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When Kayla Warner first came to [Governors State University](#) as a freshman, she was unfamiliar with the [Honors Program](#) and reluctant to participate.

“I had struggled throughout high school and didn’t believe I was smart enough for it! It wasn’t until I met other people in the program and saw how much they enjoyed their classes and the opportunities they had that I decided to join again,” Warner explained.

Now, Chair of the Honors Programs Student Council, the [communication disorders](#) major is thankful she gave the program a chance.

“The Honors Program helped eliminate a lot of the fear I had about not being good enough or not being a leader.”

Since her freshman year, Warner has been privy to the benefits of the program, including the opportunity to conduct research and present her findings at the regional and national levels.

"These conferences are such a good way to gain experience and confidence as a presenter, as well as to network and learn about research others are doing."

The team-building events and community service opportunities hosted by the program each semester were a particular highlight for Warner. From retreats in Chicago to the end-of-year banquets, where Honors Program students celebrate their accomplishments, she views the community created through the events as key to her success at GSU.

"One of the benefits to the Honors Program is that you get to be a part of a community. Personally, I have built many lasting relationships with people I met at the HP events and in the honors courses."

The Honors Program has encouraged Warner to reach for the goals she would have previously thought impossible.

"During my time in the program I've learned that success comes with dedication and lots of hard work, but it is absolutely achievable."

This is best illustrated by the creation of the new Honors Lounge on the second floor of the E Wing, which Warner helped to develop.

"It's been a dream of the Student Council for years. Now HP students have a space on campus to call their own!"

Thinking of her future, Warner can already see the impact these life lessons will have in her academic career and beyond.

"I know I can move forward being confident in my abilities and not fearing the things that used to scare me like research or leadership positions," she said.

Her advice to current and future Jaguars?

"Set big goals and really put yourself out there. Whether you want to apply for a certain job or internship, or if you're thinking about starting a campus organization, or contemplating sharing your work at a conference, or whatever it is for you personally, you've got to try. Even if it's uncomfortable, you should go after what you want. Chances are you'll look back and be grateful you did!"