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## SANDRA & JACK PINE HONORS COLLEGE

### Putting it Together: Honors in one alum's Journey

*Interview - Dean Richard England: Images - Kofi Bazzell-Smith*

Kofi Bazzell-Smith is an EIU Honors art graduate, a professional boxer, manga artist, and now an MFA student at the University of Illinois. Honors at EIU was part of his personal, and artistic journey, so I asked him to share some of his inspiring story.

Kofi started out as a student at the University of Illinois many years ago, but dropped out



to become a boxer. At the same time, he took a range of classes at Parkland Community college where he discovered his love of Japanese and sought to combine it with his interest in manga, the traditional form of Japanese graphic novels. He saved up and went to Japan for a month where he studied manga and improved his grasp of the language. Kofi went to Eastern thanks to a Parkland advisor who told him about how EIU's smaller classes and personal relationships with faculty can really support student success.

It was a great decision. Kofi worked hard, made connections, and excelled: his 2.0 GPA from Parkland became a 3.9 in his first semester at EIU. He also discovered Honors. Kofi noted that "Originally, I just walked into the Honors College office with the explicit intent of getting back to Japan.... I met Ms. Sara Schmidt who became my mentor, guidance counselor, and advisor, and we would talk about my future – even back when I wasn't eligible to be an Honors student. I didn't know anything about

*Continued from p 1.*

scholarships, but with Sara's guidance and help from Study Abroad I won the U.S. Japan Bridging Foundation Scholarship and the Freeman ASIA Scholarship." These prestigious awards, along with EIU support, allowed him to return to Japan to study at Kyoto Seika University, a global leader in manga.

Kofi's diverse interests were united in his study abroad experience: "In Japan, I trained with a bunch of boxers. I learned most of my Japanese at boxing matches. They wouldn't speak in the formal way that you learn in a classroom, so it was an immersive experience. I was learning real Japanese by training in boxing gyms, I was working under a famous manga professor, and I was producing a boxing manga in Japanese. So it was like these things that seem so unrelated were all coming together."

Kofi's experience of Japanese culture and his work as an artist are also shaped by his African-American identity. As he told me, "There's a lot of opportunities for connections between our cultures. In Japan, there is a whole vibrant hip-hop dance community, but those connections haven't been made. The main reason for this is the language barrier.... So, I think my work is a way to bridge that gap. I'm working on a book now about a little Black girl who's a rock, paper, scissors champion. I've produced kid's versions of this book in both English and Japanese. In Japan there's a bunch of little kids who have my book and they're reading a manga with a positive Black main character.... And then, Black kids in America get to see something that looks like them in this art form that they enjoy.... More broadly, I'm trying to figure out a way to create spaces for international and cross-cultural dialogue, which extends beyond manga. I think I can use a popular art form as a conduit for deeper conversations."

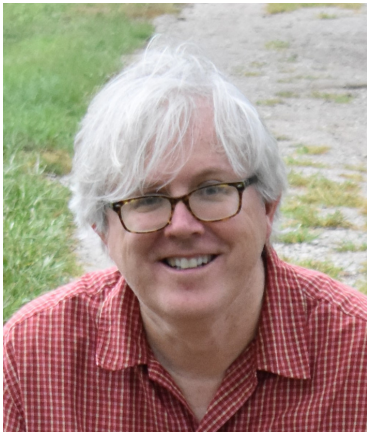
Kofi has been working with Sara Schmidt on a Fulbright scholarship application so he can return to Kyoto and continue to learn. He hopes to become a pioneer in teaching manga in an American university and to "create spaces that promote more inclusive education." He is also aiming to publish serialized manga in Japan: "So far, there's only one American who has ever done that, and that was back in 2012. I want to be the second to do that.... I've been submitting works, which hasn't been successful yet, but I'm getting better every time I make one."

For current students, Kofi says EIU Honors is a great opportunity: "It is just a better and heightened experience. You get access to different kinds of ideas and interesting people. Being a part of the Honors program has provided many things that have allowed me to carve out a path in different ways in my life. You never know the kind of opportunities that it will bring you. It can be difficult and more rigorous, but that's okay. It's okay to work hard while you're in school. I recommend being in Honors. It's just a better educational experience."

Honors is about going further, expanding your horizons, and building your skills, your vision, and your intellectual self. We are honored to have had Kofi Bazzell-Smith in Honors and look forward to reading his work and watching him write and draw his own path to success.



## ALL CHANGE! 2022 IN THE MIRROR



When a bus goes out of service and everyone has to board another one the driver (in the UK at least) says, "All change!" Sometimes the current moment feels a bit like that – we are going back to our pre-pandemic lives, with vaguely new ideas about sharing space, the limits and possibilities of technology in communication, and what it means to talk face to face. Things seem simultaneously familiar and strange. The bus has changed somehow - has the destination?

We will see some big changes in the Pine Honors College! Our administrative assistant, Suzann Bennett, retired after many years of service to the university and we wish her well! Suzann always kept the office running smoothly and greeted our guests, and now I am without her help, I really understand how much her position entailed!

We are also congratulating and saying sayonara to our assistant dean, Dr. Catherine Polydore, who will soon become chair of the department of Counseling and Higher Education. Dr. Polydore has been a great asset in Honors, particularly in helping us to recruit, advise and organize events, and to connect with students. She has also taken a leading role in our efforts to make Honors more inclusive, and I have learned much from her. I look forward to working with her on some shared projects with the College of Education, although I will miss her infectious laughter, her positive spirit, and dedication to students.

As usual, we are also congratulating an outstanding crop of Honors graduates in both University and Departmental Honors programs. It is always bittersweet to see them commence the next chapter of their lives, but so rewarding to hear about their successes. It seems such a short time ago they were young freshmen. We are delighted to feature Kofi Bazzell-Smith as an exemplary Honors alumni in this issue (pp. 1-2).

We look forward to the challenges of the new academic year, learning from our current students, and seeking inspiration from past struggles and successes. We look forward to a summer of welcoming new freshmen, planning new events, and preparing for new ways to learn from our constantly changing world.

Thanks to all you members of the Honors community who enrich it by your participation and to those who support it in many ways: advisors, committee members, teachers, and donors. We would not be able to weather the turbulent times without your work, courage, and confidence in Honors. Here's to a great new year, with new plans, new students, and the same ideals of excellence, growth, inclusion, and community. All change!

-- Dean Richard England

## Honors Events, 2021-22

We enjoyed weekly Honors events this year, working with Residence Life and the Association of Honors students to encourage thinking, relaxation, creativity, conversation, laughter, memory-making and of course, the consumption of carbs and caffeine. Here are a few highlights...



### Tea and Paint



### Dogs and Donuts



Thanks to Beccah Maley and her team from the new Living Learning Community group for helping us organize these events at the Thomas Hall Honors LLC, along with many more over the course of the year!

## Reflections from Black Men Living in Contemporary America

Honors students and students from across campus joined together to attend Reflections from Black Men Living in Contemporary America an event giving student peers, faculty, staff, and community members an opportunity to share and discuss their experiences.



## Student Research and Creative Activity Conference

The Pine Honors College hosts this annual celebration of mentored student projects. The conference featured panels, posters, and talks by undergraduate and graduate students, and was a great return to in person presentations. Thanks to the folks at Booth library for sharing their beautiful and welcoming space!



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## SPOTLIGHT ON SENIORS

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### Esperanza Murillo

*Esperanza is a senior from Robinson, IL, graduating this spring with a degree in Health Administration.*

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Esperanza's favorite class was her Public Health Honors Research which let her investigate a "topic that I *really* feel passionate about." She adds that her mentor, "Dr. Hillier, was extremely helpful throughout the entire process.

In Honors, Esperanza has really stretched herself: "We all go through moments where we doubt ourselves, and I had my fair share of these moments. These past several years I have done stuff that I would not have thought of doing before!"

*“This course let me do research on a topic that I feel really passionate about”*

After graduation, Esperanza will be continuing at EIU, pursuing her M.S. in Health Promotion and also being a Graduate Assistant at the Health Education Resource Center.




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### Jason Tabit

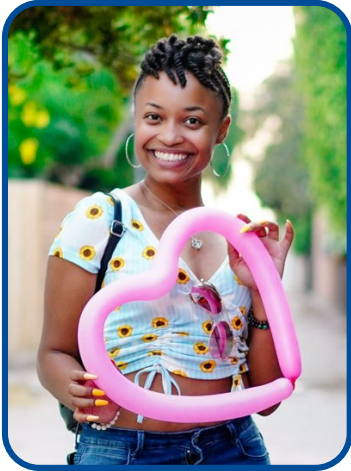
*Jason is a senior from Fairport, NY, graduating this spring with a degree in human resource management.*

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Coming to EIU from upstate New York, Jason has prepared for a career in the business side of the National Football league. He notes that he has "built a wonderful network of connections in the field of football and that seemed exceptionally far away when I began college." Like Esperanza, he particularly enjoyed research, citing his experience working on his undergraduate thesis with Dr. Michael Dobbs: "I learned an exceptional amount during this process and I am incredibly proud of the work we were able to produce together."

*“ I learned an exceptional amount during this process...”*

Jason has been very pleased by how much professional development he has been able to achieve as a student at Eastern. This fall he is heading to the law school at the University of Toledo, where he will also be working with their football program. Ultimately, he hopes to build a career in football administration with the National Football League.



*“At EIU, I have achieved greatness.”*

Chavionne came out of her shell at EIU. "In high school, I was not very active outside of class. However, in college... I became the president of Psi Chi and Pemberton Hall Council, I became an intern as a TRIO advisor, I work as a Desk Assistant and Spanish Tutor, and I have participated in many other organizations..."

Chavionne will pursue her masters degree at EIU in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. She will also be a graduate assistant to Dr. Polydore. Her end goal? "I plan to become a bilingual counselor helping adolescents with their everyday hardships."

## Chavionne Thomas

*Chavionne is a senior from Antioch, IL, graduating this spring with degrees in Spanish and Psychology.*

Chavionne, a first generation student, wasn't sure she could graduate with Honors when she started at EIU, but as she puts it, "At EIU, I have achieved greatness. I will be graduating with University Honors, Departmental Honors in psychology, and Departmental Honors in Spanish." This is truly an achievement! Her favorite Honors class was anthropology with Dr. Angela Glaros: "I found this class to be extremely interesting. It taught me a lot about different cultures besides just their language."

## Jennifer Wisner

*Jennifer is a senior from Forsyth, IL, graduating this spring with a degree in accounting.*

Jennifer had been daunted by the prospect of doing business internships when she started college, but she has now interned at two companies. She notes: "I have surprised myself by becoming much more confident in college. I have experienced a lot of personal and professional growth over the past four years, and I feel like I have a much better understanding of who I am and what I want in life." Her favorite Honors class was a survey of twentieth century world history with Dr. Brian Mann: "Professor Mann was really engaging and always lectured like he was telling a story.... I feel like I learned a lot and really enjoyed the learning process in that class." This summer Jennifer will intern with BKD in Decatur, and then return to EIU this fall to pursue an MBA with a concentration in accounting. She will also be a graduate assistant to the Director of Accounting.



*“I have experienced a lot of personal and professional growth over the past four years.”*

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## SPECIAL INTERVIEWS

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### Suzann Bennett

*Suzann Bennett, office support associate extraordinaire, has recently retired. She worked for Eastern Illinois for almost 30 years and has spent six of those years at the Honors College. .*

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#### **What has been your favorite part about working in the Honors College?**

I like getting to know the students, and I enjoy working with them. I enjoy the Teas with the Dean on Fridays. It's especially fun to see the camaraderie of all of the students together and seeing Dean England interact with them. He really puts his heart and soul into making the Honors College a place of community for the students.

#### **What has been your overall experience with the Honors College?**

It's been very positive. It's very energetic here. There is always something going on. There is always something to be done. There is always something to learn. I've liked the interaction with not only the students, but also the faculty and the different staff across campus that you have to interact with just getting to know even more people through this job.

#### **What do you most look forward to in retirement?**

I would say free time! I've worked since I was a high school student. So, I look forward to having free time to do what I've always wanted to do. I want to be able to read more books and maybe try painting a little bit! I enjoy working in my garden—we have a large garden—and I think that will just give me more time to work at a more leisurely pace. I want to travel a lot. I look forward to having no time schedule and being able to relax and take my time to enjoy the things I want to do.

#### **Any last words for our Honors students?**

I would say, be active with other students. Become involved in things happening on campus and in the world. Continue to look for ways to expand your horizons, expand your knowledge, and remain positive. Reach out to other people and take this experience and always remember it throughout your life. It really is a rich opportunity. I think you get to just have a lot of possibilities. So, take advantage of those and enjoy your time in college, because it goes by fast. It's something you will always look back on in your life and appreciate.



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## Catherine L. Polydore, Ph.D.

*Dr Polydore, Daily Eastern News 2022 College of Education Person of the Year, became assistant dean of Honors in August, 2020. At the end of May she will move over to a new EIU post: chair of the Department of Counseling and Higher Education.*

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### Tell us a little about yourself.

I am originally from the Caribbean island of Dominica. I came to the U.S. as an international student in 1995 with the intent of getting a science degree, going on to medical school then returning home. Ultimately, I obtained a Ph.D. in educational psychology, and came to EIU in 2008. Thereafter, I got promoted through the ranks. Along the way, I got to work with Dean England on a few diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. I believe that it was from our work together that he saw the potential in me, and when the opportunity came up, he asked me to be the honors assistant dean. I had never considered working within Honors, since my interest was with at-risk and marginalized student populations. However, I have learned so much working in this position. Now, I have a more holistic view of student support, student needs and the functioning of the institution as a whole. Dean England is not only an amazing person, but he is also a wonderful mentor. I benefited tremendously from his wisdom and insights as a colleague.

### What is the best part about working in the Honors College?

I really enjoyed engaging with the students. I enjoyed participating, talking, interacting with the students, and taking photos for the newsletter and social media. I very much enjoyed our Honors opening event, a picnic and field day, last August. There were about 50 students in attendance. They seemed genuinely thrilled to be together in some friendly old school competitions like egg and spoon, and obstacle races. We had a lot of fun. I also enjoyed planning events and was doubly pleased if they had strong attendance. For example, I was very satisfied with the Reflection of Black Males event that we organized to commemorate African American Heritage Month. It was very important to me to have a successful event that reflected the Honor's College commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

### Any advice for students considering the Honors College?

Honors is an amazing opportunity that allows students to challenge themselves; to go beyond the mundane; to be part of a community of others who may have similar interests inside and outside the classroom, who may be similarly motivated with regard to academics, and who understand the struggles of someone who is academically inclined but may be challenged by invisible conditions like anxiety, depression, and neurodiversity in general. The staff are extremely committed, and that can make all the difference. Do not rely on the experiences of others: take the chance and create your own experience. Ultimately, your college experience, with Honors or without, will be truly what you make of it.



## 2022 GRADUATES

### SPRING 2022

Allyssa B. Adams (D)  
 Jessica N. Anderson (U)  
 Rhys-Maxwell A. Barnes (U&D)  
 Emma L. Beck (U&D)  
 Paul A. Blanchard (U)  
 Karly B. Coffey (G)  
 Jurnee J. Evans (U)  
 Delainey M. File (U)  
 Kayla J. Granat (G)  
 Annabelle L. Heddell (U&D)  
 Anna J. Hemrich (G)  
 Atlas A. Hennegan (U&D)  
 Elizabeth C. Hicks (U&D)  
 Lucy R. Hill (U)  
 Aysha C. Hutson (D)  
 Mason D. Jones (U)  
 Sarah F. Lemar (D)  
 Daniela A. Lopez (D)  
 Samantha G. Mabry (U)  
 Rebekah H. Magee (U)  
 Makayla E. McPhedran (U&D)  
 Jackson R. Melvin (U&D)  
 Ryan A. Moore (U&D)

Esperanza Murillo (D)  
 Harper M. Nebergall (U&D)  
 Keegan B. Noll (U)  
 Tess M. Patterson (U)  
 Joan M. Philip (U&D)  
 Mya L. Roberts (G)  
 Francesco W. Romano (G)  
 Caroline E. Shively (G)  
 Katherine M. Smith (U)  
 Lynsey D. Steffen (G)  
 Jason D. Tabit (G&D)  
 Joel C. Talley (G)  
 Chavionne D. Thomas (U&D)  
 Michal J. Treadway (U&D)  
 Meredith G. Vandeventer (U&D)  
 Macarthur R. VanOudt (G)  
 Anakin M. Weston (U&D)  
 Madison R. Wiedeman (U)  
 Ashtyn B. Wilhelm (D)  
 Olan J. Williams (D)  
 Jennifer L. Wisner (U)  
 Elizabeth H. Wood (U)  
 Amanda R. Wright (U)

### SUMMER 2022

Margaret A. Adams (G&D)  
 Emily A. Bernard (D)  
 Savannah L. Ettien (G)  
 Dallas A. Jones (G)  
 Joey T. Keigher (D)  
 Dylan M. Otto (D)  
 Morgan A. Weishaar (G)

### FALL 2022

Kinsey L. Romack (U&D)  
 Megan E. Sterling (D)  
 Carrie L. Wennerdahl (D)



U = University Honors

D = Departmental Honors

G = General Honors

# Sandra and Jack Pine Honors College

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Charleston, IL 61920

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## 2022-23 DATES TO REMEMBER

**Aug. 21** | Freshman Orientation: Honors Session

**Aug. 26** | Welcome Back Picnic and Field Day

**Sept. 23** | URSCA Proposals due for spring awards

**Late Sept. - Early Oct.** | Priority Honors Advising Appointments

**Oct. 10** | Annual Honors Pizza Crawl

**Oct. 17** | Priority Registration for Spring begins

**Mar. 27** | Priority Registration for Fall begins

**Mar. 31** | EIU Student Research and Creative Activity Conference

**Apr. 13-15** | National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) Conference

**Apr. 23** | Pine Honors College Awards Reception (by invitation)