

BY KATHERINE CORREA, *REAUD HONORS COLLEGE STUDENT*

Disrupting Education

Creativity and innovation in Honors start at home, as Reaud Honors students promote their projects during the NCHC conference in New Orleans.



From the beautiful music played on the streets to the giant murals painted carefully by local artists, creativity and innovation can be found around every corner in New Orleans. These interconnected concepts of creativity and innovation come to life through the ingenuity of the people all around, as vendors, restaurant owners, architects, and street performers have found a unique way to bring something extra special to New Orleans' culture.

Taking time to delight in Louisiana's largest city, a group of

Reaud Honors College students were invited to New Orleans to present at the annual conference hosted by the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) in November 2019.

As they crafted their proposals in an atmosphere of free expression and collaboration, Honors students Samira Ahmed, Katherine Correa, Jackson Dolce, Madeline Hiebert, Fizzah Khan, and Mackenzie Savage met earlier in the year to talk about the conference theme, "Disrupting Education: Creativity and Innovation in Honors."

Like many, Elaine Torda, NCHC19 conference chair from Orange County Community College in the State University of New York System, believes that creativity and innovation are essential to our nation's growth. However, these qualities are disintegrating in education, as they are categorized and confined to certain fields.

"Many assume creativity is found only in the arts and innovation is confined to tech and industry—thinking connotatively rather than denotatively," Torda said.

Exploring New Orleans

Reaud Honors students explored the sites in New Orleans during their visit for the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference. (From left) Jackson Dolce, Fizzah Khan, Madeline Hiebert, Samira Ahmed, and Katherine Correa.

ALL STUDENT PHOTOS BY DR. TILISA THIBODEAUX

A simple Internet search of the word “creativity” conjures images containing vibrant colors, often depicted as paint splashing or flowing out of our cerebrum, to represent the spontaneous and lively free flow of ideas.

In contrast to creativity, innovation is often seen as more mechanical. Pictures show gears and straight lines coming from the brain, to symbolize linear thinking. Many of these images are confined to the color blue, reflecting electricity or technology.

To help educators move away from categorizing creativity as reserved for the Fine Arts and innovation for the Sciences, the NCHC 2019 conference tasked Honors students with presenting ideas that disrupt this way of thinking.

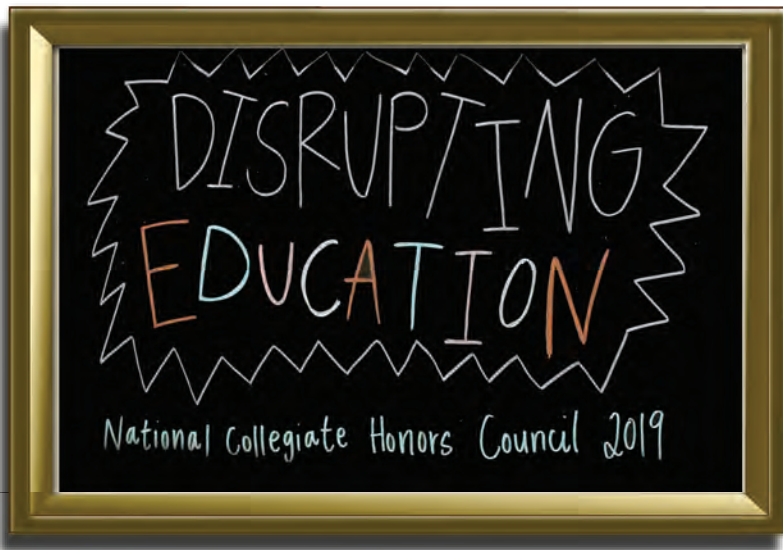
Students from the Reaud Honors College contributed to the conversation through a panel discussion over the use of ePortfolios and an Idea Exchange session about the Honors Topics class “Poetry of Perception.”

ePORTFOLIOS

Honors students Samira Ahmed, Jackson Dolce, and Fizzah Khan led the discussion of the ePortfolio as a “Digital Tool for Personal and Professional Creativity and Innovation.” (Though she helped cowrite the proposal for the discussion panel, Mackenzie Savage was unable to attend the conference due to her participation in National Model United Nations in Washington, D.C.)

“The implementation of the ePortfolio into Lamar University’s Reaud Honors College gives students agency over their learning experience, allowing for student reflection,





The Reaud Honors College contributed to the (1) “Disrupting Education” conversation at NCHC19 through an ePortfolio panel discussion, led by (2, from left) Jackson Dolce, Fizzah Khan, Samira Ahmed, and Dr. Tilisa Thibodeaux, and by showcasing their (3) books from the Reaud Honors Topics course “Poetry of Perception” at the Idea Exchange, led by (4, from left) Madeline Hiebert and Katherine Correa.

development, and expression of ideas,” the students stated in their proposal.

Introduced by Dr. Tilisa Thibodeaux, Director of Digital Literacy at the Reaud Honors College, and then continued by students Ahmed, Dolce, and Khan, the ePortfolios panel discussion shed light on how the ePortfolio has become more than another electronic resume, as the students gave accounts of their own experience working on ePortfolios and the importance of this tool.

“I, for one, am not a creative person at all,” Ahmed said. “However, while I constructed my ePortfolio, it allowed me to tap into areas that I had never thought of before.”

For instance, in addition to listing all her academic accomplishments, Ahmed added tabs to her ePortfolio so she could discuss her experiences shadowing a dentist, as well as share her henna drawings.

“The whole concept of an ePortfolio is to allow the students to have individuality without barricading them in a certain format,” she said. “This way, the students can be as creative as they would like, while still meeting the basic [graduation] requirements we have [at the Reaud Honors College].”

Creativity and innovation were not only found in the subject of the ePortfolio itself, but also in the presentation, as the students distributed interactive pamphlets showcasing outstanding ePortfolios that one could access by scanning QR codes.

The ePortfolio pamphlets were created by Reaud Honors students in the ePortfolio initiative led by Dr.



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Thibodeaux. A part of this initiative for more than a year, Ahmed, Dolce, Khan, and Savage have shared ideas, feedback, and assistance to help figure out the best way for Reaud Honors students to benefit from ePortfolios.

These Reaud Honors student leaders made such a powerful impact showing how ePortfolios can disrupt education in a positive way that NCHC advertised its 2020 conference with a photo of them leading the panel discussion to encourage other Honors students to share their ideas.

POETRY OF PERCEPTION

A Drawing and Biology Pre-Optometry senior, I presented in the conference’s Idea Exchange with Madeline Hiebert, an American Sign Language junior and recent recipient of the David J. Beck fellowship award, to showcase the Reaud Honors Topics course “Poetry of Perception” that we participated in during Fall 2018.

“Poetry of Perception” was a class that explored not only poetry, but also how different our perceptions were given the various ways each student interpreted poetry and life.

Taught by nationally-recognized photographer and Lamar professor



Keith Carter, the course was designed to explore one's perception of the world through the interaction of photography and poetry. Students were tasked with interpreting poems and producing photographic images that best expressed their interpretations of the poems. These photographs served as the materialization of one's perception that the viewer could use to ponder about further. For their final piece of work, students published a photography book, arranged with their favorite poetry lines and photographs.

During the class, Professor Carter challenged students to answer questions that had no clear answers, such as, "What makes a meaningful career?" Sir Ken Robinson's TEDTalk "Do Schools Kill Creativity" inspired class discussions about society.

The class structure allowed students freedom of expression and encouraged them to think critically on what it means to be a person.

It was through this class that I was reminded of how unique each person is; that each person's experiences, background, and culture all come together to form their perception of the world in which they live.

Those special perceptions that bring uniqueness to the world could be seen in the Idea Exchange presentation, as Hiebert and I talked with session visitors about final project books, including *The Wonders of the Mind*, by Alexis Nieto, *Conquering Creativity*, by Meaghan Bloodworth, *Image Prints*, by Hiebert, and my book *In the Beginning*.

INSPIRED FOR THE FUTURE

In November 2019, six Reaud Honors students were ready to contribute to the conversation happening at the annual National Collegiate Honors Council conference in New Orleans: Ahmed, Correa, Dolce, Hiebert, Khan, and Savage.

Coming from different fields, cultural backgrounds, and future goals, these students provide testament that creativity and innovation can transcend the boundary between Fine Arts and Science which a compartmentalized education tends to impose on them. The ePortfolios and the Honors Topics class "Poetry of Perception" encouraged the students to explore who they were as people, gave opportunity of creative freedom in presentations orally and graphically, and allowed for innovation in executing said presentations.

Just as the students were permitted to bring in their unique takes on disrupting education through creativity and innovation, they also took away inspiration from both the many presentations at the NCHC19 conference and the beautiful city of New Orleans.

"The NCHC conference was very interesting and experimental to attend as an Honors student at Lamar University," Khan said. "It impacted my view on ideas, research, and opportunities, and showed me the importance of connecting with others in order to have creative and successful projects.

"New Orleans was a very fascinating city to explore as it was my first time there. I loved the culturally enriched environment, people, and places it had, along with the endless talent on the street. The food was also delicious, and the beignets were the best I've ever had!"

While Reaud Honors students made an important impact on conference attendees in New Orleans, the entire New Orleans experience made a bigger impact on the students and allowed them to take away inspiration for their future.