

Fall 2020

# FSW Honors Scholar Program

## A MESSAGE FROM THE COORDINATOR

We made it to the end of a strange and historic semester. If your semester was anything like mine, there was no shortage of awkward moments in Zoom World: I moderated impassioned discussions between disembodied voices emanating from black boxes on the screen; suddenly realized my face had frozen into a twisted Picasso portrait mid-sentence; and got booted out of my classroom by unruly WiFi more than once. But there were also sweet moments that offered a glimpse into the lives of my students: a cat strolls across the frame and takes a swipe at the computer screen; younger siblings practice Tik Tok dances in the background; a student folds laundry while listening and nodding along with the lecture. Overall, in spite of the daunting challenges many of our students face right now, I have been impressed by their tenacity and resilience. I have been particularly inspired by the quality of the research projects and proposals for future projects created by our Honors students.

As of Fall semester 2019, all students admitted into the Honors Scholar Program are required to complete a capstone project. These projects can take many forms and many of them are born out of research proposals developed in their Honors seminars although this is not always the case. Three recent projects demonstrate the wide range of topics addressed and methodologies they applied. Tiffany Leung conducted a discourse analysis focused on how media outlets in China, Hong Kong, the U.K., and the United States reported on the Yuen Long Train Station Incident during the recent Hong Kong protests. Sara Tinocoabella Duque produced a short documentary on site-specific portraiture painted on the border wall between Mexico and the United States. Amethyst Tyler conducted a survey of FSW students who had contracted Covid19 to gain insight into the impact it has had on their lives. She shared the results of her analysis, along with recommendations for how to better support these students, with the Dean of Students, Dr. Mark Bukowski and our Provost, Dr. Eileen DeLuca. Regardless of the project, we strive to offer students the opportunity to acquire an in-depth understanding of the process of knowledge construction in their field of study. There is no question that producing original scholarship or a creative body of work is a high impact experience for all undergraduates. Through their capstone projects students practice relevant research methodologies or creative techniques, learn to analyze data and interpret results, understand that assertions must be supported with facts and evidence, and build tolerance for obstacles and setbacks. Ideally, they also learn to work independently, build meaningful relationships with faculty mentors, and clarify their academic and professional aspirations.

This newsletter is dedicated to current students and alumni who have participated in undergraduate research and creative capstone projects. You will see photographs of the Inside/Out Project which could not be installed last spring due to the pandemic. Fortunately, half of the students involved in that project are still at FSW and they were able to display their work at ArtWalk in downtown Ft. Myers in November. To learn more about this global art project, please click on the link underneath the statement of belief which was written by the students. We are also featuring Dr. Brandi George and Dr. Michael Sauer who are currently team-teaching a new Honors seminar they designed last summer titled, *Connecting to Southwest Florida's Ecosystems: Nature Writing and Environmental Science*. I also interviewed several of our alumni to hear how their experiences conducting research or making art while at FSW shaped their personal and academic trajectory after they transferred. I invite any faculty member who is interested in designing a seminar, involving students in a research project, or proposing a service learning experience to reach out to me. Dr. Jacquelyn Davis and I will be team-teaching the capstone course this spring and we welcome your advice, expertise, and involvement.

# FSW



Dr. Wendy Chase

Coordinator,  
Honors Scholar Program

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## FACULTY FEATURE: DR. BRANDI GEORGE

People always say to me, “How can you teach creative writing? Isn’t writing natural and effortless?” I think there is this myth in our culture that some people are born as writers, and it’s easy for them. This isn’t true. Writing is like running. There is only one way to improve: practice! If you want to run faster and longer, it’s simple: run. If you want to write a moving poem or novel: write. Of course form is important, in both running and writing. My job as a professor is to teach beginners the technique, the craft, to show them what is possible through example. But the motivation to make time each day, the drive to work hard, and the willingness to revise something—maybe hundreds of times—is what gives a piece of writing energy and purpose. Each person must show up and put the work in. There are no shortcuts. One of my writing professors once shared this quote by Pablo Picasso with me, and so I will pass it on: “Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.”

I have always loved writing and reading, but I didn’t always know what I wanted to do with my life. As the first person in my family to attend college, I was just so excited to be there, and I wanted to major in everything. First it was pre-med, then psychology, history, literature. It took me quite a while to realize that a person could study creative writing as a profession, but once I discovered that, I felt an instant connection to my path. I felt a sense of “aliveness” and excitement. I gave myself the space I needed to explore, to find out what was possible for me, and then I followed my intuition.

I’ve had a lot of memorable teaching moments this semester. My Honors Seminar with Dr. Sauer asks students to connect to SWFL ecosystems, blending creative writing with environmental science. Every few weeks, we go on a field trip to explore the systems we are learning about in class. Dr. Sauer offers insights about the local species and systems, and we ask students to complete a writing prompt. During the third field trip to Six Mile Cypress Slough, it began to pour, and it didn’t let up. The students never complained. When it was time to write by themselves, each person went on their way, observing the sounds of the swamp. If we passed each other on the boardwalk, we nodded in silence. On the field trips, there are always these quiet moments when we practice listening. I guess listening, like writing and running, is an art. Creative writing emphasizes finding your own voice, but scientific observation asks you to simply observe. I think that is why, ultimately, the two disciplines are so powerful together.



## FACULTY FEATURE: DR. MICHAEL SAUER

Marine wetlands in SW Florida are our most important asset. They stink, they're muddy, the water's murky. It's often a tangle of branches that cuts you up arched over narrow channels of dark water where there are worms, snails, fish, snakes, mosquitoes and everything else you never wanted to touch. We've lost a massive amount of Mangrove ecosystem area in Florida to human development and they continue to be threatened.

These sites provide massive economic benefits through their function as primary nutrient absorbers, sediment stabilizers, storm barriers, and nurseries. Our coastal marine food web is dependent on the quantity and quality of these areas which greatly improve our water quality and our livelihood.



The most memorable experiences teaching are almost always found in the field. Whether it's a student tentatively stepping into a seagrass bed (or the ocean!) for the first time, trying to hold on to a squirming fish, or navigating the Mangrove channels on a kayak, students connect to what they're learning best when there is some visceral component to the class. I know this connection is tied strongly when I can't get students to leave the seagrass bed, let go of the fish, or get out of the kayak and end the field trip so we can all go home.

### 2021 CONFERENCES

#### Florida Collegiate Honors Conference (FCHC):

Where: Virtual

When: February 12 2021

Deadline: Jan 11 2021

Theme: "Disruption and Adaptation in Honors"

#### Humanities Education and Research Association (HERA):

Where: Virtual

When: March 4 2021

Deadline: Jan 25 2021

Theme: "Cultural Divides: Bridging Gaps and Making Connections"

#### Southern Regional Honors Conference (SRHC):

Where: Charlotte, NC

When: March 25 2021

Deadline: Jan 25 2021

Theme: TBA

Conference Links:

[FCHC](#)

[SRHC](#)

[HERA](#)



## HONORS IN ACTION: INSIDE OUT PROJECT

### Project Leaders:

Justine Alcarraz, Kevin Aulet, Martha Bautista, Shirin Bos, Sara Duque, and Haley Gamez







## There is beauty in being unapologetically yourself

Self-acceptance is not an easy state of mind to achieve, especially when our lives are consumed by social media. We sometimes base our self-worth on how many likes or swipes we receive from people digitally. We get caught up in comparing ourselves to others because it is so much easier to see how we differ rather than notice qualities that we share with the rest of humanity. In short, we feel connected but alone. And yet, the only thing all humans have in common is that every single one of us is unique. Our uniqueness is what makes us both distinct from others and exactly like them. The 50 people pictured in these photographs are all standing up for what it means to be unapologetically themselves and embrace what makes them unique.

[Check out the website here!](#)

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: PAMELA RAMON



Hello everyone, my name is Pamela Ramon. This was my last semester at FSW. I will be transferring to FGCU next semester to major in political science and business management. My goal is to fight for other's civil rights and employment rights as an attorney. From attending out of state conferences to presenting research, being involved with the Honors Scholar Program at FSW strengthened my overall educational experience in ways that I could have never imagined.

The Honors Scholar Program offers great classes. I was able to learn about global politics and international relations in the program's Model UN class. Through this class, I was able to attend Harvard's Model UN conference in Boston. It was fun to learn about global politics and then apply what we learned in a scholarly environment. One of the great aspects about the HSP is that a student and professor can create an honors contract to receive honors credit for a non-honors course. This allows students to create projects they are truly passionate about. The last thing I want to mention about the HSP is the development fund. Using the development fund, I was able to attend a conference in Washington, D.C. where I was able to meet with congress members and learn about the Arab-Israeli/ Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I would tell all FSW students to take advantage of the student support programs. If you need math tutoring, help with a speech, or assistance with an essay, there are resources available. I would also tell students to get involved and attend events. This is a great way to make new friends.



If you or someone you know is struggling please reach out to the Counselors at FSW. Email [counseling@fsw.edu](mailto:counseling@fsw.edu) for appointments. Emergency situations should call 911 or the FSW Police at (239) 489-9203. Students who have never seen a counselor will be able to schedule a Zoom appointment, but they will need to complete the paperwork ahead of time. All of that can be arranged by sending the email to [counseling@fsw.edu](mailto:counseling@fsw.edu).



## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: AMETHYST TYLER

**Tell me a little bit about yourself and the activities that you have been involved with during your time at FSW.**

Hello everyone! My name is Amethyst Tyler, and I am completing my last semester at FSW this fall and starting at FGCU spring 2021, where I will pursue a Bachelor of Art in Psychology. I am a lifelong resident of Naples, FL. and the second oldest of seven siblings. Some of my interests include listening to music, practicing the guitar, yoga, meditation, and being home with my family. I also have a garden where I cultivate various plants such as marigolds, sunflowers, aloe vera, peppers, and various young trees, including mango, avocado, and citrus.

I joined the Honors Scholar Program Fall semester 2019 and enjoyed a tremendous academic experience. The most memorable is the research I conducted for my capstone project on undergraduate college students' lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's purpose was to examine the coping and resilience behaviors utilized by undergraduates during the pandemic. This research helped identify gaps in support services and coping and resilience strategies for future situations. After seeing so many friends and peers suffer, I felt it essential to make sure students do not feel alone during cataclysmic events. I hoped to identify ways to efficiently support and prepare them with practical resources.

**Has your involvement in HSP made a difference in your overall educational experience here? How so?**

The Honors Scholar Program allowed me to take numerous thought-provoking classes that significantly enriched my educational experience at FSW. The courses also resonated well with my interests in psychology and the humanities. For example, the Psychology and Statistics Honors Seminar introduced me to the exciting world of psychological research. Great Human Questions enriched my critical thinking, and the Introduction to Philosophy and Ethics courses were intellectually invigorating. The professors were highly educated and passionate about their studies, which was a breath of fresh air. The smaller classes proved ideal for connecting with other Hon-

ors students and encouraging meaningful interaction. Additionally, I met outstanding students who contributed to the overall course experience; I felt inspired to discuss, share, and soak up as much knowledge as possible from my peers.

**What advice would you offer to all FSW students? What advice do you have for HSP students?**

My advice to FSW students going through this unprecedented time is to remember to be patient with yourself. Right now, attending college AND learning to be an adult is challenging, but it is also a great time to make mistakes so that you can learn from them. YOU are your greatest asset, so remember to invest time and energy into yourself as you continue your academic journey.

As for HSP students, remember to take advantage of the many benefits of being an HSP member. The program helps facilitate networking by connecting students with like-minded individuals who are academically driven. If you are lucky, you gain a couple of “forever friends” as I have. You will also meet outstanding faculty passionate about teaching who are great role models and may serve as mentors. I was fortunate to meet my Capstone mentor, Dr. Jacquelyn Davis, in my Honors Seminar. She was instrumental in helping me with the research process, had high expectations, and pushed me to accomplish my goals. Overall, being part of HSP has prepared me for FGCU. Thank you for a great experience FSW and HSP!!!



# BACK TO THE FUTURE: ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS

## DENISE RUIZ: B.A. IN SOCIOLOGY AND GLOBAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

After completing her A.A. degree at FSW in the spring of 2017, Denise Ruiz transferred to University of Chicago on a QuestBridge scholarship. When I asked her which of her experiences at FSW prepared her best for the transition she said, “I think the most impactful experience I had was writing my Honors thesis. Going through that process prepared me to think like a researcher and gave me the confidence to write a B.A. thesis here at the University of Chicago. While I am working on a very different topic from what I wrote about at FSW, my experience in the Honors program taught me how to translate my curiosity into viable research questions. My current thesis is focused on representations of prisons in both popular culture and in historical texts. I’m marrying the two through a study of Alcatraz. A lot of our national discourse about incarceration is written into the history of Alcatraz—and history is political and socially-constructed so a study of this prison reveals a lot about our prevailing attitudes towards incarceration in general.”



Another FSW course which helped shape Denise’s academic future was the special topics course taught by Dr. Baltodano titled, *Politics, People and Power: Living in a Developing World*. This course included a study abroad experience in Nicaragua over spring break. Each student had conceived of a research project before the trip and they had the opportunity to interview human subjects while they were in Nicaragua. Denise speaks Spanish fluently and she said being able to work directly with human subjects felt consequential. “I deeply cherish the experience I had in Nicaragua. It taught me a lot about how to formulate questions when working with live subjects. It was a journalistic approach to research and I found it fascinating.”

Denise was scheduled to work and study in Austria through a program at UChicago last spring when the pandemic interrupted those plans. Fortunately, Denise had been accepted into the Human Rights Internship Program sponsored by the Pozen Family Center for Human Rights at University of Chicago and they helped her secure an online internship at the ACLU in Florida in their criminal justice division. “It was really interesting to witness their process of switching to online activism as a result of the pandemic. We couldn’t interact face-to-face but it actually gave us opportunities to engage with more of our politicians. We were able to hold their feet to the fire and hold them accountable for their record on criminal justice reform. For example, Covid was raging through the prisons and they were not doing enough to stop it and we were able to confront them about that.” She said that one meeting that left a particularly profound impression on her happened when she and other interns were interacting with a politician who had a particularly poor record on criminal justice. “Even though I completely disagree with him on many issues, he gave us a piece of advice that I couldn’t stop thinking about afterwards. He stressed how important it is to thoroughly understand the law when you are writing bills because a lot of times, organizations will write bills and if they have made even a miniscule mistake in their understanding of the law, lawmakers will disregard all of their recommendations due to that one error—however small. That advice has driven me to pursue a law degree so that I can help do this work.”

Her advice to FSW students? “Reach out to your professors. Talk to them. This seems like such cliché advice but FSW has incredible, superstar professors and they will guide you to other opportunities. When I got to University of Chicago, I knew how important it was to visit professors during their office hours. All of my friends were shocked that I did this. They were intimidated by their professors but I kept telling them that it was the best thing they could do. I always start by asking professors about their own research. They are inevitably passionate about it, which is inspiring, and you learn so much from those conversations. I would also tell Honors students to take advantage of the opportunity to go to conferences. I was funded to go to a “United We Dream” conference that focuses on immigrant rights. It was in Miami and I ran into another former FSW Honors student who is at Duke but was attending the same conference. Both of us had attended the Model UN conference at Harvard while we were at FSW and I think that primed us to seek out these other opportunities.”

Denise graduates with a B.A. in sociology and global studies this spring. “When the pandemic hit, it gave me time to slow down and reflect. Most of the clubs and extracurricular activities I was involved in shut down and I focused solely on my academics. I realized that I was exhausted and I decided to take a year off before applying to law schools. But I was accepted into another program at University of Chicago that helps match students with a one-year fellowship in public policy, law, and non-profit work so I am going to do that—hopefully in person—and I will take it from there.” To see Denise in action as a panelist for the Human Rights in Practice Internship Symposium, click on this link: <https://humanrights.uchicago.edu/Symposiumautumn2020>



## KELLY CHASE: B.S. IN MARINE SCIENCE, FGCU



Kelly was not thrilled with the idea of going straight to college after a rather uninspiring high school experience. To appease his parents, he agreed to attend FSW for a year. That fall, Kelly enrolled in Dr. Rozalind Jester's course, *The Living Ocean*, and a world of possibilities opened up to him. "I was the kid who used to wake up at 5:00 in the morning and walk to the river just to fish a little bit before school. I had spent a ton of time exploring our rivers, mangrove forests, and beaches. But Dr. Jester's class taught me so much more about the local ecology—and maybe more importantly—it made me curious and got me asking questions about how to best preserve our ecosystems."

Dr. Jester recommended that Kelly apply to the Honors Scholar Program and he was accepted the following semester. He promptly enrolled in two Honors courses that were linked as co-requisites: Dr. Jester's marine science course and Dr. Rona Axelrod's statistics course. Every student enrolled in these courses had to design their own research project

and present their results at the FSW Research Expo at the end of the semester. Kelly claims that this experience set him on his path. "I remember the whole class being out on the beach collecting sea grass samples on a really windy day. We were wearing weight belts to keep us anchored in a fast-moving current. We were wading through sea grass beds and I thought—is this actually something I could do as a professional? That was the first time it clicked in my head that I was no longer taking classes to memorize and regurgitate information for an exam, which is what I had done for my entire K-12 experience. This was different—I was getting experiential training to do meaningful work. My research project involved collecting data on the presence of microplastics in the eastern oyster. I loved every part of the project—from kayaking to collect specimens from oyster beds in a variety of different ecosystems here in SWFL to ordering and testing oysters from other states to presenting my findings at the Research Expo. For the first time, I felt like I was actually *using* what I was learning in the classroom in a meaningful way."

Kelly transferred to FGCU in the fall of 2017 and graduated with a B.S. in Marine Science last spring. He worked (first as a volunteer, then as a paid lab assistant) in the benthic ecology lab at FGCU for two years. He also received two internships: one at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and another at Johnson Engineering where he worked as an environmental technician. Kelly was offered a full-time position as a biological scientist at FWC upon his graduation and he says it was his experience in the FSW Honors program that paved the way for his success. "It wasn't only the knowledge and inspiration I got studying marine science that made a difference; Dr. Axelrod taught us how to use a software program called "R" to compile statistical data. Being able to put that on my CV definitely gave me a leg up when I applied for internships both on and off campus. And now I use that program at work regularly. Before taking that class with Dr. Axelrod, I dreaded math classes. But learning how to collect and analyze statistics for my own research made all the difference. On Sundays, I used to meet the other students in that class on campus and we would study together. A couple of times, Dr. Axelrod walked to campus from her house to meet with us and help us with the program. That level of personal instruction from a professor makes a big difference. It changed my entire attitude towards math and made me confident and more interested in it." When asked what advice he would give to other students at FSW he replied, "If you like hands-on learning—apply to the Honors Scholar Program. I ended up taking nine Honors classes while I was at FSW. They are smaller classes with motivated students and incredible professors. And if you are planning to be a scientist—learn to write! Not to brag but I always get compliments from scientists and professors about my writing style. And I credit Professor Ihasha Horn with teaching me to write well as an undergraduate. He was a tough grader and a meticulous teacher but I took his Honors sections of both Comp. I and Comp. II and it has paid off. Apparently, scientists aren't exactly famous for their writing skills but it actually makes a difference if you can write reasonably well." Kelly plans to return to graduate school after working in the field for a year or two. He hopes to complete his M.S. at FGCU's Water School and pursue a Ph.D. in marine science at either the Virginia Institute of Marine Science or University of Miami.

MARTHA DE LA CRUZ: B.F.A. IN SCULPTURE, USF

ALEJANDRO HERNANDEZ GÓMEZ: B.F.A. IN PAINTING USF

DALTON HOWARD: B.F.A. IN SCULPTURE, USF



At every orientation for new students in the Honors Scholar Program I emphasize the importance of community and how developing connections with like-minded students who inspire you and push you to achieve your goals can be a life-changing experience. The friendship that developed between Marty, Alejandro and Dalton is a case in point. All three of these students credit their experiences in FSW's Art Department and the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery with preparing them to flourish when they transferred to USF. Alejandro explains, "We always talk about the fact that we would be completely different people if we hadn't gone to FSW. Not only because we wouldn't have known each other but we wouldn't have developed our ability to critique each other's work." Dalton agrees, adding that Professor Roes taught them the importance of critique as an essential part of the artistic process where artists learn what is working well and what isn't so that they can get closer to realizing their vision in their art. "We pick each other's work apart," Dalton says, "and we can be really harsh sometimes. But it is always for our betterment—it is always about pushing each other to make our work better." Alejandro adds, "When we were taking Professor Roes' classes we knew they were great, but it wasn't until we got to USF that we realized how strong of a foundation we received." Marty elaborates, "Professor Roes has this way of knowing what you're

thinking and then pushing you to your outer limits. But it isn't only Professor Roes, in my last year at FSW I took music classes and theater and logic. I think it's the collective in the L-building—the professors all know each other, and they will point you towards other classes and other professors and you become part of that larger community. And the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery offers a completely different perspective for students." Their decision to transfer to USF started when Professor Roes took them on a tour of their art department. Marty explains, "We fell in love with the facilities—especially the fact that we would have 24-hour access. And then we talked to Jade Dellinger, who is an alumni of USF, and he encouraged all of us to apply."

While Dalton and Alejandro volunteered for the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, Marty worked closely with gallery director, Jade Dellinger, as a student assistant. "Without the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery I would be a completely different person. My first experience there was as a volunteer. Professor Kelm encouraged me to volunteer there



when I asked her for suggestions about where to volunteer. The time I spent working with Jade taught me a lot about curating and how to handle artwork. He also pushed me to do graphic design which is something that I'm still using now. If he hadn't encouraged that, I wouldn't have a job right now. Jade also exposed me to artists I'd never heard of and art movements like Fluxus." Marty's dedication to her work with the gallery was rewarded in the summer of 2018 when the docents offered her the Bob Rauschenberg Travel Grant to help cover the cost of her study abroad experience at the Lorenzo di Medici Institute in Florence, Italy.



When I ask how they think about the quality of their education at FSW now that they have completed a degree at a university, Alejandro is quick to respond, "If I could go back in time I would always go to FSW again because going there, I know for myself but I think for all of us, definitely shaped who we have become. I couldn't have anticipated the effect my time at FSW would have on me both professionally and personally. I decided to take classes because I had only moved to the country from Cuba two years before and I wasn't ready for a big university experience. I was still processing my life in the States so I decided I would just go and take a couple of art classes to see what college was all about and that decision changed my life." Dalton agrees, emphasizing how important it was to be offered the time to explore ideas and concepts in other classes that he then brought to his artwork: "In the path that I'm on, you have to take the time you need to grow. You can learn as much about other artists as you want, but what contributes to your growth is spending more time with your own ideas and concepts from other disciplines and then integrating them into your personal practice. It takes time to immerse yourself in your own thoughts."

While graduating from college during a pandemic is not an ideal way for anyone to shift gears and focus on their professional aspirations, all three of them are excited about the next stage of their lives. Marty is looking forward to traveling more before deciding on her next move, "In the long term, I'm thinking I might pursue a graduate degree. I want to do more curating. I want to curate small POC shows. I want to focus on diversity. Dalton and I were also thinking about creating some kind of maker's space in the Cape Coral/Ft. Myers area. Some kind of gallery/studio space." She talked about the influence of Tempus Projects, a non-profit in Tampa that organizes exhibitions and promotes local artists. "There is nothing like that here and artists need more than a space to create and exhibit work, they need a place to build a community of artists. We'd like to create something like the Tempus Projects of SWFL."

There is a common refrain when asked what advice they would give to current students at FSW. Alejandro says, "I would tell them they don't know what they have until they leave and they are going to miss it." Marty adds: "Take advantage of all of the opportunities FSW has to offer because there is so much available to you." To see their work and read their artist statements, click on this link: <https://www.outofstock-usf.org/artist>

# Congratulations Graduates!

Way to go class of Fall 2020!

Wishing you continued success on your  
future endeavors!





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# WANT TO LEARN MORE?

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Are you or someone you know interested in the Honor Scholars Program? If you are motivated, hardworking, creative, innovative, forward thinking, or ready to achieve your dreams then the Honor Scholars Program might be right for you! We strive to cultivate your academic excellence, leadership skills, and commitment to being socially responsible. Honors is a great way to build your academic resume, meet like-minded people, and develop your very own research! Email Dr. Chase or Tori about all that the program has to offer!

Contact Us:

Honors Program Coordinator: Dr. Wendy Chase, [wchase@fsw.edu](mailto:wchase@fsw.edu)

Honors Staff Assistant: Tori Frisina, [vfrisina@fsw.edu](mailto:vfrisina@fsw.edu)

Check out our website at [FSW.edu/Honors](http://FSW.edu/Honors)



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