



# COLUMNS

The Honors Program Newsletter at Bentley University ■ Spring 2014

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## WHIZ KIDS

### Bentley students “Flex” their brain muscles in academic competitions

*By Kenneth Yang*

Over the past few years, students representing Bentley University in academic competitions have been consistently lighting up on opponents’ radars. These opportunities enable students to apply their knowledge and to test the quality of Bentley’s academics and its students against other schools. Although there are many more academic competitions that are available for students to participate in, four are highlighted here: Fed Challenge (economics), Supercomputing (computer science), xTax (accounting), and Moot Court (law). Although all competitions require extensive preparation, both the Fed Challenge and Moot Court teams currently offer three-credit courses to help in the vigorous preparation required.

#### Fed Challenge

In the Fed Challenge, students simulate a Federal Open Market Committee meeting by providing an assessment of the economy and a monetary policy recommendation, then answer questions from a panel of judges. Aradhana Kaul participated in the 2013 team’s presentation, playing a “dovish” role as one who favors low interest rates. Taking EC225 and EC112 generated her passion for economics and economic development and drove her to join the team. She credits the

success of the team to the advisers: “It is due to the environment that they create and the tone that they set that the students are so dedicated and willing to work hard.” Kaul plans to further her interests by comparing the workings of the Reserve Bank of India with the U.S. Federal Reserve in her honors capstone.

The 2013 team earned third place in the hypercompetitive regional competition held at the Boston Federal Reserve, facing off against heavyweights

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The 2013 Bentley Fed Challenge team

# THE POWER OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Giving back for a greater cause

By Brian Levine

**“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.” – Aristotle.**

These were the first words I saw on the board when I walked into Professor Joan Atlas’ Honors EXP 201 embedded service-learning class my freshman year. The course teaches students how to enhance their writing and critical-thinking skills through an integrated grant-writing assignment. I knew grant writing was a long process, but I was unaware of the actual amount of work that went into it. You could say I had always taken the process, well, for granted (pun intended). However, I quickly realized that grant writing is much more than a simple request for money; it is a journey to find the meaning of civic engagement and social responsibility, the two motifs that Atlas stressed time and again.

The process began before our first day of class, with Atlas and the Service-Learning Center selecting four local non-profit organizations. She has been teaching the grant-writing course since fall of 2005, but approaches each year with the same energy and passion she had when she first started. “I love teaching the course because I’m not just teaching writing,” Atlas explained. “I’m teaching writing for a bigger purpose. [Students] see that they are not just writing a paper to hand in for a grade. They are producing something that matters, something that a nonprofit can use to do good.”

My group was assigned the Dana Court Learning Center, an after-school program for children of the Dana Court housing complex that emphasizes positive mentorship and encouragement. Our first goal was to familiarize ourselves with the organization and its needs, so we traveled to the site and met with the program’s co-directors. Dana Court needed money to cover various operating expenses such as the directors’ salaries, snacks and school supplies. Based on these needs and the amount we were requesting (\$10,000), we researched potential grantors and selected the Amelia Peabody Foundation, whose mission is to increase the depth of positive learning experiences available to materially disadvantaged young people living in Massachusetts. Now that we had our potential grantor, a thorough understanding of our organization, and projected expenses, we were ready to begin writing our grant proposal.

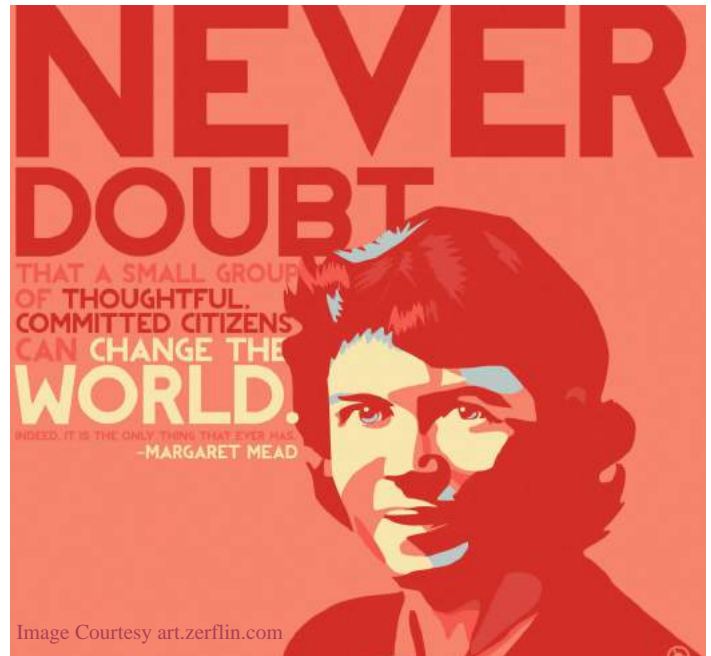


Image Courtesy art.zerflin.com

The key to grant writing is persuasion. Why should the funder give money to our organization above all others? Atlas taught us the traditional persuasion techniques of logos, pathos and ethos, but, more importantly, stressed the significance of rewriting. I was unaware of exactly how much rewriting went into the grant-writing process, but learned that every edit we made, no matter how small, made a huge difference. On the last day of class, each group presented its research and shared its experiences. The representatives from the community partners attended the final presentations, and it was rewarding to have them see the hard work we had put into the project.

In addition to writing the grant, we were assigned a short project to help our community partners. Our group chose to reach out to family and friends to raise money for Dana Court. We raised well over the \$200 minimum requirement, a testament to individuals truly wanting to make a difference in the world, however they can. The aforementioned themes of civic engagement and social responsibility have an even greater impact at a school like Bentley. “There’s a tendency for Bentley students to focus on getting a job just to make money,” Atlas told me. “This course helps them see that there is more to life than making money and that money doesn’t always equal happiness.” This experience was more than just a writing course; ultimately, it was about developing compassion for others and showing that everyone can make a difference.

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# THE BIGGEST COMPANY YOU'VE PROBABLY NEVER HEARD OF

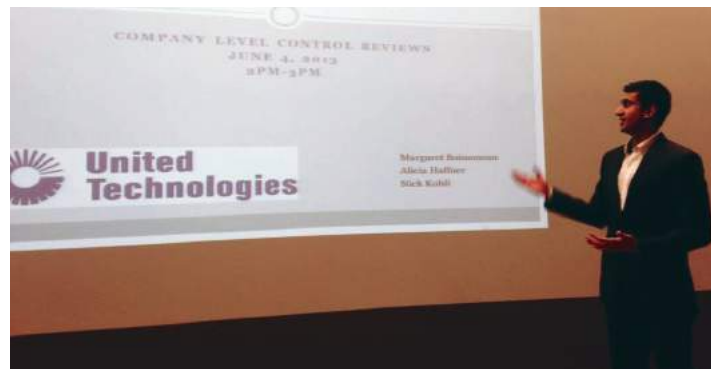
## An intern story

By Nick Kohli

For those of you who read the fall 2013 edition of *Columns*, you already know that United Technologies Corporation (UTC) committed \$250,000 to Bentley University's Honors Program for the next five years. For those of you who have never heard of UTC, don't worry, neither had I before I was offered an internship there. Even Greg Hayes, UTC's CFO and a Bentley dad, said "UTC is the biggest company you've probably never heard of." After my summer experience, however, I realized how lucky Bentley's Honors Program is to have a global powerhouse partner like UTC.

I am a junior at Bentley currently studying abroad at the London School of Economics. When I was first offered a summer internship at UTC last year, I was skeptical. I hardly knew anything about the company (probably because I've never been in the market for an elevator or Blackhawk helicopter) and was therefore completely shocked when I learned that it is one of the 50 biggest companies in the U.S. When deciding between internships, I was lucky to have the guidance of my fraternity brother and former UTC intern, Ryan Driggs. He is currently working in UTC's Financial Leadership Program and had a lot of positive things to say about his experience there.

I cannot imagine a company that gives an intern as much responsibility or exposure to high-level management as UTC does. My first week on the job, I was asked to make a presentation to UTC's acting controller, John Stantial. Keep in mind, this was not the controller of a small business employing 50 people, but rather the controller of a 218,000-person manufacturing juggernaut. Thus, my slight nervousness at the time can be understood. While I sat prepping my PowerPoint slides in my cubical, I looked across the hall of 1 Financial Plaza — or the "Gold Building," as it was affectionately called — and saw who I thought to be Aaron Jackson, head of Bentley University's Honors Program, with a group of Bentley and UTC people. After doing a double-take just to make sure I wasn't seeing things, I realized it was definitely him. I greeted the group, and asked the one person I didn't know, "Do you work here?" Kim Patterson, the head of all undergraduate finance hires for UTC, gave me a slight smile, which hinted that maybe it was a dumb question. The mystery man was



**United Technologies Corporation has committed \$250,000 to support the Honors Program**

Peter Longo, CFO of UPAZ (the umbrella company that includes Pratt and Whitney and United Technologies Aerospace Systems, boasting a combined net sales of \$20.3 billion) and Bentley University alumnus, who introduced himself before turning to Patterson and saying, "Make sure you keep him busy this summer."

Now that I am studying in London, the scope of UTC has only become more apparent. As I enter the "tube" and descend an escalator manufactured by a subsidiary of UTC, Otis Elevators, I think to myself, "This summer I ate lunch in the headquarters of the company that built this." It is almost impossible to fathom how omnipresent UTC is. For example, Otis manufactured the elevators in the Empire State Building, the World Trade Center, the Eiffel Tower, the Burj Khalifa (the really tall building in Dubai), and countless others.

In all fairness, so as not to mislead future potential interns or Bentley alumni, I must admit that my time at UTC was special. I was one of only three finance interns at the corporate headquarters. This allowed me to partake in once-in-a-lifetime activities, such as attending an "All Hands" meeting with CEO Louis Chenevert and working with people at each of the corporate office's 17 functional groups, things other interns did not do. This leads me to the final important aspect of my summer at UTC: the people. From my direct bosses, Peggy Yocher and Alicia Haffner, to everyone else I worked with, my coworkers were instrumental in making my internship unforgettable and equipping me with the skills and experience I'll carry with me throughout my career. ■

*Nick Kohli '15 is a Finance major.*



# RUNNING THE NUMBERS

## Is the Honors Program really worth it?

By Sean McEwan

When I sat down to write a story conveying the value of the Honors Program for *Columnas*, I thought about taking the easy way out. “Countless studies have concluded that the Honors Program will make you taller, more attractive, more sociable and, above all, more successful.” After realizing that this claim might open me up to several lawsuits, I decided to try and assess the value I derived from the Honors Program. Despite working in finance, it was difficult to apply the concept of valuation to a series of experiences. At the end of the day, it came down to this question: Are the future benefits of the Honors Program going to outweigh all of the hard work and effort you have to exert today? It may not be a perfect solution, but here are a few concepts to assess the value of the Honors Program.

### Assessing Risk

When I received an invitation to join the Honors Program in the fall of 2001, I didn’t hesitate to accept the offer. The benefits seemed clear to me: a smaller learning environment, intellectually curious peers, unique academic and cultural opportunities, and greater faculty exposure. How could I go wrong?

I failed to think about any potential downside risks until after I had already joined. Along with greater faculty exposure came increased preparation for each and every class. Being surrounded by intellectually curious peers meant expectations were much higher, and you were judged to a more exacting standard. When you



Sean McEwan

enter the Honors Program, you’re given tremendous resources and opportunities, but there’s also the risk of coming up short.

In finance, as in life, you cannot eliminate all risks. In fact, within reason, taking on additional risk can yield higher returns. Demonstrating to an employer that you were selected for an elite program and embraced the challenges that came with it goes a long way. In your first interview, how are you going to respond to “What’s the most challenging thing you’ve ever done?” Are you going to pause, feign deep personal reflection, and say, “Calculus II,” or are you going to say, “I built a Black-Scholes stochastic volatility model”?

### Maximizing your Investment

Unless you were fortunate enough to come into a trust fund, your most valuable asset when you walk across the stage at graduation is going to be your intellect. My MBA accounting professor told us, “Don’t worry about the student loans you’ve taken out, because offsetting that liability is a huge asset: your mind.” It’s that asset and the future earnings derived from that asset which makes paying for school worth it.

If the greatest asset you have right now is your mind, why wouldn’t you do everything and anything in your power to increase its value? That means learning as much as you possibly can over the next four years. That means pushing yourself to try and grasp difficult concepts. That means finding teachers and peers to push you when you find it difficult to motivate yourself.

Making those investments early in your life will reap significant dividends now and in the future. You’d be surprised by how much you’re able to retain after you’ve been out of school for a while. In fact, I recently took on a new role supporting our Fixed Income division and I still find myself referencing concepts that were discussed in my honors courses. Because of the information I learned in honors macroeconomics and through my senior capstone project, I am now able to engage with my business partners on topics such as the Federal Reserve’s tapering, changes in the yield curve, and what the appointment of Janet Yellen means to our business.

### Future Success

The most common phrase when talking about financial returns has to be: “Past performance is no guarantee of future success.” I’ve been very fortunate in my professional and personal life, and I attribute part of that to my time in the program. If you want to hear more about my story, or the stories of other alums, be on the lookout for upcoming Honors Alumni Chapter events taking place on and off campus. We look forward to when you join our ranks of successful honors alums. ■

*Sean McEwan '05 was an Economics-Finance major, and is currently a senior director in fixed income finance at Fidelity Investments.*

# THE TIME-VALUE OF HARD WORK

## My freshmen semester in the Honors Program

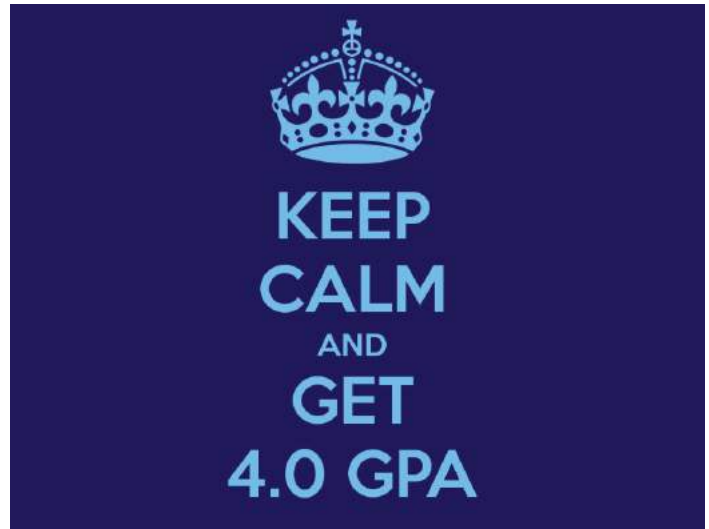
By *Jacob LaPierre*

“Honors Student” has a nice ring to it, but after many years of high-school honors classes, I became somewhat numb to its meaning. College offered me an honors experience that I was not accustomed to, involving events, speakers and strict academic requirements. These were not the only differences that existed. In fact, after only one semester, Bentley University’s Honors Program had become the most important organization that I belonged to on campus.

My first semester at Bentley University gave me new friends, new networks and new skills. Excuse my cliché, but in the beginning I felt like a fish out of water. I have always favored routine actions and consistency because, in the past, it had worked well for me. I mean, I got into Bentley, so I did *something* right. In high school, I was able to get good grades and make friends while staying within my comfort zone and, to be honest, it felt a little like I was entitled to what I was given. As a result, I began my first semester as a college honors student with the mindset that I had already earned it. This was my fatal, yet enlightening, mistake that brought about the realization of what being an honors student at Bentley really means.

I enjoyed my studies, but my honors classes were by far my favorite because they challenged me. I enjoyed the critical thinking and reflection that honors classes offered. I allocated my energy toward my honors classes because I knew that they required the most effort. Although “easy A” grades felt familiar to me, I unfortunately underestimated the amount of effort that my non-honors courses also required. Because I didn’t have to study too hard in high school, I rarely studied for quizzes in these classes. You may justifiably wonder, “Why is this kid in the Honors Program?” In my defense, I really focused during class by taking excellent notes and participating, which are what I would consider to be my strongest honors qualities. Nonetheless, bad habits encroached on my first semester, even during the most important week of the semester: finals week.

Up until finals, I was able to maintain A grades in all of my classes except two. I was excited about my performance and I felt as though I had earned those grades. In addition, I had been managing my time between attending drama rehearsal four nights a week, attempting to start a new club on campus, and playing intramural soccer. Thus, my lackadaisical study habits could be vindicated because I



took on too much, right? All excuses aside, I slacked off and, to be frank, I paid the consequences. Because I did, I experienced an epiphany on the subject of the Honors Program: Honors students still have to earn their A’s through hard work, dedication, and excellent academics in all aspects of course work.

The Honors Program is not merely a reward for being a great student in high school, but an investment in the student to live up to his/her academic, leadership, and extracurricular potential. Sure I had been successful in high school, but I have not yet succeeded at Bentley, where I have to prove myself each and every semester. However, I believe the key word is “yet.” I’m just a bond that hasn’t matured (I’m sorry, business joke), and my maturity date is in four years. I learned that the Honors Program is really an honor, not for your prior accomplishments, but for what you will accomplish during your time at Bentley.

Sometimes it takes a good kick in the rear to realize how important the opportunities you receive really are. The Honors Program at Bentley University has given me a path to success, and I came up a bit short the first semester. However I am now refocused to take advantage of everything the program has to offer, as my future value will only be enhanced through my involvement in the Honors Program. I am proud to be part of such an amazing community of brilliant people, and I am proud that I have the opportunity to make the program’s investment worthwhile. ■

*Jacob LaPierre '17 is a Finance major.*

## WHIZ KIDS *(Continued from page 1)*

Harvard and Dartmouth, among others. Past teams, including the 2010 and 2012 teams, won the regional competition, eventually earning a national championship and a second-place finish respectively, while facing judges at the Board of Governors in Washington, D.C.

### Supercomputing

Professor David Yates, along with advisers from Northeastern and MIT, serve as mentors for this team. The process of entering the competition itself is extremely difficult, as the Bentley team had been turned down the past three years. Unlike other teams that had a qualification process, Yates handpicked the students. Their task was to build a computer with a \$2,500 budget from off-the-shelf components, then run a set of tasks. Teams are scored on speed and accuracy, among other criteria, and have a fixed amount of time to build the computer and complete the computations. One team member, Dmitry Veber, had the responsibility of preparing the Weather Researching and Forecasting Model (WRF) application.

For Bentley, the first time in this competition was the charm. The team not only came in first in its division, beating those with previous experience, but also outscored contenders in a separate unlimited-budget track using the same scoring system. Veber found “one of our advantages of being business students, we did the math because we knew it was not going to finish on time.” For example, 10 hours

into the competition, the team found themselves running an application that was not going to finish for another 50 hours, leading them to reevaluate and reprioritize. Another team with the same problem wasted time when they did not identify needed adjustments. Yates concurs that the students’ business background — namely presentation and group work skills, and cost-benefit analysis — added value to the team. Having won at the national level in January in Colorado, the Bentley-Northeastern team has been invited to compete at the international level in Germany this June.

### PricewaterhouseCoopers xTax Competition

Bentley’s xTax entries began with 10 teams, one of which was selected from a school-wide competition with judges from PWC, which sponsors the case competition. Teams of five students provide a presentation of their case and findings, then defend their position facing judges’ questions. This year’s case involved resolving the problem of declining gas tax revenue within a fictitious state where people were converting to fuel-efficient cars.

Professor Jay Thibodeau felt privileged to carry the 2013 Bentley team through the round right before the nationals. He attributes the advantages of the team to the unique requirement that first-year students take both accounting and finance. Asked of what changes he would have made given a second chance, Thibodeau responded, “I could not be more proud of my team. There

was nothing I wished to change. The presentation was exceptional, and I was pleased with their really hard work.” Salvatore Visali, a team member, gained confidence and inspiration to join after receiving a personal invitation from his GB212 professor. He shares Thibodeau’s belief that Bentley’s superior business program gave the team an upper hand. Sal, in fact, wished that the judges had harder questions at the end of the presentation to reward their hard work. Despite narrowly missing advancement to the national competition held in Washington, D.C., past xTax teams have competed in the nationals, demonstrating consistent success, and validating Bentley’s traditional strength in accountancy.

### Moot Court

Groundwork for participating in moot court begins in its feeder course, LA108, where students learn about oral advocacy and have practice moots. Once on the team, students take a special course dedicated to the competition and preparation. Last year’s questions dealt with government rights to cellular data and presidential authority to detain US citizens indefinitely. Each side has 20 minutes to divide between students and persuade the court as to whether the government did or did not have authority using precedent cases. As a member of one of the Bentley teams, I focused on the question of presidential authority, while my partner Sawyer Huth made arguments on search and seizure of cellular data.

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## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT *(Continued from page 2)*

The greatest feeling of all came during the summer following my freshman year, when I received an email from Atlas informing us that our grant was accepted and Dana Court was awarded the full \$10,000. Knowing that my group's hard work contributed to

sustaining an after-school organization that provides children with a safe and encouraging environment gave me a tremendous sense of accomplishment. I immediately thought back to a Margaret Mead quote from class that resonated with me: "Never doubt that

a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." ■

**Brian Levine '16** is an Economics-Finance and Liberal Studies major.

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## WHIZ KIDS *(Continued from page 6)*

Because we needed to make arguments for both sides, we could compare our own arguments against each other's to find holes that needed to be covered. The practices run by our astute adviser and moot judge Professor Franklyn Salimbene enabled our Bentley teams to test and improve our arguments against each other. Unlike in a real court trial, one twist of moot court is that judges can interrupt

oral arguments with questions, which I enjoyed. Salimbene says the objective of this competition, if not to serve as a foundation for students interested in law, is to "offer students a set of transferable oral skills, improving both their ability to articulate an argument and respond to questions on the spot." In addition to the challenge, I found that with my participation, I gained better communication and persuasion

skills, which will stick with me well after graduation. Out of Bentley's four teams, two made it to the nationals this year. One student, Moussa Hassoun, earned the Top Orator award at the regional level. Since their first competition in 2001, Bentley has advanced to the nationals every year except for two. ■

**Kenneth Yang '14** is an Economics-Finance major.