

University Honors Program

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

2022 - 2023





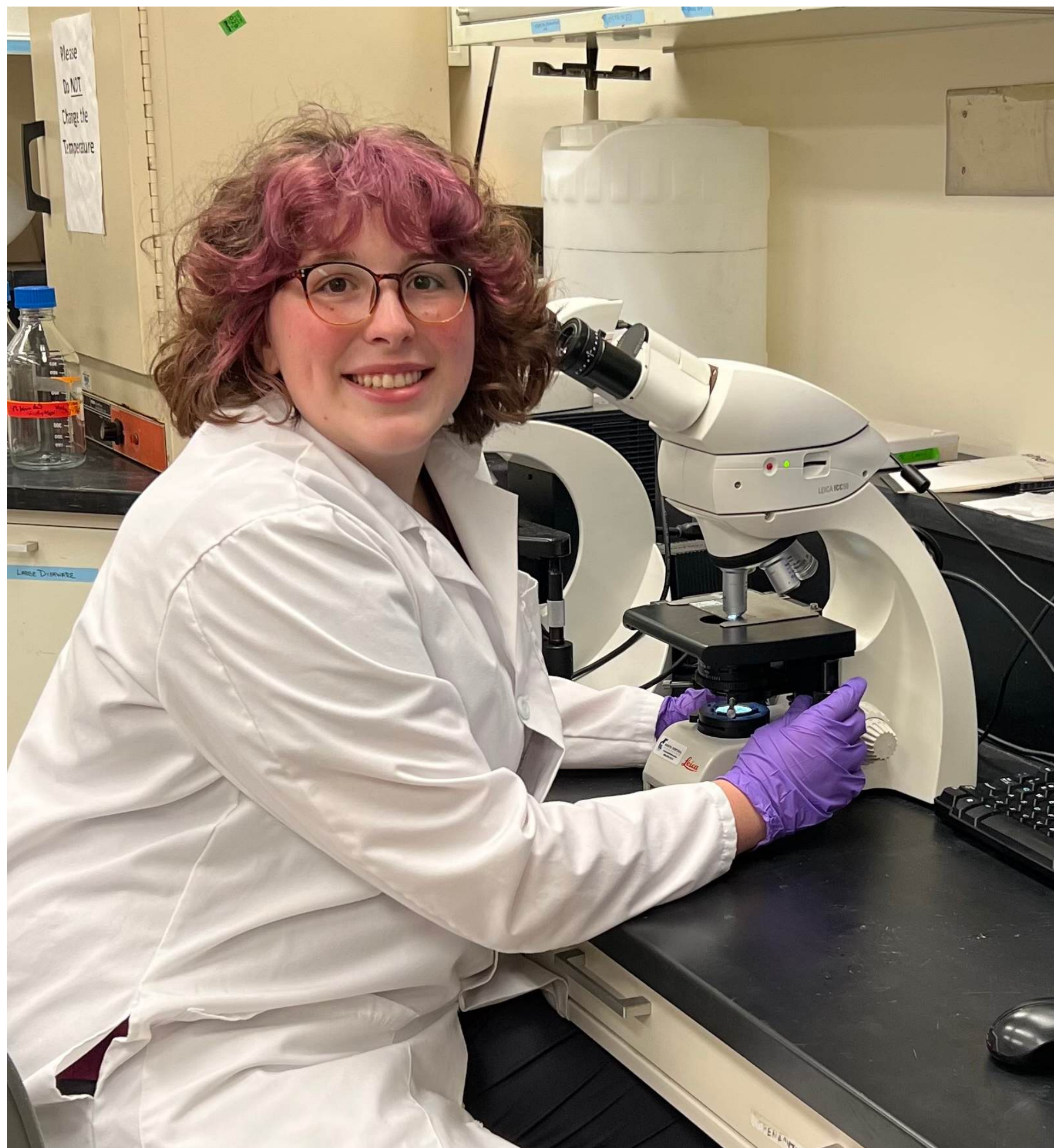
Anna Wingert

English major with minors in Japanese and marketing

Anna Wingert is a senior from Arenzville, IL. She is majoring in English with minors in Japanese and marketing. She came to SIU with the goal of working for a publisher but has since decided to follow in her mother's footsteps and become a teacher. So many opportunities at SIU have allowed Anna to discover how passionate she is about learning and teaching. She will be applying for the JET program to be an assistant English teacher in Japan. Following that, she plans to earn a master's degree from a Master of Arts in Teaching program or from a Teaching English as a Second Language program.

Since her freshman year at SIU, Anna has been a member of Saluki Service Dawgs, and this will be her second year serving as the RSO's secretary. Currently, she is training a "start to finish" dog named Enya. Anna has been Enya's primary handler since the dog entered the program, and Anna will help Enya and her new handler work together as a team when she graduates from training in November. Anna also works in the writing center as a consultant, and every session inspires her to think about writing as an integral part of learning. As she is particularly interested in children's literature, during her sophomore year, she worked with Dr. Jane Dougherty to develop an honors seminar called Exploring Children's Literature. Anna has drafted two children's novels of her own so far with the intention of preparing them to present to agents and eventually publish.

Anna is excited to experience her final year at SIU and is grateful to all of the faculty that have been supportive in the classroom, in professional environments, and by recommending her for departmental scholarships.



Grace Lehnhoff

Physiology major and minors in Chemistry and Forensic Science

Grace Lehnhoff is a senior undergraduate from Herrin, IL, majoring in Physiology and minoring in Chemistry and Forensic Science. She is graduating in Spring and will continue her studies towards receiving her Pathologist Assistant's license through a master's degree in health science. Her goal is to work directly with a forensic pathologist to help determine the cause of death in postmortem autopsy exams.

During her time at SIU, Grace has been conducting undergraduate physiology research in Dr. Buck Hales' lab, where she studies the effects of Flaxseed and CBD as a preventative for ovarian cancer. She was a part of the Simmon's Cancer Institute internship program during the summer of 2021 and received the REACH award for the 2021-2022 school year. Throughout both of the programs, she spent most of her free time working on her quantitative CB-1 and CB-2 analysis measuring how prominent the receptors are in chicken ovarian and liver tissues.

This past summer, Grace shadowed a Pathologist Assistant in Peoria, IL, where she was able to get hands-on experience within her future career. Grace plans to shadow another PA before she is set to apply to the West Virginia University Pathologist's Assistant program, which will begin in the spring of 2024.



Julia Beckner

Zoology major specializing in wildlife biology and a minor in art

Julia Beckner is a senior majoring zoology with a specialization in wildlife biology and a minor in art. She is a member of the Honors Assembly, the President of Zeta Theta Omega, and part of the leadership team at The Wesley Foundation. Since last fall, she has also done undergraduate research in Dr. Jennifer Weber's lab on plant evolutionary ecology. Julia is assisting in a study of mixed mating systems and the pollination patterns in the plant genus, *Triodanis*. Julia enjoys going to Project Human X in her free time and contributed a piece to their Earth Month Art Show last year.

Over her time at SIU, Julia has found a love of painting and uses her paintings to showcase an invasive species of comb jelly, *Mnemiopsis leidyi*. Through her art, she has been able to connect with many people and spread awareness of multiple environmental issues. She hopes to continue spreading awareness and wants to explore other ways art can be utilized for scientific communication to the public and build public engagement with the environment.

This past summer Julia spent the month of June helping a PhD student from Dr. Guillaume Bastille-Rousseau's lab capture and collar white-deer fawns around the Touch of Nature and Giant City. She also traveled to Anchorage, Alaska with the Weber lab to participate in Botany 2022, a conference hosted by The Botanical Society of America. After graduating in the spring, Julia plans to continue her education and work towards a master's degree in ecology or conservation biology, but also is hoping to find a program that will allow her to continue connecting science and art. She wants to eventually work in invasive species management.



Wyatt Smith

Physiology (premed) major and minor in Spanish

Wyatt Smith is a senior majoring in Physiology (premed) with a minor in Spanish. He is a member of Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, having led a bible study for 3 semesters and served on the leadership board for four. He is also a member of the Pikmin Bloom RSO, which is fun and keeps him motivated to stay in shape. He highly recommends both RSOs to strengthen both your spiritual and physical muscles.

Wyatt is a premed student who spends a lot of his time working towards graduate school applications and studies. He is involved in undergraduate research in Dr. Buck Hale's lab researching Ovarian Cancer. He assists in using High Performance Liquid Chromatography to quantify CBD uptake in the Laying Hen Model.

In his free time, he enjoys playing with his cats who he and his wife have raised for a little over a year now. He also enjoys spending lots of time with his close friends during game night, movie nights, epic pranks, and church on Sundays.



Alexis Stallman

Computer Science with a specialization in Animation

Alexis Stallman is a senior majoring in Computer Science with a specialization in Animation. She has had the honor of receiving the College of Engineering's "Top Female Junior/Senior GPA" award for the past two years. Alexis is also currently working full time here at SIU in the Office of Information Technology. This job has given Alexis some great experiences and has proven to her that she is on the right path with her degree.

Alexis has always aimed to find a balance between her love for art and her love for coding, this semester, she has done just that. She is currently working on an independent study project that involves building her own 2d platformer game from scratch. Over her years at SIU, Alexis has found a passion for coding and animation, and she is very excited to continue working on this project and can't wait to share the game with her peers.

In her free time, Alexis loves to spend time with her family and her fiancé, whether that means going on a hike, playing a board game, or watching the Amazing Race. She has a love for animals and currently has five guinea pigs, two crested geckos, a hamster, and a dog that she loves taking care of and spoiling. Alexis is extremely grateful for all the opportunities that she has had here at SIU and cannot wait to graduate in the spring and see where life takes her.



Jordan Altug

Bachelor's of Science in Microbiology and minor in chemistry

Jordan Altug is a senior that is graduating in May 2023 with a Bachelor's of Science in Microbiology and will have a minor in chemistry. Jordan has been a member of the University Honors Program since her freshman year. She is currently the President of the Pre-Veterinary Science Club and the secretary of the Microbiology Student Organization. Jordan has also been in various other organizations such as Delta Zeta Sorority, where she held many leadership positions. However, junior year she decided to drop her sorority to focus more on pursuing her dream of becoming a Veterinarian. She has spent many hours shadowing at Greater Vision Veterinary Care, Little Egypt Veterinary Clinic, and Beasley's Equine Clinic. She currently works at a local pet store, Pure Pet, where the goal is to focus on more holistic health approaches. She has volunteered at Saint Francis CARE, Wright Way Rescue, Free Again Rehabilitation, and some other activities that did not include caring for animals, such as GumDrops. She has applied for five different Veterinary Schools and hopes to find out that she was accepted in March. She plans to study abroad with the University Honors Program over Spring Break on the "UHON 351S: The Earth Around You". Jordan loves to travel, try new healthy recipes, and fitness. In the future, she would love to do an internship with a zoo focusing on Zoo Animal Veterinary Care or a professional internship with the Walt Disney World Company focusing on animal care there as well. One more fun fact about Jordan is that over Winter Break in 2022, Jordan plans on getting Scuba Diving Certified.

As a freshman, Jordan entered college thinking that she was going to be a pre-med student and had a plan to join a research laboratory and do everything possible to make a picture perfect resume. Throughout her time at Southern Illinois University, she learned that she wants to be an advocate for animal care and welfare and that there is no such thing as a "perfect resume". There are many different paths that make your resume unique to you, therefore you should always give something a try. The biggest advice Jordan would give to freshmen is to try new things that push you outside of your comfort zone. This allows you to grow as a human being and to find new passions.



Caleb Hoffman

Psychology major, specializing in parent training, and minoring in neuroscience and anthropology

This is Caleb Hoffman, a senior getting a Bachelor of Arts degree here at SIU. He is majoring in Psychology, specializing in parent training, and minoring in neuroscience and anthropology. He is currently working with Dr. Michelle Kibby and graduate student Genni Newsham in conducting psychological research, funded by the Research-Enriched Academic Challenge (REACH) grant. Caleb's research is on the different factors that can maintain subclinical levels of anxiety over an eight-year period from adolescence to adulthood. They are using Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scans to also check for any structural differences between participants with low levels and high levels of anxiety. Caleb has absolutely loved all the lab experience he has been able to get in his undergrad, and he advises that anyone planning on going to grad school should at least consider applying to work in a lab. Some things that Caleb likes doing in his free time are hiking around Shawnee National Forest, playing music on his guitar, playing DnD, and spending time with his friends.

After he finishes his BA here in the spring semester, he plans on going to graduate school to enter a PhD program for Clinical Neuropsychology, and he hopes to one day have his own private practice working with neurodivergent parents and children. Over this last summer semester, he had the amazing opportunity of going to Taiwan for three months to study Mandarin Chinese at Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages in Kaohsiung through the Taiwan BEST scholarship. Because he got to stay there for three months, Caleb was able to fully immerse himself in Taiwanese culture and visit all sorts of beautiful places. His favorite place that he went was Alishan, a mountain near Kaohsiung, famed for its view of the clouds, known as “雲海,” “The Sea of Clouds.” Caleb also wanted to say that everyone should look around for different study abroad opportunities if they're interested in studying out of the country, as there are programs where they pay you to study in a beautiful place, like the Taiwan BEST scholarship!



James Benefiel

Fermentation Sciences Major

This is James Benefiel, a senior currently working towards a Fermentation Sciences degree here at SIU. At the Fermentation Sciences Institute (or FSI for short) James diligently studies and learns about the wide world of Fermentation and what it can do for himself and the world. While there are many specializations for him to choose from, he has channeled all his creativity into a passion for the art of brewing and hopes to use the skills he is learning to make a wide variety of new and incredibly tasty beer. His plans to conduct research with Dr. Matthew McCarroll, while in their infancy, hold great potential to further his understanding of the delicate craft that is brewing and help push the boundaries of this ancient practice. James finds anything and everything about beer fascinating and hopes that someday his beers will be enjoyed by consumers everywhere. During his undergrad he has worked as a Competitive Sports Supervisor and Program Manager at the Student REC Center on campus and is still currently employed there today. He hopes that every student here at SIU has given at least one of the many outdoor and athletic programs held through the REC a chance, there's a little something for everyone! When he finds time to relax, he enjoys being outdoors, playing his bass guitar, spending time with his friends, and listening to music. Groovy!

James has spent the last two summers as a Research Assistant with Bayer Crop Sciences working in Farmer City, Illinois. There he helped maintain experimental data fields and collected valuable data that can help revolutionize farm production of several vital crops like corn, soybeans, and barley. This upcoming summer he plans on interning with a microbrewery to learn the ins and outs of producing and marketing beer. He is currently on a team designing and brewing several new beers to be put on the new SIU label. He hopes that one day the beer he and several other hardworking students are working on can be enjoyed by both students and parents alike at sporting events, social gatherings, and after a long day.

Before coming to SIU, James was unsure of what he really wanted to do after high school. SIU gave him the chance to learn not only about many academic fields but also about himself. SIU gave him the chance to find a career and a passion in beermaking, and he hopes SIU fuels the flames of your passions as well. If he had any advice for students young and old, it is this: Life is adverse and full of new challenges every day. You might not be where you want to be right now, and that's okay! If you work hard and keep your passions, you will find yourself exactly where you want to be.



Isabel Camacho

Computer Engineering with a specialization in Cyber Security and a minor in Mathematics

Isabel Camacho is in her 4th year majoring in Computer Engineering with a specialization in Cyber Security and a minor in Mathematics. Isabel plays piccolo in the Marching Salukis in the fall and the Basketball Pep Band in the winter. She also plays flute in the Symphonic Band in the spring.

Isabel in the past has taken courses involving programming, creating circuits, and programming with a Raspberry Pi. She is in the final stages of her academic career and is starting to take classes such as Ethical Hacking and Computer Systems Security. She is expecting to start her Senior Design project in the spring and an internship over the summer.

In her free time, Isabel can be seen either working at a winery here in Southern Illinois or chilling at home watching both the Rings of Power and House of the Dragon. She enjoys going to the movie theater and late game nights with friends.



Priscilla Koomson

Degree in Languages, Cultures, and International Studies specializing in International Trade. and minors in Marketing and Business and Administration

Priscilla Koomson is a senior graduating with a degree in Languages, Cultures, and International Studies specializing in International Trade. She will also obtain her minors in Marketing and Business and Administration. This past summer, she went on the SIU study abroad trip to France. She could interact with people from different countries and occasionally practice her French. Being at one of the Grande Écoles in France has inspired her to continue her studies abroad.

With hopes to travel and live life abundantly, Priscilla knows her career path will take her to greater heights. The Honors program has enjoyed having Priscilla as a student worker for the last four years. She is not only a dedicated worker, but she also brings life to our program and joy to our staff and students. Priscilla interned with F2 Strategy, a wealth tech management consulting firm(virtual)founded in Silicon Valley. There she got hands-on mentorship from the founder and an SIU alum. Her research there focused on Expansion and the European wealth management market.

Priscilla has been a part of the Women's Civil Institute, Emerging Saluki's. She has also served on a hiring committee at SIU with other student leaders and worked as an APA. One of her favorite memories in Honors was organizing a movie screening by Ai Wei Wei, which examines the scale of the refugee crisis and its human impact. On Fridays, Priscilla is at CIE engaging in exciting conversations and learning from international students. All these would not be possible without the mentorship she gets at the Honors Program.

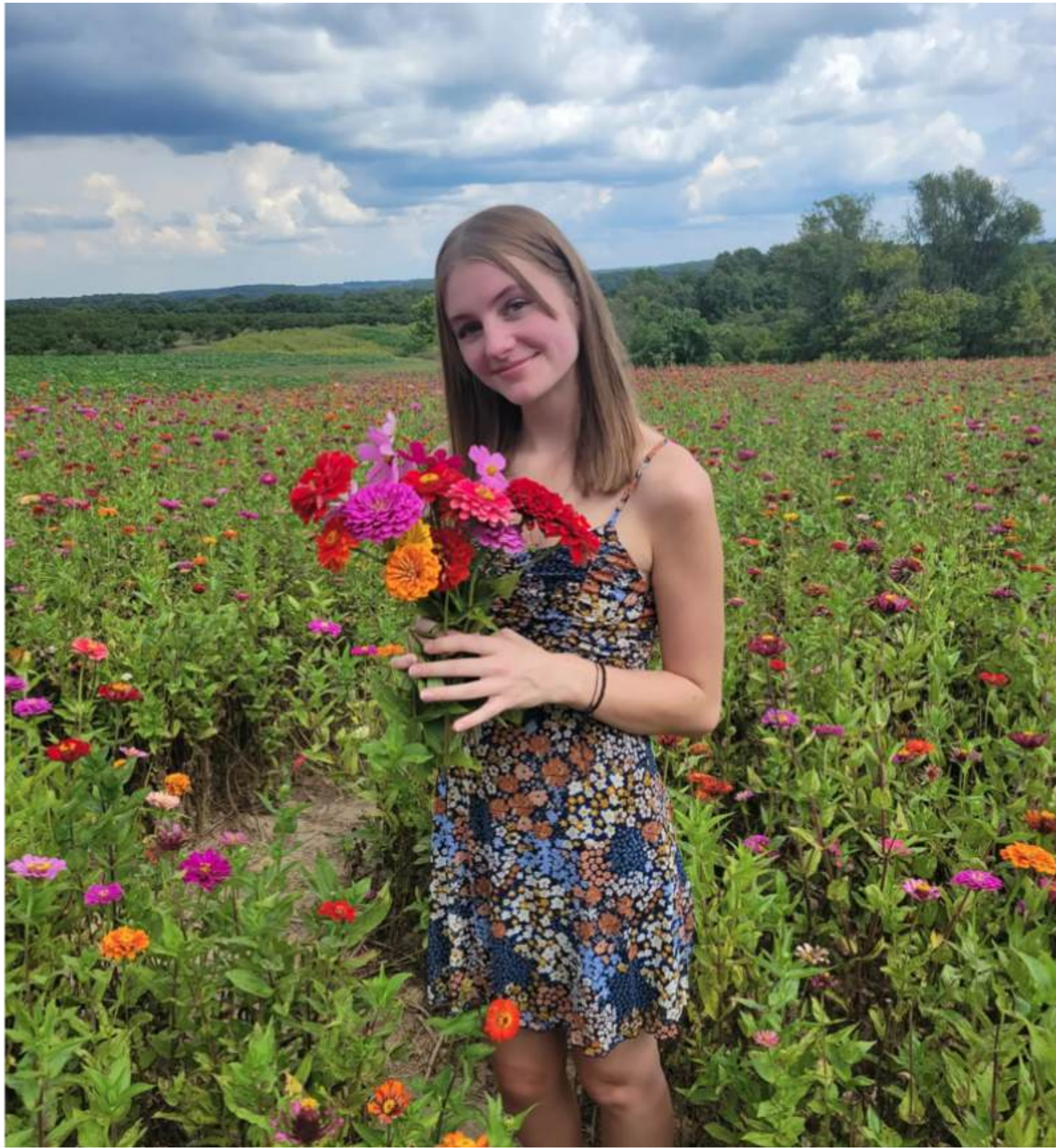


Madeline Goldman

Physiology major and minor in Chemistry

Madeline Goldman is a junior at SIU majoring in Physiology and obtaining a minor in Chemistry. She plans to graduate in December 2023 and attend Physician Assistant school post-graduation.

Madeline has been a member of the University Honors Program since freshman year. Also at SIU, she is Vice President of Timmy Global Health and a member in the Pre-Health Professions Association as well as Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. Madeline enjoys playing on the SIU Women's Club Volleyball Team. In her free time, she enjoys volunteering and participates at Gumdrops weekly. During breaks, she works in the Emergency Room as an ER Tech/CNA. Madeline is motivated to attend PA school and is excited to see where her future takes her! Go Dawgs!



Alyssa Poker

Geography and Environmental Resources major and minor in Environmental studies.

Alyssa Poker is a sophomore studying Geography and Environmental Resources with an emphasis on environmental sustainability, and a minor in Environmental studies. In the past, she has been interested in the environment and how to protect it. She felt her calling and decided to start taking environmental studies classes in high school to prepare her for her college studies. She chose Southern Illinois University because she saw the great environmental programs that were offered and thought that the location for her major would offer great opportunities.

Currently, Alyssa is interested in environmental advising and hopes to someday work with construction companies to ensure that they carry out all of the environmental regulations. Alyssa will be applying for internships for the summer of 2023 and hopes to work with companies in Chicago to get work experience and develop the skills she needs for her future career. She joined the Honors Program at the beginning of her sophomore year and is grateful to the Honors Program for providing her with excellent opportunities to allow her to excel in her studies and meet all kinds of amazing people.

In her free time, Alyssa loves to spend time playing games with her friends as well as cooking and baking all kinds of treats. She loves hiking, going on walks around Carbondale, and exploring new areas of town. Alyssa loves SIU and can't wait to advance in her studies and find a great career.



Cristina Ramirez

Chemistry major with a specialization in Environmental Chemistry.

Cristina Ramirez is majoring in Chemistry with a specialization in Environmental Chemistry. She graduates on December 17th after three and a half years at SIU. She has been a part of the Society of Physics Students, Marching Salukis, and the Saluki Pep Band since her freshman year. She was also an Academic Peer Advocate for three semesters. Cristina owns a cat named Dr. Whiskers who provided comfort to numerous residents during the exam seasons. There have been numerous support systems such as the First Saluki Center and the Multicultural Center who supported her since her freshman year through mentoring and scholarships.

Once COVID regulations were reduced in her sophomore year, Cristina finally was able to be involved in research on campus. Her passion for environment restoration guided her to join an aquatic toxicology research lab. Her work revolved around studying the phototactic response in pyrethroid-resistant *Hyalomma azteca*. She was accepted to SIU's 2021 Research Experience for Undergraduates program where she continued doing work with Dr. Lydy. The project was continued in the following fall under an Honors Independent Study. During that fall semester she also earned a solo platform at the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry 51st Annual Conference. After concluding the project in the spring of 2022, she moved on to explore another application of chemistry. In the summer of 2022, she completed a chemistry internship at NuMat Technologies, a company with strong ties to Northwestern University. The internship's project focused on synthesizing metal-organic frameworks and characterizing them using various instruments. She is currently working towards earning an assistant research and development chemist role before applying to attend graduate school in 2024. She hopes to eventually earn a PhD in Chemistry or Toxicology.



Kate Held

Finance major and minor in Spanish, Environmental Studies, and Economics.

Kate Held, a senior from Springfield, Illinois, is studying Finance as an Honors Pre-Law Scholar with minors in Spanish, Environmental Studies, and Economics. She will graduate May 2023.

Kate is a member of the SIU Women's Soccer team, a Sector Leader for the Saluki Student Investment Fund, member of the Sustainability Council and the Delta Zeta Sorority, sits on the Leadership Task Force for the Student Alumni Council, and is the student representative for the College of Business External Advisory Board.

She aspires to build on her background in finance to work as an environmental attorney. Kate has applied to multiple law schools and will be making her selection soon. In the photo above, Kate is standing in front of the Illinois Supreme Court located in Springfield, Illinois.

Over summer 2022, Kate interned at Asset Consulting Group in Clayton, MO. The firm manages over \$163 billion in assets. There, Kate learned more about Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG) Investing and how clients use ESG in their portfolios. During Fall 2022, Kate worked with Dr. Sylwester to write her honors undergraduate thesis "ESG is Fiduciary Duty". Kate is looking to further her research with ESG investing and may publish her work in a finance journal.

Kate is extremely grateful to the Honors program for inspiring interdisciplinary studies. "From getting advice from Elizabeth, taking Dr. Kapur's interdisciplinary classes, volunteering with David, and always striking interesting conversations with Lauren, the honors program has taught me so much and has made my time at SIU special".

Kate is also a big foodie and enjoys trying all the "boujee" restaurants in the Carbondale area. In her free time, she enjoys anything and everything outdoors. This semester she hopes to complete "The Shawnee Challenge". The challenge highlights 24 unique areas in the Shawnee.



Kristina Pike

Physiology major and minor in Chemistry.

Kristina Pike is a senior studying Physiology with a minor in Chemistry, and is on a pre-medicine route. Throughout her college experience, she has been a part of the Honors Program, the Wind Ensemble, the Orchestra, and Pre-health Profession Association. Working in the medical field as a nurse's aide in a retirement center, a patient service representative in a hospital clinic, and patient care technician in a hospital has encouraged her to continue pursuing her undergraduate degree and inspired her to look towards medical school. She is passionate about helping other people and developing meaningful relationships with everyone that she encounters. In spring semester of 2022, she began a volunteer initiative of handwriting personal letters to elderly shut-ins due to COVID-19 and nursing home residents. The goal behind this service is to help alleviate loneliness in those who may not have any family left or around. Along with writing letters to the elderly, she volunteers with the app Be My Eyes. Through this app, she has helped visually impaired and blind people by being their eyes and allowing them to do daily activities with ease. She has also done many community clean ups and served at banquets in South Dakota.

In her free time, Kristina loves to go hiking at Little Grand Canyon and Garden of the Gods. Getting out in nature helps her clear her mind and ensure that there is time for herself. She also loves to play music and often will play piano, ukulele, and clarinet to let off stress. She is a big proponent of staying healthy and visits the gym regularly. Outside of these hobbies, she enjoys painting and doing small crafts to give as gifts and decorate the house. After college, she will be taking a gap year to save up for medical school. She will be taking the MCAT in August and continue working as a patient care technician. In this gap year, she will be travelling to several states around the country. Because school has been such a constant factor in her life, she is going to enjoy a couple vacations before she goes to medical school.



Gustav Persson

Economics major

My name is Gustav Persson, and I grew up in Helsingborg, a city in Sweden. I came to Southern Illinois University to be a part of the swimming team and I am currently pursuing a degree in economics. Despite being a junior, I am on track to graduate in May due to my consistent efforts in accumulating a significant number of credit hours per semester. In the summer of 2022, I gained valuable experience through an internship as a Project Manager for Robot Minds, a company that specializes in facilitating human-robot interactions with world-leading robots. During my internship, I also took an accompanying research class that deepened my understanding of the impact of robots on the global economy. The class was taken simultaneously with the internship and provided me with a comprehensive education on the subject and allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the implications of robotics on various industries, as well as the broader societal and economic effects.

In conjunction with my academic pursuits, I am also actively involved in extracurricular activities. I am a member of the university's swimming team and this activity takes up most of my free time. However, I also serve as a mental health advocate for the athletic department, hold a position as a business ambassador and actively participate in the Wesley Foundation and the Blockchain Economics Club. These extracurricular activities provide me with supplementary opportunities to develop my skills and gain valuable experiences. Overall, I am greatly appreciative of the opportunities that SIU and the Honors Program have provided me.



Macy Sanchez

Chemistry major

Macy Sanchez is a senior from Benton, Illinois and is majoring in Chemistry. She is graduating in December of 2023 and intends to go on to law school. She enjoys involving herself in various organizations here at SIUC, including the Marching Salukis and Symphonic Band. Every fall she is apart of the Southern Illinois Symphony Orchestra (SISO), and she was recently admitted as an officer in Musicians United. Music is a huge part of her life, as she plays the oboe, clarinet, and guitar.

She is also motivated to do well academically, and she is apart of the Honors Program and the Society of Physics Students (SPS). She enjoys the Astronomy Nights with SPS and is currently looking into research opportunities involving Astrophysics. She was also an undergraduate Teaching Assistant for a Chemistry lab and is always looking to help and mentor others. She is also currently studying for the LSAT. Her goal for the future is to attend and graduate law school, where she then will become a medical malpractice attorney. She is also considering working as a judge later in life. She is eager to start her career and is excited to see all the opportunities the future holds.

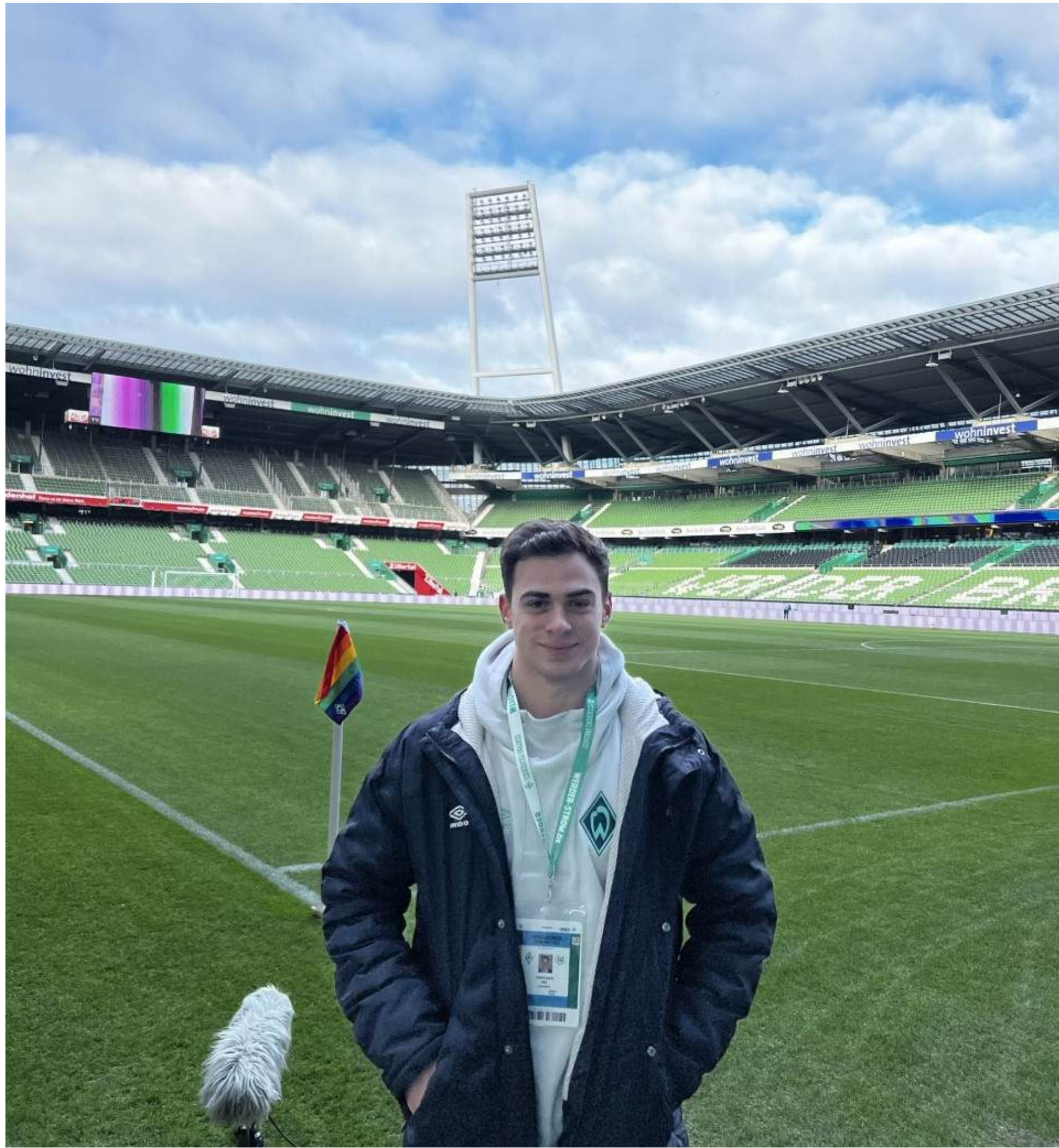


Reese Borlin

Forestry major with a specialization in Forest Recreation and Park Management

Reese Borlin is a senior majoring in Forestry with a specialization in Forest Recreation and Park Management. Within Forestry, he specifically enjoys studying natural resource policy, wilderness, and recreation planning. Reese also has minors in Geographic Information Systems and Spanish. In addition to the Honors Program, Reese is a member of the Society of American Foresters. He enjoys volunteering at Touch of Nature, Green Earth, and the Shawnee National Forest.

In his free time, Reese enjoys a variety of outdoor recreation including endurance running, cycling, and backpacking - in 2020, he hiked southern Illinois' River-to-River trail. After he graduates in May, Reese will begin a position with the US Forest Service as a District Recreation Planner for the Huron-Manistee National Forests in northern Michigan.



Tobias Hagen

Business Management major and minor in Computer Science

Tobias Hagen is a Senior who is majoring in Business Management (Specialization in Supply Chain & Logistics) as well as minoring in Computer Science. He enjoys a variety of fields in business including information systems management and logistics management, as well as sports and venue management. Tobias has had internships in those respective categories including an internship at a software programming company in Bremen, Germany, a supply chain management internship with Amazon in Venice, Florida, and most recently a venue management internship with a Bundesliga Stadium in Bremen, Germany.

Tobias, who is from Bremen, Germany spent his childhood there before moving to Lemont, Illinois where he and part of his family reside now. He enjoys traveling and will frequently fly to Europe to see his family and visit other countries. When he is not traveling, he enjoys sporting events and working out. Tobias also likes going on hikes, exploring nature, and spending time with his family and friends. After graduation, he plans on accepting a management position and gain experience before attending graduate school to pursue his MBA.



Jessica Grygus

Microbiology major and minor in American Sign Language, Chemistry, and Physiology

Jess is a Senior majoring in Microbiology with minors in American Sign Language, Chemistry, and Physiology. Jess LOVES gross anatomy and is currently a student in the cadaver dissection courses at SIU. It is very uncommon for universities to allow undergraduates to take these courses, making this opportunity at SIU especially unique! She is also a Teaching Assistant for PHSL 301 and hopes to pursue teaching in her future career. Currently, she has been accepted into Pathologists' Assistant School and plans on focusing in surgical pathology. If you ever have questions about this amazing career and/or its unique perspective to medicine, don't hesitate to reach out!

Jess is involved with Saluki Ambassadors, the RSO that gives campus tours and helps out with other prospective student events. She has served as Vice-President and President, allowing her to give back to SIU and share her love for this university. She also plans to study abroad this spring break in Costa Rica with UHON 351 - The Earth Around You. Jess has gained so many valuable experiences through the Honors Program and is grateful for all the opportunities it has given her! When not in school, Jess loves to go on walks with her dog, Hadley.



Kaylee Wobig

Cinema major and minor in Communication Studies

Kaylee Wobig is a junior majoring in Cinema with a minor in Communication Studies. She has been involved in the film RSO Movie Camera Movement (MCM) since her first semester at SIU and currently serves as the secretary for the club where she manages the social media. Through MCM, Kaylee has been a part of over a dozen films, from being an extra and assisting with the camera to producing and directing. She is also a part of the writing club Writer's Room, helping critique scripts every week. She is also very involved in band, having participated in marching band since her first semester and doing pep band this spring on the trombone. Additionally, this is her second year working as a Resident Assistant on West Campus. Volunteering outside at places such as Touch of Nature and Green Earth Sanctuaries are her favorite places to volunteer. Over her summers, she volunteers as a camp counselor for the American Diabetes Association at Camp GranADA, helping to educate and inspire young campers also fighting type one diabetes.

Over the summer of 2021, Kaylee interned at the Dreamscape Studio in Champaign working as a wardrobe production assistant where she got hands-on experience organizing a set, working with actors, and working with production stunts. She is looking forward to future internships that will arise, with hopes of working for a YouTube company such as BuzzFeed or CollegeHumor. Her goal is to use film as a medium to spread awareness about topics she's passionate about as well as entertain and educate viewers to inspire change. Kaylee wrote, directed, and produced her own short film last semester, and is excited to continue doing such things in her future career.



Alaina Wilson

Double major in Zoology and Languages, Cultures, and International Studies with a specialization in Classics

Alaina Wilson is a junior from Clarksville, Tennessee and is a double major in Zoology and Languages, Cultures, and International Studies with a specialization in Classics. She has always had a love for wildlife and conservation work and enjoys knowing that her programs allow her to continue pursuing multiple interests.

Alaina is a lab assistant to researcher Amy Buhman in Dr. Heist's zoology lab here at SIU. This lab genotypes samples sent in from multiple agencies to assist in the conservation of the endangered Pallid sturgeon. It is very rewarding for her to know that her work is helping actively make a difference in the survival of such a unique and interesting species. Over the past summer, she worked as a Summer Camp Counselor at the Nashville Zoo. There, she got to teach children ages 5 - 14 everything from animal characteristics to dinosaurs and geology to history of the Nashville Zoo. It was an amazing experience, and she hopes to pursue an Animal Care internship at a zoo in the future.

As a Chancellor's scholarship recipient and Honors student, Alaina is very grateful for all of the service work she has been involved with here at SIU; a few of her favorite sites are Gum Drops, Touch of Nature, and Green Earth. Alaina is also a member of Sigma Kappa sorority, where she has held 3 chair positions over the last two years. She has also been a CPA recruitment counselor and a CPA delegate for her sorority. Alaina is a member of the SIU Classics Club, has participated in a MCM project, and plans to pursue a media-related independent study in the next year.



Nicholas Winkler

Double major in Business Management (Specialization in Management of Health Care Enterprises) & Marketing

Nicholas Winkler is a Senior who is double majoring in Business Management (Specialization in Management of Health Care Enterprises) and Marketing. Originally from Memphis, Tennessee, he enjoys running, traveling, and watching the Memphis Grizzlies play. During his time at SIU, Nicholas had the opportunity to study marketing abroad at Grenoble Ecole de Management, a renowned French graduate business school that specializes in innovation and management. There, he learned from a small business professional from Italy, a venture capitalist from Dubai, and a marketing specialist from Iran.

In addition to his academic pursuits, Nicholas is actively involved in various extracurricular activities. He has been a member of the SIU Honor's Program, Saluki Student Investment Fund, Area Housing Council, Student Healthcare Management Association, SIU Call Center, and Stanford's University Innovation Fellows program. One of his favorite memories from these activities was being flown out to Stanford to learn from professors and other members of Stanford's Design School. After graduation, Nicholas plans to take the LSAT, gain professional experience in his field, and apply to law school.



Myla Croft

Major in Political Science with a specialization in pre-law with a minor in Global Studies

Myla Croft is a senior majoring in Political Science with a specialization in pre-law with a minor in Global Studies. She is the 2022 Lincoln Laureate of Lincoln Academy of Illinois. Myla is a McNair Scholar, on the Dean's List, and recipient of multiple scholarships including the African American scholarship and the Penny Severns Public Service scholarship. She is the Vice President of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, the Secretary of Black Affairs Council and Black Women's Task Force. In addition to this, she is the Third Vice President of the Southern District of the Illinois Association of Colored Women's Clubs. In the past, she has volunteered with the Boys & Girl Club of Southern Illinois. This past spring, Myla was the Vince Demuzio intern for the Jackson County State's Attorney's Office. During her time interning for the state attorney, she took on several initiatives to reduce crime in the local community including developing a restorative justice program and coordinating a music program for at-risk youth.

Last summer, she participated in the McNair Summer Research Institute where she worked under the advisement of Dr. Stephen Bloom from the Department of Political Science. During the summer, Myla researched the history of United States-Mexico relations, as well as analyzed executive orders from Trump and Biden's administrations and how Mexican asylum seekers are affected by them. She developed a compelling argument that political factors are more prominent than economic factors in regard to implementing immigration policy. In April, she will attend the Midwest Political Science Association conference in Chicago, Illinois to present her research from the past summer. On May 13, Myla will graduate with her bachelor's degree. The following semester, she will attend law school. In the future, Myla aspires to be an immigration attorney. She desires to represent asylum seekers and refugees. Myla is determined to be a voice for the voiceless.



Rylee Conner

Major in Criminology and Criminal Justice with a minor in Forensic Science

Rylee Conner is a Senior majoring in Criminology and Criminal Justice with a minor in Forensic Science. She is in her second semester of an Accelerated Master of Arts in Criminology and Criminal Justice and is very excited to become a full-time graduate student come summertime. Her research interests include prosecutorial discretionary decision-making, mass incarceration, and critical theory. Throughout her time at SIU, Rylee has been a member of the university debate team, Honors Program, Dean's list, and the Graduates of Criminology and Criminal Justice. After graduation, she plans to take the LSAT and go to law school, with the hope of one-day practicing constitutional law or becoming a civil rights attorney.

In her free time, Rylee enjoys spending time with her cats, Pepperjack and Coupon, who provide endless hours of entertainment and shenanigans. She is (a little too) passionate about coffee, owns several different types of coffee brewers, and has plans to expand her coffee making collection. She loves to travel with her fiancée and enjoys exploring the beautiful landscape around Carbondale.



Paula Horton

Major in Psychology

Representing Gen X, Paula is here to demonstrate how “old dogs” can learn new tricks. She is a non-traditional, first-generation sophomore majoring in psychology. She loves the Spanish language, and is considered fluent – though she might argue against that. She stays very busy as a mom of two (19 & 14-year-old kiddos), a volunteer in Dr. Hurtado- Parrado’s Behavioral Learning Laboratory (BeLL Lab), and a paraprofessional tutor at Carruthers Elementary School in Murphysboro through Illinois Tutoring Initiative. She has her sights set on a Ph.D. in experimental psychology, but the subject of that study is evolving as she hones her focus. In the meantime, she’s gaining a deeper understanding of behavior analysis through an Honors independent study with Dr. Hurtado- Parrado and his doctoral student, Julián Cifuentes. She assists with rat colony maintenance, troubleshoots graduate experiments, and assists in human psychology experiments all while learning about the experimental process and lab procedures in a psychology laboratory.

She was thrilled when she recently found out she is one of this year’s McNair Scholarship winners! Soon after, she received the Top 5% Award from the psychology department. Last year she was honored and grateful to be the inaugural Eva & Joe Corder Honors Scholarship Award.

Paula volunteers her time with the Center for English as a Second Language, Career Center job fairs, Pride Festival, and pumpkin carving for the Boys and Girls Club Halloween charity walk. In another lifetime – before kids – she sang professionally, fronting several bar bands through the years. This led to adding to her musical repertoire by learning to play rhythm guitar. She also plays trumpet, though she could not convince any of the bands to let her wail with it on stage. Something about trumpets not being rock n’ roll enough...? Everyone’s entitled to an opinion!



S. Ryaan Ligon

Major in Microbiology

Ryaan is a senior in microbiology who graduates in May 2023. Her creativity and desire to learn motivate her. She feels truly blessed to be in a field that she adores. She likes to say she hasn't found something a bacteria cannot do naturally or cannot be engineered to do. Secondly, her other motivation is her dog, Theo. He is an older dog, and she wants to give him the best life she possibly can. He loves going on hikes, car rides, and anywhere he can get attention. When Ryaan is not with her dog or doing homework, she can be found in a research lab. Ryaan joined Dr. Jayakody's synthetic microbiology lab in January 2021. She describes synthetic microbiology as the process by which you modify a cell (in this case, a bacterial cell) with non-host DNA to perform a function or achieve a goal. In Dr. Jayakody's lab, she uses these concepts to engineer bacteria that can break down plastic and produce high-value chemicals, such as the compounds for nylon and compostable plastics. Additionally, as of the Spring 2023 semester, Ryaan joined Dr. Scott Hamilton-Brehm's geomicrobiology lab and Dr. Sean Moran's (chemistry) laser-protein lab. With Dr. Scott, she is characterizing the metabolism and genome of a novel bacteria. In Dr. Moran's lab, Ryaan is learning how to use different computational chemistry programs, as well as modeling proteins structures and movements.

Additionally, I was a recipient of the 2022–2023 REACH awards and was able to present at the SIU student creativity and research exposition forum that was held last week. She found it to be an honor to present her research and findings at SIU; it was also cool because for the first time since she joined Dr. Jayakody's lab, the entire lab had a poster and a presentation. While Ryaan is saddened to leave her lab, she is equally excited to see what the future holds. Ryaan is currently job-searching for a job in the biotechnology industry, preferably in Colorado or California. Ryaan plans on working for a few years and narrowing down what PhD program she wants to choose before going to graduate school for a PhD. She is planning a trip via train and ferry through Italy and Greece for the fall.



Emma Metz

BFA in Painting

Emma Metz is currently a senior working towards her BFA in painting. Her thesis work focuses on transforming the two cornerstones of the history of the image: the still life and the landscape. Her interest lies within rejecting photorealism and refracting the world through an abstract and surrealist method that she utilizes to create her work. She describes this method as the “melting of objects across the canvas” which catches the resulting paintings in between two poles, one redundantly representational, and the other, too abstract, stripping referential meaning all together. Emma draws her inspiration from her life, using what she sees and learns as a reference to create and cultivate bodies of work. Oil and acrylic on stretched canvas are the main materials used, but she also works with oil pastels on paper as well.

This semester she has been working closely with her professor Xuhong Shang to help build a strong portfolio. Her current body of work was recently shown in SIU’s Surplus Gallery for the annual Rickert-Ziebold Trust Award Competition. Emma was one of two winners of the 2023 trust award, which helps seniors kick start their art careers post-graduation.

In addition to painting, Emma also works at SIU’s craft shop, teaching ceramic lessons and workshops to the community and students. This includes wheel thrown pottery, and hand built ceramics. After graduation, Emma plans to travel and explore the world more before applying for graduate programs where she plans to receive her MFA in painting.