

# HONORS HERALD

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER FOR THE UMKC HONORS PROGRAM



## Summer camp gives high schoolers the Honors experience

Twenty-one high school students from Kansas City, California, and Illinois learned what it is like to be an Honors student at UMKC during the first Roo Honors Academy, June 21-25, 2021.

Academy participants explored environmental justice, food culture, local history, and urban wildlife in non-credit classes taught by professors who emphasized experiential learning, an Honors Program hallmark. Students also toured the UMKC campus and area attractions including the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and the National Museum of Toys/Miniatures.

Margo Gamache, Honors Program Director of Student Services, proposed the Academy after talking to local parents who wanted a fun and academically challenging summer enrichment program for their teens.

To learn more about the first Roo Honors Academy, read our article here in [UMKC Insider](#).

This year, the Academy will be held from June 20-24 and will offer four non-credit classes on communicating effectively, criminal justice, urban public health, and the sociology of sports.

If you know high school students who are looking for a unique summer learning opportunity, encourage them to apply to the Roo Honors Academy! The application deadline is **June 1**, and applications are reviewed on a rolling basis. Click the button below for more information.

[Apply Now](#)



## Honors Program partners with campus food bank

The Honors Program helps UMKC students through our new partnership with the Kangaroo Pantry.

Each month, Honors collaborates with other campus organizations to co-sponsor themed donation drives to benefit the Kangaroo Pantry. In March, Honors worked with the UMKC Women's Center to collect menstrual products.

"A lot of people don't speak up, but they need these supplies," said Honors Ambassador Tia Kahwaji. "We need to support one another and help each other out during these hard times."

In May, the drive will focus on furniture and larger donations. If you are a student who is moving at the end of semester and have goods to donate, please contact Kahwaji at [tiahawaji@mail.umkc.edu](mailto:tiahawaji@mail.umkc.edu). Alumni also are invited to make donations by contacting Kahwaji.

## Honors alumni spotlight: Khalid Tayani

Using the problem-solving skills he practiced as an Honors student in the Electrical and Computer Engineering Program at UMKC, Khalid Tayani designed a device to make life safer for construction workers.

Tayani's "Ladder-shoe" attaches to the ends of extension ladders to provide support and stability. He hopes that his invention will reduce ladder-related injuries, which account for 81% of emergency room visits for workplace injuries.

"As an engineer, it is my desire to solve problems," Tayani said. "And I've found one."

Tayani, who graduated in 2017 and is an electrical engineer at Honeywell FM&T, developed Ladder-shoe using a \$2,500 3D printer. As an Honors Program student, Tayani worked with Dr. Faisel Khan on his senior thesis to become the first engineering student to graduate as an Honors Scholar. He said his favorite part of the Honors Program was the people. "The environment was positive and professional, coated with a sense of desire to accomplish great things in this world if we all congregate and communicate as a goal-driven society."



Khalid Tayani (BS '17) climbing a ladder using a Ladder-shoe.



## New alumni mentoring program

Looking for a way to give back to the Honors community at UMKC? Look no further than the Honors Alumni Mentoring Program, which matches current Honors students with alumni working in jobs and professions of interest to the students.

Ella Valleroy (BS '21), a former Honors Ambassador, launched the program in September 2021.

"It was just the next logical step to wrap up my work as an Honors Ambassador," Valleroy said. "The Honors Program at UMKC is developing connections with alumni and keeping people involved with the university after we leave."

To get involved, alumni should send a biography and two or three keywords describing what they do to Valleroy. These job descriptions will be sent to current honors students and matches will be made accordingly.

"I've had a really great relationship with mentors throughout my undergraduate studies. I thought the program would help give alumni a way to share their experiences and what they've learned with those who don't have a great relationship with a mentor yet," Valleroy said.

If you're interested in learning more about the program or connecting with a student, contact Valleroy at [erv4dq@umsystem.edu](mailto:erv4dq@umsystem.edu).

## Honors student travels the world - twice

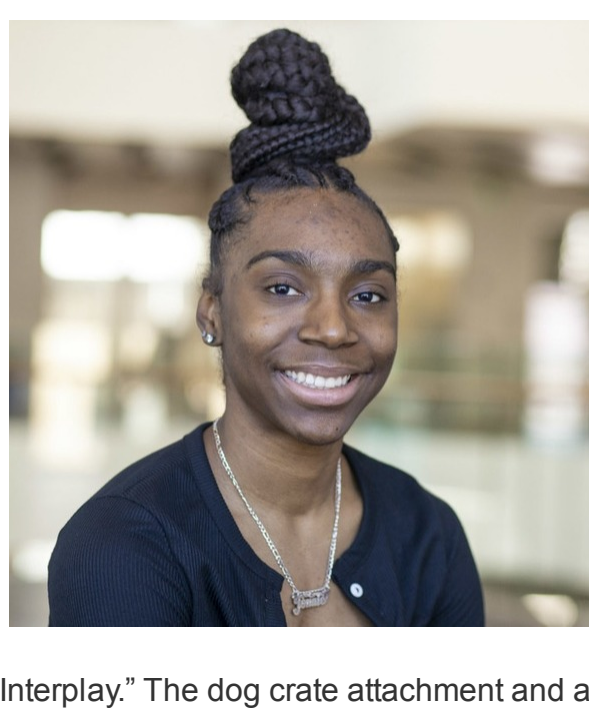
Despite the global pandemic, Honors history and English major Niki Joshi has crossed the Atlantic two times.

In the summer of 2021, Joshi won the Frederick Douglass Global Fellowship in Ireland, which focused on leadership, intercultural communication, and social justice. She was one of only 13 students from across the United States to earn this award.

This spring, Joshi spent the semester in Spain. "I wanted to build on my existing knowledge and improve my Spanish through an immersive environment," Joshi said. "It's so gratifying, and I know that it will only get better."



Niki Joshi (BA '22) in Nerja, Spain



## Honors alumni spotlight: Jonaie Johnson

When Jonaie Johnson (BBA '21) noticed her aunt left family gatherings early to take care of her dog, she thought: "Wouldn't it be great if she could do that remotely?"

Johnson's idea evolved into what she hopes will be "the Apple of dog crates":

"Interplay." The dog crate attachment and accompanying app could change the way pet owners interact with their furry friends when they can't be there in-person. The device includes video and audio access, sound and music capabilities, and the ability to give food and water to pets with the click of a button.

The Interplay app was tested in April, and Johnson plans to begin a Kickstarter presale campaign. "This journey has been full of surprises," Johnson said. "You don't know what you don't know."

Though she didn't originally envision herself in a tech-based venture, Johnson has found support across the city and is learning as she goes.

"I'm so thankful to have started my business in Kansas City because I can't think of a better city to get your start," Johnson said. "Decision makers are readily available and point you in the right direction. If they can't help you, they point you to people who can. I'm loving every bit of the way."

In addition to her business, her work as a program manager at LaunchCode, and pursuing an MBA, Johnson also acts as a mentor for the Henry W. Bloch Scholars Program at UMKC.

## 2022 Talbott Honors Scholarship recipients

Awarded annually since 2015, the Talbott Honors Program Scholarship helps outstanding Honors students.

Although Dr. Linda H. Talbott died in December 2020, her legacy lives on through her generous donations that provided \$1,000 scholarships to two students this year.

This year's recipients are Electrical and Computer Engineering major Jenny Okerman and Flute Performance major Gabrielle Porter.

If you would like to help an Honors student succeed in their academic career, click the button below to donate.

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