



HARDING UNIVERSITY
HONORS COLLEGE

Annual Report: 2025-2026

Dean
Dr. James E. Miller



MISSION

The Honors College seeks to cultivate opportunities for highly motivated students to grow in leadership, service and academic excellence through shared experiences that are informed by faith and focus on the development of the whole person.

The college is committed to building a stimulating undergraduate experience that enhances the academic profile of students as they pursue opportunities after Harding.

VALUES

The College is committed to fostering an environment where communication is paramount, ensuring students can effectively convey ideas and collaborate across diverse disciplines; critical thinking is cultivated, encouraging rigorous analysis and thoughtful problem-solving; and scholarly contribution is championed, promoting original research and active engagement in the academic community.



ENROLLMENT POLICY

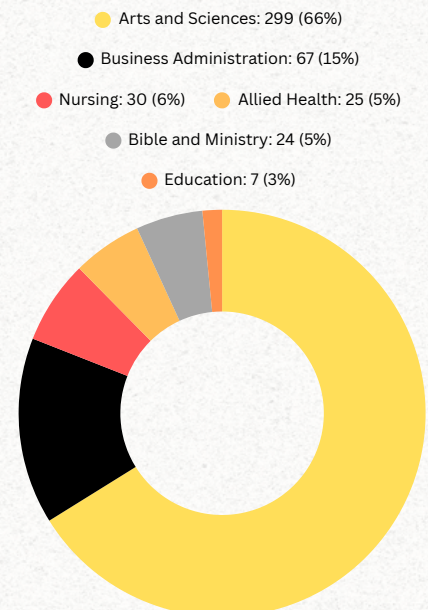
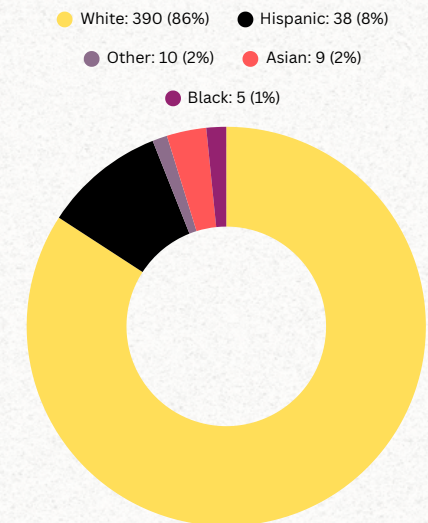
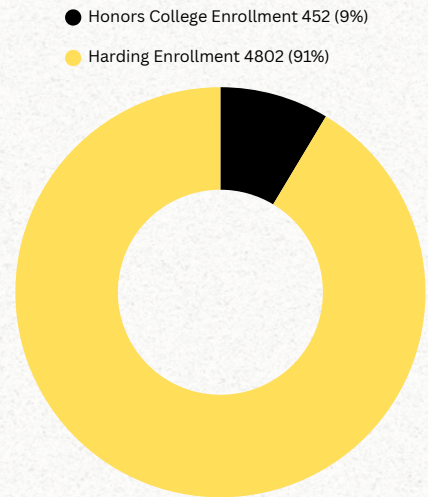
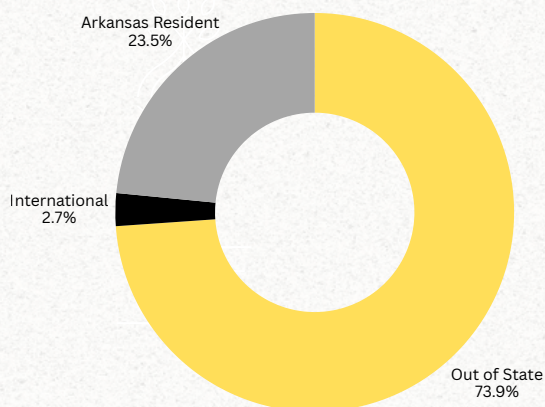
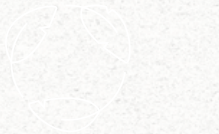
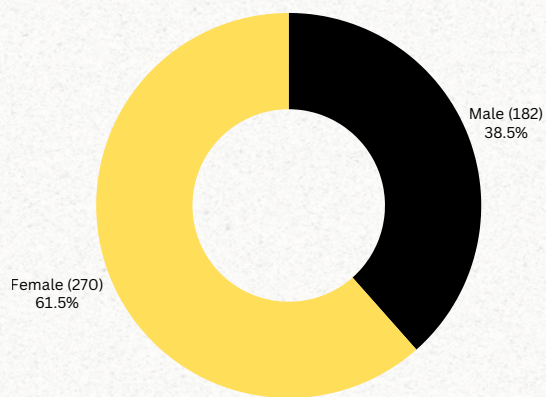
Each year, the Honors College welcomes approximately 100 students, representing about 10% of the undergraduate population — a cohort size that aligns with the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) best practices for elite honors education.

Recipients of the Trustee or Heritage scholarship, National Merit Scholars, and students with perfect ACT or SAT scores are accepted to the Honors College in the fall semester of their first year. All other students may apply to enroll at midterm of their first fall semester or in any subsequent semester, provided they have earned a minimum GPA of 3.25.

TOTAL ENROLLMENT

The Honors College enrolled a total of 452 students in 2025-2026. This represents 9% of Harding's student population, mirroring national norms in honors education.

The average GPA in the Honors College is 3.82. Women make up 61% of the total enrollment. The College of Arts and Sciences was by far the largest represented college, with 66% of honors students coming from that area. More than 80% of honors students identified as white or Caucasian. Close to 3% were international students, mainly from Latin America.



NEW STUDENT ENROLLMENT

In fall 2025, the Honors College enrolled 61 new students, including nine National Merit Scholars. The fall class's average high school GPA was 4.0, with an average ACT score of 33. In spring 2026, the college accepted 55 new students who applied after earning a 3.25 midterm GPA in fall 2025. In total, the college enrolled 116 new students this academic year.

By the Numbers: Fall 2025 Cohort

- **17** Trustee Scholars
- **28** Heritage Scholars
- **9** National Merit Scholars
- **7** students earned perfect scores on the ACT
- **33** fall class average ACT score

GRADUATE OUTCOMES

Honors students may choose to graduate from the Honors College at two levels.

1. **Honors College Graduates with Distinction** must earn a minimum of 26 hours of honors credit, including three honors contracts and an honors thesis or capstone project while maintaining a 3.5 GPA. Twenty-four students graduated from the Honors College with Distinction in 2025-2026, the largest class in the last 14 years. Their theses and capstone projects titles can be found on the Honors College website, harding.edu/honors.

2. **Honors College Graduates** must earn a minimum of 20 hours of honors credit, including four honors contracts, while maintaining a 3.25 GPA. Sixteen students graduated from the Honors College in 2025-2026.

Graduate School Acceptances for 2026 Graduates Include

Georgia Tech
Harvard Law School
Lyon College School of Veterinary Medicine
Syracuse University
Texas Tech University
University of Arkansas Law School
University of Connecticut
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Gillings School of Global Public Health
University of Tennessee College of Dentistry

Employers Include

Arkansas Children's Hospital
BNSF Railway
L3Harris Technologies
Salas O'Brien
Walmart

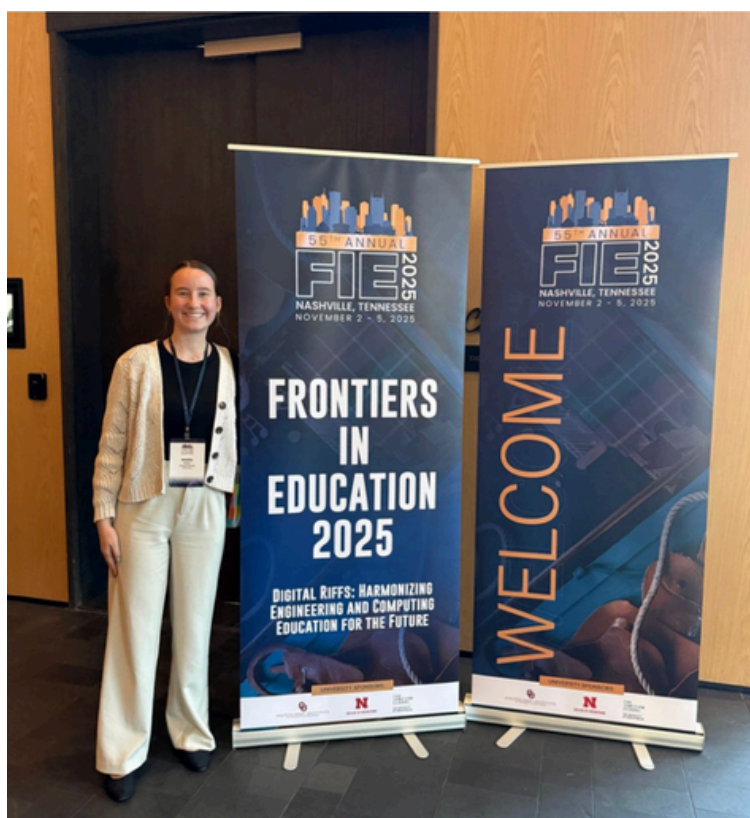
STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP



Rosengartner, Murphy, Smith, Bewley



Pschierer



Slater

Several honors students were invited to present this year at national and international conferences in recognition of their scholarly and professional contributions.

In November, senior mechanical engineering major Amelia Slater presented her work-in-progress paper "The Design Activity Engagement of Women Engineering Students" at the Frontiers in Education Conference in Nashville.

The same month, senior interdisciplinary studies major Camille Bewley and senior psychology major Emma Rosengartner presented research related to their honors thesis projects at the National Collegiate Honors Council annual meeting in San Diego.

In April, senior integrated marketing communications major Jackson Pschierer presented research at the Broadcast Education Association Conference in Las Vegas. His paper was titled "The Tribe Has Spoken: Examining Social Grouping as Alliance Formation via a Content Analysis of CBS's 'Survivor' 45." Jackson, who completed his research in Dr. Jim Miller's Communication Research course in fall 2025, also got to see "Survivor" host Jeff Probst and contestant Cirie Fields, who accepted a television achievement award at the conference.



Hernandez, Haustein, Reynolds

GRANTS FUND STUDENT RESEARCH

Three students were awarded a Student Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) from the Arkansas Department of Higher Education to be funded over the next year. Murphy Hernandez, molecular and cellular biology major, is working with Dr. Ryan Stork on "Disrupted Light Pattern and Hunger Stress in *Rabidosa rabida*." Caden Haustein, cybersecurity major, is working with Dr. John Stone on "A Needs-Based Analysis of Vehicle Forensics for Arkansas Law Enforcement." Lillian Reynolds, public administration major, will be working with Professor Zac Muncy on "Threshold Barriers: Legal and Institutional Barriers for Arkansas Small Businesses."

Each award is for \$4,000 and will support the students for two semesters. The grant funds a student stipend, research support and travel expenses for students to present their findings at an external conference in their discipline.

These students are third-year honors students on track to graduate with honors distinction. Harding was the only private university in the state represented among this year's SURF recipients.

HARDING RESEARCH CONFERENCE



The Honors College and Alpha Chi co-sponsored the fifth annual Harding Undergraduate Research Conference in April.

Dr. Nathaniel Wiewora, Honors College faculty fellow and associate professor of history, served as conference chair. He was assisted by a student

committee including Hope Dillman, Caden Haustein, Bayli Nash and Lindy Stevenson.

A total of 36 students from across campus participated in more than 30 presentations of original research and creative scholarship.

From digital vehicle forensics and modern death education in children's literature, to shame and spiritual struggle and engineering for sustainability, to false confessions and rural healthcare, to biblical themes in "Barbie," the conference was truly interdisciplinary.

Nearly 500 people attended. Participants also heard a keynote address from Dr. Greg Brooks, 2025 Alpha Chi Faculty Scholar. Brooks is a professor in the College of Nursing.

HONORS SYMPOSIUM

Honors Symposium is a two-week summer academic program on the Searcy campus designed to challenge, encourage and equip high school students who are entering their senior year.

Honors Symposium introduces students to college life, specifically the Harding experience, and gives

them exposure to the Honors College, which they may aspire to join in the future.

Students take classes in theology, philosophy, ethics, history, literature, critical thinking, art and design, and more taught by faculty affiliated with the Honors College.

By the Numbers

- **222** students attended Symposium in 2024, and **80%** of them enrolled at Harding full time in fall 2025.
- **226** students attended Symposium in 2025, and **81%** of them are currently enrolled at Harding full time for fall 2026.

DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER EVENT

In October, the Honors College hosted former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson. He spoke in honors chapel and to a combined history and political science class.

Hutchinson discussed his experiences in government and encouraged students to seek leadership positions.

Kennedy Kittinger, an Honors Student Government Association spiritual life director, arranged for his visit.

In 1996, Hutchinson won the first of three successive terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. During his third term in Congress, President George W. Bush appointed him

director of the Drug Enforcement Administration and later as an undersecretary in the newly created Department of Homeland Security. His experience established him as a national resource for his expertise on trade, energy, national security and education.



The Honors College hosted former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson in October. He shared his experiences in government, including in the Drug Enforcement Administration and Department of Homeland Security.

ALUMNI OF THE YEAR AWARDS



Wiser, Ortballs-Wiser

Dr. Candice Ortballs-Wiser ('97) and Dr. James Wiser ('00) were selected as the first Honors College Alumni of the Year award winners. The awards were presented at the annual Black and Gold Banquet at Homecoming Oct. 31. They both graduated from the Honors College with distinction.

Ortbals-Wiser earned a bachelor's degree in political science, history and Spanish from Harding, and master's and doctoral degrees in political science from Indiana University Bloomington.

Wiser earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Harding, a Master of Library Science from Indiana

University Bloomington, an MBA from Pepperdine University, and a Doctor of Education from The University of Texas at Austin.

They currently live in Manhattan, Kansas, and Wiser serves as dean of libraries at Kansas State University, where Ortballs-Wiser is also a professor of political science.

Wiser has been named a Fulbright Specialist of library services by the U.S. State Department, and Ortballs-Wiser received the Carrie Chapman Catt Award for Political Science Research from Iowa State University.

They have two children: Etta and Marian.

ANNUAL END-OF-YEAR AWARDS

Dr. John Mark Warnick, associate registrar, won the inaugural Debbie Baird Distinguished Staff Award, which recognizes a Harding staff member for dedicated service to the Honors College. The award includes a \$250 stipend.

Max DeLoach and Olivia Bell won the Larry R. Long Commendation, which recognizes students who exemplify the highest standards of scholarship, leadership and service to the University and Honors College.

Dr. Julie Harris, professor of history, won the Patrick H. Garner Award, which recognizes a faculty member for their commitment to excellence in teaching and student mentoring in the Honors College. The award includes a \$250 stipend.



Warnick, DeLoach, Bell, Harris

NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL



Fatula

Partners in Peace

Professor April Fatula, Honors College Faculty Fellow and assistant professor of communication, was part of the inaugural Partners in Peace Oslo Peace Congress held in May in Norway. It was an effort coordinated between the National Collegiate Honors Council and the Nobel Peace Center in Norway.

In addition to presenting best practices from the Partners in Peace HNRS 2010 course she taught in fall 2025, she listened to presentations from colleagues around the U.S. NCHC member institutions included R1 and R2, two-year, public, private, military, and HBCU. Harding was the only faith-based university represented.

The congress began with a reception at Oslo City Hall. The group also had meetings at the Nobel Peace Center, Parliament building and Nobel Institute, hearing from various representatives of each organization.

Jared Wrigley, who was a student in Fatula's class last fall, was accepted to continue his education by enrolling in a virtual course this fall titled The Nobel Peace Prize Laureates – Exemplars of Determination, Faith & Hope in Striving Towards Peace. The course culminates with a December trip to Oslo in which he will get to be part of the Nobel Peace Prize award ceremonies and have an audience with the laureate.

NCHC Program Review

In October, the Honors College underwent a comprehensive external program review conducted by experienced honors educators affiliated with the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC).

The reviewers praised the Honors College for its strong leadership, dedicated faculty, vibrant student community and significant contribution to Harding University's enrollment, retention and academic excellence.

They noted that the Honors College provides a distinctive educational experience that attracts high-achieving students, fosters meaningful faculty-student relationships, and serves as a model of interdisciplinary learning.

The review also identified opportunities for continued growth, including expanded alumni engagement, enhanced leadership and staffing resources, increased fundraising support, and continued efforts to strengthen student access and belonging.

Overall, the reviewers affirmed that the Honors College is one of Harding's strategic strengths and encouraged the University to continue investing in its future as a catalyst for academic innovation, student success and institutional distinction.



TUTORING PROGRAM HELPS LOCAL STUDENTS

A tutoring program that matched 25 students from local junior high and high schools with 20 honors students began in fall 2025, and it was a great success. Sessions were held twice a week at the honors house.

Parents shared their thoughts about the tutoring program:

"This program definitely greatly helped Brayden this last semester in understanding and passing geometry... Thank you immensely for this program. I don't know how he would have made it through last semester without the assistance of your gifted tutors!"
— Jeanie Merrell, grandmother of 10th-grader

"We are so appreciative of the help this program has been and hope to attend again next year. A big thank you to all involved!"

— Erin Green, mother of 7th-grader

"She is really benefiting from your program. Thank you.... This has been a blessing."

— Brandi Williams, mother of 11th-grader



Honors SGA semiformal event

HONORS SGA

Led by President Max DeLoach, the Honors Student Government Association officers planned community-building activities, including a semiformal, spiritual retreat, Friendsgiving, Nooma Night, Olympics watch party, art exhibition, weekly chapel services, and movie and game nights, just to name a few. They also organized service projects, including working with Sparrow's Promise – an organization that provides resources for foster families – by sorting food and supplies.

- President: Max DeLoach
- Vice President: Caden Haustein
- Secretary: Eleanor Kingry
- Treasurer: Wiz Loayza
- Activities Directors: Elyse Rogers and Emily Shearer (spring '26)
- Service Directors: Emma Byerly, Eliza Kuhlmann, Lexi Howell (fall '25) and Elizabeth Palmer (spring '26)
- Spiritual Life Directors: Kennedy Kittinger, Gabriel Whitley, Jared Wrigley and Zoe Carris (spring '26)
- Communication Directors: Callie Douglas and Kelly Mahawanniarachchi
- Freshman Representatives: Macy Blair and Levi Cullum



Russian Literature and Theology class

SPRING COURSES STUDY CLASSIC BOOKS

This year, 20 honors students participated in Russian Literature and Theology, a course taught by Dr. Mac Sandlin and Dr. Heath Carpenter.

Students read Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina" and Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov," examining questions related to faith, morality, human nature and purpose.

Through discussion and writing, students considered how these works continue to inform contemporary issues and ways of thinking.

Additionally, eight honors students participated in Books You Must Read in College, a course taught by Dr. Jim Miller and Dr. Steve Warren. Students read and discussed six influential

works: "Apology of Socrates," "Frankenstein," "Brave New World," "Crime and Punishment," "Man's Search for Meaning," and "1984."

Through discussion and writing, the class examined enduring questions related to truth, freedom, justice, suffering, responsibility, and what it means to live a meaningful life.



HONORS IN ITALY

During Christmas break, 35 Honors College students participated in Cerca Trova ("Seek and Find"), an immersive honors study abroad course in Florence and Rome, Italy.

Dr. Jeremy Daggett and Mark Slagle, Honors College alumni, co-taught the course as visiting honors faculty. Students explored the intersections of art, architecture, history, culture and place while inviting students to wrestle with timeless questions about meaning, purpose, beauty, and what it means to be human.

Students learned from local experts, engaged firsthand with some of the world's most influential artistic and historical treasures, and concluded the experience with presentations in Rome that connected their observations to the course theme of seeking, finding and living life's most important questions.

The experience exemplified the Honors College's commitment to transformative learning that extends beyond the classroom and encourages students to engage deeply with the world and their place within it.

TREY CARLOCK AWARD

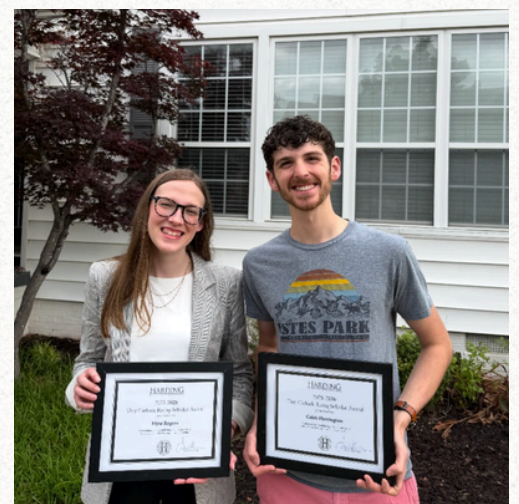
This year, Caleb Herrington and Elyse Rogers were selected to receive the Trey Carlock Rising Scholar Award.

The award recognizes honors students who demonstrate a commitment to Christ-centered scholarship, active engagement in research, and plans to present their work at an academic conference.

Funded through the generosity of the Carlock family, the award provides recipients with a \$1,300 grant to support conference travel and presentation expenses.

Herrington's research focuses on machine learning applications for quadcopter drone recovery, while Rogers' project examines relationships among government spending, HPV vaccination rates, and HPV incidence in sub-Saharan Africa.

Both students plan to pursue graduate study and careers involving research and scholarship.



Rogers, Herrington

'WITH HONORS' PODCAST LAUNCHES



The Honors College launched "With Honors," a podcast hosted by Dr. Mac Sandlin, associate professor of Bible and ministry and Honors College faculty fellow, that explores student-submitted questions. Guests from across the University and community joined the conversation to discuss topics like artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency, the role of pain in life, Christian perspectives on taxes, the pursuit of excellence, modern media, business ethics, honoring parents, and ongoing faculty research. The podcast serves as an extension of the honors classroom, inviting students to continue wrestling with meaningful questions long after class has ended.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

The opportunities described in this report are made possible in part through the generosity of alumni, parents and friends.

The Honors College is especially grateful to Dr. Patrick and Mona Lee Garner and to William Hess, whose gift in honor of his parents, Thomas and June Hess, will have a lasting impact on our students and programs.

Their investment reflects a shared commitment to Christian higher education and to the mission of the Honors College to cultivate thoughtful, engaged, and service-minded leaders.

If you would like to support the Honors College, please scan the QR code below or visit <https://www.harding.edu/give/give-now/>

