

Honors in Action Project Award (Chi Upsilon Chapter)

Honors In Action Project Award

Optional: Chapters may attach up to three tables, charts, or photographs that illuminate their Honors in Action research and action. No more than three attachments are allowed per Honors in Action entry. No additional explanation may be included in the attached table, chart or picture. Tables, charts or pictures should be explained in the body of the 2,600-word entry.

Home Exercise for the Pandemic.pdf

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Mental and Physical Health.pdf

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PTK Stress Busters from Mchenry County College.jpg

<p>Honors in Action Project title (include a brief project title) Example: Deciphering Truth in Climate Sources</p>

Helping the Community Cope with a Pandemic

Provide a brief abstract or summary of your Honors in Action project including the following components: academic research into and analysis of sources related to the Honors Study Topic, action that addresses a need in your community that was discovered through your research and analysis into the Society's current Honors Study Topic, and the impact of your project. (NOTE: Recommended word count for the abstract is no more than 300 words.)

Our Honors in Action Project investigated how human mental and physical health are impacted during the pandemic. In March and April, our campus was closed to students. In the fall semester, in-person classes were limited and student organizations were prohibited from meeting on campus. Due to these changes, we were concerned with how the pandemic would impact students and community members. We interviewed several experts: MCC's Director of Crisis Intervention and Prevention, a local mental health therapist, and a local physical therapist. We determined that isolation, lack of personal connection, and reduced access to the stress-relief activities of exercise and hobbies can negatively impact one's mental and physical health. Also, we determined that students at our college need additional support in areas such as mental and physical health, financial support, and academic support. To increase awareness of these factors and provide coping mechanisms, we created a workshop called Deskwork Stressbusters and infographic tip sheets to help people learn coping strategies and post such strategies around the college and community. These tip sheets shared information about mental and physical health, home exercise, the MCC Student Success Fund, and Student Conference Hours. These materials were created to assist students during the pandemic with hardships that they may have faced in their personal life and with their college education.

What theme in the current Honors Program Guide did your chapter focus on?

Theme 2 - Natural and Constructed Environments

Summarize your research objectives. In other words, what did your chapter set out to accomplish in terms of its research? (See Research Objectives Rubric in the [Honors in Action Project Rubrics](#) for more detail.)

Our chapter started by exploring possible Honors in Action topic ideas. We listed socially relevant topics and examples related to the Honors Study Topic, determined what people and groups were impacted by each example topic and how, and investigated how Honors Study Topic themes related to those examples. At chapter meetings, students discussed these ideas in small groups and presented findings to the chapter. Members next evaluated the relevance of the explored topic examples using a rubric based on the following criteria: theme-oriented, internationally relevant, interdisciplinary, intellectual, interesting, important, and in-the-news. We chose the most relevant example and developed a research question related to the Honors Study Topic. The chapter members next found academic research related to the example, and conducted expert interviews related to our study question. For each step in this process, advisors and the project chair led activities during chapter meetings designed to engage chapter members and facilitate the HiA process.

Describe your academic research into the Honors Study Topic, your research questions(s), your analysis of your research findings, and your research conclusions.

Our research question was "What are the long-term and short-term effects on mental and physical health caused by technology reliance and other responses to COVID-19?"

We found that the COVID-19 pandemic has made people feel more isolated, which can lead to further mental health challenges. The pandemic has also led to more neglect of physical health, such as diet and exercise due to the disruption of peoples' routines and limited access to fitness tools. Additionally, people may have more free time which can lead to boredom. Healthy coping mechanisms may not be available. Students may not have a support system that values education, which can negatively impact a student's online education by impacting motivation and drive. Students experience problems with self-advocacy because they do not have the same amount of direct help, but we can combat this by altering the use of technology. One helpful strategy is for instructors to hold virtual office hours on Zoom. Additionally, students need more support. Problems include lack of access to computers or technology, lack of financial resources, lack of internet connection, difficulty learning and focusing online, and underdeveloped computer literacy. Access to technology or a functional workspace may be limited if a student's family has multiple members working or attending school at home.

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<p></p><p><label class="control-label scholarship-form">List the 8 academic/expert sources that were most enlightening regarding multiple perspectives of the Honors Study Topic theme you selected. Briefly explain why these were the most important sources and what you learned from each of them as you researched your theme. (NOTE: Please use full, formal APA citations for your entry. However, do NOT worry about bold, italics and underlining as these are not available in this application software.)</label></p><p></p><p>
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Resource 1

Blaz, J. (2020) Personal Communications.

A health and fitness instructor at our college, Jim Blaz provided information and clarification in response to several communications during the summer and fall of 2020. Ultimately, Professor Blaz provided the draft text for our Exercising During the Pandemic infographic tip sheet. Information from Professor Blaz was also used to create one section in our Deskwork Stressbusters presentation.

Resource 2

Boldman, R. (2020) Personal communications.

Director of Crisis Intervention and Prevention at our college, Rachel Boldman visited our chapter meeting via Zoom and answered questions via email. We formally interviewed three people in Zoom at chapter meetings and four more over email after brainstorming and editing questions and training in interview techniques. Topics covered were as diverse as business restructuring due to COVID, impacts on delivery of therapy services, and impacts on children and their educational progress. All topics were of interest as we looked at the needs of the community related to COVID, but our interview with Ms. Boldman focused us on some campus and student specific needs which, given the pandemic, seemed more plausible for action projects.

Resource 3

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1 July 2020). Coping with Stress. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

This article identified symptoms of stress, crisis resources, vulnerable populations and basic tips. The tips included self-care ideas easily within reach of average people and led to some brainstorming about how to encourage such healthy practices in both students and community members during the pandemic and beyond.

Resource 4

Engberg, E., Alen, M., Kukkonen-Harjula, K., Peltonen, J., Tikkanen, H., & Pekkarinen, H. (2012). Life events and change in leisure time physical activity. *Sports Medicine*, 42, 433–447. <https://doi.org/10.2165/11597610-000000000-00000>

These researchers examined the effect of disruptive life events on physical activity. Lack of physical activity creates cascading negative health effects. This led to discussion of the complicating factors of COVID as a disruptive activity that is related to health risks and discourages physical activity. All factors are accelerated by the other features of the pandemic. Assisting students and community members in maintaining physical activity became a top project priority.

Resource 5

Gao J., Zheng P., Jia Y., Chen H., Mao Y., Chen S., Wang, Y., Fu, H., & Dai, J. (2020). Mental health problems and social media exposure during COVID-19 outbreak. *PLoS ONE*, 15(4), e0231924. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0231924>

This article connected social media use to worsening coronavirus-related anxiety and depression. This led to discussions concerning how to reach students without using social media and the default nature of social media as an outreach platform. One idea was to remind students about conference hours to encourage more connecting one-on-one with faculty. Another suggestion was taking a break from using social media.

Resource 6

Holland, K. (8 May 2020). What COVID-19 is doing to our mental health. Healthline. <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/what-covid-19-is-doing-to-our-mental-health>

This article brought attention to the rapid growth of serious mental health struggles due to the pandemic. It also encouraged further investigation and inclusion of the tips for maintaining a positive mental attitude and coping with hardships within our project tip sheets.

Resource 7

Panchal, N., Kamal, R., Orgera, K., Cox, C., Garfield, R., Hamel, L., Muñana, C., & Chidambaram, P. (21 Aug 2020). The implications of COVID-19 for mental health and substance use. KFF (Kaiser Family Foundation). <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

This article discussed the increasing incidence of mental health and substance abuse problems during the coronavirus pandemic and possible causal relationships and effects. Isolation, anxiety related to the pandemic, lack of access to some services, financial insecurity, job stress for frontline workers, and inactivity were cited as probable contributing factors. The article led to discussions regarding risk factors our project could address and what information could be useful for students and the public. We developed our poster about the student success fund in response to the aspect of financial concerns this article brought forward, and the intent of poster handing was to raise awareness of support systems available on campus.

Resource 8

Xiang, Y., Yang, Y., Li, W., Zhang, L., Zhang, Q., Cheung, T., & Ng, C. (1 March 2020). Timely mental health care for the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak is urgently needed. *The Lancet*, 7(3), 228-229. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30046-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30046-8)

This article explains that mental health care for patients and health care professionals who have been affected by the corona virus outbreak needs to be addressed. Clear communication with regular and accurate updates about the corona virus outbreak should be provided to both health care professionals and patients, thus helping to address uncertainty and fear. The article provided impetus to consider what information is needed by students and the public.

<p>Summarize your project action and collaboration objectives. In other words, what did your chapter set out to accomplish in terms of its collaborations and action?</p>

The Chi Upsilon chapter set out to mitigate the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. related to specific student and community member struggles: decrease isolation in order to lessen the impact of mental health problems, spread awareness about the current increase in mental health problems, distribute alternative resources for exercise, educate the community on available resources for their mental and physical health and education, augment student success and self-advocacy, promote student conference hours, and highlight the student success fund.

Describe the service or "action" components of this Honors in Action project that were inspired by

and directly connected to your Honors Study Topic research. (Action can also include promoting

awareness and advocacy.) Be sure to include information about the people and/or groups with whom you collaborated, why you chose these collaborators, and the impact they had on the outcomes of the project.

The first action component of our project was an informative workshop to aid students both during and after the pandemic. Since access to campus was limited during the pandemic, all workshops were delivered remotely through Zoom. The areas of focus were ergonomics, accessible yoga poses, connection with nature, deep breathing, mindfulness, and apps for mindfulness and productivity. One officer and one active member collected research, created a presentation, and presented the workshop sessions after practicing in front of a small group of chapter members. In creating the workshop, the chapter collaborated with MCC's student club SOTA (student occupational therapy assistants). SOTA provided tips on deskwork ergonomics, accessible exercises, and stretches for the workshop. The collaboration with SOTA allowed the chapter to integrate accurate, evidence-based information on these topics from experts in the area. Finally, we collaborated with the Illinois region: the region allowed us to present the workshop as an educational forum at the Illinois Regional Leadership Conference. In collaborating with the region, we were able reach an audience beyond our campus.

The second action component of our HiA project consisted of creating tip sheets for the pandemic. These tip sheet posters were distributed around the college and the community. The posters encompassed topics such as student conference hours, the Student Success Fund, tips for improving mental health, and home exercise for the pandemic. The poster for student conference hours coached students on how to use this time with instructors: getting help with course material, discussing intended majors or career plans, and preparing for transfer. Our second infographic tip sheet informed students about how to access the Student Success Fund and its purpose: to provide emergency small-dollar scholarships for students in crisis. These scholarships could pay for internet access, a computer, or a car repair, for example. The infographic with mental health tips encouraged people to find a new hobby or return to one they previously enjoyed, replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts, stay physically active, eat healthy, get enough sleep, connect with friends and family virtually, and keep a gratitude list. Our home exercise tips provided instructions for deep belly breaths, foot and ankle stretches, air squats, and functional lunges. The tip sheet contained text that instructed readers to take a photo of its content for later use at home.

Our first collaborator was Jim Blaz, instructor of Health and Human Performance at MCC. Professor Blaz provided a document with instructions for easy exercises, which we converted into an infographic matching the format of our other tip sheets. We wanted the exercises to be accessible enough for anyone to try them regardless of their level of physical fitness. Professor Blaz's expertise in accessible exercises provided reliable, research-based information from a physical health expert.

After creating the tip sheets, we needed to distribute them to as many students as possible. To do this, we worked with the MCC marketing department, the Friends of MCC Foundation, the Student Life department at MCC, and MCC student navigators. The marketing department provided MCC photos to use in the tip sheets. We wanted photos to show MCC and its students while respecting intellectual property and privacy. We were given permission to use MCC branding, such as college colors and logos. By working with the marketing department at MCC, we were able to create attractive and professional-looking tip sheets. The Friends of MCC Foundation funds scholarships for students. We asked for permission to create and distribute a tip sheet regarding the student success fund, which provides emergency scholarship funding for students in crisis. The Foundation provided information on the student success fund and how to apply, which allowed us to create posters of our tips sheet to promote the fund. The Deskwork Stressbusters presentation will be included in a video library hosted by student life for more students to view in the future. MCC's student navigators, staff members tasked with connecting students in crisis with campus resources, expressed a desire to use the Deskwork Stressbusters video with students in the future. By collaborating with Student Life and student navigators, we reached a larger audience on campus.

What are the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of your project? What impact did your project have on the problem addressed and on opportunities for chapter members and others to grow as scholars and leaders.

Seventy copies of each of our four infographic tips sheets were distributed on campus. Additionally, thirty of each of the infographic tip sheets on home exercise and mental and physical health were distributed in community locations. The final tip sheet posters were also distributed digitally through our Facebook page and college internet outlets such as the Student Life webpage and social media pages. The Deskwork Stressbusters workshop was presented five times: three at MCC PTK welcome sessions for new members, once at the IL regional convention, and one through MCC student life. In total, we had fifteen attendees. Though the groups were small, we received positive feedback. Attendees told us they learned new tips they would use every day. One student who attended the workshop reported, weeks later, still using some of the strategies learned. The video of our presentation is posted on a Student Life resources page, so we hope it will reach more students in the future.

We found that connections are more difficult in the virtual environment. Our presenters learned how to present in Zoom but felt it was harder to reach workshop participants through the negative effects of Zoom fatigue. We also found that we can execute a project in a virtual and/or socially distanced environment: making a Zoom-based workshop, posting videos, contact-free pick-up of posters. We were able to create a successful project with fewer active members and officers, with less access to campus. With flexibility, strength, and resolve, we made the most of what we had.

We learned to use the document design site Canva for tip sheets, which provided simple, ready-to-use layouts. We also learned how to access and use MCC and PTK branding for materials. Due to the online nature of the project, we sent many emails to MCC employees, advisors, and expert interviewees, practicing and refining professional communication. When creating the presentation for the Deskwork Stressbusters workshop, we learned about ergonomics, yoga, breathing, and mindfulness, which will help us in the future. The collaboration with SOTA, faculty, and staff on campus helped us hone our skills in professional communication. Student navigators were excited to get video of the workshop, which means it will likely get more circulation. Although we may not have had as many members involved in the process, we reached a large audience (one alumna posted in Normal, IL and one remote student posted in Arizona). We learned that we could have more involvement and reach with a socially distanced project. We can integrate these new findings into future projects to involve more people.

Opt out of consideration for inclusion of your chapter's Honors in Action entry in the next issue of Civic Scholar: Phi Theta Kappa's Journal for Undergraduate Research