



Aaliyah Avellaneda was our 11th winner of the Jack Kent Cooke. She went on to a full ride at Southern Methodist University where she maintained a 3.8 GPA. Avellaneda graduated from SMU this past December, and now works for the Regional Chamber of the Dallas metroplex. She recently visited home in MP and helped judge our poster contest.



Neida Perez was our 4th All-USA team member, and our 8th student representative of the Great Plains Honors Council. She graduated last year from NTCC and has maintained her auspicious GPA at the University of Texas at Tyler. She plans to apply to dental school. This spring, her beautifully conceptualized essay about the Texas war on pathogens was published by *Touchstone*, a publication of the Texas State Historical Association. It is our 30th, sole-author publication of student work pursued at NTCC.

Alacrity: Newsletter of Honors Northeast

College Leaders

President: Dr. Kevin Rose
Exec. VP Advancement: Dr. Jon McCullough
VP Instruction: Dr. Anna Ingram

Honors Committee: Skylar Hodson, Alison Majors, Heidi Wooten, and **Honors Professors:** Dr. Andrew Daniel, Dr. Melissa Fulgham, Dr. Chris McAllister, Dr. Drew Murphy, Dr. Karyn Skaar, and Dr. Andrew Yox.

Secretary: Elizabeth Simas

Like to Help?

View our Honors Northeast website, and you may find the largest collection of prize-winning essays, films and poems about a single region--in this case, Northeast Texas--in the world. Our benefactors have enabled this “above-and-beyond” culture of scholarship. If you would like to contribute, contact VP Dr. Jonathan McCullough, 903-434-8229, Nita May, 434-8113, nmay@ntcc.edu, or Dr. Yox at ayox@ntcc.edu.



Want more information?
 903-434-8229 • ayox@ntcc.edu
 www.ntcc.edu/honors

NTCC is an AA, ADA, Equal Opportunity institution.

Alacritous Alumni

Aubrey Watkins won a Texas STAR award in Phi Theta Kappa, and a Caldwell Award with us. She is attending East Texas A&M at Commerce, and doing very well. She plans to take the LSAT for law school in a year. Her essay on the “Church that Should Never Be,” the Cowboy Church, was published this spring as well by *Touchstone*, making it our 31st sole-author publication. Watkins’ story chronicles the apparent impossibles that brought the pagan cowboy image into a Christian spotlight.



Verania Leyva, like Aubrey above was both a Texas STAR winner, and a recipient of the Caldwell Prize, though for work on Barbara Conrad which became the basis of our prize-winning film. She has performed very well at UT Austin majoring in Chemistry and Sociology, and has worked as a Clinical Research Coordinator. Now, however, she too is studying for the LSAT.



Morgan, shown above. Davis graduated with honors from Texas A&M at College Station. He is working with EHRA Engineering as a civil engineer in Houston. He was very upbeat in talking to the students about NTCC and the honors program.

Luke McCraw, like Neida and Aubrey above only graduated from NTCC one year ago. He has made two NTCC graduations since then, cheering on Vanessa, and Skylar (on cover), and this August for his brother, Jonah. He has excelled at Dallas Baptist University as a Gunn Scholar



and he plans to pursue his Master’s in clinical psychology also at DBU. McCraw was a wonderful actor/catalyst for our film on toxification even after his NTCC graduation.



August 2025

ALACRITY



Hodson, Bayna, and Rivero Earn Four National Awards

We did not in 2025 equal our 2014 performance. With graduates like Matthew Jordan and Noah Griffin, our scholars in 2014 won six very prestigious national awards. Still, four national awards in one spring remains a testimony to the singular teamwork at NTCC, the generosity of our donors, and the tenacity of our students. All of the awards this spring were quite exclusive. Nationally, only 55 students won the \$7,000 Udall Prize, and Vanessa Bayna was one; only 22 students won the \$7,500 Hites Awards and Skylar Hodson, and Monse Rivero were two; only one student won the \$16,000 PTK Board Scholarship and Monse Rivero was it.

All 3 won special scholarships at NTCC thanks to our benefactors. Bayna was our Texas Heritage Bank Scholar, Hodson, our Russell-Mowery Scholar, and Rivero, our Dr. Jerry Wesson Scholar. All 3 of our winners presented work at the National Collegiate Honors Council. All 3 were involved with our local chapter of Phi

Theta Kappa, particularly Rivero who became an international PTK vice president. All 3 won state PTK awards. All 3 were involved with our award-winning films in a rather intense way--as Bayna was the film scholar of our 2024 film, and Hodson, and Rivero took turns directing and acting. All attended our honors day trips sponsored by the Archers, and all were duly present for the latest trip (p. 5). Two--Bayna and Hodson helped win our second series of Portia Gordon Awards at the 2024 meeting of the East Texas Historical Association. Bayna became the student representative of the Great Plains Honors Council. Both Bayna and Hodson won state Caldwell Awards.

The Udall prize targeted students with special promise in environmental studies. Bayna was 1 of only 4 community-college sophomores to win. The Hites and Board Scholarships went to students who excelled along many fronts. Bayna and Rivero were NTCC’s premiere winners of the Udall and Board awards.

16th Annual Thank You Dinner in April



Above: The Student Table at Rancho Seco in Mt. Pleasant. Donors dating back to the era of Joe Bernat and Pittsburg’s Carson House have provided memorable yearly occasions for all the main units of honors to see each other, and enjoy each other’s company. Not to mention great food. The current anonymous donors who have covered this grand celebration have maintained this tradition since 2015. We are indebted to them for this opportunity to put names with faces, and illustrate how honors is a function of teamwork and generosity. Another aspect of this meal is our yearly discussion which this year was joined by K. Harmon, K. Wootten, H. Old, A. Majors, S. Hodson, A. Yox and M. Otero (see notes on discussion, p.5 below.)



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Volume: 18
 Issue: 1

Beneficent Benefactors



Every new month, it seems, presents us with a reason to thank Jerald and Mary Lou Mowery for their support. Our poetry and poster contests, our films, our excursions to see Shakespeare have stemmed from their gifts or the gifts of their friends.

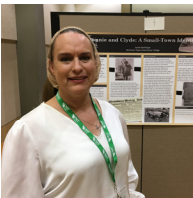


An anonymous donor has funded 32 \$100 Eckman Awards for students with the highest academic honors in H seminars. In the spring, Stephanie Hernandez won the honors for the ChemPsych Seminar and Mary-Faith Wilson became the best Honors seminar performer among the sophomores.



John Bryan above left, from Naples supported the idea of honors at NTCC before our founding in 2007. He continues to help us in a multitude of ways. To the upper right, we thank Lori Shaw of Omaha for another special Giving Day gift.

Our Recent Graduates



Our 2025 graduating group had anomalous features. Two high achievers were actually not sophomores, but juniors who gave much to our collective effort for three years. We notice too an absence of men. Excellent male scholars such as Luke McCraw and Andrew Higgins intersected with this group though they were out of sync with our normal matriculation cycle. Three very talented entering men hit brick walls, it seemed, with issues that were off-the-charts complex. (For a look at retention issues with us, Google ‘NTCC honors newsletters’, and note the article on the bottom of p. 3 in the summer of 2024). The talents and perseverance of this group were notable. Two made remarkable turnarounds academically. Two extremely successful and gifted members of this group could have increased our prize count, though both wanted to take a gap year for their junior year, and thus were not eligible for some awards. The group had classroom super-achievers, particularly Mary Faith Wilson,

in Humanities, and Vanessajane Bayna in science. Sarah Dierflinger above left in white was a steady influence. Emily Hamlin, second from the left above won in poetry and posters. The group had an awesome presentation of our films at the NCHC.

Regional Vanguard

Across the top tier of this section we see the 4 Caldwell Award winners of NTCC of 2025: Stephanie Hernandez, Araceli Landaverde, Estefani Garcia, and Mary Faith Wilson. NTCC took home \$850 in essay awards. Only in the years 2016, 2019, and 2024 have we done as well. No other university or college in the state topped this performance. On the lower left, we see Stephanie Hernandez winning her Britt Award in a competition where contestants entered from Nebraska to Texas. Left, the three NTCC winners of the Red River Symposium. Right, the team that attended the GPHC in Denton.



Spring Happenings



We thank Drs. Jim and Paula Archer for our 35th day trip--to Dallas. What an amazing legacy. This time we enjoyed Starbucks, the Perot Museum, the Dallas Art Museum, the Frisco Mall, and the Allen-American hockey game--especially as it was glowstick night. Right, the winners of our 2025 McGraw Hill Poster Contest: Emma Mendoza (1st), Stephanie Hernandez (2nd), Emily Hamlin (3rd), and Mary-Faith Wilson (4th). For this lucrative event we thank Jerald and Mary Lou Mowery, and

Winners of the 17th-Annual McGraw Hill Poster Contest



Bill Welsh of the McGraw Hill Education Corporation office in Debuque, Iowa. Awards started at \$400 for first place and went down to \$100 for fourth. We thank eight community judges for making the ratings possible, as well as our sponsors for a lunch afterward for all involved in Mount Pleasant.

Below the eleventh winner of the \$200 Elizabeth Chitsey Award for an Honors Student who most exceeded expectations. This year’s winner was Estefani Garcia, shown with the daughter of the late Elizabeth Chitsey, NTCC Emeritus Professor, Dr. Mary Hearron. After the fall semester, Garcia was promoted to Presidential Scholar. Her essay on Mary Kay, as a Queen of Motivation won a fourth-place Caldwell Award on the state level, and she was a top performer in the ChemPsych Seminar.



Deo Gratias! “Scholarship Center” By Dr. Andrew Yox, Honors Director

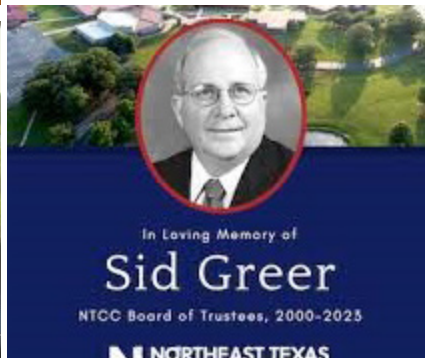
We so thank our anonymous donors for providing us a collateral treat on the evening of our thank-you dinner. We were able to discuss Allan Bloom’s, *The Closing of the American Mind*. Described as “electric shock therapy” for the nation 40 years ago, the book spotlights vulnerabilities that are no less inherent today in America’s universities. Bloom highlights the fact that American universities see truth as relative. Higher Education in the United States has succumbed to the Nietzschean dictum that having many truths is . . . good. There is a certain altitude of scholarship that begins to drop as long as such a premise is admitted, but there is more. The “Self” has surpassed God or even “others” as the paramount object of thought. As only bigotry could define evil, the sublime also is a chauvinist idea. High Culture is a racist imposition. Such clever thinking can slide into a mode of thought which in honors we have called “derogation”—refusing to deal with the most paramount and lofty of questions. With relativism, and low-c culture, students tend to exit out of the Edenic garden of free conceptualization, and into a degraded dust bowl, where sex, gender, race, grudge politics, and the debased jargon that flows from those obsessions dominate thought. Art can under these circumstances degenerate into junk. Classical music has flagged into oblivion among many, though our HuMusic seminar contests this trend.

At NTCC, I am thankful for a regional culture which I sense has evaded much of this degradation. Many of us do believe in truth, and aspire to what is sublime. For many of us, a scholar who doesn’t believe in the possibility of truth is like a physician who views his patient’s death as a mere stage in the cycle of life, or like a Christian who doesn’t believe in heaven. To be sure all things are tarnished by levels of falsehood. But we tackle issues, surmising, writing, and conceptualizing so that life might be better. What does scholarship become without truth? It can become mimicry, a promotional device for those who crave advantages, and probably have accumulated the privileges to get them. It can become a handmaid to the self-serving dictums of an elite. It can become incredibly dull. We have espied such weaknesses in university student scholarship. I believe that a college like NTCC can thus indeed provide a better setting to become a center of student scholarship.





Dr. Charles B. Florio (1938-2025). Dr. Florio's departure from this world marks an important moment in our history. He had an immense impact on the shape and scope of our honors experience at NTCC. While a graduate student at Ohio State, Florio worked under Dr. C. Grey Austin, one of the founders of the National Collegiate Honors Council. As a kind of swan song of his NTCC presidency, and in combination with a record-breaking 1.7 million-dollar gift to the college in 2007 by James and Elizabeth Whatley, Florio inspired interest in an honors program. He was aided in this by college trustee, John Bryan, and Vice President Herbert Riedel. Our program was gifted from the start with many advantages. After he left NTCC in 2008, Florio continued to support the honors program with a series of fourteen yearly financial gifts. He is shown here in 2013 with honors alumnus, Ricky Huitema, currently working locally as an electrical engineer for Priefert's.



Sid Greer (1949-2024). Greer was a blunt, pragmatic, and perspicacious trustee at NTCC for the first quarter of the 21st century. He welcomed the honors program in 2007, though with a few singular caveats. He and his wife, Eva, later served as hosts for two of the most lavish Thank-You Dinners in our history on their beautifully tended farm in Morris County. We are thankful for Greer's service, and also thankful that his fellow trustees of his Texas Heritage National Bank elected to pursue a scholarship in his honor. Left, board chairman, John Bryan hands Dr. McCullough the check. Litzy Flores, 2025 Daingerfield Valedictorian will become the first Sid Greer Scholar of NTCC. This is the 2nd yearly scholarship that THNB has conferred to Honors Northeast! On the cover of this issue, we note the accolades of Vanessa Bayna, our THNB Scholar of 24-25.



Scholar of the Year:

Stephanie Hernandez set a new NTCC record for the number of scholarly awards won in 1 semester-5! She won for her work on Tejano murals, and for research in parasitology. For her "Protest to Pride" analysis of Hispanic art, she won a \$400 first-place Caldwell Award, a \$100 Britt Award of the Great Plains Honors Council, a 2nd place in the Red River Symposium, and \$300 for 2nd place in the McGraw Hill Contest. She also won first in the oral contest at the Red River for her work on fish parasites.



The Webb Chapter Award won by NTCC students in Houston in March was the 8th year in a row that we have walked out of a meeting of the Texas State Historical Association with an award for our film-making. Yahir Garcia edited the work. Vanessa Bayna's work on toxification provided the foundation for the script.



Honors Professor Chris McAllister has added an exciting facet to student scholarship at NTCC. Students have taken excursions to the rivers of Arkansas and Texas, in search of fish parasites. Left, this past April, Presidential Scholars Stephanie Hernandez and Isabel Tresidder presented at the Southwestern Association of Parasitologists in Kingston, Oklahoma. Right, Stephanie Hernandez examines specimens.



Photo by Hudson Old



Summer Filming: We thank Jerald and Mary Lou Mowery as well as the family of David L. Stevenson in Longview for another opportunity to film an unfilmed legend of Texas this summer. The competition between two rival art circles in San Antonio and their struggle to define the Mexican-American identity in the late-20th century forms this year's topic. Our work was derived from the award-winning scholarship of Stephanie Hernandez, above. Emma Mendoza is the director, and H. Randall the Unit Production Director. Johnathan Ventura is the cinematographer, and associate producer.