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GSU Honors program supports first-year research in the classroom



As a freshman in college, it can be difficult to reach outside of your comfort zone.

That's why Governors State University's Honors Program takes pride in integrating professional development opportunities into the Writing Studies II classroom—namely, the Honors Council of the Illinois Region Council (HCIR) Spring Symposium. Since 2017, the GSU Honors Program has integrated this project into the classroom, which offers GSU students an opportunity to bring their classroom research to a regional conference. While presenting the project at the HCIR Spring Symposium is not required, it is encouraged and supported from the development of the research question to final mock presentations in class.

The first year in college is a time of exploration and academic jumps. To Math Education major Ryan Santoro, now a Junior, having presented at HCIR 2020 helped

him become acclimated to college, which is something that he had initially struggled to do prior to Writing Studies II. Santoro focused his research on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the impact that the UDL can make in a classroom, a project which had stemmed from his interest of becoming a math teacher. Having the opportunity to explore a project so well aligned with his goals left him with a great sense of motivation to continue these academic pursuits.

Physical Therapy and Biology student Caitlin Sellers also presented at HCIR 2020. Her project, which explored why females are most likely to tear their ACLs, still sticks with her to this day.

“I have the poster currently hanging up in the athletic training office at GSU so athletes can learn about the topic themselves,” Sellers said. “If you are on the fence about taking your Writing Studies II project to the HCIR, I will tell you that it is worth it!”

The 2020 HCIR Spring Symposium is the most recent conference to be held in person. However, the Illinois Regional Honors Council has since reimagined the event to be a remote experience due to COVID-19. The 2022 HCIR Spring Symposium took place online on February 26, 2022 hosted by the College of DuPage, which represented universities all over Illinois with over 70 student speakers. Amongst the ten GSU student speakers is current Writing Studies II student Liam Kirshbaum, who placed third in the contest.

Kirshbaum’s presentation focused on the origins of the economic practice of neoliberalism, and states that it was through the support of Writing Studies II that he was able to reorient his project and make it both inclusive and understandable to his audience. That is something that is important especially due to the scale and complexity of his topic, he said. He attributes the finished product on the online workshopping and group discussions led during class which helped him to bring his project to its final stage.

To Kirshbaum, presenting at the HCIR gave him a burst of confidence in both his knowledge on the chosen topic as well as in his own abilities as a student.

“I am extremely proud of how far this project has forced me to grow,” he said. “If I could do this my first year of college, then I have a lot of confidence in my abilities for the years to come.” Kirshbaum’s thoughts mimic those of Honors Program Coordinator Dr. David Rhea, who states “there is no can’t in the Honors Program at Governors State University.”