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# An Explanation of Research Honors

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## An Explanation of Research Honors

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When most companies are facing glass ceilings in their top management, the Economics Society at Illinois Wesleyan is a truly diversified one. We have had three female presidents in the past and one of them was an Asian. Our fifth president, Kim Hanratty, the first non-Economics major president in history, has done a great job. During an interview with Kim, she said her executives have been very responsible and helpful. Kim is also planning on going to law school. With the upcoming election on March 22, we are waiting to see another Executive Board and another good year for the Economics Society.

## **An Explanation of Research Honors**

by David Rudd

College presents the student with a structured academic environment that often consists of formal classes, directed assignments, and objective courses. Though the student accomplishes these independently, most parameters of college studies are tightly controlled by faculty and the university. Consequently, the student rarely has the opportunity to engage in self-structured yet disciplined research over which he or she maintains a degree of concomitant control.

However, the university offers one program in particular, entitled Research Honors, that gives the student the opportunity to undertake an independent research project with considerable latitude in scope and determination of topic. Specifically, Research Honors is a special university program designed to give qualified students the chance to conduct research. Students are allowed to

select research topics in a variety of majors and spend their semester researching and writing reports. There are no scheduled classes; it is up to the student to plan meetings with faculty advisors for assistance with the project.

But before everyone runs out and signs up for this full-credit course that does not meet regularly, certain qualifications need to have been met before the student can participate in the program. Students must have a GPA of 3.5 in their major and an overall GPA of 3.25. Having met these qualifications, any student regardless of major may begin Research Honors.

In one major at least, the faculty have witnessed a tremendous increase in the popularity of Research Honors. Over the past four years, Economic majors have been the most represented major in this campus-wide program. Consistently, 50% of senior economics majors have undertaken the Research Honors program. This year is no exception, as 12 of 21 economics majors have begun this type of project.

Why then is Research Honors such a prevalent phenomenon in the Economics Department? Dr. Michael Seeborg, chair of the Economics Department, believes that the major lends itself to Research Honors. "The Senior Project course that all senior economics majors must take," reasons Seeborg, "really exposes the student to this type of research, and upon completion, the student enjoys a great deal of satisfaction that encourages him or her to do a Research Honors project."

"Another reason that our majors are well-represented in this program is that we really support our students and are genuinely willing to assist them in this endeavor," adds Dr. Seeborg. Kara Rocheleau, senior economics and math double major, currently doing a Research Honors project, confirms this. "All

of the economics professors openly encourage the student to do a project and then don't abandon the student but stand by her and offer guidance when needed."

Typically, a student decides on a topic for his or her project and then selects a committee of faculty advisors, usually two from the major and one from outside the student's area of concentration. Weekly meetings and planning sessions are arranged by the student to inform the professors of any progress made, to get assistance, and receive constructive criticism concerning the project. Much of the student's time is spent researching at the library and reading numerous sources of useful information.

Dr. Seeborg compares it to a dissertation or master's thesis, though not as rigorous or exhaustive. He says, "It's a good opportunity to pool together in a single project a lot of what the students have learned in all of their classes." Research Honors prepares students for life in the real world where the person is given great latitude in completing tasks. In addition, the Research Honors program develops one's analytical, communicative (both oral and written), leadership, and creative skills, such attributes that are in demand after graduation.

And so, after completing the research and finishing the written report, the student is faced with one more unique aspect of the program. Before officially completing the course, the student must defend his or her project in front of the selected committee. Typically, the committee gathers in a room and the student proceeds to summarize the project. The faculty then asks the student questions in part to determine if the student fully understands the project and is capable of defending it from criticism. Finally, the student is asked to leave the room while the committee deliberates on the efficacy of the project.

If successful, the student earns the distinction of graduating with honors, but if not successful, the student still earns credit toward graduation.

Overall, Dr. Seeborg agrees it is "a very good program. It's fun to watch young people struggle and learn on the job which is an extraordinarily useful part of the education." Rocheleau would also agree. "Research Honors with its unstructured atmosphere is good experience for what I hope to be doing in the real world."

So then, Illinois Wesleyan University's Research Honors program is more than just another accolade for the student's resume but also gives confidence to the student as he/she enters life after graduation.

## Senior Report

by Greg Gallagher

**Baindu Banya** is a double major in Economics and Computer Science from Sierra Leone. She graduated after January-term and currently works in Minnesota. Baindu has plans to pursue a Ph.D. in economics with a specialty in computable general equilibrium models.

**Mehmet Besceli** is an international student from Turkey and is a double major in Economics and Accounting. Future plans include among other things a mandatory stint in the Turkish military.

**Alpna Bhatia** is an international student from India. She is a Student Assistant for the economics department who plans to pursue a Ph.D. in Economics at the University of Colorado.

**Steven Burrows** is an expert on the Major League Baseball industry having finished a