



HOLSTER
SCHOLARS

2023 Fall Symposium

Friday, October 6

9:00AM

UConn

HONORS PROGRAM

EVENT SCHEDULE



WELCOME

Dr. Vin Moscardelli

Director, Office of National Scholarships and Fellowships &
Coordinator of the Holster Scholar Program

(9:00 a.m.)

PANEL #1: SHAPING FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN MEDICINE

(9:10 a.m.)

COFFEE BREAK

(9:50 a.m.)

PANEL #2: APPLIED RESEARCH IN PATHOBIOLOGY AND PLANT SCIENCE

(10:00 a.m.)

COFFEE BREAK

(10:45 a.m.)

PANEL #3: EXLORING COMMUNITY IN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

(10:55 a.m.)

CLOSING COMMENTS & THANKS

Dr. Jennifer Lease Butts

Associate Vice Provost for Enrichment Programs and
Director, UConn Honors Program

(11:40 a.m.)

PROGRAM

Panel #1: Shaping Future Directions in Medicine

SOFIA PAPANIKOLAOU

Assessment of the Triple Reuptake Inhibitor Diclofenic: Effort-based Decision-Making in a Rodent Model of Motivational Dysfunction

CLERIN JOHN

Creating an in-vitro Coculture Model of Megakaryocytic Erythroid Progenitor Cells and Bone Marrow Endothelial Cells to Test Factors that Skew Fate

ADEMIDE OGUNSINA

Investigating Relationships Found in the Kidney Microenvironment to Understand Malfunctions of Proteins in Kidney Disease

Panel #2: Applied Research in Pathobiology and Plant Science

ANDREI ABARIENTOS

Investigating Sex-Related Antibody Responses to a Powassan Virus-Like Particle (VLP) Vaccine Using a Mouse Model

MAGGIE LIU

The Effect of Chitosan on Plant Growth, Flowering and Substrate Characteristics of Potted Geraniums

IRENA KOMNINAKAS

The Effectiveness of CRISPR/dCas9 Technology to Insert Methyl Groups to the Promoter Region of the PG gene of the Tomato

Panel #3: Exploring Community in the Humanities and Social Sciences

KATHRYN ANDRONOWITZ

The Fashioning of Individual and Group Identities in the ThriftTok Community

LOUISE LEONARD

How Masculinity Beliefs Impact LGBTQIA+ Relationships

SAFIYAH AHMED

Geospatial Disparities in Dental Care Access across Worcester County, Massachusetts

Introducing the 2022 Holster Scholars



Andrei Abarientos (CAHNR '26), from Higganum, CT, is a pathobiology major who intends to pursue professional or graduate training in the biomedical field. A graduate of Xavier High School in Middletown, Andrei was treasurer of the Science Honor Society, as well as a member of a park clean-up club, the school newspaper, and the photography club. He was also captain of the Robotics team, where he ran multiple LEGO robotics programs and created curricula for STEM camps. At UConn, he is fundraising lead of Partners in Health Engage, and member of Campus Big Buddies and Kids and UConn Bridging Education. He is also a certified crisis counselor for the Crisis Text Line. In his free time, he likes to read, hike, and spend time with his chickens.

Project: Investigating Sex-Related Antibody Responses to a Powassan Virus-Like Particle (VLP) Vaccine Using a Mouse Model

Mentor: Prof. Paulo Verardi, Dept. of Pathobiology & Veterinary Sciences





Safiyah Ahmed (CAHNR '26), from Shrewsbury, MA, is a STEM Scholar majoring in allied health sciences who hopes to pursue a career in dentistry. She worked at the Tufts University School of Dental Medicine assisting with research on new therapies for periodontitis as a member of Dr. Chen's Lab. Safiyah has an interest in not only biology, but also healthcare management and accessibility after working in multiple dental offices. In high school, she gained an interest in research and competed twice in the Massachusetts Science and Engineering Fair. She was a member of the National Honor Society, the FIRST Robotics Competition team, and also coached a middle school FIRST LEGO League robotics team. She was the president of the Calligraphy Club and secretary of the Muslim Student Club. At UConn, Safiyah is a member of the Pre-Dental Society, competes as part of UConn's Equestrian Team, and serves as a co-coordinator of the Sci-Art Gallery. In her free time, she enjoys horseback-riding, painting, and visiting family.

Project: Geospatial Disparities in Dental Care Access across Worcester County, Massachusetts

Mentor: Prof. Ryan Talbert, Dept. of Sociology





Kathryn Andronowitz (CLAS '26), from Monroe, CT, is an English major pursuing a dual degree in sociology. She graduated from Masuk High School, where she was a member of the National Honor Society and Science Honor Society and captain of the volleyball team. She also played violin and was vice president of Masuk's orchestra, with which she traveled to Germany to perform. Kathryn completed a Capstone project and volunteers at the nonprofit Groundwork Bridgeport, whose mission is to improve social and environmental conditions in local communities. At UConn, she is a member of the Honors Arts and Humanities Collective and writes opinion articles at *The Daily Campus*. She plans to earn a J.D. in preparation for a career in public policy while continuing to pursue her passion for writing. In her free time, Kathryn enjoys traveling, yoga, hiking, and spending time with friends and family.

Project: *The Fashioning of Individual and Group Identities in the ThriftTok Community*

Mentor: Prof. Clarissa Ceglio, Depts. of History and Digital Media & Design





Clerin John (CLAS '26), from Stamford, CT, is a molecular & cell biology major on the pre-medicine track with a strong interest in patient care and research. As a high school student at the Academy of Information Technology and Engineering, she was the president of the Medical Mentorship Club and Tri-M Music Society, and Founder and President of the American Red Cross Club. Furthermore, she was a member of the National Honor Society, Science Honor Society, and served as the CT COLT representative of the Spanish Honor Society. She helped study the connection between the size of the aorta at the time of dissection at the Aortic Institute (Yale School of Medicine). At UConn, she is the secretary of the Pre-Medical Society, Co-Director of the BIOL 1107 Tutoring Program, a UNIV 1784 Facilitator, and a member of the Red Cross Club. During her free time, she enjoys playing the piano, baking, reading a book, and spending time with family and friends.

Project: Creating an in-vitro Coculture Model of Megakaryocytic Erythroid Progenitor Cells and Bone Marrow Endothelial Cells to Test Factors that Skew Fate

Mentor: Prof. Vanessa Scanlon, Dept. of Regenerative Medicine & Skeletal Biology (UCHC)





Irena Komninakas (CLAS '26), from Easton, Connecticut is a STEM Scholar majoring in molecular & cell biology and Spanish. She is a graduate of Hopkins School in New Haven, where Irena was captain of her high school crew team and secretary of the Greek Orthodox Youth Association. Throughout the summer, Irena worked at The Plaza Diner in Shelton, Connecticut. She assisted The Lolis Lab of Pharmacology (Yale School of Medicine) in conducting research investigating alternative signaling pathways of human chemokine G-protein-coupled receptors to find more efficient ways to target cancer cells. At UConn, Irena is a coxswain on the women's crew team and a member of the 2023-2024 CLAS Student Leadership Board. She also enjoys mentoring for youth rowing programs and volunteering in a variety of community organizations. Outside of athletics and academics, Irena enjoys reading, eating out, cultivating kombucha, and spending time with her loving family and friends.

Project: The Effectiveness of CRISPR/dCas9 Technology to Insert Methyl Groups to the Promoter Region of the PG gene of the Tomato

Mentor: Prof. Yi Li, Department of Plant Science & Landscape Architecture





Louise Leonard (CLAS '26), originally from Torrington, CT, is a molecular & cell biology major with a minor in human development & family sciences. Currently, she is on the pre-health track, but she is considering a career in research or education. She is extremely interested in genetics, philosophy, and human development, specifically relationships. In high school, she was secretary of the National Honor Society, captain of the swim team, a member of the Interact Club, and a competitor in the National High School Ethics Bowl. She participated in bioinformatics research where she annotated the genomes of bacteriophages. In addition, she was co-chair of Torrington High School's Raider Rally, a biannual field day fundraising event supporting local charities. She is also a member of Alpha Phi Omega, a national service fraternity, and a volunteer at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital. In her free time, she likes to volunteer, bake, swim, and play games with friends and family.

Project: *How Masculinity Beliefs Impact LGBTQIA+ Relationships*

Mentor: Prof. Kari Adamsons, Dept. of Human Development & Family Sciences





Maggie Liu (CAHNR '26), from Woodbridge, CT, is a STEM Scholar majoring in allied health sciences. At Amity Regional High, she served as the captain of the Science Olympiad team, conducted research on phytoremediation and eutrophication, and founded the Amity Envirothon Club to help her fellow classmates cultivate ecological stewardship. She also volunteered at the town's Human Services Department and was a member of the National English Honor Society. On campus, Maggie is the president of the Pharmacy Debate Club and a member of CUSA and JSA. She is fascinated by plants and biological systems and hopes to learn more about them during her time at UConn. In her free time, she enjoys painting, playing tennis, and spending time with her friends and family.

Project: The Effect of Chitosan on Plant Growth, Flowering and Substrate Characteristics of Potted Geraniums

Mentor: Dr. Mayra A. Toro Herrera, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Dept. of Plant Science & Landscape Architecture





Ademide Ogunsina (CLAS '26), from Springwater, ON, is a biological sciences major who hopes to pursue a career in pediatrics. In high school, Ademide was the president of her Student Council and founder of the STEM Club. She was also a proud member of the STEM Fellowship Organization as a high school chapter lead. In 2021, she was awarded the Youth Excellence Award by the Canadian Cancer Society for raising over \$1,000 in donations for cancer research through the Relay for Life program. At UConn, Ademide participates in the UConn Conversation Partners program, plays badminton, and as a Nigerian, frequently uses her voice to promote diversity and inclusion, which includes being a Multicultural and Diversity Officer in the UConn Undergraduate Student Government. When she gets to relax, Ademide enjoys reading graphic novels, painting, traveling, and spending time with her huge family.

Project: *Investigating Relationships Found in the Kidney Microenvironment to Understand Malfunctions of Proteins in Kidney Disease*

Mentor: Prof. Dong Zhou, Dept. of Nephrology (UHC)





Sofia Papanikolaou (CLAS '26), from Shelton, CT, is a Nutmeg Scholar majoring in physiology & neurobiology. In high school, she was Valedictorian, vice president of the National Honor Society, president of the Writing Resource Center, co-editor of her school's Literary and Arts Magazine *The Amaranth*, and a Student Ambassador. She was also a competitive dancer for 16 years. At UConn, Sofia is involved with Natchaug Elementary School's After-School Tutoring Program, the UConn chapter of MedLIFE Movement, the UConn American English Language Institute's Conversation Partners Program, the UConn Dance Company, and is a Teaching Assistant for MCB 2210 (Cell Biology). She also serves as the Director of Health and Wellness Education and Junior Panhellenic Council Representative for her sorority. Inspired by her years as a dancer, Sofia is fascinated by the neural mechanisms of decision-making and motivational behavior, and hopes to utilize her research in neuropsychopharmacology to provide foundational knowledge for a career in medicine. In her spare time, Sofia enjoys doing yoga and volunteering as an EMT at Tolland's Fire Department.

Project: Assessment of the Triple Reuptake Inhibitor Diclofensine: Effort-Based Decision-Making in a Rodent Model of Motivational Dysfunction

Mentor: Prof. John Salamone, Dept. of Psychological Sciences



ABOUT THE PROGRAM



The Holster Scholar Program is a selective enrichment opportunity for curious, first-year Honors students.

The program is supported through the generosity and vision of Robert and Carlotta Holster, who, together, established an endowment fund in 2009. Inspired by Robert Holster's own excitement in discovering new paths of learning as an undergraduate, this program supports a small number of motivated students who wish to pursue independent research, design, or creative projects in the summer following their first year.

Holster Scholars past and present constitute a community of scholars. Because the awards go to students at an early stage of their development, the program has an outsized impact on the students and their development. In the process, Holster becomes an identity that shapes Scholars' experiences throughout their time at UConn, and often beyond.

Learn more about the program at honors.uconn.edu/holster-scholars



ABOUT ROBERT & CARLOTTA HOLSTER



Robert Holster and Carlotta Detomaso Holster both entered UConn in 1964. Bob was a member of the inaugural cohort admitted to the Honors Program. They are proud Class of 1968 alums: Bob graduated with a B.A. in Economics and Carlotta graduated with a B.S. in Family Studies.

The Honors Program wishes to acknowledge and thank the Holsters for their enduring gift and its lasting impact on all Holster Scholars.

HOLSTER SCHOLARS THROUGH THE YEARS



2011



2012



2013



2014



2015



2016



2017



2018



2019



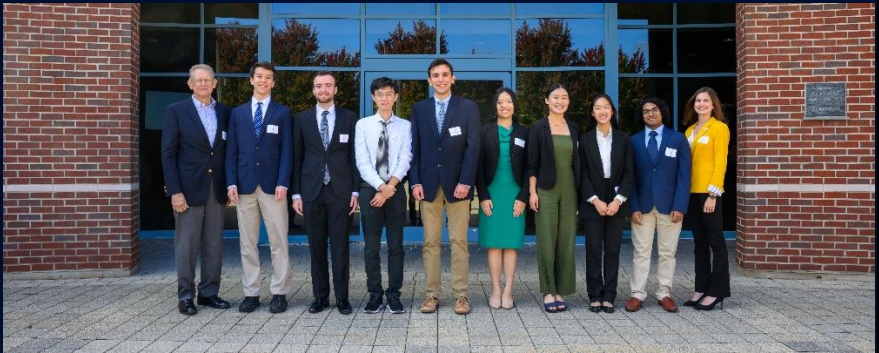
2020



The 2021 Holster Scholars

(credit Defining Studies)

2021



2022