

# CADENZA

FALL 2008

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NEWSLETTER OF THE LAMAR  UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

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## Birdwell Retires, Travels the World

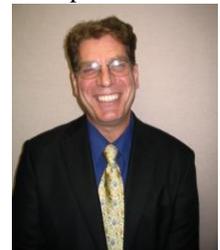


After many years of hard work and dedication to the Honors Program, Dr. Donna Birdwell retired after this past spring semester. Dr. Birdwell has been embracing her love of travel and culture since her retirement. She has travelled in India with her daughter, seeing the Taj Mahal, Kathmandu, the Dalai Lama's monastery, and is taking lessons in the Tibetan language. You can learn more about her adventures at <http://www.wideworldhome.net-a.googlepages.com/>

## New Leadership in the Honors Program

### *Interim Director*

Dr. Kevin Dodson has taught philosophy at Lamar University since 1991 and now holds the rank of Professor. He attended the University of Washington, where he graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in Philosophy and was accepted into the UW chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. After a brief rest, Dr. Dodson went on to study philosophy at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, completing his Ph.D. in 1991. Since then, he has served as an officer in several professional organizations. Dr. Dodson's scholarship has focused on the history of modern philosophy, moral and political theory, and the philosophy of history, and he has received support for his work from the German Academic Exchange Service and the National Endowment for the Humanities. In addition to presenting papers at both national conferences and international congresses, Dr. Dodson has published numerous articles and is a coeditor of the Online Encyclopedia of Enlightenment and Revolution and senior editor of Ways of Knowing: Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Knowledge (Kendall/Hunt).



### *Interim Assistant Director*

Dr. Nicki Michalski has been at Lamar University since 1999. She received her master's degree from Eastern Michigan University and her Ph.D. from Wayne State University. She teaches classes ranging from public speaking and performance studies to rhetorical theory. Her areas of research include rhetorical criticism and popular culture. She has been a member of the honors faculty at Lamar since 1999 teaching Honors Public Speaking and Honors seminars dealing with rhetorical criticism.



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## Mikel Named First Beck Fellow

Honors Program member Jennifer Mikel was awarded the first David Beck Fellowship in November 2008. This is the most prestigious award given to Lamar students and includes scholarship funds for a special summer project. Mikel's project is a nursing internship in Ghana, where she will work in a rural hospital and live with a local family. This experience has been a dream of Mikel's since she was in high school and met a nurse who had worked in Africa.



"I thought this would be an excellent way for me to mix what I want to learn in nursing with a fantastic trip that would be a journey of a lifetime. I was so happy that David Beck came up with this fellowship so that it could be possible," Mikel said.

David Beck, the sponsor of the fellowship, is an alumnus of the university and is one of the top lawyers in the state. He is also a regent of the Texas State University System and has served as president of the LU Foundation. Beck established the fellowship to provide promising Lamar students with the opportunity to pursue unique educational experiences they would otherwise have to forego.  
(information provided by the LU website)

## Honors Students Attend National Democratic and Republican Conventions

Four Honors Program members were given the experience of a lifetime with visits to the National Conventions this summer. They were participants in the Washington Center project. Caitlin Kruger and Craig Tahaney attended the Democratic Convention where they met Alisa Hicklin. Hicklin is an honors alumna, current political science professor at the University of Oklahoma and an active part of the Washington Center convention project. The Republican Convention was attended by Daniel Whitton and Jill Hamilton.

## Kruger Recalls Her Experience at the National Democratic Convention

*Senior Political Science and Communication major, Caitlin Kruger, tells of her experience at this year's Democratic National Convention:*

I had the honor of attending the Democratic National Convention through an organization called The Washington Center, a non-profit organization that hosts seminars and internships for college students interested in government and the media. During the convention, I was assigned a field project with the European PressPhoto Agency and was given full access press passes.

What I remember most from the convention is the atmosphere. The delegates, visitors, and press alike couldn't help but be pumped up by the hype the convention produced. The first three days of the convention were held at the Denver Pepsi Center. Here, I was able to meet many delegates and members of the press alike.

The last day of the convention was held at INVESCO stadium. This was the most exciting day of the convention. I was working with a photographer located on top of the stage, which allowed me to be close to the action. Obama finished speaking, fireworks exploded and engulfed me with red, white, and blue confetti. Overall, my experience was one I will never forget.

*Alisa Hicklin (left) and Caitlin Kruger (center) pose with a democratic representative, Nick Lampson*



## **STUDY ABROAD**

### **Volunteering in Belize**

*Josmery Ramirez writes:*

During my freshman year, I came upon a community service organization known as Rotaract. What began as an attempt to secure a few points for the Honors Program has turned into a life-changing experience. Through Rotaract, I have had the opportunity to work with the children of Chunox, Belize, helping raise over \$10,000 in educational scholarships. I traveled there this past summer and had the pleasure of sharing this experience with my fellow Honors Program students Laura Whitmire and Madison Bunde. While in Belize, we conducted a service project known as Camp Believe encouraging children to believe in their dreams.

My work in Belize opened doors to other opportunities, and I am now proud to say that I am the recipient of the Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship for 2009-2010, which provides a student \$25,000 to study anywhere in the world. My ambition is to raise funds for various humanitarian needs by sharing the Camp Believe vision with the world.

As I prepare for graduation, I look back on my decision to join the Honors Program with joy. It was this program that opened my eyes to the possibilities around me, helping me make my dream and the dreams of others a reality.



*Laura Whitmire, Ms. Sho, Josmery Ramirez and Madison Bunde in Belize*

### **Summer in London by Nigeria Savoy**

This past summer, I enrolled in the Oklahoma State Summer Study in London Program through the Honors Program and the campus study abroad center. It is an annual three to four week summer semester that takes place at Regent's College in north central London where students received college credit in International Accounting and European Business Environment.



*Nigeria enjoys the sights of England*

Both courses were uniquely tailored to immerse students into the British culture. Frequent class trips to the Parliament, Financial District, London Metal Exchange, and many other historic British sites, gave students a better understanding of England from an accounting view. Students also had a once in a lifetime opportunity to sit in on an International Accounting Standards Board Meeting and to tour the Charter of Accountancy Hall.

There are numerous benefits for students who have the opportunity of an overseas experience. Whether future students are contemplating a formal study abroad, work abroad, or volunteering abroad, the opportunities that are available for Lamar Honors students are limitless. Students should remember that studying abroad is all about self discovery and cultural immersion. In my opinion, it is a unique opportunity that every college student should experience.

## Study in Spain by Callie Summerlin

Did you know that Lamar houses a Study Abroad office on campus dedicated to making your study abroad happen? In fact, because so few students pursue this opportunity, it is likely that those who *do* will receive a Study Abroad Scholarship (up to \$2,000). Of course, the study abroad office cannot fund your trip entirely, but if you're like me, you'll be resourceful in your efforts to find as much alternative funding as possible. For example, did you know that the Honors Program offers financial support through the McMaster Scholarship Fund for honors students engaging in academic pursuits? I also applied for the study abroad scholarship (\$1,000) offered to fifty students nationwide by the National Honors Society of Phi Kappa Phi. No one from Lamar had ever inquired about the scholarship, so when I applied actually got it, our local chapter awarded me an additional \$500 as an incentive for future applicants to "go for it!" So, if faced with an opportunity to get more money, *go for it* because you might just get it!

I did my study abroad in Salamanca, Spain, where I studied Spanish language and history at the University of Salamanca during the month of June. I attended classes during the week, and on the weekends I had the option of taking trips to various cities throughout Spain. I traveled to Toledo, Sevilla, and Granada during the first two weekends, and I spent my last weekend in Lisbon, Portugal. Most universities that offer study abroad programs include similar pre-planned weekend trips.



As a McNair Scholar, I tailored my research project in a way that would allow me to continue my research abroad. I studied the work of Miguel de Unamuno, a Spanish philosopher and a former president of the University. While in Salamanca, I had the opportunity to visit and do research at the Casa Museo de Unamuno. The museum houses a library filled with the complete works of Unamuno as well as critical sources unavailable in the United States.

Studying abroad affords you the opportunity to immerse yourself in a culture that you are passionate about. The trip will exceed your expectations, and you will come back to Lamar with a newfound perspective after having experienced our world from a completely different standpoint.

## RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

### Studying Psychology at IU by Heather Vega

My summer Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) was very enlightening. I experienced first-hand the challenges of on-going research. The program I participated in was through the Center for the Integrated Studies of Animal Behavior (CISAB) at Indiana University in Bloomington, IN. I did not perform the traditional "animal" research. The project that I worked on this summer came about to answer the questions: How does caregiver's response to infant gestural production affect the frequency and type of gestures produced by the infant and how does infant gesture production relate to infant vocal production?

What I did was video record 22 infants playing with their respective caregivers for 2 30-minute play sessions, manipulating the gestures in the second. We looked at the change between the first and the second phases to see if the manipulation worked; we also looked at the change between the first and the third phase to see if there were any short-term consequences of the feedback pattern. We found that caregiver response patterns do affect infant gestural production in the short term and that, in the short-term, an infant produces the most developmentally advanced vocalizations when gesture production decreases.

While the research was a major part of my summer it was not the only thing the program allowed us to participate in. There was time to explore the town and take the trips that the program has planned for us to the Exotic Feline Rescue Center and to the Indianapolis Zoo. We also attended free GRE preparation courses and seminars on how to effectively communicate research information and results in writing, posters and speech. Bloomington has a lot of really interesting things to offer and although it is a college town the city is full of life and culture. With the research and the recreational activities provided those of us accepted into the program became a very close-knit group and it was the people involved that made the summer worthwhile. I had a blast in the program and would recommend it to anyone involved in the fields of biology or psychology in a heartbeat.

## Ralph Bunche Summer Institute Aides in Jarmon's Search for a Graduate School

This summer I attended the Ralph Bunche Summer Institute hosted by Duke University. It is a 5-week, intensive research program designed to create the graduate school experience in political science for racial and ethnic minorities who have been historically underrepresented in political science graduate schools. The institute prepares students for graduate school and helps them determine whether or not they really want to attend graduate school.

While there, students learn to use statistical software, attend lectures headed by professors, and participate in discussion seminars headed by teaching assistants. Students also are encouraged to develop research tools and use them in the application of a research agenda, which is extremely important in the field of Political Science. The students also participated in a graduate fair in which recruiters from various schools presented information about their graduate program.

The Bunche Institute solidified my decision to go to graduate school and gave me the resources necessary to succeed. I was extremely satisfied with my Bunche experience and would encourage anyone who is interested to apply.

by Chris Jarmon

## REU at Clarkson University by Ritchie Acosta

This past summer I had the opportunity to participate in a Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) at Clarkson University in Potsdam, NY. The name of my project was the "characterization of a virtual impactor". I never imagined that I would be working with a device used to size-segregate large particles from the air. Moreover, I never thought that I would be in charge of setting up equipment, creating connections, researching past literature, presenting results to my advisor, and even performing experiments by myself. After ten weeks of studying virtual impactors and writing papers, we presented in the Clarkson University Summer Undergraduate Research in Engineering/Science (SURE) symposium. I saw that my work had paid off.



In the end, I learned a great deal about virtual impactors and had the best summer of my college life. If I have the chance, I will do it again. To those who have never participated or heard of an REU, I suggest that you research a program that sounds interesting and apply. This experience made me eager to think about where to go to graduate school after earning my degree from Lamar.

*Acosta (top left) and friends take a break from research*

## Honors Briefs

- Honor student and Mirabeau Scholar Valerie Juarez was awarded an Emerging Scholar Award from Phi Kappa Phi, the nation's oldest honor society.
- Program member Joshua Davis is co-chair for this year's Beaumont Relay for Life event. Davis has long been an active participant and has chaired smaller events in the past. He is excited about the challenge of moving into the larger arena.
- Fitting in with this year's historic presidential election, the summer read for fall 2008 was *How Democratic Is The American Constitution?* by Robert Dahl. Students investigated and discussed, among other topics, the issues of the Electoral College and the matter of unequal representation in the Senate. Many remarked that they had no knowledge of these issues until participating in the summer read. In addition, the honors seminar Presidential Address was offered by Dr. Nicki Michalski. Class members have explored speeches by Presidents Nixon, Clinton, Reagan, Bush (first and second), Roosevelt (first and second), and of course the events of the recent nominating conventions. A third tie to the current events was Dr. Dodson's ASCUU experience with the Democracy Project.
- Honors Program members Jessica Byerly and Brittnee Rodriguez represented Lamar University at the fall meeting of NCHC in San Antonio. Although the group was small, due to difficulties imposed by Hurricane Ike, enthusiasm was high. They brought back many ideas they hope to share and integrate into our program.

## Honors Program Commends Students at Spring Reception

The Honors Program held its Spring Awards Reception April 8, 2008. During the reception, Dr. Donna Birdwell recognized honors students for their participation in three areas of excellence. The outstanding service award was presented to Meghan Greer, the service committee chair of the Honors Student Association. Academic achievement is expected of Honors Program members but Chemical Engineering major Derek Dupre was acknowledged for going beyond the usual heights attained by honors students. The leadership award was given to Tony Sarda, student government vice president and co-founder of the honors program peer mentoring program. In addition to the awards, the incoming McMaster Scholarship recipients and Mirabeau Scholars were introduced and graduates were acknowledged. The honors professor of the year award went to Elena Sandovici.

## May 2008 Graduation



Honors Student Tiffany Smith (right) received the Plummer Award this past May. The award is given to the students (male and female) with the highest gpa in their graduating class.



*May 2008 Honors Program Graduates*

## 2008 Mirabeau Recipients

2008 marks the third year Lamar University has offered the Mirabeau Scholarship. This is a full paid, four year scholarship given to a select few students entering as freshman. This year's recipients are as follows:

*Brett Bertles, Bridge City, Engineering*  
*Lucas Castle, West Brook, Engineering*  
*Madison Davis, Bridge City, History*  
*Cory Fenn, Royal (Pattison), Biochemistry*  
*Brittany Graham, TALH, Biology*  
*Christopher Johnston, Hardin-Jefferson, Engineering*  
*D.J. Johnston, Hardin-Jefferson, History*  
*Seema Kansara, TALH, Biology*  
*Brett Leyendecker, Port Neches-Groves, Engineering*  
*Nathan Minshew, Port Neches-Groves, Engineering*  
*Daniel Mortensen, Crossroads Christian, Sociology*  
*McGarrity Stanley, Port Neches-Groves, Chemistry/Psych*  
*William Ware, Huntington (Lufkin), Engineering*

*Staff Writers/Editors*

Christi Grudier

Beverly Paris

*The University Honors Program*

P.O. Box 10968

Lamar University

Beaumont, TX 77710

Phone: 409-212-9724

<http://dept.lamar.edu/honors/>

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