

Incoming Honors College student relishes the opportunity to excel

Special to Pelahatchie News

Pelahatchie's Margaret Wingo is among fifteen of the nation's brightest high school graduates committed to academic excellence, spiritual maturity, and civic engagement. She will soon develop life-long friendships while challenging her colleagues as they challenge her scholastically, creatively, and biblically as participants in the Honors College at Mississippi College (MC).

Members of the incoming, fourth cohort hail from five different states, have varied educational backgrounds, and seek degrees in a wide array of academic programs, but they all share the same goal: to closely follow the college's mission to "imitate Christ, cultivate virtue, and pursue human flourishing."

This summer, they will go through general freshman orientation before meeting with their respective departmental advisors and enrolling in Honors 101.

While the main threshold for Honors College consideration is an ACT of 29 or above or equivalent SAT score, Dr. Erin Norcross, director of the Honors College, said each participant is selected after a rigorous application process.

"The first part of the application consists of two essays they write in response to questions the selection committee asks," said Norcross, assistant professor

in the Department of Biological Science at MC. "Then students are selected to be interviewed by multiple faculty members, who ask a variety of questions to get to know them better. That's where their personalities get to shine.

The desire to excel scholastically comes naturally to Wingo, a Pelahatchie native and Hartfield Academy graduate who will be pursuing a degree in Christian Studies.

"I have always tried to push myself and broaden my opportunities as much as possible, especially in academics," Wingo said. "Honors College seems like the perfect place to be challenged and grow more than I would otherwise. The Honors College faculty have already been incredibly welcoming, and the other students in Honors College are amazing. The sophomores and juniors have reached out already and made me feel like a part of the family.

"The Honors College will help me focus on what I need to accomplish my career

goals and provide more experience and training in the specific area that I need. It will better prepare me and connect me with where I need to go."

Honors College students also have the opportunity to interact with notable guests, including community leaders, physicians, politicians, and athletes, and gain valuable insight into numerous professional fields.

Earlier in May, in conjunction with MC's McMillan Center for Education Abroad, the inaugural cohort of Honors College students toured the country of Thailand. They visited the Queen's Botanical Garden in Chiang Mai and experienced horticulture from around

the world. They stayed in Kanchanaburi and visited the River Kwai. They learned about events in World War II and the hell-fire pass death railway. They explored several palaces and saw various forms of Buddha, contrasting their religious practices and beliefs with those in Thailand.

Dr. Beth Stapleton, director of the McMillan Center and professor of Spanish and linguistics at MC who accompanied the Honors College students on the excursion, said, "The overarching theme for them was discovery. They each discovered aspects of themselves in the new culture.

It was an experiential learning opportunity that Dr. Blake Thompson, MC president, envisioned when he announced the formation of the Honors College during his inauguration in 2018. Established by J.L. Holloway, a Mississippi businessman, Honors College students receive a four-year, full-ride scholarship covering all educational costs at the Baptist-affiliated University, including the summer international experience.

Stapleton said the highlight for many of the first Honors College cohort's trip to Thailand was the unscripted information the tour guide shared with them during the visit.

"During their first two years, they take Honors College classes together," Norcross said. "Once they get to their junior year, they take honors classes more directly related to their individual areas of interest.

"The international experience brings everyone back together. How they travel and study and look at various cultures becomes interdisciplinary once again."



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Dr. Erin Norcross, front row, right, and Dr. Beth Stapleton, front row, second from right, join the inaugural cohort of MC Honors College students enjoying the scenery near Chiang Mai, Thailand. MC Honors College Class of 2026 Cohort Roster includes: Avery Foret, Nathan Heard, Eva Henderson, Charlie Hight, Mia Hyme, Aiden Knudsen, Micah Lindley, Kennedy Maloney, Anna Robbins, David Schmid, Brinley Sullivan, Anne Taylor, Brandon Welch, Margaret Wingo and Hannah Winston.

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