

HONORS

NEWSLETTER

Ever Wanted to Join Honors?

Talk to some of your professors to write a letter of recommendation for the students who seek challenge, academic excellence, and a better transcript. For detailed information, visit the RCC website and look for the Honors program. The requirements are obtainable and there are lots of benefits you will receive. Finally look for the honors office at Academic I, Room 1226 for additional information.

The Benefits?

Students who complete the Honors Program with an academic average of 3.5 or higher have a very high transfer rate with full junior standing to virtually any four-year college or university they choose. Ivy League and Tier One college recruiters seek out RCC honors students for transfer because of the program's reputation for producing students with proven ability.



Meet The Mentors



Professor Peter Arvanites has taught mathematics at RCC for over thirty years. He has been a member of the Faculty Senate since 1989, serving as Vice President/Secretary from 1995 to 1997, Acting Vice President/Secretary from 2004 to 2005, and then President from 2005 to 2009. In 1994, he became the Honors Mentor for students pursuing math, computer science, and engineering majors. Since then, he continues to enjoy working with the Honors students and helping them transfer to prestigious schools such as MIT, Stanford, Cornell, and NYU. Since 1996, Peter has been a Co-Advisor of the Chess Club, becoming Advisor in 2020. Throughout the years, he has served on many committees such as the Curriculum Committee, College RTP Committee, Sabbatical Leave Committee, and Community Involvement Committee. Peter is a member of the Academic Standards Committee and the Professor Emeritus Nominating Committee. In addition, he is a member of the Curriculum and Transfer Pathways Working Group of the SUNY Transfer Task Force.



Professor Elyse Fuller has worked at RCC since 2004, teaching and working with students. Over the years, she has taught various courses, mainly focusing on General Biology I & II. Elyse has also been an active member of several committees and working groups at RCC. Some of her most cherished experiences have been serving as the advisor for the Alpha Phi Sigma Chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society for many years, as well as Co-Advisor for Environmental Club and Co-Advisor for Biology Club. Since 2018, she has been an Honors Mentor for students interested in biology, health sciences, pre-med, environmental science, and related fields. Furthermore, she started teaching General Biology I & II Honors. Apart from her work at RCC, Elyse has volunteered for various organizations for over 30 years. She started as a candy striper at the hospital in her hometown and is now volunteering as her daughter's Girl Scout troop leader. Elyse's daughter, husband, her loveable but wacky black Lab, and her parents keep her busy, and she enjoys reading, listening to audiobooks, cooking, baking, and being outdoors.



Professor Andrew T. Jacobs is a communication studies professor who also teaches Gender & Sexuality Studies courses (GST prefix). He is the Director of Forensics – the coach of the RCC Speech & Debate Team. We compete in the Impromptu Debate League (IDL) he founded. Andrew has co-authored *Introduction to Women's & Gender Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Oxford University Press, currently in its 3rd edition) and has written academic and popular press pieces on the rhetoric of identity, freedom of speech, debate, politics, and other topics.



Professor Kristen Kolka has been teaching mathematics at RCC since 2010 and previously worked as a high school mathematics teacher for three years. She teaches a variety of math courses both in-person and asynchronously. In addition to being an Honors mentor, she is involved in many committees on campus and currently serves as the Faculty Senate Vice President and RCCFT Treasurer.



Professor Matt Matcovich is an alumnus of the Honors Program at Rockland Community College and was mentored by Professor Peter Arvanites during his time there. Since being hired as a full-time faculty member in 2013, he has been an assistant baseball coach, worked in the advisement and tutoring centers, directed the summer camps, and chaired several committees. Some of his proudest work at the college is seeing his mentees in the Honors Program grow and watching them excel in their future endeavors.



Dr. Meghan P. Nolan, MFA, MA, PhD, is an Associate Professor of English and Chair of the Sam Draper Honors program at RCC. She is a recipient of the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. Dr. Nolan is a multi-genre writer, who focuses on (Neo-)Victorian and Modern literature/ crime writing and fragmented perceptions of self-hood through published academic works, fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Her most recent book, *The Crossroads of Crime Writing: Unseen Structures and Uncertain Spaces* was published by Anthem Press in 2024. Her other academic/ non-fiction works have appeared in *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Fernando Pessoa* (MLA 2024), *Transnational Crime Fiction: Mobility, Borders, and Detection* (2020), *Exquisite Corpse: Studio Art-Based Writing in the Academy* (2019), *Persona Studies* (2021 and 2015), *Thread* (2017), and *The 100 Greatest Detectives* (2018). She is the author of the poetry collection, *Stratification* (2008), and her poems have been in many literary journals over the years.

MJ Broadway Show

New York City - home to many great sights. In the city that never sleeps, the honors students had the opportunity to take a day trip to view a critically acclaimed Broadway show, MJ. In September, the students can vote for which Broadway show they get to see, so make sure to follow the RCC Honors Instagram. On the day of the tour, we got to enjoy a “lovely” hour-and-a-half bus ride. Once there, the students had the opportunity to explore the city and find someplace to eat.



Dave's Hot Chicken was the place half of the students took, some chose mild, some chose none and anyone who'd gone there before, and some naive alike chose extra spicy.

After eating, the students headed over to the Niel

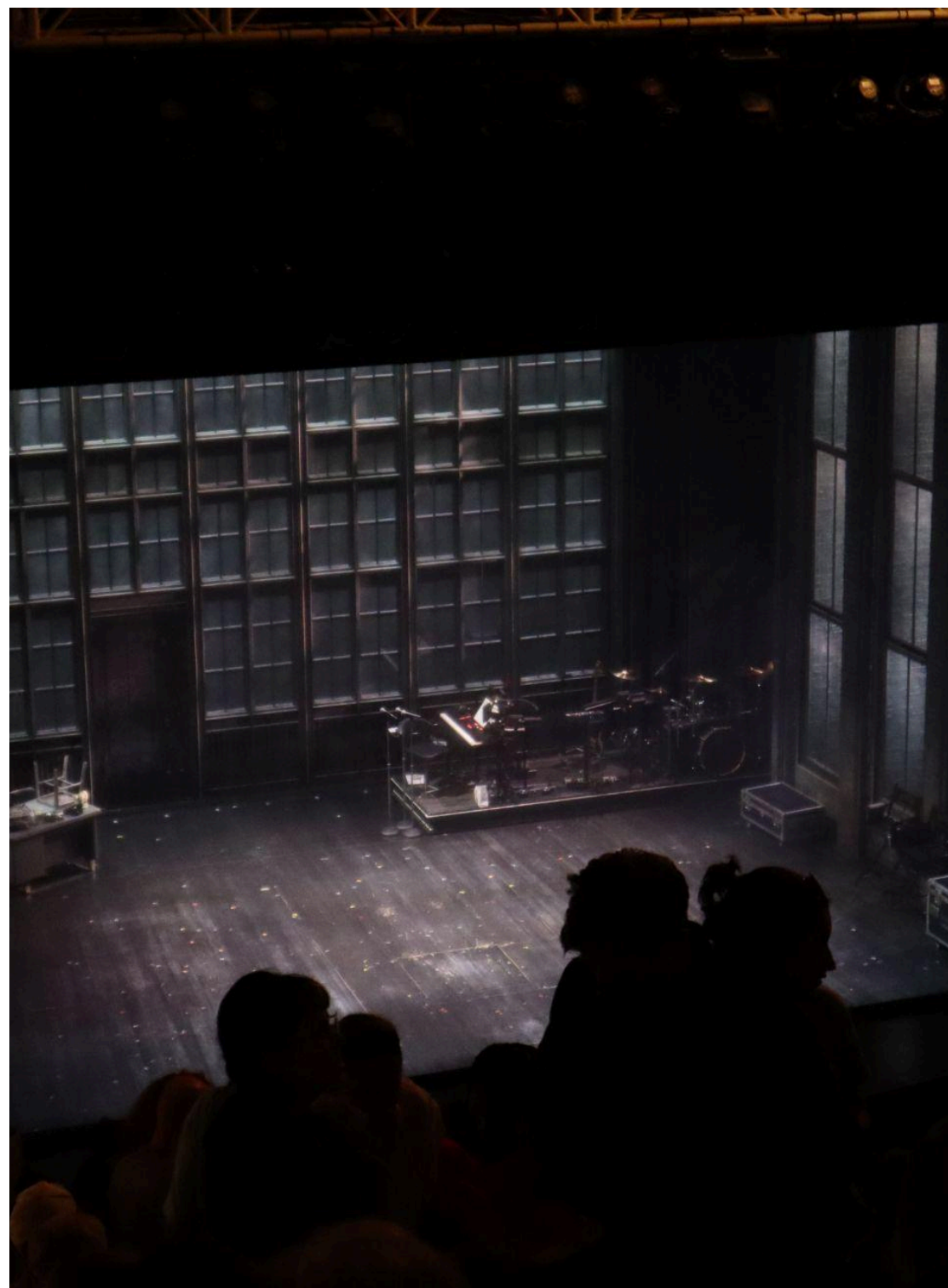


Simon Theater, where we were all excited to see the MJ musical. The show lasted roughly 2 hours and a half, but it was an amazing experience. We

enjoyed the show a lot. Would recommend it to everyone. After the show, we all enjoyed another “lovely” hour-and-a-half bus ride back to the campus.

(Written by Kyle Chicaiza, Edgar Guerra Lemus and Sara Paredes)

(Edited by Edgar Guerra Lemus)



Internship

Experiences

“It’s great to help and connect with the RCC community as a whole. I am the Hawks Hub manager and with that comes a lot of responsibilities, like making sure all operations are running smoothly, giving extra to help those in need, and answering the questions of those curious. The volunteers and I work as a team to help log in participants for potential follow-up visits, give bags, provide hygiene products, and more! It is open Tuesdays from 10-4, Wednesdays from 12-7, and allows participants to come in once a week. Balancing school and the internship hasn't been without its challenges, but working alongside Steven Marks, Rashid Jeeter, and then Mike Verschinder, who gets all our food has made this a wonderful team to be a part of.

(Kalyssa Insdorf at Hawk’s Hub)

“I am so happy and grateful for the opportunity to intern at Rockland Community College's Connection Center. While working here every interaction was a chance to learn, grow, and contribute to overall campus life. for me this was more than just gaining experience; it was about making meaningful connections and helping others who needed it.”

(Sundari Ruth at Connections Center)

(Interview by Sara Paredes)

Volunteer

Experiences

“I’ve volunteered for TLC Animal Rescue for the past 10 years, but off the books, I’ve volunteered my whole life, as my family is at the heart and center of the rescue. We’re based in Connecticut but our operations span the tri-state area, prioritizing the location of permanent, safe homes for animals in danger of euthanasia. My family and I have saved over 1000 dogs in our time. Apart from the family business, I’ve also done a few Keep Rockland Beautiful Cleanups. Volunteering is probably one of my top 3 favorite pastimes. Giving back to the community and making the world a little better place feels beyond rewarding. After successfully finding an animal their forever home, or after a hard day’s labor cleaning up trash out of the environment, you always feel accomplished and content. Whenever I’ve volunteered I’ve always felt much happier and energetic than I had before my volunteering.”

(Gabriel Orrego)



True Loving Companion
Animal Rescue

Meet The Alumni – Mark Svensson

Mark Svensson is one of RCC's most renowned Alumni. During his time at Rockland, he made great strides, not just in the school but in the Honors program too. Such strides include being the first scholar in RCC history to win the All-USA Community College Academic Honor. This is exactly why I've asked him, and his wife Ismini Svensson, to come down to the honors office for an interview. Here's what he had to say about how his commitment to the Sam Drapers Honors Program contributed to some of his many fantastic accomplishments.



Q: What inspired you to pursue a career in law and public service, particularly with your diverse experiences working for organizations like the United States Small Business Administration, the New York State Office of the Attorney General, and the United Nations?

A: I believe that my time at RCC opened my eyes to several different social issues that I wasn't necessarily involved in or exposed to in High School. I think it kickstarted my interest in making an impact and finding ways to use my talents to make a difference. That, over time, segwayed to a career path in law.

Q: How do you balance your professional career with your philanthropic endeavors, such as StayUNITED and the '50 Acts of Giving Back' initiative?

A: My wife and I work very hard, we make time for everything important to us. Whether it be family, community engagement, or philanthropic endeavors. If you have a passion for something and you believe it to have great value, you're going to find ways to budget time to pursue those passions.

Q: What are some of the most rewarding experiences you've had while working on philanthropic projects, and how have they impacted your perspective on community engagement and social change?

A: Even going back to RCC days I believe the most rewarding thing is to see people smile and see that I've made a real difference in their lives. This, as I mentioned, started at RCC and has continued to pursue my professional career. It's simply one of the most rewarding things, trying to give back and use your time to make a difference.

Q: Could you share some insights or lessons learned from your experiences as a Commitment Mentor for the Clinton Global Initiative University, and how do you see the role of mentorship in fostering the next generation of leaders?

A: I think mentorship is key, I believe not everyone has money but everyone can find time to give back, and with mentorship in particular I believe that to be important. I would also love to see RCC's alumni reach out to students more to assist them. Whether it be with job placements or simply conversations to expand their knowledge in whatever respective field they choose to go into. I do these things in several capacities, I help students out with whatever goal they have set, especially from RCC and the Honors Program. I have a special place in my heart for both.

Q: How do you see your work evolving in the future, and what are some of your aspirations for your continued impact on both a local and national level?

A: I think impact-wise, you always want to continue to grow and expand. For me, it started growing as a student in the Honors Program, and I pretty much had that same sort of mentality back then too. I wanted to help and make a difference in people's lives. And, as you garner more success in your professional development, you're able to reach out your impact to a greater number of people. It's so important to give back, it's how you help people and lift others that's the most rewarding in my opinion.

Q: How has becoming a parent influenced your approach to philanthropy and community service, and what values do you hope to instill in your daughter, Rafaela?

A: I wouldn't say it changed anything, I'd say if anything my wife and I want her to grow up understanding and appreciating opportunities given to her. He wants her to have a safe school environment where she can learn kindness and empathy. At least at her age, we want her to have a worldly perspective where she understands how to recognize what's right and wrong, and if she sees something wrong, we don't want her to just sit there and watch.

Q: Finally, what message or piece of advice would you like to leave with our readers who may be inspired by your story and work?

A: I think the RCC honors program is a phenomenal opportunity to develop yourself as a student, and as a productive young professional. Even now I still attribute a lot of my experience here at the Honors program as really formative to how I've developed as a person. Take every opportunity you can seek out, the main thing is to give it your all, work hard, and don't be afraid to ask for help. The honors program has a fantastic alumni network, reach out, seek support, and do everything you can to further yourself.

Mark also wanted to inform our viewers about his foundation scholarship, which is open to all students who want to make a difference in their community and have strong leadership skills and qualities. Here's the link for anyone interested, <http://www.stayunited.org/scholarships>. It was a great pleasure and honor, to be able to meet Mr. Svensson and his wife. Both are incredibly hard-working and accomplished individuals whose passions have led them to many great feats. Thank you for reading.

(Interview by Julian Goldstein)

Winter Potluck

In December we had a potluck for the holiday season. There was an explosion of culture, anything from humble Chinese fried rice, to Ecuadorian chicken rice or the hearty Tortillas of the Latin Americas, and pastas of Italy, Guatemalan Steak, and the chicken and rice Soul Food. It was a time to celebrate, that even though we may look, speak, and eat different foods, in the end, we all are quite similar.

(Written by Edgar Guerra Lemus)



SUNY CASE Awards– Ilyssa Shapiro and Sundari Ruth

The SUNY CASE Award, or The SUNY Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence, is an incredible honor to receive. For the most part, it acknowledges outstanding students and their achievements through academics, extracurriculars, and community outreach. In the honors program, we have two amazing young adults who were both nominated and won the awards. Here's what they had to say about the experience.

Ilyssa Shapiro



Sundari Ruth



Congratulations on your accomplishment of winning the SUNY CASE Award. Can you share with us how you felt when you learned about your achievement?

I: When I learned about the nomination, I was very excited, I got nominated by a few professors I believe so. I got nominated by my honors mentor Professor Fuller. I was excited because I knew that I as a student could reach out to people and ask for them to nominate me, but it was an honor to receive a nomination without having to go and ask for it, so that meant a lot to me.

S: It was amazing, I felt incredibly happy. At first, I didn't even believe it was real—it was such a surreal moment. I thought it might be spam, especially since it happened over the break. It made me feel nice.

J: What do you think led to your nomination for this award? Can you highlight to me the key accomplishments or contributions that you earned for this recognition?

S: Of course, I mentioned parts of my public service to scouting, the scouts of this local area in Pearl River, and how I am working on making a handicap ramp as a part of my quartermaster project. Also, my service here in school, being part of public safety.

I: I think academics played into it a little bit, but I think it's more about what you do on campus. The leadership that you show. I have been involved in a lot of things on campus, a variety of things. To highlight a few of my presence in the sustainability club that I've been president of since Spring 2023. We have done lots of things, we've been active on campus doing clean-ups, events, and presentations. I think my active involvement is there, also I feel like I am everywhere on campus

Thank you to both Ilyssa and Sundari for their contributions to the Honors Program and RCC as a whole. We will miss them greatly but we wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors, thank you.

(Interviewed by Julian Goldstein and Natalia Benitez)

Poetry Spotlight – Perry Kornbluh

Hi everyone. In this short blurb, I want to showcase one of our most poetic students here at the Sam Drapers Honors Program. Perry Kornbluh goes deep into mental health and her struggles with depression and anxiety in this awe-inspiring work titled *In Every Artery*.

(Written by Julian Goldstein)

**You will find stardust in every artery.
In the periwinkle pond/ sluggish
blood sneaking its way/ through
the veins and venules/ converging,
meeting at capillary beds/ metarterioles
kissing the thoroughfare channel/ while
the sphincters stand guard/ leaky
vessels spitting out glitter/ on
the surface of body tissues/ demons
bathed in crimson glow/ sniffing
the waste left behind/ like
shadows/ vessels
cross paths/ and
pass each other by
Stars line the tunica intima of the bluest
veins.**

**The defiance of capillary walls/pericytes
stand strong against the tide/ pain
fuels resilience/ never
dampened by the viscous rush/ the
infinite maze of vessels and life/ like
the narrow hollow arteries/ we
constrict, we feels, and we
let it go.**

**At the end of the day, our hearts all bleed
the same.**



Halloween Party

Not all fun honors events need to be outside of the campus. On the 31st of October, we dressed up in our best Halloween costume and joined the party in the honors office. Enjoying all of the snacks and refreshments while admiring the costumes of our friends.

(Written by Kyle Chicaiza and Edgar Guerra Lemus)



Fall Outing

The fall outing was just the beginning of many great events the Honors program has. All of us had met up at Secour Farms, where we were able to take fun pictures with friends and get the chance to purchase pumpkins. It was one of the first major outings we as an honors collective had gone on, and for many of us one of the first university experiences, the start was rough with finding out transportation but we all made it in one piece.

Hayrides were occurring throughout the day, as well as an acorn maze open for exploration. The whole place had a Halloween makeover, with spooky ghosts and haybales dressed up as supervillains and heroes alike.



Although the maze wasn't too difficult, it still definitely would have been bad to get lost! And don't tell a couple of kids we heard screaming in there that couldn't leave that! Still, a blast all around, and all of us were so excited to have gone.

(Written by Edgar Guerra Lemus and Sara Paredes)

(Edited by Edgar Guerra Lemus)



Meet The Writers



Edgar Guerra Lemus

**President, Writer,
Formater, and Editor
of this Volume**



Kyle Chicaiza

**Writer, Editor and
Photographer**



Julian Goldstein

**Vice President and
Writer**



Natalia Benitez

Photographer and Writer



Yaritza Santana

Advisor



Sara Abigail Paredes

Writer

Adopt A Family

The holidays bring with them a sense of giving, warmth, and community. However, for some families, the merriness can be dampened due to financial strain. During the 2023 festive season, the Honors Program had the opportunity to “adopt” a family, and help alleviate some of the worries that came with gift shopping. To ensure that as many young children could smile during the festivities, members provided them with gifts and other necessities. It was an enjoyable time not just for those receiving gifts, but for the Honors members as well. Adopt a Family is a great way to not just impact a family’s holiday experience, but to extend a hand of support to those in need. After all, the greatest gift is kindness!

(Written by Sara Paredes)

(Edited by Edgar Guerra Lemus)

Lambs that learn to walk in snow	As they wait beside the ewe,	Oftentimes we find ourselves
When their bleating clouds the air	Her fleeces wetly caked, there lies	stressed, and wondering what
Meet a vast unwelcome, know	Hidden round them, waiting too,	one can do. However, taking a
Nothing but a sunless glare.	Earth's immeasurable surprise.	moment to smell the flowers,
Newly stumbling to and fro	They could not grasp it if they	and to live in the moment, can
All they find, outside the fold,	knew,	truly bring a reinvigorated
Is a wretched width of cold.	What so soon will wake and grow	reason, to be.
	Utterly unlike the snow.	
	-Philip Larkin	-Edgar Guerra Lemu

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