



JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

HONORS PROGRAM

Fall November 2020 Newsletter

Remembering Dr. Benjie Blair

This year the Honors Program lost a valued member who spent years helping us grow and was beloved by many.

Dr. Blair was a fundamental component of our JSU Honors Program. His level of dedication to the students who were also highly motivated and dedicated was unmatched. Always the team player, Dr. Blair jumped in wherever needed to help us reach our goals in the Honors Program. Even in the final weeks of his illness, Dr. Blair was still writing letters of recommendation and support for students and for colleagues applying for tenure or promotion. In addition to his vast knowledge in his field and his talent for teaching and guiding students completing research projects, Dr. Blair could also converse extensively regarding practical matters that were of interest to a broad range of individuals. Those of us in Honors who were blessed to work with Dr. Blair will always treasure him as a friend and colleague. Moreover, all of us will remain inspired by his dedication to our students. Family was everything to Dr. Blair and I had the privilege of getting to know Stacy, Raven, and Savannah. He and Stacy raised two exceptional daughters. We will continue to remember Dr. Blair's family and lift them up in prayer.

- Dr. Lori Owens, Honors Program Director



I smiled every time I saw Benjie Blair because he was such a happy person! His energy and obvious love for teaching made him a joy to be around. As a colleague on the Honors Board, Benjie was fair-minded, engaged, and an advocate for our students. On a more personal level, we both shared an interest in drama and he loved to tell me about his daughter's involvement in the local community theatre. I have no doubt that Benjie was greatly loved by his students and all of his JSU colleagues, and that they will carry his memory for many years to come. I know I will.

- Dr. Ellen Peck, Honors Board Member



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I was fortunate to have known Dr. Blair as my Microbiology professor, my Pre-Health advisor, and as the Acting Director of the Honors Program. In class, he was always so engaging and blew all of us away with his breadth of knowledge. He always sought to teach us the “grossest/ coolest” information he knew because that was the “best way for us to learn,” and he definitely (unfortunately) was not wrong about that. I reached out to him this past summer because I was at a loss with finding a mentor to help me with my medical school application and letters of recommendation. Despite everything he had going on, he still took the time to offer me advice and help me reach my goals, and I will forever be grateful to him for that. Dr. Blair was truly a treasure at JSU, and he impacted many student’s lives, including my own, for the better.

-Lauren Usrey, Honors Program Student President

Dr. Blair was our chapter advisor for our premed AMSA chapter. He was so supportive of premed students. My freshman year, he took a few students to the DO school in Auburn to tour it. He took his time and drove us in his own car, and we talked about food, his birds, medicine, and science on the drive. The University and Biology Department won't be the same without him. His microbiology class was a joy. He will be missed.

- Marina Alvarez, Honors Program Student Member

Dr. Blair was one of the kindest, most caring people I have ever met. In over 10 years of working with Honors students, through interaction and advisement, I never once had a student say anything negative about him. He was genuine and always took time to make everyone feel important. He is deeply missed from the Honors Program.

- Janet Whitmore, Honors Program Coordinator



A Message from the Officers

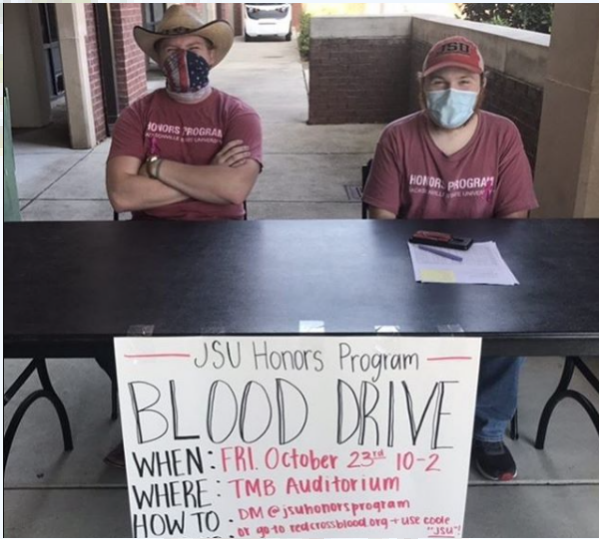
Hello, everyone! As we wrap up the fall semester, the officers would like to take a moment and thank you all for your participation that made our service and social events possible. The JSU Honors Program truly consists of individuals of exemplary character. This semester was far from what was anticipated, and unfortunately, guidelines have kept us from truly being together. However, due to our members' hard work, we have been able to make this semester a successful one.

The Honors Program puts embracing service, social responsibility, and leadership at the forefront of our objectives, and this semester proved that. We began the semester by forming a volunteer-partnership with the local animal shelter, Rockin' P Rescue, and have had regular volunteers donate their time there. We created an Encouraging Poster Campaign to shine a positive light during these times of isolation, and in October, we helped with a city-wide cleanup in Anniston, AL. We also partnered with the Red Cross to host a blood drive at the end of October, and we were incredibly thankful for this opportunity to help others during the pandemic. We will wrap up this semester by creating gift boxes for Operation Christmas Child and writing Christmas cards for Legacy Village of Jacksonville.

As we go into the new semester, we aim to incorporate more in-person social and service events. There will continue to be donation opportunities, but there is nothing like serving people first-hand and aiding our community. Service is not always easy or convenient, especially during these unprecedented times, but it is so worth it. We would like to encourage you over this two-month break to search for opportunities to intervene on someone else's behalf. Further, be sure to take mental health breaks, be kind to yourself, and social-distance.

The Officers wish you a blessed and purposeful holiday season! We will see you all next Spring!

Sincerely, The JSU Honors Program Officers



Board Member Spotlight

Dr. Ellen Peck earned her Ph.D in 2009 from University of Illinois, Urbana in Theatre. She has been teaching here at JSU since 2010 in lower and many upper level courses. Also, she is the Stage Management Advisor for JSU drama productions, and her book, *Sweet Mystery: The Musical Works of Rida Johnson Young*, was published in 2020 by New York: Oxford University Press.



In 2014, Dean Wade invited me to accompany a group of Honors students on a trip to Taizhou University in China. I said yes because I love to travel and had never been to China. But the trip turned out to be one of the best experiences in my time here at JSU, primarily because of those students. Over two weeks that included many hours on planes and buses, trying new food like duck's tongues (the students were braver than me), learning tai chi, and walking a section of the Great Wall, I got to know these wonderful young men and women. Each one was curious, kind, enthusiastic, open to new experiences, and genuinely enjoyed each other's company. Immediately upon our return, I reached out to Dean Wade to say that I would be happy to be of service to the Honors Program in any way I could; the students had impressed me immensely.



Since then, I've had the great fortune to serve on the board of this terrific program. JSU's Honors Program offers our students a wealth of opportunities for broadening their educational experiences through advanced classes, book clubs, service, and trips both local and abroad. I am an ardent believer that travel expands our minds and hearts. I tell all my students that they should take any chance to travel, anytime and anywhere. The Honors students have been to places as diverse as South America, Asia, and Northern Europe, accompanied by incredible professors and Honors staff. I know the students will carry the memories and relationships formed on these trips with them for the rest of their lives. Honors students are also called to serve the community, to use their gifts for the benefit of others. Our students run food and clothing pantries, help with storm cleanup, work with underprivileged children, and volunteer their time to many organizations in need. I am so proud to be part of this program, proud of the many faculty and staff who work hard to create all of these opportunities, and proud of the students who represent JSU with pride and service to this community.



Ellen M. Peck, PhD
Associate Professor of Drama
Jacksonville State University



***New JSU Honors LinkedIn Page**

We are starting a community group on LinkedIn under "Jacksonville State University Honors Program". This page looks to connect current program seniors with our diverse and growing alumni group. Go check it out!

Click the Logo



Check out the rest of our social media in the bottom bar too!



Attention JSU Faculty!

We are accepting applications for our Fall 2021 University Honors (UH) courses! Apply to teach an Honors Lecture, Honors Forum, Honors Book Club, Honors Professional Preparation Seminar, or Honors Special Topics Interdisciplinary. Let us know by December 1st if you would like to submit an application. Applications are due January 1st!

[Find UH details and application HERE](#)

**HAVE A GREAT
THANKSGIVING!**



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