

## Alumnus Nick Flores Builds on his Capstone



Adil Siddique  
Junior  
Neuroscience

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UIC Honors College alumnus Nick Flores knows all too well how Capstone projects can open doors for students. Flores's Capstone project was to write a brief for a criminal appeal for the Cook County State's Attorney's Office. He was supervised by Assistant State's Attorney and fellow Honors College alumnus, Eric Leafblad. In this case, the defendant had been found guilty of selling small amounts of heroin, and had appealed the decision. Flores wrote a rebuttal to the appeal, which outlined arguments proving that the appellant's claims were faulty and therefore undeserving of a retrial. His task was to state clearly how the prosecutors had "proven the appellant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt." Flores recalls, "I researched the law, wrote the argument by using that law, and responded to the appellant's arguments one by one." His brief was submitted to the appellate court. The court favored the state, which meant that Flores had successfully proved his argument. To complete his Capstone, Flores held a mock oral recitation of his brief for his Honors Faculty Fellow and other mentors.

After earning his bachelor's degree in philosophy at UIC, Flores went on to study law at the University of Wisconsin Law School. Now as a criminal state's attorney, Flores recently defended his first case, which required the same skills he learned while completing his Capstone project. In a rare act by a court, Flores was called to argue an appeal orally. Coincidentally, the case was also about drug distribution, though the reason for the appeal was different from his Capstone. Though Flores did not write the brief this time, he argued it in front of judges.

While a student in the Honors College, Flores was an accomplished student leader, who was named the 2011 Lincoln Student Laureate and



Nick Flores

awarded the 2012 Riddle Prize, which are both awards given to one outstanding senior at UIC. Flores credits his UIC mentors for helping guide him to success as a student and as a lawyer. He gives a lot of credit to former Honors College Dean Bette Bottoms for helping him to make connections with other faculty. Flores's mentors also include Dr. Evan McKenzie, Department Head of Political Science; Professor Emeritus Dr. Matthew Lippman from the Department of Criminology, Law and Justice; and Honors College Associate Dean Stacie McCloud Williams.

Aside from being an Honors College requirement for graduation, completing an Honors Capstone project can provide students with opportunities for hands-on experience in their career fields. Flores recalls how his Capstone helped him during law school by providing him with early exposure to the process of researching laws. Flores emphasizes that Honors College students should take the time to find their passions as they choose their Capstone projects. He recommends that students who already have clear goals start working immediately towards building their resumes for professional school and beyond.



Ralph Keen  
Dean of the  
Honors College

## A Note from the Dean

Dear Honors Community,

The Honors College is a community: an inclusive and close-knit one for current students, and one that extends throughout our region and beyond. In this issue of *The Ampersand* you'll read about Christopher Kooy and Mariel Rancel, who participated in fascinating internships under the auspices of the Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement. Read about what alumnus Nick Flores is doing to eradicate drug abuse—and how this work began in his Honors Capstone project. It's always a delight to see Honors College students like Stephanie Vondell active in the creative and performing arts, so we applaud her role in *The Secret in the Wings*. You'll also meet our latest Lincoln Academy Student Laureate, Rafid Rahman, whose time in the Honors College has included creative forms of community service.

Our community thrives under the watchful care of valued partners like Eileen Hacker, whose dedication over the years was recognized

in her being named Capstone Advisor of the Year. With this issue we also welcome two new members of our team: Nikki Gottlieb, the newest addition to our superb advising team; and Tyler Nielsen, not a newcomer to the Honors College (he's a recent graduate) but our energetic and capable new Program Assistant.

Burnham Hall is always bustling with activity, and you'll see some of this in the latest news about the Speech/Forensics Team led by Honors College students, and our regular update from HCAB. It's been a busy semester and I hope it's been a good one for everybody.

Cordially,

Ralph Keen

### Upcoming Events and Scholarship Deadlines

#### Honors Capstone Progress Reports and Completion Forms

Dec. 2 • [www.uic.edu/honors/hars](http://www.uic.edu/honors/hars)

#### Honors College Convocation

Dec. 7, 7:00PM • Illinois Room Student Center East

#### Honors Activity Completion Forms Due

Dec. 9 • [www.uic.edu/honors/hars](http://www.uic.edu/honors/hars)

#### Humanity in Action

Jan. 4 • [www.humanityinaction.org](http://www.humanityinaction.org)

#### Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellowship

Jan. 13 • [woodrow.org/fellowships/pickering](http://woodrow.org/fellowships/pickering)

#### Carnegie Endowment Junior Fellows Program

Jan. 15 • [carnegieendowment.org/about/jr-fellows](http://carnegieendowment.org/about/jr-fellows)

#### DAAD-RISE Internship Program

Jan. 15 • [www.daad.de/rise/en](http://www.daad.de/rise/en)

#### Woodrow Wilson STEM Teaching Fellowship

Jan. 23 • [woodrow.org/fellowships/ww-teaching-fellowships](http://woodrow.org/fellowships/ww-teaching-fellowships)

#### DAAD Undergraduate Scholarship

Jan. 31 • [www.daad.org/undergrad](http://www.daad.org/undergrad)

#### Rangel/Pickering International Affairs Summer Enrichment Program

Feb. 2 • [www.rangelprogram.org](http://www.rangelprogram.org)

#### NSEP Boren Awards for International Study

Feb. 9 • [borenawards.org](http://borenawards.org)

#### Gilman Study Abroad Scholarship for Pell Grant recipients

Mar. 7 • [www.iie.org/Programs/Gilman-Scholarship-Program](http://www.iie.org/Programs/Gilman-Scholarship-Program)

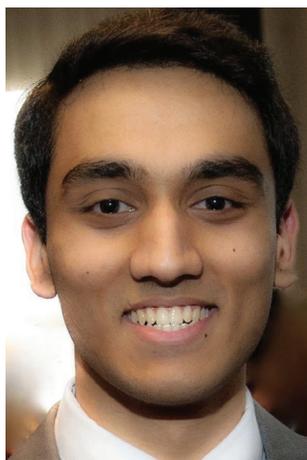
#### Udall Scholarship for Native Americans or environmental issues

Mar. 15 • [www.udall.gov/OurPrograms/Scholarship/Scholarship.aspx](http://www.udall.gov/OurPrograms/Scholarship/Scholarship.aspx)

## 2016 Lincoln Laureate Rafid Rahman



Sahana Reddy  
Freshman  
Biological Sciences



Rafid Rahman

The Lincoln Laureate Award from the Lincoln Academy of Illinois is given each year to recognize one outstanding senior from each four-year institution in Illinois for his or her academic achievement, leadership, and service. This year, the Lincoln Laureate from UIC is Rafid Rahman, Honors College senior majoring in biological sciences and anthropology.

As a freshman, Rahman researched health disparities at Rush University. He also has research experiences at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, UIC College of Medicine, and Harvard Medical School, where he studied cancer immunology this past summer. While balancing his schoolwork and his commitments as a pre-medical student, Rahman has led multiple organizations and services around campus that focus on giving back to the community.

Rahman founded and led the College of Cycling, which hosts bike riding events and workshops in Chicago while promoting the benefits of cycling. This organization partners with UIC Dining Services to deliver by bike over 500 meals of leftover food from the cafeteria to a local homeless shelter. In addition to the College of Cycling, Rahman was also formerly the president of the New Life Volunteering Society, a tutoring organization through which UIC students volunteer at Chicago Public Schools every week.

However, Rahman's contributions to the community are not limited to the UIC campus. The

most recent organization that he started this year is MedSpeak, a YouTube channel that creates videos addressing and answering questions about the process of applying to and going to medical school. Rahman seeks answers to these questions from professors, admission committee advisors, and medical school students themselves.

In the future, Rahman aspires to integrate peer health education with social media and news station media, extending his work with MedSpeak. He plans to get involved in healthcare outreach projects by providing information regarding health and medicine to news stations and on social media platforms. Rahman will be attending medical school at the University of Toledo next fall and is dedicated to becoming a physician and researcher. He also hopes to be part of an admissions committee for a medical school or a medical correspondent at a news channel.

Rahman believes that his leadership and volunteering have contributed to his future goals. "[These activities] all have the aspect of outreach and volunteerism, so I think those ideas and principles have translated into what I want to do and how I want to give back to others," stated Rahman. He advises students who want to be more involved in their communities to start with any club they're interested in and see where the organization takes them from there. "Life is a journey," he commented, "you really need to just ride it out and along the way you'll figure out exactly what you want."

### HCAB Update

I am pleased to announce that planning for the Honors College Ball has already begun! Mark your calendars for Saturday, March 11 for the event at Pinstripes. Information about ticket sales will be available early next semester.

Wednesdays with HCAB have also been taking place all semester. On November 30, our members hosted a Finals Stress Relief night, a quick study break featuring aromatherapy, snacks, and stress relief information.

For information about HCAB events and Wednesdays with HCAB, like our Facebook page. Best of luck on finals, and I look forward to seeing you all at future HCAB events!



HCAB board

—Celine Dalde, HCAB president

# Next semester, I'm looking forward to...



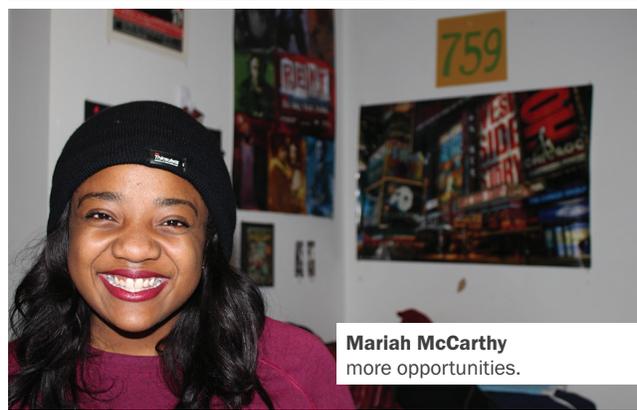
**Abigail Guillaume**  
the challenges ahead and trying new things!



**Seth Baligod**  
knowing what I want to take after first semester.



**Alicia Rivera**  
ending classes early.

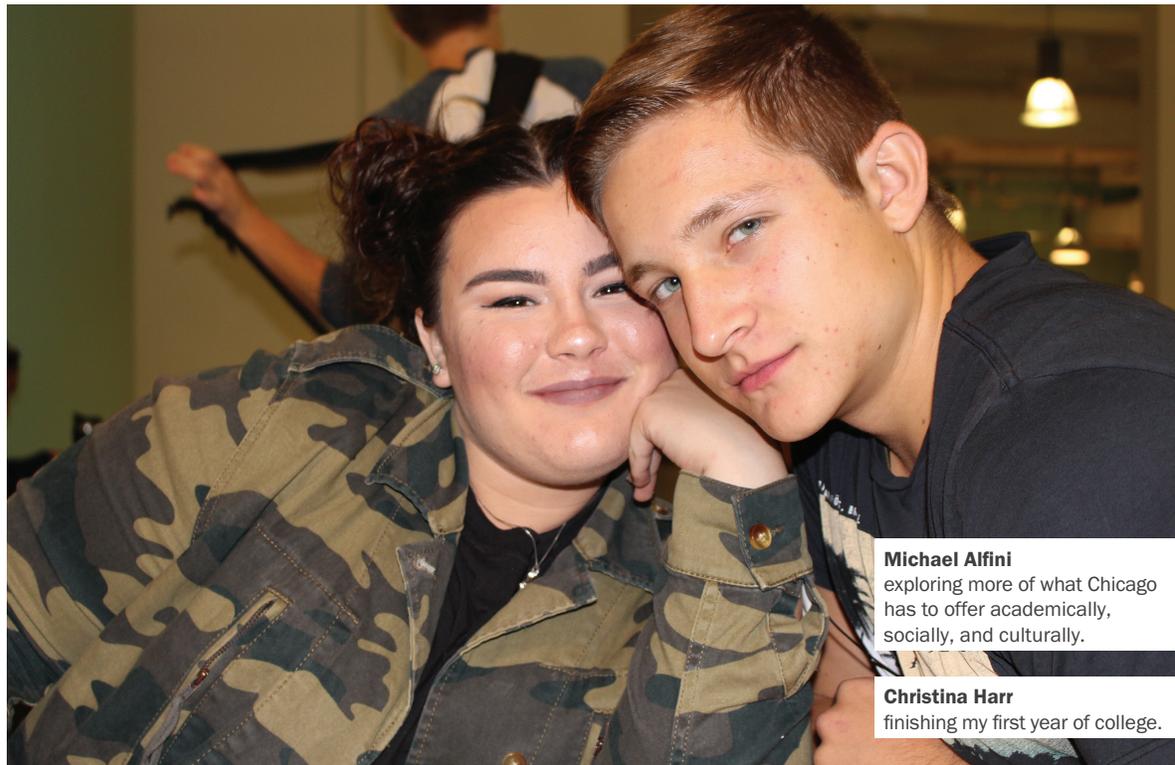


**Mariah McCarthy**  
more opportunities.

**Thoughts from Honors College freshmen**  
Photo credits: Rachael Vargas and Ari Guerra



**Nicolas Robledo**  
my new classes.



**Michael Alfino**  
exploring more of what Chicago has to offer academically, socially, and culturally.

**Christina Harr**  
finishing my first year of college.

## Meet the New Honors College Staff



Srinivasan Iyer  
Freshman  
Biological Sciences

This semester, the Honors College welcomed two new staff members dedicated to the success of its students. Nikki Gottlieb will be the new Honors Academic Advisor and Program Specialist and Tyler Nielsen will be the new Program Assistant.

Gottlieb earned her bachelor's degree in theatre performance from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. After graduating, she worked as a student life specialist at Kaplan University, where she was first introduced to student advising through an online format. She enjoyed advising and counseling so much that she decided to pursue it as a career. To achieve that goal, she earned her master's degree in Higher Education from Loyola University Chicago. She worked as an advisor at the University of Chicago before coming to UIC.

Gottlieb was drawn to the Honors College because of the opportunity to work with students who are truly motivated. She thrives in an environment where people set high goals and work to achieve them. Gottlieb advises students who are feeling overwhelmed to utilize proper time management skills. She reminds students to make use of all available services on campus, including tutoring, visiting professors during office hours, and participating in recreational activities. She is also available to any students who want to come in just to talk. In addition to her work as an advisor, she is also an advocate for the LGBTQ community and is committed to social justice.

Coincidentally, Tyler Nielsen also has a background in theatre. The Honors College alumnus earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in theatre from UIC's College of Architecture, Design, and the Arts. Soon after graduating, he accepted a position to work full time at the Honors College front desk. Later he worked in recruiting at Conversant, a company located in downtown Chicago, for two years. He realized that he enjoyed being in a higher education environment more than a corporate environ-



**Top** Nikki Gottlieb

**Bottom** Tyler Nielsen

Photo credit: Andrea Guerrero

ment, as the former allows for much more flexibility. In his free time, Nielsen works with several small theatre companies, including the Realize Theatre Group, which he helped found alongside peers while a senior at UIC. He says he is "glad to be back on campus" and looks forward to finding ways to use his position to "make positive changes in [students'] lives."

Nielsen's role as the Honors College Program Assistant is to "streamline and make processes for students more centralized and efficient." He will assist with programming and planning events for the Honors College. Although he does not advise students, he welcomes the opportunity to get to know students and have discussions about where they are headed in life. With a background in both fine arts and business, Nielsen offers a unique perspective of two contrasting worlds. He would love to become acquainted and share his experiences with students at the Honors College.

## Capstone Advisor: Dr. Eileen Hacker



Fatima Ahmad  
Sophomore  
Biological Sciences

Dr. Eileen Hacker, a UIC Honors College Faculty Fellow and Capstone advisor, has recently been awarded the Capstone Advisor of the Year Award. Her nominator, Miglena Garkova said, "Dr. Hacker is an exceptional mentor... She is skilled at providing the undergraduate student the tools they would need to guide them into research practice... This being my first research endeavor, I felt like I was in great hands."

As a Capstone advisor, her job is to serve as a mentor and monitor undergraduate Capstone projects and Honors Activities. One of the aspects she enjoys the most about being a Capstone advisor is "watching people grow professionally" and become successful by learning various kinds of skills from research. For instance, many of her mentees have learned trial and error problem-solving skills when results of the research turn out to be different than expected.

Additionally, Dr. Hacker is the Associate Department Head of Biobehavioral Health Sci-

ence at the UIC College of Nursing. Dr. Hacker's research focuses on discovering methods by which quality of life can be improved in cancer patients who have had hematopoietic stem cell transplantations. Dr. Hacker became involved in the UIC community because of her commitment to undergraduate education and her belief that it encourages students to explore areas and careers they might not have considered otherwise. Dr. Hacker advises students who are just starting to pursue undergraduate research to develop a strong mentor-mentee relationship.

Dr. Hacker will be leaving UIC at the end of the Fall 2016 semester. She will be joining the faculty at Indiana University School of Nursing as Professor and Department Chair, Science of Nursing Care. The Honors College thanks Dr. Hacker for her contributions and congratulates her on receiving the Capstone Advisor of the Year Award.

## Stephanie Vondell Takes the Stage in *The Secret in the Wings*



Rafia Ali  
Freshman  
Biological Sciences

Stephanie Vondell, Honors College senior and theater major, rehearsed for over 18 hours every week to prepare for the UIC production of *The Secret in the Wings*. *The Secret in the Wings* is an adaptation of classic, lesser-known fairy tales that reflects the dark nature of childhood. This play is about Bianca, a child who goes on multiple suspenseful adventures with her babysitter. In *The Secret in the Wings*, Vondell plays the roles of one of the Three Blind Queens and Steph.

Vondell always had an interest in acting, and began acting in plays and commercials when she was in high school. During her time at UIC, she has participated in several productions, as well as a student-produced short film. Vondell describes her involvement in *The Secret in the Wings* as one of her most memorable experiences in a play. "It's so different because all of the characters are on stage all the time... There's one main character but that doesn't even matter because...we each lead a story but the stories all are connected," Vondell said.



Stephanie Vondell in *The Secret of the Wings*  
Photo credit: William Vavrin

Vondell currently works as a marketing and production assistant at Artemisia Theatre. After graduation, she plans to continue her work there, audition for more roles, and venture into vocal work. *The Secret in the Wings* played at UIC Theater Chicago from November 11th-19th.

## UPPF Internship Highlight: Chris Kooy



Yuwa Edomwande  
Junior  
Biological Sciences



Chris Kooy

Honors College junior Chris Kooy is participating in the Urban Public Policy Fellowship (UPPF) at UIC this year. UPPF, a program that introduces undergraduate students from underrepresented communities to public policy issues, matches student interns with organizations across the city. The aspiring foreign service officer has been busy interning with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), a nationally recognized non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the civil rights of Latinos in America through advocacy for policy reforms, litigation, and community outreach.

Kooy, a political science and Spanish major, decided to participate in the year-long internship with MALDEF because of his interest in one issue in particular: immigration policy. He professes, "Immigration policy is one of the things I'm most passionate about." He works with legislative staff attorneys and litigation attorneys to translate

legal documents, analyze data relating to Illinois demographics and electoral history, and construct spreadsheets of Latino non-profit organizations in Chicago.

Kooy's work with MALDEF has been particularly important in this year's presidential election. His mentors are involved with sending out information that circulates through Latino constituencies. He has been directly involved with creating directories, voter rights summaries, and guides on how to register to vote. All of these efforts help to increase civic engagement.

Though his internship has just started, Kooy has already learned the complexities of writing legal briefs, starting cases, and arguing before a judge. He plans on getting a head start on his Capstone project through the internship. Kooy recommends the rigorous program to any student interested in policy, regardless of their educational goals. He reminds students, "Policy affects just about everything."

## UPPF Internship Highlight: Mariel Rancel



Aiswarya Baiju Fnu  
Freshman  
Computer Science



Mariel Rancel

Mariel Rancel, an Honors College junior majoring in biological sciences and minoring in nutrition and chemistry, is also participating in the Urban Public Policy Fellowship (UPPF), which introduces undergraduate students from underrepresented communities to public policy issues through weekly seminars and an internship experience. Rancel's experiences with UIC's Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services program (LARES) motivated her to be part of UPPF by introducing her to issues of civic engagement and social justice. The UPPF internship has allowed Rancel to pursue her interests in maternal and infant nutrition, and consider their implications for public policy.

For the duration of the internship, Rancel attends seminars where various speakers involved in public policy come to talk with the interns; for example, Brenna Conway, the Illinois Director of the Roosevelt Institute, spoke to the interns about strategies on networking and how to advocate for issues they find important. State

Representative Will Davis, 30th District, also held a seminar with the interns.

As a part of her internship, Rancel works at the Catholic Charities site, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), where she develops newsletters for the food program, posters with recipes for the holiday season, and healthy recipes to make with the WIC food. Rancel thought that the most fun part of her internship was "packing sandwiches."

Additionally, Rancel's research topic for the duration of the internship is WIC policy. She will be analyzing data regarding redemption rates of the vouchers that mothers in the WIC program receive from the WIC clinics every three months, as well as the factors that may influence redemption rates, such as acculturation, age of the mother, hours of TV watched at home, and marital status. Of particular interest is the redemption rate of the fruits and vegetables that were added to the program in 2009. At the end of the spring semester, Rancel will present her research, which will also serve as her Capstone Project.

# New Student Organization: Speech and Forensics Team



Polina Gubareva  
Junior  
Biological Sciences/  
Psychology

The Speech and Forensics team is a new student organization this year that was founded by Honors College students Michael Martinez, Brittany Neloms, and Meghna Peesapati. The team, consisting of 13 students, travels to different universities to compete in three speaking categories: public address, interpretation, and limited preparation.

As a new team with limited funding, coaching, and experience, the UIC Speech and Forensics Team has already competed at multiple universities and even placed in the finals. The team recently participated in its first tournament at the University of Minnesota where it secured seventh place out of 11 schools. When the UIC Speech Team competed at the Illinois/Bradley competition, the competitors received fourth place out of 12 schools.

Peesapati recalls that one of her most memorable experiences was when her teammate, Neloms, won 1st place in their second tournament. Peesapati remembers her teammates clapping and cheering. "I knew that moment was a turning point," she said. "That was the moment that we were on the map," Neloms added. Martinez shares that his favorite memory was when his teammate Sunil Dommaraju went to finals and placed fifth at their first tournament. "[Dommaraju] had no experience, worked hard, put in so much time into practicing, and all his hard work paid off," Martinez said.

The Speech and Forensics team represents the excellence of Honors College students. "The



**Top** Speech and Forensics Team  
**Bottom** Team captains, from left to right, Brittany Neloms, Michael Martinez, Meghna Peesapati  
Photo credit: Debra Sodimu

Honors College is a supplement to our education, so that we are empowered to go out and make a difference in the world. In speech and forensics, we go out and challenge political and social spheres through language and communication," Martinez said.

## Mission Statement

To highlight the achievements of Honors College students, staff, and faculty, to report on Honors College events, and to provide a forum for students and faculty to share interesting experiences and opinions, all for the purpose of fostering a sense of community and celebrating diversity among the constituents of the Honors College.

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