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Honors Students Present Artistic Impressions at National Conference

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Rachel Beckmann's winning entry pays tribute to connections
lost to COVID



A multimedia poster designed by [Governors State University Honors Program](#) Rachel Beckmann recently won a first-place award in the art and visual media category of the 2021 National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) Conference in Orlando, Fla. About 200 students competed across 10 categories.

“I’m At A Loss, But Not For Words: A Multimedia Creation” combines Rachel’s passions for writing, photography, and design to reflect on her newfound appreciation for physical connection to loved ones in a semi-post COVID-19 world.

Through photographs and essays, Rachel shares her powerful connection with a 150-year-old barn that has been part of her family for six generations, her deceased grandmother and beloved grandfather, and finally to her significant other of six years.” I say he is like a newly stitched teddy bear—stiff, stubborn, but soft and playful,” Rachel, a senior English major, writes in her vignette.

Also presenting at the NCHC conference was junior Psychology major Kaylin Richey, an African American student whose 2- and 3-D art and sculpture won praise from the conference leader. “I Don’t Belong Here,” depicts a Black woman who revisits slavery and has to run from police. Kaylin’s poster echoed the personal sentiments of 2021 NCHC President Suketu Bhavsar, said David Rhea, Director for the Center for Junior Year.



“As DEI – diversity, equity, and inclusion- continues to be a very real struggle in honors-level education, this immigrant of Indian descent, was moved to see an African American female student creating art and sculpture highlighting oppression,” said Dr. Rhea, adding, “in his presidential address, Dr. Bhavsar coincidentally used the same words “ ‘ I don’t belong here.’ ”

Both Kaylin and Rachel began the Governors State Honors Program as first-year freshmen and join more than 100 others in the unique initiative designed to provide high-impact, challenging, and experiential learning opportunities—both in and out of the

classroom. The GSU Honors program provides leadership skills and personal development, as well as co-curricular opportunities for the betterment of the individual student, the university, and the global community.

The NCHC conference, held at Disney World property in Orlando, provided a national stage to honors students, many of who hadn't been that far from home ever, said Rhea who thanked the [Center for Student Engagement and Intercultural Programs](#) for helping to sponsor the students' trip, affording them a rare opportunity.

“This is significant for students because the large platform provides a showcase for their work and allows others to engage in their work. For professional development, the presentations help students as they prepare for graduate school and future careers, and for their personal development, it is excellent for them to engage and widen their world as young adults, future graduate students, and career professionals.”