feeling so sick and being out-of-my-head feverish, I drank this tea she gave me and was completely better.”

She ended up staying nine days. “We woman taking care of me brought her two little children. We just sat in the river and washed the laundry on the rocks, and the kids were picking mangos, and they would just peel them and give me pieces. And it was just this sunny, beautiful afternoon under the trees.”

LaPlaca called it one of the best afternoons of her life.

“I needed to be cut off from contacting home, contacting people back here. It made me feel like I had a purpose again, for me to be connected to the service project.”

She experienced a strong, profound sense of connection with the people in that village, something that will always be part of her.

“That trip formed a deeper and different connection,” LaPlaca says. “It happens when you spend time with people, but under more intense circumstances, when you both have a mission and a purpose going forward.”

>> Charles Anzalone
1988
Joseph Czerwinski - In July, Joe joined Robert Parker’s Wine Advocate as managing editor and reviewer of wines from Australia, New Zealand and Southern France.

Karen (Shute) Kraeger - Karen and family – husband Hans, daughter Monica and son Josh – on their Christmas trip to Key Largo, FL.

1989
Dorrit Ram - Dorrit lives in Orlando, FL, with her husband and two sons (ages 5 and 8) and is a clinical social worker.

1990
John Neumann - Last year, John began a guitar-building class and built a copy of a Martin D-28 Dreadnaught from scratch. Although an avid guitar player, John had no prior wood-working experience. He’s pictured here with his guitar and proudly wearing a Duff’s T-shirt.

1997
Alysia Roehrig-Bice - Alysia is the graduate program director of educational psychology at Florida State University. The Institute of Education Sciences recently awarded her over a million dollars to fully fund a training program intended to increase the diversity of doctorates in education. She and her husband, Kris Bice, welcomed their second son, Sebastian, on April 14, 2017.

1999
Graydon Mull - Graydon is managing director of consulting at Cogent Analytics, a management consulting firm based in Greensboro, N.C.

2000
Kimberly Boyd-Bowman - Kimberly received her PhD in counseling psychology in August 2017 and lives in Denton, TX, with her wife, Kealoha Solatorio, and their five cats.

Regina Campbell-Malone - Regina and her partner, Ken, celebrated their 10th wedding anniversary this summer. They and their daughters, ages 5 and 8, and two Catahoula Leopard Dogs recently relocated to Massachusetts where Regina will join the science faculty at Noble and Greenough School.

Jess (Cavano) Gestwicki - Jess is currently president of the Ball State University Women’s Club in Muncie, IN. In addition to homeschooling her four sons, whenever she has the chance, she steals away to fulfill a lifelong dream — learning to sail.

2001
Michaelangelo Rocco - This spring Michaelangelo accepted a job as an art director with the theme park Universal Studios Japan and currently lives in Osaka, Japan.

2002
Erik Anspach - Erik accepted the Academic Directorship of ENSCI-Les Ateliers, a French grande école dedicated to industrial and textile design.

2004
Kelly (Sayles) Currie - Kelly and her husband Dean welcomed their first child this past spring. She completed nine years of post-medical school surgical training and started working as a plastic/reconstructive and hand surgeon in St Louis, MO, last fall.

Colleen Bronner - Colleen was hired as a faculty member in the UC Davis Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering in July 2015.

Ruth Kleinman - Ruth and her husband Steven welcomed their son, Ezekiel Franklin Kleinman-Morris (Zeke), on December 28, 2016.

Megan Stewart - Megan and her husband Mike welcomed their son, Thomas Robert, on April 7, 2017. He joins older brother Hudson, now 3.

Alumni Memories
I remember feeling like being a part of the Honors College made me feel like I was at a small college and not a big university in the sense that someone knew who I was, what my goals were and cared about helping me to achieve my best.

Sujata Gill, 2005
2006
Christa Cusimano - Christa has a one-year-old son.

Jeet Patel - Jeet began working as a radiologist at Einstein Medical Center in Philadelphia, PA, this summer.

2008

2009
Kelly Carr - Kelly has been a partner practicing immigration law at Fiegel & Carr law firm since 2014. She is also an attorney at UB’s SBI Legal Assistance Office where she helps UB students with legal issues. In her free time, she swims competitively with the Nickel City Splash Masters Swim Team.

Vaibhav Jain - Vaibhav is a software development manager at Amazon.

Luke-Hieu Nguyen - Luke was awarded a full scholarship for dental school through the U.S. National Health Services Corps and has also traveled to all 50 states in the USA.

Erik Zavrel - Erik is a PhD candidate in biomedical engineering at Cornell University. His research focuses on the development of novel non-pharmacological, device-based interventions for sleep disorders. Erik was the Three-in-Five Competition grand prize winner at the 2017 Design of Medical Devices (DMD) Conference.

2010
Julie Ficarra - Julie married Sam Avery (UB ’10) on August 13, 2016, and is a PhD candidate in the Cultural Foundations of Education program at Syracuse University, where she teaches courses on international and social justice education.

Nick Kabat - Nick graduated from University of Michigan Law School and works for a federal judge in New York City.

Lydia Newman - Lydia graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a master’s degree in clinical nutrition in May and is a registered dietitian at UPMC Presbyterian Hospital in Pittsburgh, PA. In February 2018, she will begin her Peace Corps service as a maternal and child health specialist in Guatemala.

2011
Brian Dolan - Brian graduated in December 2016 from the University of Cincinnati with a PhD in aerospace engineering. Currently living in Pittsburgh, PA, Brain is employed with the RAND Corporation and is engaged to be married in 2018.

Lucas Hammill - Lucas is working at The Buffalo News as a reporter for The Hamburg Sun.

Reese Hornbaker - Reese continues to work on the PhD portion of an MD/PhD program at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, TX.

Mary (Brummond) Lester - Mary recently began her residency in small animal internal medicine at the University of Florida Veterinary Hospital.

Jessica Yox - Jessica launched a mobile bicycle repair shop, Two One Fix Bicycle, in Cleveland, OH.

2012
Sanjay Jain - Sanjay began his family medicine residency at Florida Hospital in Orlando, FL.

Melissa Lockwood - Melissa is working at New Era Cap and completing an MBA at UB this fall.

Amanda Lohiser - Amanda earned her PhD at UB in 2012 and then taught communication courses at the Singapore Institute of Management. In 2016 she began a tenure-track position as assistant professor in SUNY Fredonia’s communication department. She is also enrolled at SUNY Buffalo State in the Creativity and Change Leadership graduate certification program.

Kerrie Martin - Kerrie recently earned her Licensed Master Social Worker. Currently she runs an alumni program and serves on the management team of a healthcare-oriented, intergenerational college and career readiness program for at-risk NYC high school students.
2012
David Noll - David began a new job as an associate attorney in the corporate and tax group of the law firm McNees Wallace & Nurick.

Jill Ricotta - Jill graduated from the Georgetown School of Foreign Service with her master’s in Arab studies and is currently working with the Middle East North Africa team at the National Endowment for Democracy, while also studying Farsi/Dari in her free time.

Ashley Welsch - Ashley is a senior attorney for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation in New Paltz, NY.

2013
Jonathan Feliciano - Jonathan recently relocated from New York City, accepting a position in Ithaca, NY, at the Cornell Veterinary School as a grant and contract administrator.

Yang Li - Yang is a PhD student at California Institute of Technology.

Jayne O’Connor - Jayne graduated from UB Law School with honors.

Joseph Swerdlin - Joseph is pursuing his M. Arch at MIT and is collaborating with GrowingChange, a non-profit in North Carolina, on the design of their first prototype project of flipping a decommissioned prison into an agricultural community center for youth in disadvantaged situations.

2014
Lauren (Stricos) Weloth - Lauren married Augustus Weloth and the couple owns a home in Colonie, NY.

Klara Chomicka - Klara completed her master’s in social science at University of Chicago.


Danielle (Tartick) Gullo - Danielle and her husband Christopher are expecting their first child in September 2017.

Kaitlyn Olbrich - Kaitlyn graduated from Cornell University with a master’s in city and regional planning in 2016 and is currently working for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation as a sustainability transportation program planner.

2015
Emma Janicki-Gechof - After graduation, Emma started with the AmeriCorps Builds Lives through Education (ABLE) program, serving at Westminster Community Charter School. In the fall she began UB’s graduate program in early childhood and childhood education. She also received a grant from NY Humanities to facilitate a “James Baldwin’s America” discussion group. In 2015 she married her high school sweetheart, Dylan, and they live in Buffalo with their cats, Fyodor and Leopold.

Chelsea (Wheeler) Pokoj - Chelsea and Nick Pokoj (’16) were married on June 24, 2017 and now reside in South Buffalo, NY. Chelsea is attending D’Youville College for her master’s in physician assistant studies and will graduate in 2018. Nick is attending the Jacobs School of Medicine and will graduate in 2020.

Sushobhna Batra - Sushobhna is a second-year PhD student at UT Southwestern Medical Center.

Kristina Hua - Kristina is an administrative assistant at M&T Bank.

Andrew D. Hurst - Andrew married Corrin Billi on July 15, 2017, and the couple moved into their new home in Western New York. Andrew began his second year at the Jacobs School of Medicine in August.

Patricia Johnson - Patricia is beginning her second year in the PhD program in chemistry at Duke University and is a National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate Fellowship recipient.

We would also like to thank the parents of Eileen Bennett (Class of 2017), who contributed $500 in honor of their daughter! This gift will be used to maintain the Honors College Innovation Fund, which supports Honors student scholarships and programming such as study abroad, research grants, and special projects. Donations to this fund can be made at honors.buffalo.edu/donate or by calling Jessica Seabury at (716) 645-3020.
2016
Melissa Kathan - Melissa is entering her second year at UB’s School of Law and has interned for the United States Attorney’s Office—Western District of New York.

Ryan O’Hara - Ryan is a PhD student at Johns Hopkins University.

2016
Davis Podkulski - David began his second year at UB’s School of Law this fall. He interned at Praxair, Inc. in Tonawanda, NY, in the R&D/tech planning group where he assisted with the intellectual property/patent process.

2017
Ansh Pandey - Ansh joined Cummins, Inc. as a product engineer in Columbus, OH, where he will work with the V8 5.0L diesel engine team — the engine found in the 2017 Nissan Titan.

Alumni Memories
Definitely the best memories were living in Governors and having burgers at 1 a.m., homework parties, Star Wars marathon, going on adventures with the suite mates and members of other suites. Living with other people who pushed me to be the best I could, and also wanted to have fun, was one of the most valuable experiences I had at UB.

Andrew DG Hunt, 2012

On Sept. 14, 2017, the Honors College hosted a happy hour at The Filling Station in Larkinville prior to UB’s All Alumni Event.

Katie Crosby (Honors, ’10) and Lisa Petronio (Honors, ’10).

New Honors College Director, Dr. Dalia Muller, chats with Daniel Sperrazza (Honors, ’88).

Sami Kader (Honors, ’16), Brendan Brady (Honors, ’02) and his wife Jennifer.

University at Buffalo The State University of New York
Sambhavi Bellary hopes to work someday as an engineer who brings electricity to remote towns and villages in northern Africa and Southeast Asia. Sam grew up in New Delhi, India, and chose to attend UB after finding diversity among its students, and many “involved in meaningful research with direct applications to daily life.” Scholarships made it possible for her to study abroad in Paris and Berlin, where she learned new approaches to engineering. She is grateful to the donors whose support she calls “a constant reminder” for her to work hard and give back to future UB students passionate about their studies. Students just like Sam.

The best public universities have the strongest private support.
UB Honors Class of 2021