

ENDURING AND EMERGING

Iowa's 2021 graduates are setting their sights on a more hopeful future. As the COVID-19 pandemic is brought to heel by a nationwide vaccine rollout, graduating Hawkeyes — and the country — are looking toward the end of a year that posed extraordinary challenges.



The Daily Iowan

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14					15				16			
17					18				19			
			20						21			
22	23	24		25					26			
27				28			29	30				
31						32				33		
			34		35	36				37		
38	39	40		41					42	43	44	45
46			47				48	49				
50						51			52			
53					54	55			56			
57					58					59	60	61
62					63				64			
65					66				67			

- Across**
- Pilgrim who's been to Mecca
 - Show stopper
 - What a keto diet is high in
 - Writer Nin
 - ___ Emhoff, stepdaughter of Kamala Harris
 - Property claim
 - Small, spiny lizard
 - ___ Mountains, dividers of Europe and Asia
 - Fruit appearing on a Southern license plate
 - Mindlessly repeat
 - Insult, informally
 - Dried Mexican chili
 - South African plant whose leaves are used for a popular herbal tea
 - "All ___ go"
 - Not sitting well?
 - Occupation for 32-Down
 - Ready to go
 - Video game franchise with characters found at the ends of 17-, 20-, 53- and 58-Across
 - Monogram on an expensive handbag, maybe
 - Zap
 - Play again
 - Transitional region between biomes
 - Having good marketing instincts

- Many whiskey-based cocktails
- Leader namechecked in the Beatles' "Revolution"
- Singer nicknamed the Prince of Motown
- D.C. mayor first elected in 2014
- Gray ___
- "Clumsy me!"
- Like fine wines
- Mental spark
- A giant one rises in Citi Field after every Mets homer
- They're prescribed by docs
- It may go out on a limb
- Stiller's comedy partner
- 15 occasions
- Dumb bunny
- Congregation leaders
- Period of history
- Reason against
- Like freshly brewed coffee
- Close way to win
- Have a brawl
- "___ out!" (ump's call)
- Fittingly, the first three letters of 32-Across
- Sprint ... or see print
- Nickname of a 1950s president
- Native Caribbean plant whose fruit grows in clusters
- Polite affirmative
- Source of great trouble
- "Walk on the Wild Side" singer
- Director DuVernay
- Columbia or Brown
- Bread choice
- Three-tone chords
- Clumsily handles
- Flushed, as cheeks
- Looks down
- Cut of pork
- Foretell
- Cheese of the Netherlands
- Hip thing to sip
- 35mm camera inits.
- Vote of support

Down

- "As if!"
- What makes God good?
- Peanut butter container
- Excessive flag-waving and the like
- "OK, that makes sense"
- Game where everything falls into place
- Some YouTube journals
- Jai ___
- Common first word for a baby
- Well-versed (in)
- Heroes of the sky
- "I want to learn!"
- Alec Baldwin, on more than

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS ON PAGE 19

	5	9				7	3	
		3		9	2		4	5
	8							
	7			4		6		
8								9
		5		1			7	
							6	
5	4			1	3		2	
	1	7					4	5

7				5			6
				8			1
		1	4		7	8	
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Kickoff into real world at Kinnick

After enduring a final year of academics online and in masks, University of Iowa graduates that opt in will finish their college careers in an outdoor celebration in lieu of a traditional in-person commencement to mitigate COVID-19 transmission.

BY BRADY OSBORNE
AND LILY ROSEN MARVIN
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After enduring a life-altering pandemic for more than a year, University of Iowa graduates will end their college careers where, for some, it began — at Kinnick stadium.

To reduce potential COVID-19 transmission, the UI opted for virtual commencement ceremonies and an opt-in in-person celebration at Kinnick stadium, where the incoming undergraduate class traditionally poses in an iconic formation each year.

The Kinnick celebration will take place on Sunday to cap a week of virtual commencement ceremonies. It will also be livestreamed online, and participating students can bring six guests. More than 5,600 Hawkeyes will receive their diplomas online in virtual ceremonies beginning Thursday.

The stadium event isn't a commencement ceremony, said Hayley Bruce, UI assistant director of media relations, and graduates won't walk across a stage.

She said the event will follow the university's COVID-19 mitigation protocols, which include wearing masks and social distancing. In relaxing its guidance for outdoor activities for vaccinated people, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cites mounting evidence that COVID-19 transmission risk is low in outdoor settings, especially for vaccinated individuals.

Bruce said the names of the graduates will flash across the screen at Kinnick until 3 p.m., when the program starts. The graduates, who will be sitting in

the stands with their guests, will then stand and be honored as a group with their college.

Bruce said there will be limited capacity in the stadium, with a maximum capacity of 5,000 to 8,000 people, which is roughly 10 percent of the stadium's 70,000-person capacity.

"Those planning this event felt that Kinnick Stadium would be a suitable location because it is a large outdoor facility," Bruce said. "This provides an opportunity for graduates to celebrate all they have accomplished with a limited number of family and friends, while lowering the risk of spreading COVID-19."

Johnson County Community Health Manager Sam Jarvis said events of this size are OK, if the proper mitigation measures are taken.

"Across the board, as we see cases trending downward and vaccines trending upward, we know that we'll start seeing more events out in the community, varying in sizes — small, medium, to large — and we're starting to get back to the new normal," Jarvis said. "And so, with any event, and with any kind of activity, we'll always be recommending that everyone take the precautions needed."

Jarvis said having this experience in a safe way is good for the physical health, as well as the emotional and social well-being, of those in attendance.

"We recognized that folks can't just stay indoors forever, and that there are many other aspects of health, whether it's physical, social, or emotional that are important too," Jarvis said. "The CDC has issued updated recommendations and they note that outdoor events

are much safer."

For many seniors, the Kinnick stadium event caps a year unlike any other in the University of Iowa's history.

Marissa Brown, a UI student graduating with degrees in psychology and criminology who plans to go to Kinnick on Sunday, said she was initially worried she would not have closure on the year.

"I was actually really worried because I have been a Hawkeye fan basically my entire life, and I have been looking forward to graduation since freshman year," Brown said.

Brown said this event means even more to her as a first-generation college student who will be the first in her family to graduate from college.

"Me and my best friend, we're both first-generation college students," Brown said. "So, this is kind of like the idea of making it for us, like, the first in our family to go to college."

Senior Savannah DeGroot plans to head to their aunt's house in Des Moines for graduation day. They'll put on their cap and gown and grab some breakfast. When their name comes across the TV screen, they'll stand up, flip their tassel, and be done with their undergraduate experience at the UI.

"Last year, when all the graduation ceremonies were moved online, I remember me and a bunch of friends were like 'I'm so glad I'm not graduating this year,'" DeGroot said. "I think this year is a little different because we knew it was coming, but it definitely sucks to not have our graduation ceremonies in person. I mean, ceremonies are ceremonies for a



Daniel McGregor-Huyer/The Daily Iowan

The statue of Nile Kinnick is seen outside of Kinnick Stadium on May 5.

reason. They have meaning for a reason."

DeGroot said they won't attend the in-person ceremony because the initial two-ticket limit was an issue for their family, and they will be out of town.

When UI senior Paisley Meegan's classes moved online at the start of the pandemic, she said she was hopeful that things would be back to normal by spring 2021. Now, with her undergraduate experience ending, Meegan said she's disappointed to close out her college years virtually.

"I didn't feel like I would be as disappointed come this time of year because I had over a year to emotionally prepare myself for it," she said. "But now that this time of year has come around, I kind of wish things were still happening — even little things, like the School of Social Work does a small party and families can come and meet the professors. I'm kind of disappointed that didn't happen."

After a year of remote classes

and social distancing, UI senior Lauren Barlow will have spent half of her undergraduate experience online.

"[Graduating] doesn't feel real yet," she said. "I'm a student in the College of Public Health, so it's a really big community that I'm used to. It was weird for my last year here to not have that, and to feel like I'm having a lot more of a depersonalized experience."

Meegan said even though this year may not have turned out to be what she imagined, she looks forward to reconnecting with friends and celebrating her accomplishments before her time as an undergraduate student is over.

"Because everything has been virtual, it can feel like it's not as big of an accomplishment or like it's not that big of a deal," she said. "But I think being able to mark the occasion in these next few weeks and celebrate my accomplishments over the last four years is something I'm looking forward to."

UI celebrates intl student grads

The first-ever international student affinity graduation recognized international student graduates at the University of Iowa. The celebration was held virtually and included speakers, individual slide recognition, and a graduation cord.

BY MARY HARTEL
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Mia Qu said she still remembers landing at the Cedar Rapids airport before beginning her first semester at the University of Iowa.

“I remember talking to a few other students on campus, and meeting one of my best friends right in front of Currier,” said Qu, who is from China. “That’s my very first memory about the campus — meeting new people, like a very exciting adventure.”

Nearly four years later, Qu gave a student speech at the inaugural UI International Student Affinity graduation ceremony on May 4.

Although other affinity graduations have taken place on campus for years, 2021 was the first year that international students were recognized. Yashwant Vyas, assistant director of Diversity Resources in the Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, proposed the initiative as part of an ongoing collaboration between the UI’s Division of DEI and International Programs.

Family, friends, and faculty Zoomed in to celebrate the 47 students who participated in the graduation, Vyas wrote in an email to *The Daily Iowan*.

The virtual program featured remarks from Qu and Associate Dean and Provost of International Programs Russell Ganim, Vyas wrote in an email to the *DI*. The event also included recognition graphics for all participants who received graduation cords, Vyas wrote.

The colors of the cords, — white, light blue, and green — were intentional, Vyas wrote. They signify the tabula rasa or “clean slate” of commencement, limitless possibilities, hope, peace, and planet Earth, she



The outside of the University of Iowa International Programs office as seen on May 4. wrote.

“Affinity celebrations, like this one, celebrate the perseverance and achievement in the face of historic and ongoing exclusion and marginalization,” Vyas wrote. “This event is to recognize and celebrate the collective experience and achievements of participating international students, to celebrate international educational interchange, and to be in community.”

While addressing the graduates, Ganim thanked international students for their resiliency and dedication to the university.

“Our international students embody the very best of our university,” Ganim said. “You represent grit, determination, adaptability, and responsibility. Our international students contribute to the UI in innumerable ways through your thoughtful perspectives, global outlook, and overall courage in surmounting the obstacles before you.”

Ganim said after the event that, although International Programs and the Division of DEI originally wanted to hold the event in person in the Old Capitol senate chambers, the virtual platform worked well and was well received.

Ganim said his favorite part of the ceremony was the individual student slides.

“It was great to see how many graduates stated that their favorite memory was just walking along the river, hanging out at the Pentacrest, getting into late-night conversations with their friends, or just walking through downtown Iowa City and getting coffee or tea,” Ganim said. “It just put a real sort of human and personal face on the whole event. And I think people appreciate it.”

Ganim said the generally favorable response to the ceremony shows that there is a considerable degree of cohesion and unity among international students, and International

Programs plans to host the event in the future.

Qu is graduating with a triple major in linguistics, economics, and marketing, and was involved in the International Student Advisory Board, the President’s Charter Committee on Diversity, the multicultural business association, and more. She said she was honored to be the keynote speaker at this year’s graduation celebration.

“I want to tell her to enjoy every moment. I don’t think I would go back and change anything.”

— Mia Qu

“To be honest, I have always dreamed of a moment like that,” Qu said. “Because I think it’s just very symbolic for me personally, because it’s the end of a part of my journey and the beginning of a new one.”

Qu added she thinks the inaugural ceremony was also a bright spot to

end a chaotic year.

“There has been a lot of turbulence and also uncertainty going on, and I think it was especially a difficult year for international students,” she said. “So, this ceremony happening at this time is especially a celebration for the achievement, not just academically, but also by overcoming those challenges and arriving at a point that’s very important in our lives.”

A major theme in Qu’s speech was to show appreciation and make a celebration of not only what international students have achieved, she said, but what they will achieve in the future.

“For any international students, coming to a new country by yourself most likely is a very scary journey,” Qu said. “Gladly, we weren’t alone in this because of the university support and International Student and Scholar Services’ support. But it’s a very scary journey and full of uncertainty.”

Qu’s education journey will not be over after she graduates from the UI, she said. In the fall, she plans to attend law school, most likely at the University of Washington in Seattle.

If she could say anything to the girl that stepped off the airplane in Cedar Rapids freshman year, Qu

said it would be to get out of her comfort zone, get to know more people, make connections, and don’t be afraid to explore new things and different options.

“I want to tell her to enjoy every moment,” Qu said. “I don’t think I would go back and change anything.”

Graduating at any age



Ayrton Breckenridge/The Daily Iowan

Graduating student veteran, Paul Richards, poses for a portrait outside of Calvin Hall on May 4.

BY ELEANOR HILDEBRANDT
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When Mekhia Hillgren realized she would only have one “normal” semester of college, she contemplated changing her graduation plans.

Hillgren came to the University of Iowa in fall 2019, fresh out of high school and already bearing an associate degree. The English and Creative Writing major will graduate this spring at age 18.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic forced her to move home within her first year at the university, she said she almost changed her plans.

“I definitely considered staying for another year or two because I was only on campus for one semester of normal college,” she said, “... but I decided not to because I want to start working full time.”

Hillgren always planned to graduate early and join the workforce as soon as possible. After the

UI deepened her love of writing, however, Hillgren said she now plans to attend graduate school after she takes a gap year to work.

Hillgren said she hopes to enjoy a more traditional campus experience after a break from school.

It is typical for UI students who follow nontraditional paths to graduation to have different hurdles in getting their degrees, said 2021 graduate Paul Richards, an international relations student and U.S. Army veteran.

He said the pandemic has only exacerbated some of the issues nontraditional students face.

“We as an identity struggle in a lot of ways with feeling like we belong on campus,” he said. “A lot of [veteran and nontraditional] students are older, they might have children or other obligations, so a lot of the way we interact is face to face and it’s crucial to develop relationships and camaraderie that way.”

Richards graduated from high school in 2015 and came to the UI in 2018, after serving in the Army in Afghanistan and Kuwait. He always planned to graduate in spring 2021, but said online learning put some bumps in his road.

As an interactive and auditory learner, Richards said it has been challenging to stay engaged in classes over the last year. He said engagement inside and outside of the classroom has been a struggle for him and others involved the UI’s Veterans Association, an organization that helps veterans and the military community acclimate to the university.

He said it’s hard to convince students to jump onto another Zoom call at the end of the day, but that he hopes students will continue to be engaged over the next few years to get the full college experience.

“If you go to college and all you leave with is a bachelor’s degree, I

While the 2020-21 academic year wasn’t “normal” for any student, some nontraditional students at the University of Iowa felt even more pressure in the journey to sinching their degree because of COVID-19.

think you did it wrong,” he said. “The engagement, the partnerships, the interactions, and the experiences — that’s a part of what you gain from college. It’s been difficult this year to engage, but that’s what college is about.”

Hillgren and Richards both used resources on campus to help navigate a nontraditional path through the university. Hillgren said she has had nine advisers in two years at the UI, adding that English and Creative Writing advisers helped her navigate her major and sustainability certificate in that time.

Iowa Veteran Education, Transition, and Support helped Richards meet students with shared experiences.

Chelsea Burk, director of the Iowa Veteran Education, Transition, and Support office, said nontraditional students often have more problems on their plates than traditional students who go to college directly from high school.

She said she’s seen the resilience of nontraditional students over her years at the university, but the pandemic added another layer to the situation.

“With nontraditional students, you have to remember how much resiliency they have had to show already,” she said. “They deserve our flexibility and our support in whatever ways possible, especially during the pandemic. We’re all trying to do the best that we can

with what we have right now, and nontraditional students often have more complications and nuances.”

She said veteran students typically have an additional graduation celebration, but Iowa Veteran Education, Transition, and Support couldn’t hold its awards dinner the last two years because of the pandemic. Burk hopes the office will be able to adapt its celebrations in the future to recognize more students.

Richards said finding his community has been the defining experience of his three years at the UI. As he moves on from his time at the university, he said he hopes more students can find people with shared experiences like he did.

“It’s not a stretch to think I wouldn’t have graduated without the opportunities that IVETS provided me,” he said. “I was able to interact with my peers and members of the military active community in a way I wouldn’t necessarily feel comfortable interacting with a traditional student. I’m not sure I would’ve graduated without them.”

Hillgren said she has no regrets about graduating early and doing her education her way, despite the fact her college experience was nothing like she imagined it would be.

“I don’t like regretting things and I think graduating early was really effective,” she said. “... I know what I want to do for the rest of my life, and I can finally start on it.”

“I don’t like regretting things and I think graduating early was really effective. I know what I want to do for the rest of my life, and I can finally start on it.

— Mekhia Hillgren

Hawkeye turns TikTok stardom into nonprofit

University of Iowa graduate student Claire McDonnell uses her TikTok account of more than 600,000 followers to address social issues for women and promote financial literacy.

BY SABINE MARTIN

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Claire McDonnell made her first TikTok last September, and the short comedic clips on women's social issues that she continued to publish quickly went viral on the platform. Direct messages filled McDonnell's inbox with women thanking her for creating inspiring content and for amplifying women's voices.

"That's when I started to really take it a little bit more seriously," McDonnell said.

McDonnell said her TikTok account, @cleasel, has a 90-percent female and 10-percent male audience.

She has 642,300 followers on the platform, and said it is important to use her platform for good — promoting financial literacy to underrepresented communities. McDonnell's TikTok tells stories of her experience at the University of Iowa and in her life.

McDonnell is a graduate student at the UI in the master of science in finance program in the Tippie College of Business. She will graduate this spring.

McDonnell's master's thesis and research grew into her nonprofit, FinanceEDucational, and the graduating business student said TikTok has played an outsized role in growing the nonprofit.

"My nonprofit is to promote financial literacy to the underrepresented, so people like women, immigrants, minorities, low-income families and individuals," McDonnell said. "I also am creating a sector as well to promote financial literacy on the business side of things for women-owned, first-gen, and immigrant and minority-owned businesses."

McDonnell said all the proceeds from TikTok and her upcoming book project about amplifying women's

voices will go toward FinanceEDucational.

"I've already been using TikTok to promote the nonprofit and get volunteers to help," she said.

Mallory Brand, a sophomore at the UI, had McDonnell as her teaching assistant in microeconomics during the spring semester. This summer, Brand plans work for McDonnell's nonprofit.

"I love that she tries to normalize stuff that a bunch of people go through," Brand said. "I'll see her record TikToks and I'm like 'How do you just say that?' and 'How are you so vulnerable?' She's really inspiring for so many people in her comments and to people that reach out to her."

McDonnell, who grew up in Iowa City, worked in commercial banking as a commercial credit analyst for two and a half years during her undergraduate education at the UI. She said she enjoyed her position but realized that she didn't want to start a high-paying finance job after graduating, when some people don't even know the basics of finance.

The National Financial Educators Council's national financial literacy test, taken by more than 17,000 participants, has an average score of 63.17 percent.

"I was inspired. I saw it just even within our own community," McDonnell said. "Every loan I was working on was for a white male, and it wasn't like we were denying women or immigrants or minorities on the application, but we weren't even really getting any."

The nonprofit is in the fundraising stage to build and launch the curriculum for financial literacy, McDonnell said.

"I'm so ready to be done and start really focusing on my nonprofit and devoting all my time to my book and my nonprofit and continuing to



Sid Peterson/The Daily Iowan

Claire McDonnell poses for a portrait at the Pentacrest on May 5.

make content for women," she said.

McDonnell was featured on the NBC show "Little Late with Lilly Singh" in February and has been written about in BuzzFeed News and Insider after speaking about her finance program at the UI on TikTok.

The Insider article, titled "A science student recorded a work call to show how often women in STEM are interrupted by men, and the TikTok went viral," was written without McDonnell's consent, but she received messages from women across the country thanking her for her TikTok's message.

"There was a lot of backlash from my peers," she said. "But I also had so many women reach out to me from those articles who said, 'Thank you for demonstrating, this is literally me every day,' and 'It's so nice to feel heard.'"

McDonnell said her opinion on traditional finance sector soured because of her experiences with some peers in her program. Some of her classmates responded

negatively to her choice to start a nonprofit to promote financial literacy. She decided not to attend the UI's in-person graduation celebration after her experience with the program.

"It's definitely been hard," McDonnell said. "I've been through a lot in my program and finance career. A lot of people, a lot of guys in my program, have even made fun of my choices for choosing to start a nonprofit. I haven't had the best experience in my field whatsoever, which was another kind of reason why I have decided to kind of exit the traditional finance field and kind of go into a little bit more of a social cause-type finance career."

The UI's online MBA program is composed of about 62 percent men and 38 percent women. In McDonnell's graduate science and finance program at the UI, she is one of four women out of 60 men.

Sean Carlin, who is graduating in the same UI program as McDonnell,

said McDonnell's platform for women to talk about feminism and social issues is inspiring. He said he commends McDonnell for speaking out against any mistreatment of women and encouraging diversity in the UI's program.

"Having that platform to promote her nonprofit, to promote financial literacy is really impressive and inspiring to those who may be afraid to take an unconventional route or take the skills that they learned in school to make an impact on the world," Carlin said.

McDonnell said, even though TikTok has allowed her many social media opportunities, her finance career will always be her lifelong work.

"No matter what I'm doing, even if it's not always my main focus, this is something I'm going to do for the rest of my life," McDonnell said. "I want to dedicate my life and everything that I've learned in my undergrad and grad school program to make a difference."

Reimagining scope of inclusion initiatives in business

As diversity, equity, and inclusion ambassador at the Tippie College of Business, Zahra Aalabdulasul took her work to the next level in hopes of promoting the recruitment of underrepresented students at Tippie.

BY MARCO OCEGUERA
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As a student of various marginalized identities, including being Afro-Latina, Muslim, and a first-generation U.S. citizen and university student, Zahra Aalabdulasul has always struggled to find a comfortable community to be a part of while growing up in Cedar Rapids.

Even within other minority communities, Aalabdulasul said she always felt out of place. So, when she arrived at the Tippie College of Business – which has only 29 Black students – her experience studying entrepreneurial management was no different.

But this time, Aalabdulasul said she was determined to take action to represent students like herself.

Aalabdulasul first got involved in BizEdge, a mentoring program that pairs underrepresented first-year Tippie students with upperclass-

men mentors. In this position, she worked to improve the operations of the program.

“The goal of [BizEdge] is to help students find success,” Aalabdulasul said. “It’s very tight-knit.”

But Aalabdulasul wanted to do more to expand business opportunities for Black and Brown students. In Tippie, Black students only make up around 0.15 percent of student enrollment, compared to 3.1 percent at the University of Iowa as a whole.

“Tippie is far, far below even the University of Iowa” Aalabdulasul said. “We want to get far past even that number.”

Gabriela Rivera, Associate Director of diversity, equity, and inclusion at Tippie, said that Aalabdulasul has been essential in helping elevate the conversation around inclusion at Tippie.

“Personally, for me, she’s been someone I really admire for being so open to sharing her cultural and reli-

gious background,” Rivera said. “She has inspired us to do better.”

Rivera added that the impacts of Aalabdulasul’s innovative work has already been felt within the halls of Tippie.

“Professors have been more receptive to what underrepresented students are saying,” Rivera said.

As a diversity, equity, and inclusion ambassador at Tippie, Aalabdulasul said she used her role to assess the climate at Tippie and identify barriers preventing Black and Brown students from pursuing business and professional education.

“I stepped back from specific programs and really looked at Tippie as a whole,” Aalabdulasul said.

After assessing data and crunching numbers, Aalabdulasul found three overarching problems that limit business opportunities for Black and Brown students. She also identified three solutions to address these problems.

The first issue she found was a weakness in Tippie’s Department of Admissions: the lack of capacity to effectively recruit Black students specifically.

In response, Aalabdulasul designed a student employment position that is geared specifically toward recruiting Black students.

“That is in the job description,” Aalabdulasul said.

The second big problem Aalabdulasul found was a concern over the lack of local exposure that Black and Brown communities have to business majors and professionals.

Aalabdulasul said she tackled this problem by forming a partnership with the African American Museum of Iowa and Jefferson High School, both located in Cedar Rapids.

Aalabdulasul said she hopes to continue expanding these partnerships so that Black and Brown students have more exposure to the business career path.

“They need to see themselves in the business career and major,” Aalabdulasul said about underrepresented students.

Finally, Aalabdulasul said she found that the college offers very small financial aid packages for Black students when compared to other business schools around the country.

Her goal to address this problem, she said, is to find more funding opportunities for Black students.

“But that’s another work in progress,” she said.

Nanette Chapa, a diversity, equity, and inclusion ambassador at Tippie, first met Aalabdulasul in 2019 when they were leaders for the Tippie Gateway Program. The program is a one-week summer experience for underrepresented high school juniors interested in business that immerses students into college life.

“We both have the same passion

for DEI and helping other people,” Chapa said.

Chapa said that she is impressed by the creativity Aalabdulasul brought to her work in promoting DEI initiatives at Tippie.

“She seems to find the perfect balance between intricate relationship building and taking action,” Chapa said.

Although Aalabdulasul is graduating from Tippie this year, she said she plans to continue her work over the summer to help the next recruitment and retention ambassador transition into the position. The next ambassador will continue Aalabdulasul’s work.

“I’ve kind of dubbed this project my Recruitment and Retention Project,” Aalabdulasul said. “A lot of these programs are aimed at recruiting Black students, but that’s not to say that retention isn’t just as important”

While there has not yet been a newly selected Recruitment and Retention Ambassador for next school year, Chapa said that she is optimistic about the prospects of DEI initiatives at Tippie.

“I personally feel pretty confident our work will get carried on in one way or another,” Chapa said.

Chapa added that many younger students at Tippie seem excited and capable of carrying out the work effectively.

“It makes me so hopeful to hear about the sheer amount of people that are passionate about this work,” Chapa said. “They may even be ahead of Zahra and I.”

Aalabdulasul echoed these statements, saying that even though she is planning to move to a major city to pursue her career goals, she is confident that her work at Tippie will be continued effectively once she is gone.

“It’s not going away, I’m sure of that,” Aalabdulasul said.



Katie Goodale/The Daily Iowan

University of Iowa senior Zahra Aalabdulasul poses for a portrait in the Chauncey building on May 3.

It's the people, not the newsroom that make the *DI*

In a remote year to cap a Hawkeye career, I'm especially thankful for the stories, both that people trusted in us and tellers that told them, the giggles, both experienced and invoked, and the hard choices, because we've grown as a result.

BY SARAH WATSON

sarah-e-watson@uiowa.edu

I've always been uncomfortable touting my own accomplishments.

But for *The Daily Iowan* team, I'll cheer until my voice is hoarse.

And that team atmosphere is what I've cherished, and how I've grown, working for (majoring in) the student-run newspaper all these years.

At first, I didn't think I was the right person to lead as an executive editor. There were many afternoons on the phone with Publisher Jason Brummond this spring and summer when I said, "I don't know." This year, we were faced with changing our printing frequency permanently for the first time in the paper's recent history. I received messages from staffers who had to leave to pick up a full-time job because they needed to support family members who'd lost employment or fallen sick. And,

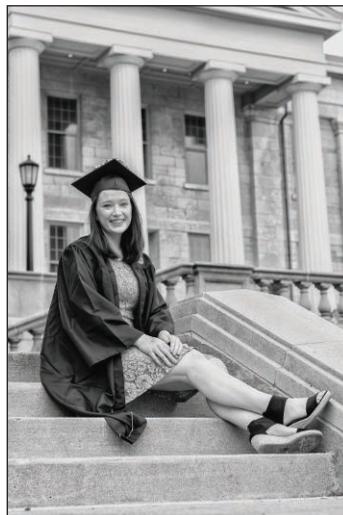
we would need to operate an almost entirely remote newsroom.

But everyone rose to the challenge and handled a newsy year — which in addition to a pandemic, also included a misinformation-fraught election and a search for a new University of Iowa president — marvelously.

In a fall staff demographics survey, we found that nearly half of our staffers started at the *DI* in the last year. That meant a huge chunk of our staff had never worked in the newsroom before.

But, as long-time UI President Sandy Boyd frequently said, it's the people, not the buildings that make the UI great.

And we found — I found — that to be true more than ever this year. We couldn't trade ideas in the newsroom, but we logged on to checkered Zooms with smiling faces and waving arms.



Contributed by Sarah Watson
Photo by Kate Heston

While the pandemic laid bare inequities we knew existed in the U.S. and in Iowa, it also forced us to reshuffle priorities and distilled our values as journalists and as human beings. Suddenly, the importance of meaningful and accurate information be-

came more tangible than it ever had before as misinformation spread about COVID-19 and the 2020 election — especially after it concluded.

DI journalists corrected politicians — especially on higher education misconceptions — through a partnership with PolitiFact. Our opinions editor, Hannah Pinski, told me after writing about anti-Asian discrimination in the age of COVID-19, multiple professors reached out to thank her for writing about shared experiences or opening their eyes to what was going on. One of our arts editors, Maddie Lotenshtein wrote a column voicing concerns shared by other Jewish students on campus about student government voting down a Jewish constituency senator. In addition to her column, students advocated for, and USG eventually passed, legislation to create that position.

My time at the *DI* showed me

that journalism is a public service. Finding the clearest truth and telling people about it is essential work. Everyone has a story to tell, and I'm thankful for all the storytellers who've made it their purpose at the *DI*, and thankful for everyone who trusted us with their stories.

The *DI* pushed me out of my comfort zone again and again into new roles, and I'm so thankful it did. I interviewed Elizabeth Warren and others competing for Iowa caucus support and corrected the record on voter IDs for students, tenure, and vaccine hesitancy. To our coaches and my peers, for always pushing for that extra source, that extra fact, that extra insight. To the staff, for believing in me. And finally, to you, readers, for trusting us as your source of information, giggles, and comprehensive analyses. We couldn't have gotten this piece of (news)paper without you.

EDITORIAL

To new beginnings, for all of us

BY *DI* EDITORIAL BOARD

daily-iowan@uiowa.edu

Roughly 5,300 Hawkeyes will get their diplomas this year, and wow are we ready for it.

For Hawkeyes in their last year at the University of Iowa, this May marks new beginnings. But this month, characterized historically by new life and a return to vibrancy from the doldrums of winter, has brought new beginnings for everyone else, too.

As the class of 2021 takes our diplomas, more and more people are hitting the two-week mark since their last vaccination for the life-al-

tering COVID-19 virus.

As we flip our tassels and leave the classroom for the next stage of life the U.S. is transitioning alongside us, too. A similar hope ignited from an end to challenging years of sleepless nights, difficult projects, and canceled nights out, is being felt across the U.S. as a pandemic that has claimed more than 580,000 lives is curbed by rapid advancements in science and technology.

For some, becoming more comfortable with going to restaurants or reentering public life may be about finally getting "back to normal," but everyone will carry the memory of the pandemic with them — that

new knitting hobby picked up, a renewed appreciation for visiting a grandparent who is vulnerable to serious disease, or an empty spot at the dinner table that can't be filled.

Despite the hurdles of the pandemic, many students earning their diplomas continued to accomplish extraordinary — and ordinary — feats during their tenure as Hawkeyes.

One graduate student is turning her TikTok fame into a nonprofit to promote financial literacy, especially for marginalized groups. Another graduating student turned Hawkeyes out to vote in droves in the 2020 election despite a new em-

phasis on mail-in ballot and absentee voting during the pandemic.

And instructors and behind-the-scenes staff provided relief, support, and joy during a challenging year. One professor offered Thanksgiving meals to students who couldn't visit family for the holiday, and another challenged UI President Bruce Harrel to a dance off, one of many light-hearted videos he made for students.

In 2018, our class was shaken to its core when one of our peers, Mollie Tibbetts, was found murdered. She should be graduating with us, but Hawkeyes' resilience was revealed despite grief then and

Iowa's Class of 2021 is facing hopeful new beginnings, just like the rest of the world, as we emerge from a pandemic and a turbulent final year as students.

even now. A group of five elite runners plans to run 100 kilometers from Kinnick Stadium to Davenport May 22 to raise money for the Mollie Tibbetts Memorial Fund for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

Thousands of Hawkeyes will end their careers where, for undergraduates at least, it began — at Kinnick Stadium on Sunday. As the light at the end of the tunnel grows brighter — and maybe "Back in Black" will greet the Hawkeyes as they take the home field this fall — the 2021 graduating Hawkeyes are breathing a sigh of relief, along with the rest of the world, for new beginnings.

Through the *DI's* lens

Five *Daily Iowan* seniors look back over their visual career and what photographic moments meant the most to them.



Hannah Kinson/The Daily Iowan

Dorothy Bell listens as her sons recount memories of their father, Marvin Bell, on Jan. 30, at the Bell family's house in Iowa City. The family revisited stories together in memory of Marvin Bell, who was the first Poet Laureate of Iowa and longtime Iowa Writers' Workshop professor at the university. "He was kind and he was loving and he was affectionate," said Dorothy Bell. "And these two are just like that."

— In January, I photographed an interview with Marvin Bell's family after his death in December 2020 and found kindred spirits within another family and their grieving process. During my freshman year of college, my grandmother on my mom's side quickly became sick with cancer and died a few months later. She was there for us for everything. Every holiday, every special celebration, every dance recital, and every birthday. Losing my last living grandparent was one of the hardest moments of my life, but my family and I found strength in our happiness together. When I look at this photo, I see Dorothy with her support system of her sons, but I also see my own mom with her support system of her daughters.

“ When I look at this photo, I see Dorothy with her support system of her sons, but I also see my own mom with her support system of her daughters.

— Hannah Kinson

“ This photo has become a favorite of mine because it reminds me that even in the most divided times, people will find a way to care for each other.

— Katie Goodale

Katie Goodale/The Daily Iowan

Rocky Twyman, 70, poses for a portrait on Black Lives Matter Plaza in front of the White House in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 3, 2020. Twyman lives in Washington and was involved with the Civil Rights Movement when he was younger. "I'm an old man," Twyman said. "I've been in many crusades and marches, but I don't think I could have handled this one." The culmination of my journalism career so far was election night in Washington.

I spent hundreds of days covering the caucuses in Iowa and months preparing for election night. This photo has become a favorite of mine because it reminds me that even in the most divided times, people will find a way to care for each other.

SEE PHOTO, 25





SAMANTHA

You might be graduating college, but you'll always be our little Rock-n-Roll Ninja.



SEAMUS DEELY

Congratulations on your graduation. We are so proud of you!
Love, Mom and Dad

MADDIE SILVERSTEIN



Congratulations, Maddie!

We are all so proud of you!!!

Love,
Jennifer, Dad, William, Sullivan,
Michael, Leo and Hawkeye

BREANNA HAAK

Congratulations Breanna, on your graduation from the College of Public Health, University of Iowa.



You make us so very proud! You are a STAR and we are excited to watch you continue to kill it as you enter your next chapter.

Love, Mom, Chris, Colton and Pierce

Congratulations NICK BENSON

on your graduation from The University of Iowa College of Law! We are so proud of your hard work and dedication!



Love, Dad and Gail

TERESA

Congratulations! We are so proud of you and your accomplishments!
Love, Your Family



NICK RUHLAND



Your Day Has Come!

We were blessed the day you came into our lives. You have your Mom's heart and we're proud of you and the man you've grown into. Go out and reach for your dreams.

Work hard, respect all and Love deeply. The day will come when you truly understand this gift.

Love, Mom & Pops



CONGRATULATIONS NEHAL PATEL



on your graduation from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. You have made us very proud and you will do great things in the future!

Love, Mama, Papa, Nikhil, and Payal

CONGRATULATIONS AMY BETMAN!



You are still our Princess and we are so proud of you!

Love, Momma, Grandma, Mark, Karen, and Greg



MAEVE BITTLE

Maeve — Congratulations! You did it. And you did it with grace and resiliency and intention. We are so proud of you and love you forever.

Mom and Dad





**CONGRATULATIONS
ALYSSA MARIE
DAVIS!!**

So proud of your graduation
with a BSN in Nursing!!
Love, Mom



SKYE

We are so proud of you and your accomplishments!
We cannot wait to see what you accomplish next!
Love, Mom, Mike and Bryan

JULIA SHANAHAN

Congratulations!
We are so proud of you!
Love, Mom, Dad, Joe, and Jessica



JEFF ROSENSTOCK

Congratulations, Jeff!
**We're so proud of you
and can't wait to see
your bright future!**
*Love, Mom, Dad,
Danny, Jessica, Kent,
Logan, Riley & your
whole family*

WAY TO GO GABBY!



Congratulations on your graduation!
Love, the Tribe

**CONGRATULATIONS
GRACIE WILSON!**



We're so proud of you!
You've truly distinguished
yourself by achieving
academic excellence!
The mountains are calling
you to new heights!
What an exciting
opportunity awaits!
Love, Mom & Dad

DANI

We are so proud of you!
Continue to follow your dreams.
Love Mom, Dad & Sadie



DANI

**You are the best little sister
ever! We are so proud and love
you so much!! Brad & Kylea**

EMMA TYRRELL



Congratulations on reaching this
tremendous milestone! You've
worked so hard and come so far.
We wish you the best in the next
step on your journey, we know
you will find great success.
Love, Mom & Dad



**WRIGLEY WILSON
GRADUATED!**

So proud you achieved your goal in 14 (dog) years.
We're so proud of you! 🥳
Love, Dad, Mom, Caleb & Gracie

JENNY BOWMAN

Congratulations, Jenny! What
a fabulous four years. We are
"psyched" for your future. And
remember, once a Hawkeye,
always a Hawkeye!
*Love,
Mom, Dad, Megan and Tom*



**MATTHEW
O'HAGAN
RAMSEY**

**Congratulations, Matthew,
on your academic
achievements in creative
writing and philosophy.
Keep thinking critically,
crafting new stories and
continue forging your
own way. We're looking
forward to the next stage
of your journey!**
*Love always,
Mom and Dad*



Once a Hawkeye...proud of
**RYAN
JOHN
BENSON,**
MAT in secondary
science education.

Love, Mom, Dad, Allison, Jared



MARISA MEISTERONI
Congratulations!

We're all very proud of you.
Good luck in OT School!
Mom, Dad, Chetti, Bambi, Destiny and Cinnamon

KASSIDE CAIN

Congratulations Kass - You DID It!!!

“For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11

Love, Mom, Dad, Kierra, Katie, Kane & Panda



SADIE HOBBS

2 degrees hotter and headed to law school! Keep looking towards the future, one day at a time! We are so proud of you!

Love, Dad, Robin, Jordan, Gramma, Grampa, Jackson and Kendall

CONGRATULATIONS TAYLOR STEFFANS AND MIKEY STARK



on your graduation from the College of Dentistry! We are very proud of both of you!

Love, Mike, Heather, and Logan

CONGRATULATIONS SARAH WATSON

Time to celebrate another graduation!



Look at all you've accomplished already in the world of journalism! We are excited about your future as you keep telling the stories that matter.

Always so proud of you!

Love, Mom and Dad



ELENA WAIGLEIN

Be proud of how far you've come. *Ti vogliamo un mondo di bene, MammaPapàMarco*

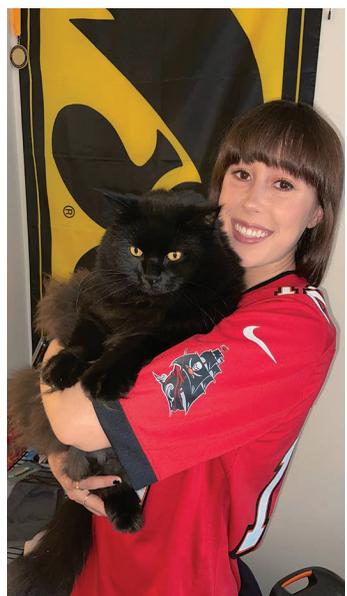
CONGRATULATIONS MOLLY ALLEN!

We are so proud of you and how hard you have worked. You have channeled your inner MJ and TB12 to achieve such amazing success!

We also want to acknowledge your study buddy, Midnight, for supporting you during those long hours of studying.

With lots of love, Mom, Dad, Phil, Brendan, Colleen, Midnight and Sue

Go Hawks!



LOGAN SCHROEDER

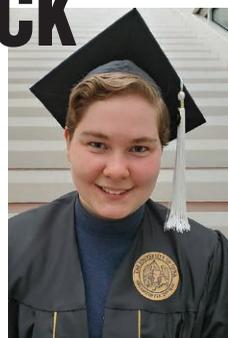
Congratulations! We are beyond proud of you! Can't wait to see the future through your lens. *Love, Mom & Dad*



MARGOT DICK

Margot, We are so proud of all your accomplishments and how you made the most of your time at Iowa. Congratulations on your graduation!

Love, Mom and Dad



MADDIE

Congratulations!!!

We delight in you and all you are. You bring your best to everyone you know and to everything you do.

Love, Grandma, Grandpa, Aunt Liz and Fluke



CONGRATULATIONS ALEXA MICHELLE WUNDERLICH!

We could not be more proud of our future Physician Assistant (PA)!

You have done outstanding at Iowa and will achieve your goal at Midwestern University. Continue to shine bright!

Remember...Once a Hawkeye, always a Hawkeye!

Love Always, All Of Us



ELIZABETH



Congratulations to our beautiful daughter on her many achievements!

You've become a marvelous woman with a bright future.

Love, Mom & Dad



CONGRATULATIONS DANI!

I love an intelligent girl. I'm so happy for you and everything you've accomplished. Your talents and passions have no limits and it's beyond cool to see you live them out!

I love you girl! Love Annie



HAYDEN FROEHLICH

Congratulations on your Creative Writing and Cinema diplomas!

From the earliest days of Dinoland to Nayobian fantasy, we knew your imagination would soar to new heights as a Hawkeye.

We are so proud of this incredible achievement...

Oh, *The Places You'll Go!*

Love Always,
Mom, Dad, and your Family Fan Club



CONGRATULATIONS, LEO CALLISON!

We are so proud of you! Can't wait to see what your next adventure will be. We love you and *Go Hawks!*

Love, Mom, Dad, Lucas, Logan, and Lauren

DANIELLE

Congratulations! We are very proud of you. We are excited to see where the future takes you and look forward to you doing all that your heart desires. We love you!

xoxoxo Uncle Dennis & Aunt Sandi



DANI

Congratulations to the love of my life. You deserve everything this world has to offer.

Love Griffin

JORDAN PROCHNOW

Congratulations on your Graduation! We celebrate you and all the hard work you've put in to earn your degree. We wish you happiness & wonder, successes & fulfillment, resilience & strength, love & adventure as you journey forward in life.



We love you and are so proud of you!

"Don't aim for success if you want it; just do what you love and believe in, and it will come naturally."
- David Frost

GO HAWKS!



CONGRATS DANI!

Graduation is a great accomplishment and something to be very proud of. We are so excited to see what's next for you. The skies the limit! Love you!

David and Michelle

DANIELLE, we are proud of you and are looking forward to seeing what comes next.

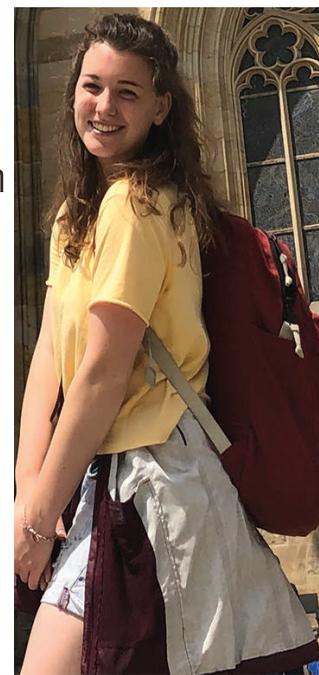
Love, Uncle Rob and Aunt Christy

DANIELLE, we are so proud of all your hard work and determination. *Congrats from the Kears!*

MARIA FRAZER

Maria, You did it, time to celebrate! Congratulations on your graduation from the College of Engineering (BME). We are proud of you!

Love, Mom, Dad, Dan, Rose and Cooper



CONGRATULATIONS DANI!

Very proud of you and your accomplishments. Look out world here comes Danielle! Love you!
Uncle Bob and Aunt Debbie



CAMRYN CORY

Congratulations, Camryn!

We blinked and our little girl is a teacher - we are so proud of you! You will make a huge impact on kids with all that you've experienced and all that you know!

Love, Mom & Dad



DANI

Congratulations!! You are a wonderfully, marvelous person and I wish all the best things in life for you!

Love Meghan



KayLee Kuehl -



We are so incredibly proud of all you have accomplished these last four years. Profound perseverance in navigating your way to a highly successful and influential career at the University of Iowa. We are blessed you call us Mom and Dad! We look forward to being a part of your life as you continue to make a difference in an ever changing world.
~ Love always, Mom, Dad, and Ian ~

ABBI CRANE

★ CONGRATULATIONS ABBI ★



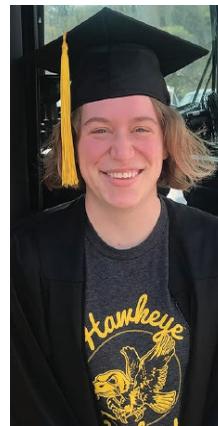
We are so proud of you and all of your academic success! So fun to have another family member as a Hawkeye Alumni!
We love you always!
Love, Mom, Tate, Dad & Jill

BRIDGET JOERS

CONGRATULATIONS, BRIDGET!



We are so proud of you and all your accomplishments at Iowa including Ultimate Captain, DM Finance Director, Cambus trainer, and Dean's List every semester. You will be the best English teacher ever!
Love, Dad, Mom, Luke, Pete, & Ted



OBALO

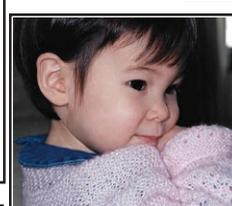
Congratulations!

You continue to make it look easy, but we know how hard you work. We are so very proud of you! Love you to the moon and back infinity times...
Mom, Dad and Emma



SONNY

Words couldn't describe how proud I am. I love you! You are the best ever!!! Love always, Dad



OLIVIA CHAN WEIHER

Congratulations on your achievements and hard work, Olivia! We love watching you grow into a wonderful human being. Much adoration from your family: Dad, Mama, Max, Goong Goong, Popo, Goo Goo, Aunt Joyce and Uncle Michael

BON TRAVAIL, « Le hasard ne favorise que les esprits préparés »,

AVA ROSELINE STIPANOVICH

We are beyond ecstatic at your accomplishments, CONATU ET CONSTANTIA. Bucksbaum Academy Alumna, Concentration in Neurobiology, and, now, Hawkeye Baccalaureate. Go Hawks! Go Ava!



With love,
Mom, Dad,
and
Uncle Randy



CONNOR HUGHES

Congratulations on your graduation from the College of Engineering. We are very proud of you! May your future be filled with happiness and success!
We love you, Mom and Dad



KIELY



Never a doubt Kiebo!!
We are so very proud of you!!
Love,
Your People



TYLER CHASTAIN

HEY HEY
LOOK
WHO'S
ON HIS
WAY!

I am so proud
of you and
all you
have achieved.
Love, Mom



MADISON SNITKER

does it
again!

University of Iowa College of Public Health
2020 BA Graduate to 2021 MPH Graduate!
Congratulations on your Masters
in Public Health!

We are so proud of all your hard work!
We loved having a Hawkeye in the family!
Love, Mom, Dad, Mitchell and Lincoln

DANIELLE

Congratulations Danielle!! We are so happy for you! Lots of
love and many blessings as you start this new season of your
life! Love, Uncle Rick, Auntie Linda, AnnaKate and Kayleigh



LUKE

Congratulations!

My how time flies...we are very proud of you
and your accomplishments!
Love, Your Family

JILLIAN R. STEVENS

JILLIAN S. (DOT) THE ROLY POLY
ESKIMO KID FROM BREWSTER WHO
BLOSSOMED INTO A BEAUTIFUL
WOMAN AND SMART TOO! YA DONE
GOOD JILLY! CONGRATULATIONS ON
ANOTHER MILESTONE! WE LOVE
YOU TO THE MOON AND BACK!!!!
DADDY, MADDIE, MAGGIE, JAYE
AND ALL OF MCGUERTY ROAD!
XOXO



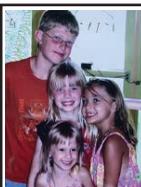
MATTHEW HAYES

We are so proud of you Matthew!! On to the
next adventure!! I know Dad is proud and
cheering you on too!
We love you! Mom, Jared, and AnnaLiese

AMANDA PENDLEY



CONGRATULATIONS!
WE ARE SO PROUD OF YOU!
LOVE, MOM, DAD AND RYAN



DANIELLE

Congratulations! Keep the STEM growing!
Vive La France!
Love Uncle Mike, Aunt Lisa, Marissa and Melanie

MADISON LOTENSCHTEIN

Congratulations!
Now a new
chapter begins.
WRITE ON.
Love, Mom & Dad



Mazel Tov MADISON ELLIS



The world is your oyster and full
of unlimited opportunities.
We are so proud of you and will
always be in your corner. Look out
Austin, Texas, here comes Madison!!
LOVE, Dad & Mom



DANIELLE

Congratulations,
I'm very proud of you.
Love Grandma



**CONGRATULATIONS
JACOB
NORTON!**

We are very proud of everything you have accomplished. You are genuine, kind, and humble. You are a natural born leader who puts everyone before himself. You amaze us every day. Keep on being you and you will go far in life. Good luck with your next chapter at Iowa.



We love you!

Love,
Mom and Grandma



DANI

Congrats on doing what I never could!
You're graduating from Iowa & I'm so proud!
Love you so much! Ashley



**LAUREN
SCHMIDT**

Congratulations Lauren!
We are so proud of you!
Love,
Mom, Dad, and Zack



**Emma
McCullough**

Congratulations,
Emma!!!

We are so proud of you and all your accomplishments these past 4 years. You've worked hard and now you're ready to fly! Love, Mom, Dad, Aidan, and the rest of your family



**CONGRATULATIONS
GRACE
COOK!**



We're so proud of you and can't wait to see what amazing things your future holds.



From a Hawkeye to a Terrapin and beyond, you're going to change the world!

Love, Mom, Dad, Bobby, Ryan, Emily, Anna & Daisy

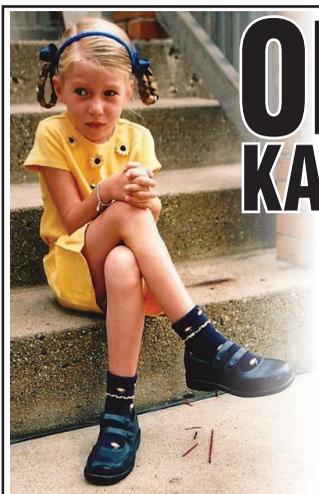


**CHAUNA DONALD
CONGRATULATIONS Schatzie!!**

We're very proud of you, all you've accomplished, and excited to see where your future takes you!

LIVE in the moment
LOVE all you can

LAUGH at everything life throws at you
Love, Dad, Mom, Dalton & FurBabies



**OLIVIA
KATHERINE**



**Congratulations
Olivia,**

We are so proud of you!
Love,
Dad, Mom, and Will



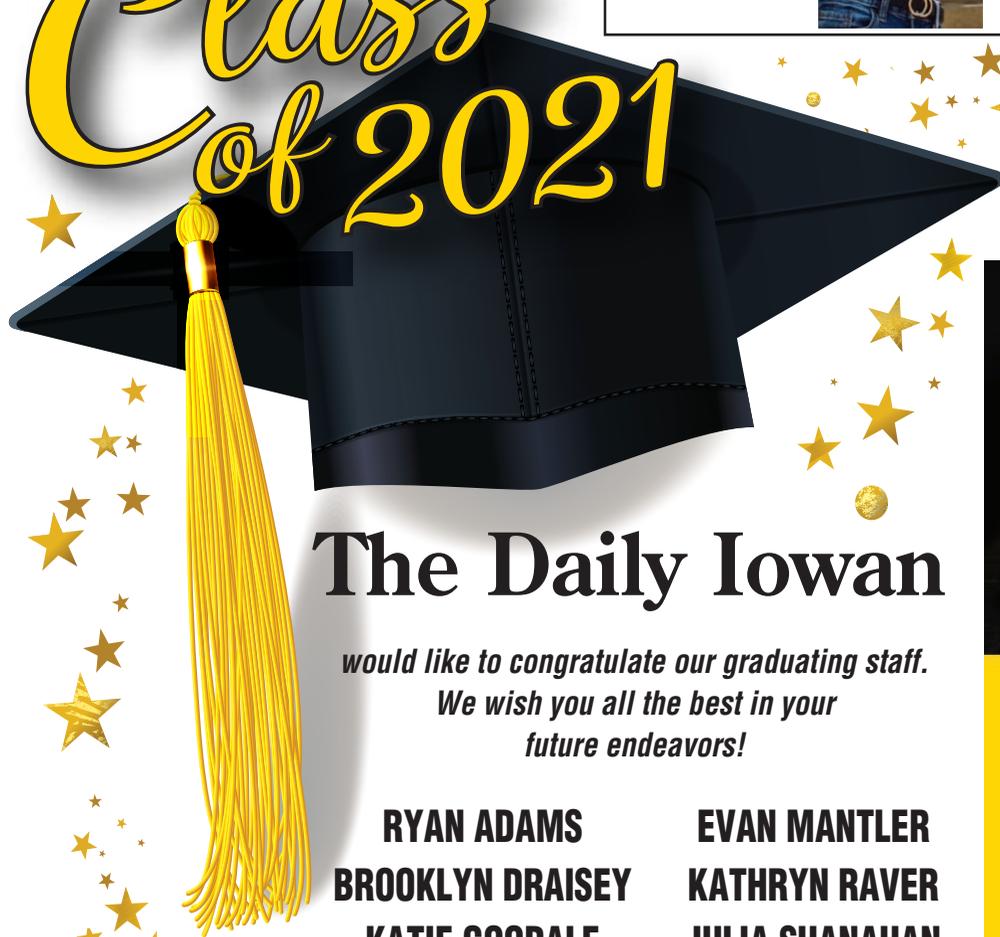
**You're off to Great Places!
Today is your Day!
Your mountain is waiting,
So...get on your way!**

Dr. Seuss

**Madeline Baron
CONGRATULATIONS!
We are so proud of you!
Be Who You Are,
Do What You Love,
& Stay true to Yourself!
Love, Mom, Dad
& Nicholas**

**GREAT
JOB!**

*Class
of 2021*



The Daily Iowan

*would like to congratulate our graduating staff.
We wish you all the best in your
future endeavors!*

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| RYAN ADAMS | EVAN MANTLER |
| BROOKLYN DRAISEY | KATHRYN RAVER |
| KATIE GOODALE | JULIA SHANAHAN |
| MARY HARTEL | ALEXANDRA SKORES |
| TATE HILDYARD | TIANNA TORREJON |
| HANNAH KINSON | SARAH WATSON |
| MADISON LOTENSCHTEIN | |

**MARCELLA
DAINEN
WILLIAMS**

**Congratulations
Sweetheart!**
We are so
proud of you
& Love you
very much.
Mom & Dad

**ALEXANDRA
DESIREE
SKORES**

**Congratulations
Zandra!**
We are very proud of you and all of
your accomplishments! We can't wait
to see what you do next!
The future is very bright for you!
Go Hawks!!!
Love, Dad, Mom, Kyle, and Isabella

JESSICA VIERKE

Take pride in how far you have come and
have faith in how far you will go.
Congratulations!
Love Mom



**CONGRATS
IOWA
NURSING
CLASS OF 2021**

CONGRATULATIONS UNIVERSITY OF IOWA CLASS OF 2021

POLITICAL SCIENCE & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS


Congratulations!
CLASS OF
2021

Ely Aponte
Mackenzie Armstrong
Danielle Beavers
Olivia Brinkmeier
David Broughton
Connor Browne
Megan Bryan
Grace Bryant
Alexis Bucklin
Katie Bulger
Savannah Buys
Camryn Carpenter
Josh Clark
Jessica Cook
Anna Correa
Grant Davis
Justin Debs
Olivia Delo
Abbi Denner
Deb Destahun
Ariana Devereaux
Isabella Dietrich
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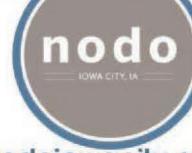
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SENIOR COLUMN

Grateful to be a *DI* alum

BY JULIA SHANAHAN
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If you had told me when I first walked into *The Daily Iowan* newsroom four years ago that I would eventually stand face to face with Joe Biden for an interview about his sexual assault allegations, I probably would have laughed.

I often joke with new reporters that my first politics story was so bad it didn't even get published online. I had a little bit of journalism experience from my time working on my high school newspaper, but the upperclassmen in the newsroom scared me. I knew it was going to be a lot of work before my writing could stand up against theirs.

I'm only days from graduating from the University of Iowa with a body of work that landed me a full-time reporting job with Report For America, and I have a box full of plaques and certificates from the dozens of statewide and national awards I've accumulated during my time at the *DI*.

I knew from the time I was in elementary school that I wanted to be a writer, but my dream to be a journalist didn't happen overnight. It happened over the course of a couple of years and hundreds of meetings with Lyle Muller, our politics coach, where he would rip apart my writing until I had a persistent voice in my head telling me what Lyle was going to ask me at our next meeting.

"Tell me in one sentence what your story is about." This was the statement from Lyle I dreaded and could never respond to concisely. After some time, I was able to answer that question, and my stories began to have fewer red markings in the margins. I knew I could make it as a journalist, and I started envisioning myself sitting in the White House press briefing room like other successful *DI* alumni.

The 2020 Iowa caucuses were a whirlwind of a reporting experience. I started out covering candidates like Andrew Yang and Marianne Williamson and before we knew it, Democratic heavyweights like Bernie

Sanders and Elizabeth Warren were holding regular rallies in eastern Iowa. We started to form relationships with campaign staffers and began scoring exclusive interviews with nearly all the Democratic frontrunners — and this eventually came to include now-President Joe Biden.

My time at the UI did not come without challenges. I was diagnosed with a serious mental illness after my sophomore year, where I then had to adjust to a medication regimen while working full-time to cover the flood of political news happening in the state. Growing up with bipolar II disorder, I didn't always feel comfortable in my own skin. I had a lot of social anxiety and often found it difficult to get through a school day or complete an assignment.

You can imagine my amazement when I stood in front of Biden and asked him multiple questions as to why he chose not to apologize to the women accusing him of sexual assault. I did not want to waste the only interview I would likely ever get with Biden on questions about stu-

As my days in Iowa City come to an end, I'm reminded of where I started.



Photo by Katie Goodale

Photo of Julia Shanahan

dent-loan debt or tuition prices.

I left that interview with an adrenaline rush I had never felt before. Having a career as a White House reporter suddenly felt reachable, and I can thank the mentoring I received at the *DI*.

I like to tell people that my major isn't journalism or political science — it's *The Daily Iowan*. I looked up to former Editor-in-Chief Marissa Payne during my first couple of years at the

DI because I wanted to achieve her level of dedication and commitment to local journalism. Current Executive Editor Sarah Watson, who was also my direct editor on the politics team, has also been a fantastic peer mentor. I never wanted to let her down.

I'm leaving the *DI* a better person than I was when I first walked in. I wouldn't take back a single late night, missed Halloween weekend, or Thursday in the newsroom.

SENIOR COLUMN

Pandemic shapes law school applications



Contributed by Evan Mantler

More applications, higher test scores overall, and a lack of transparency from schools made this one of the most competitive application seasons ever.

BY EVAN MANTLER
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As a junior in college preparing to apply to law school, I never anticipated how massively the pandemic would affect my life, particularly during this year's law school admissions process. I'm happy to be graduating this spring and headed off to the University of California Berkeley School of Law in the fall, but my experience of this admissions cycle has shown me just how vulnerable so

many of our systems are.

This year, the number of applicants for law schools jumped nearly 30 percent. In addition, each applicant submitted more applications on average than previous years.

Last cycle, when the country was just starting to feel the effects of the pandemic, many prospective law students decided to delay their applications and save them for this year. Still, others who were accepted into schools deferred their enrollment to this year, too.

All this together means more people are competing for fewer spots — and they also have less to differentiate them.

The primary factors in the law-school admissions process are a student's undergraduate GPA, essay responses, and their Law School Admissions Test score. During the pandemic, the Law School Admissions Council, the company that administers the LSAT, canceled in-person tests.

Instead, they introduced the LSAT

MANTLER CONTINUED FROM 20

Flex, a shorter at-home test that uses online proctoring software. In an attempt to prevent cheating, the Flex test reduced the time applicants would spend testing by removing two sections from the typical LSAT.

The altered distribution in the types of questions testers answer makes the Flex a fundamentally different test than the regularly administered LSAT, which is scored

on a curve. Scores from the Flex test were less predictable, and generated higher scores than usual, making the cycle even more competitive overall.

In response to a competitive and confusing application season, schools postponed their decisions and hedged their bets by relying increasingly on wait lists, yet still ended up over-enrolling. Based on information from LawSchoolData.org, some schools are estimated to have several thousand students on multiple tiers of wait lists but are expected to admit only 50 to 75 stu-

dents from those lists.

The lack of transparency from schools also includes fluctuating timelines for students to receive information key to their decisions. Each school sets its own deadlines for applications, but schools don't have to provide a date by which students can expect an answer. Schools' timelines often do not match up, meaning that students may be asked to make commitments to one school, while still waiting for admissions decisions and financial aid information from others.

Students are left with a dilemma — either put down non-refundable seat deposits or lose out on opportunities while they wait for more responses. Some state schools require only a tentative intent to enroll without a deposit, while schools like George Washington University charge up to \$3,000 to reserve a spot.

Schools scrambling to adapt their processes during the pandemic have in many cases passed the burden onto applicants, leaving people with even less insight to figure out how to respond. Difficult

for any applicant, all these further advantage economically privileged students, while others — especially those facing financial strain during the pandemic — are struggling to keep up.

I'm lucky enough to have come out of this process with a great choice for law school, but many of my fellow applicants cannot say the same. While those accepted into the class of 2024 are gearing up for torts and property classes, plenty of this cycle's applicants are preparing to "R and R" — retake and reapply.

SENIOR COLUMN

Thank you, *Daily Iowan*

This is a 'see you later,' not a 'goodbye.'

BY ALEXANDRA SKORES
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Ever since I was little, I wanted to tell a story.

My mom will laugh when she reads this, but when I was in elementary school, I wrote my first book, titled, "Where are the puppies?" It was a chapter book written in a wide-ruled spiral notebook, filled with spelling and grammar errors. My mom probably has it somewhere in a bin in our basement, but she always brings it up when I talk about my writing. I always knew this was what I wanted to do.

As the first of my siblings that went to college, I knew it was something important that I had to do as a role model for both of them. My parents have always worked hard to make sure I had everything I could ever need to achieve my dreams. I was always told to put the important information at the top of the story. So, mom and dad, thank you.

Over the last three years, I've gotten to write some of the most influential stories of my life, teach the brightest reporters I could have ever had the privilege of mentoring, and grew up to be the woman I am today. The *DI* wasn't just a newsroom.

It was a second home.

I had one of the toughest conversations with a mother that had lost her child. My story on children's mental health influenced an Iowa emergency room doctor to raise money for #ForALLTheKids. I was able to cover presidential hopeful Andrew Yang on the day of the Iowa caucuses, and later covered former President Donald Trump, two days before the 2020 election.

And this year, a group of UI students came to me to share a story after an email thread had surfaced questioning diversity, equity, and inclusion training in their college. I am grateful to these students for trusting me with such an important story that needed to be brought to light.

But for me, my favorite part of my *DI* experience happened in my final year. After months of conversations, Executive Editor Sarah Watson and I put our heads together to create initiatives that promote inclusivity and diversity in our newsroom. What was born was my absolute favorite section in the *DI* (sorry news, I still love you though), Amplify. The section has given writers in our staff the opportunity to showcase their identities and others. I am proud to

see the section continue to develop next year, under the leadership of Opinions Editor Hannah Pinski, with beautiful designs by the talented Design Editor Kate Doolittle, and the team next year. You all have taught me so much, and I am forever grateful.

I have so many people to thank for these last three years.

To Katie Ann McCarver, I am grateful to have someone in my life that balances me so well and is always looking out for me — let alone, someone that would let me into such important parts of her faith and her world. There was no one I would have rather endured managing news content in a pandemic with, or talking it out with in editing bays when the job got tough. She was there through every rejection, interview, and offer I received. And when she placed third in the Hearst Journalism Awards for a story so close to her heart, I was ecstatic. Katie Ann, I will always be your No. 1 fan. I didn't just get a forever co-editor. I got a forever friend.

To my partner in scoops, the Batman to my Robin, Sarah Watson — I would not be half the leader I am today without learning from you. Your courage, perseverance, and



Photo by Kate Heston

brevity are remarkable. Our leadership complements itself like no other, and I am grateful for you and your friendship. I will forever be down for a drink at Joe's rooftop — say the word, and I am there.

Politics Editor Julia Shanahan, I have always envied your "winner" attitude. I like to believe that is a former competitive cheerleader thing, and I have it too sometimes. Go out and win more — and continue to ask the tough questions.

To the coaches at the *DI*, especially Jason Brummond and Jenn Wagner, thank you for a great three years. I wouldn't have been able to make my post-grad decisions without the 10 p.m. phone calls and frantic emails about what to do. I have appreciated the mentorship and constant support. I would not be the journalist I am without the support I have.

Finally, if you were one of the

folks that took time to answer an email or pick up a phone call — thank you. I owe the world to the people that have gotten me to where I am today. To every person that let me tell their story, I am grateful.

Big dream alert: One day, I will run a newsroom that focuses on amplifying underrepresented voices and incorporates those stories across all sections. For now, I am going to keep working to do just that in my own newsrooms, wherever that happens to be. For the summer after graduation, I have accepted an internship reporting on *The Dallas Morning News'* business team. This Chicago girl is ready for a new, big city, filled with stories to tell.

And it is all thanks to *The Daily Iowan*.

In the words of dear Winnie the Pooh, "How lucky am I to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard."

The *DI* taught me it's good to be different

I used to wonder why I was at *The Daily Iowan*. Now, I wonder where I'd be without it.



Contributed

Photo of Shivansh Ahuja.

BY SHIVANSH AHUJA

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As photojournalists, we're taught to look at everything in front of us through a lens. We're taught to press a button at the right place and the right time. We're taught to not make it too bright or too dark. We're taught to put the subject in focus. We're taught to use this machine in our hands to tell a story.

After four years at *The Daily Iowan*, I've told plenty of stories. But they've rarely been my stories.

During Iowa football's spring practice on May 1, I stood in the first row of Kinnick Stadium's bleachers with a pair of cameras strapped to me. It was my job to tell the story of everything happening within those walls, from the linemen wrestling in the end zone and the post patterns being run at midfield, to the kids in the stands wanting to run after every errant punt that blew in the spring wind.

In between those chapters, however, I started to reflect on a different story: The story of how I ended up

there in the first place.

I picked up a DSLR camera for the first time in high school as an outlet. Already comfortably entrenched into a STEM path, my broadcast journalism class was my escape from numbers and graphs.

I brought that interest with me to my college orientation and noticed that the student newspaper was hiring photographers. One reference led to another and suddenly I was on my first *DI* assignment: my class's own freshman convocation, before I even attended a college lecture.

Things could have very easily played out completely differently. Just a few months into my career at the *DI*, I questioned what I was doing. Why is a kid who's studying engineering throwing so many hours into what was, at the time, a hobby? Nobody here does what I do, and nobody here looks like I do.

I was ready to leave since I was different. Now, I'm glad I stayed because I'm different.

This hobby quickly turned into a career that I'm incredibly proud of.

I took every assignment given to me as a chance to broaden my skill set. I covered presidential candidates as they made their way through Iowa. I found a home in athletic photography where I combined my passion for sports with the art of photojournalism. Before I knew it, I was jet-setting across the country to cover national tournaments and bowl games, and every occasion was an affirmation that my different approach is welcome.

I'll always be grateful for the number of opportunities that the *DI* gave me to escape my comfort zone. I revel with science and math because of an everlasting aversion to writing, so I never imagined I'd be spending a day with Iowa's winningest women's basketball head coach to write and photograph a full-

length feature about her. Earlier, you couldn't pay me enough to do any amount of public speaking, so I never imagined I'd have anchored dozens of episodes of *DITV*.

I don't know what I would have done had I quit, but I know my belief in myself wouldn't be where it is today if I'd left because I felt too out of place.



I don't know what I would have done had I quit, but I know my belief in myself wouldn't be where it is today if I'd left because I felt too out of place.

I wouldn't have the confidence that I built up patrolling the sidelines of Carver-Hawkeye Arena, or the composure that I built trying to navigate rain delays (plural) at Jack Trice Stadium. Those realizations are more than I could have ever dreamed of getting out of a college job.

In fact, this doesn't even feel like a job, and that's because of the incredible people I've had the privilege of working with at *The Daily Iowan*. I co-host a sports podcast with my best friends where we vent about our favorite teams for an hour a week, and I get to call it "working."

I've been ridiculously lucky to work

with talented reporters, disciplined editors, and inspiring coaches across all four of my years here. Everyone who's worked with me and believed in what I can do has brought me to where I am in my story.

And it's a story I'll be telling for the rest of my life.



Shivansh Ahuja/*The Daily Iowan*

Iowa forward Luka Garza dunks the ball during a men's basketball match between Iowa and Iowa State at Hilton Coliseum on Dec. 12, 2019. The Hawkeyes defeated the Cyclones, 84-68.

The stories that made me

As I close the book on college, I'm looking back on the stories I've told, and how they've helped me write my own story.



Photo by Shivansh Ahuja

Photo of Brooklyn Draisey.

BY BROOKLYN DRAISEY
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If you asked me in high school what I expected from my future as a college journalist, I would've said I could cover complex problems affecting my new home. I definitely wouldn't have mentioned the Pancheros owner.

I had a specific vision of what the start of college life would be like. My first week of school would be spent exploring campus and finding little nooks no one else had discovered and cultivating my persona as a cool college woman.

Instead, I spent my first week of college writing about Pancheros. Not quite the story I had expected from my first assignment at *The*

Daily Iowan, but I was still more than intimidated by the burrito franchise's owner, the first source I interviewed.

Since that interview four years ago, I've met a few famous faces, including director Joe Russo, former University of Iowa President Sandy Boyd, and two CIA agents who wouldn't share their names. And I've covered many more unique people whose names may not spark recognition.

Shane Mullnix. Sandra Gimpel. Jonathan Jackson. Earie Seals. Zach Luppen. These names — along with so many others — may not be known to the public, but I've had the privilege to meet these people and share their stories with the world to the best of

my ability. They've taught me everyone has a tale to tell.

Some of the stories I've told have been so, so tragic. Laura Calderwood, whose daughter, Mollie Tibbetts, should be graduating with me this year. Gerald Belz, who died on campus on the coldest day seen in years. My own story, about the struggles my brother faced with his illness and what I faced with his death.

But so, so many pieces were happy nuggets that I had the opportunity to shine some light on. Christine Grant, who spent decades of her life paving the way for women in collegiate athletics. Inventors who haven't reached junior high, showing off their work with passion and fire. The time I

spent the night at the Villisca Axe Murder House and was irrationally terrified the entire time.

There have been more stories than I can count that I haven't had the chance to tell, and those are only stories from my time at *The Daily Iowan*. I had the chance to tell so many amazing stories during my time at *The Gazette* and *The Southeast Iowa Union*, and I made stories of my own.

Marissa Payne accompanied me to a forum on the UI's \$1.165 billion utility system public/private partnership, spouting background info like nothing while I looked on in awe and confusion. I finessed my way into working with Marissa for almost a full year after she graduated, because I couldn't bear to be fully separated from her just yet. I'm still not sure how I'm supposed to cope without her icon on my Google documents.

Kayli Reese shared an itemized list of predictions of who is most likely to win an Oscar in every category. After I found out I would be moving to Davenport, I calculated exactly how long it would take to travel to Dubuque. Turns out she did the same thing. After three years of living in each other's pockets, we'll be hard pressed to live more than 1 hour and 22 minutes apart.

Katie Goodale beckoning me over to the visuals desk and asking my opinion, knowing full well I can't give an informed opinion on photography. She was my vaccine buddy and my brother-in-arms during a long summer, and I know she'll keep putting out amazing work.

Ryan Johnson, freaking me

out by silently coming into the kitchen and poking my head. I've known him since I was 2 years old, and if I have any say in it, we'll be friends until we're ancient. He was a roommate, and I'll miss just having to walk a few feet to annoy my found brother.

Autumn Tallman, painting my nails and finally convincing me to stop biting them. I know she doesn't like movies, but I'm always happy when she obliges me, especially when I show her something she ends up liking. I can't wait to see how she changes the world.

I do have a few regrets from my time at the UI. I'd thought often of joining the garden club or auditioning for a theatre production, but never got around to it. I didn't find nearly as many strange rooms as I had hoped — maybe I should have tried to get out of the newsroom a little more. But I can't wait to watch what my friends who have yet to graduate do next.

Jenna Galligan will put out amazing work and go so far, and I'll be there whenever I can, reminding her to sleep sometimes. The Sophomore Squad, soon-to-be seniors, is taking over the *DI* and will take it to new heights. I'm so proud of all of them, and they better get ready for teary hugs before I leave.

As I graduate, I've been looking back on the stories I've told and looking forward to all the stories I'll get to tell, with Sarah Watson at my side at *The Quad-City Times*. My parting advice: Make sure to pay attention to your own story while you're telling everyone else's.

I can't wait to start my next chapter.

Finding purpose through the arts

I'm a writer to my core. But I never adhered to any form of purposeful writing until I started working as a freshman arts reporter at *The Daily Iowan*. Finishing my collegiate journalism career as the arts co-editor, I took a glimpse in memory's mirror, reflecting on what I'm thankful for, and how I've changed.

BY MADISON LOTENSCHTEIN
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I had never given much thought about why I love to write or why I became a journalist. It was simply an unnarrated decision, a path I walked down without a purpose. But the past four years at *The Daily Iowan* guided me in finding purpose as a writer and journalist.

Working in the arts and culture section for the past four years has been one of the most thrilling privileges of my life. It made sense to apply as an arts reporter. I'm an artsy gal, period. I loved writing about theater, writing profiles on artists and writers alike, and eventually, crafting feature stories for the front of our in-print insert, 80 Hours. My experiences writing on such diverse topics molded me into someone with the ability to write anything within the realm of arts.

Writing profiles on artists such as Donté Hayes, Ekaterina Korzh, Mary Bozaan, and so many other talented Iowa City artists inspired me to try and master the art I practice: writing. Covering cultural phenomena including people howling in Iowa City and writing about a night spent at the Villisca Ax Murder House gifted me with a rush only reporters feel in a moment. Writing about theater was my journalistic foundation, and I'll never forget the deep, bubbling joy I felt previewing and reviewing *Les Misérables*, the musical love of my life. Oh, and of course, the Rocky Horror Picture Show.

A characteristic I learned about

myself while at the *DI* is that I don't know how I feel about anything until I put it on paper. In the summer of 2018, I went on my Birthright trip to Israel and knew I wanted to write about my immersive experience. It was through the written word that I found and deepened my Jewish identity. Since then, I had a bi-weekly column about living in Tel Aviv for a summer and also wrote a long-form piece on the rise of anti-Semitism, which became a finalist in the 2020 Associated Collegiate Press awards.

Most recently, I wrote a column about my dismay toward the UI's Undergraduate Student Government voting down the creation of a Jewish constituency senator. Since then, they held a re-vote and passed the legislation.

I'd like to thank a merry few people:

Radiating a bright and bubbling energy is the *DI*'s beloved writing coach Jennifer Wagner. Jenn, it's tear-jerking to think you've listened to my ramblings and read my stories for four years. Your eye for detail and knowledge of the written word helped me become the writer I am today. I'd also like to thank the *DI*'s publisher, Jason Brummond. You've led the *DI* through history. Our favorite Beatles album is *Revolver*, and I am thrilled we share this opinion because it means you are a true Beatles fan.

To my reporters and co-editor, Josie Fischels, thank you for working diligently this year to provide the Iowa City community with beautifully written and edited



Photo by Katie Goodale

Photo of Madison Lotenschtein.

arts stories. Arts and culture journalism is imperative to our society. Without it, who would ever know the goings-on of the intricate, artistic world around them?

Charlie Peckman, Aadit Tambe, Emily (Wingdings) Wangen, and Elijah Helton, y'all already know how much I love you guys. You made my newsroom experience a delight — RIP to our Thursday night shenanigans and staying up until 6 a.m. To everyone reading this, you just had to be there. To Naomi Hofferber, thank you for being an excellent friend and editor when I needed it the most.

I'd also like to thank my class-

mates in my modern human origins class. Our discussions with Professor Robert Franciscus provided me with a reason to think more deeply about our existence. Walking into class, I often feel like I'm part of a novel because you are all such characters, brimming with depth and personalities that jump off the page.

There's a permanence and structure that comes with writing for a student newspaper, one that I've come to love and cherish. I struggled with the concept of purpose, and the *DI* alleviated some of the mental stressors I've dealt with. Had I not joined, I would

have never discovered my affection for illuminating other people's lives and what impacts them through language, nor would I have ascertained elements of myself.

An unknown destination waits as I search for a writing job in this hellscape of an economy. Though the process may not entail the terror and courage it takes to make the journey from the Shire to Mordor, job searching is a trek within itself, one I've found difficult to overcome. But in the words of Gandalf the Grey, "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us."



PHOTO

CONTINUED FROM 9

Ryan Adams/The Daily Iowan

The Iowa men's and women's swim teams recite the Iowa fight song in the diving well after a swim meet at the CRWC on Jan. 11, 2020 between Iowa, Illinois, and Notre Dame. The Hawkeye men's team defeated the fighting Irish 159.50 to 140.50 while the Hawkeye women's team defeated the fighting Illini 223 to 86 and lost to the fighting Irish 99.50 to 209.50. – All my work for the publication could culminate into one photo of the Iowa men's and women's swim team celebrating after a meet against Notre Dame and Illinois in January 2020. The photograph was taken before the university's decision to end both men's and women's swimming programs, along with men's gymnastics and men's tennis. Looking back at it now, the photo reminds me of the importance of capturing a moment, because life takes unexpected turns, and what might seem like a fun moment in the present might one day represent the hard work and camaraderie of a family, and that moment will exist forever.

“ Looking back now, the photo reminds me of the importance of capturing the moment.

– Ryan Adams

“ I can say without a doubt that this was the assignment that gave me the confidence, experience, and knowledge that I used to cover the Hawkeyes for the following years.

– Shivansh Ahuja

Shivansh Ahuja/The Daily Iowan

Iowa quarterback Nate Stanley makes a pass during a football game between Iowa and Iowa State at Jack Trice Stadium in Ames on Sept. 14, 2019. The Hawkeyes retained the Cy-Hawk Trophy for the fifth consecutive year, downing the Cyclones, 18-17. – I will never forget covering the rivalry football game between Iowa and Iowa State in 2019. The history, the atmosphere, and the wild weather all combined to turn Jack Trice Stadium to complete mayhem for the entire day. I can say without a doubt that this was the assignment that gave me the confidence, experience, and knowledge that I used to cover the Hawkeyes for the following years. I'm forever grateful for the career that The Daily Iowan has given me, and I'm thankful that I can look back through the work from my career and relive the days as if I'm there again.



“ It took me a few years to become even semi-competent with a camera... and The Daily Iowan has given me the space, the opportunity, and the confidence to do those things.

– Tate Hildyard

Tate Hildyard/The Daily Iowan

Local Republicans cheer on as Joni Ernst delivers her victory speech at the Des Moines Marriott Downtown on Nov. 3, 2020. Republicans from across the state have gathered to watch the results of the 2020 general election. – It took me a few years to become even semi-competent with a camera, let alone be able to develop my own set of stylistic flourishes, and sensibilities and The Daily Iowan has given me the space, the opportunity, and the confidence to do those things. When I shoot, I always try to heighten moments and capture the inherently weird and manic energy of the situation and election night in 2020 was just an absolute hurricane of weird. I didn't even see the shot until later while flipping through my take and I just laughed because her expression just captured the aggressive insanity that was going on that night and it was exactly the kind of eccentric moment that makes photography so much fun.



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TAUSAGA

CONTINUED FROM 28

Track and Field Trials Tausaga had qualified to compete at in the discus were pushed back a year.

The podiums Tausaga had goals standing atop of now seemed so far away.

At that moment, Tausaga and her fellow seniors didn't know whether their Hawkeye careers had just ended.

"We were shutting down, heading home and everything was done," Woody said. "I was like, 'Is this really the end? This is how we're going to end it with these seniors?' There were a lot of tears and there was a lot of disappointment. I was scared to hug people, even if I wanted to hug them."

Tausaga finds herself off the track

Eighteen days after the remainder of the 2020 season was abruptly canceled, Tausaga and other track athletes around the country received a piece of positive news.

The NCAA granted all spring sport athletes an additional season of eligibility (Iowa thrower Allison Wahrman started a petition for the cause, which received over 330,000 digital signatures), meaning Tausaga had one final outdoor season left with the Hawkeyes.

But while her Iowa career had been extended, it was still on pause.

Tausaga and her teammates did not have access to team facilities after the season shut down because of the pandemic, leading her to travel to local high school tracks to train. But eventually, Tausaga went back to her home state.

When she's competing, Tausaga, described by her coaches as a perfectionist, knows she can't throw a personal best every time she steps into the ring. But that doesn't mean she accepts that.

"Sometimes she will have a little fit, jumping and letting out a shout, but [Werskey] will be like, 'OK, that looked like a good one to me,'" said Nia Britt, one of Tausaga's best friends on the

team, who is also back for her final season with the Hawkeyes in 2021. That competitiveness is an attribute to why Tausaga is among the elite athletes in collegiate sports, her coaches said. But with the trials postponed and her return date to the track unclear, Tausaga had to adjust her mindset.

"I had to take a step back and find who I was without track to make sure I could come back ready for track," Tausaga said. "It was eating at me a little too much. I kinda had to step away mentally, get myself back together while doing some of the physical things but trying to get out of that mindset of 'We gotta go, we gotta go.' It's OK to just sit still for a minute."

The communications major was back at her family's San Diego home for about a month, which Tausaga believes is a first since she's been in college.

While there, Tausaga rediscovered her love of cooking.

"I'm very picky in the kitchen," Tausaga said. "I love to cook. If someone cuts onions the wrong way, I'm like 'You need to leave the kitchen now.' I will make everything, I don't care if I have to cook for like a million people, I would rather do it. I don't want anyone else to touch the food."

Despite rejecting any extra pairs of hands when she's in the kitchen, Tausaga would gladly offer assistance to someone else.

Tausaga describes herself as an introvert, but a helper. She doesn't think she gives helpful advice, but could listen to someone's problems all day. When one of her teammates needs help moving a couch they never should have bought out of their apartment, Tausaga will help move it — perhaps while rolling her eyes.

After she graduates this spring, Tausaga will pursue a professional athletic career, while also exploring graduate programs. If those career paths don't work, Tausaga's teammates and coaches seem to think stand-up comedy would be a realistic career path.

"That's just her," Britt said. "It's not like a 'Why did the chicken cross the road?' She's just naturally funny. She has everyone laughing. Literally she could just be talking and we're laugh-

ing. It's that natural for her."

Tausaga sank her head into the palms of her hands after those comments.

But she didn't necessarily disagree.

"I don't know what flies out of my mouth sometimes," Tausaga said. "But somehow, somehow it makes people giggle and I'm just standing there like, 'What are you doing?' When people are super enjoyable to be around, you want to see them smile. I guess I'm doing that for them."

And there's a reason for that.

While Tausaga was succeeding on the track in high school, she said she was struggling to care in the classroom. She hated that feeling. And needed help to escape it.

Maria Garcia is the department chair of the counseling department at Mount Miguel High School, a place she's been for the past 16 years.

Becoming a counselor was a calling to Garcia. She had been influenced by the educators who had changed the trajectory of her life, ensuring that she went to and graduated college. Garcia noticed Tausaga immediately during her first year of high school.

"She's someone who stood out to me as someone who had this infectious personality. In a room, she stands out," Garcia said. "You see out in her competitive sport and she's a beast. She's focused, driven. But there's this whole other side of her. She's got a big heart. She's a teddy bear and super comedic. She always had me laughing. You want to be around her."

Tausaga remembers walking into Garcia's office one day to find out a college was interested in her. Programs were seeing what Tausaga was doing in the ring. But Garcia stressed that academics were going to be just as crucial as Tausaga's athletic performance.

"It took an adult, and I'm just one of them, who built a good relationship with her to really see her and let her know that I believe in you more than you see for yourself," Garcia said.

By the end of Tausaga's junior year, things started to click. Garcia helped Tausaga prepare for her ACT and arranged for her to retake classes she hadn't performed well in during previous years. Garcia held Tausaga ac-

countable.

Tausaga is thankful for Garcia's impact on her life. She still visits her former counselor on her trips back to California. To hear that Tausaga is interested in becoming a school counselor — in helping people in general — and to know she's a reason why, is why Garcia is in her line of work.

Part of why Tausaga works the way she does is because she's still trying to make good on the opportunities people like Garcia made available to her. Earning her degree this May will accomplish one of those goals.

Another will have to wait until June.

A final season to remember

After spending nearly six months away from team facilities, Tausaga and her teammates were together again in Iowa City beginning last August. But without any indoor eligibility remaining, Tausaga was, at times, left behind in the fall. She didn't travel to away meets, but did win the shot put at the Hawkeye B1G Invite while competing unattached.

Tausaga has only competed in four meets so far this outdoor season, but her 60.81-meter mark in the discus ranks first nationally, and her 17.94-meter shot put throw at the North Florida B1G Invitational is tied for fifth.

Twenty-four months will have passed since Tausaga won gold in the discus by the time the 2021 NCAA Outdoor Championships are held.

Tausaga returned for this outdoor season to shatter the records she's already set. She returned to do what she couldn't last year — win gold at the conference meet being held May 14-16, and then repeat as champion at NCAAs, which begin June 9.

After the pursuit of another national title in the discus ends, Tausaga will shift her focus to competing in Eugene, Oregon, at the Olympic Trials, which run June 18-27. She already exceeds the standard (58 meters) to qualify for that event and hopes to make it for the shot put as well.

When her Hawkeye career is over, Tausaga will still live and train in Iowa City while pursuing a profession-

al throwing career. Tausaga already knows she will probably need to pick up a job separate from track to support herself while pursuing a career in a sport where sponsorships can be difficult to find.

Tausaga wants to be remembered. For an athlete as accomplished as she is, that doesn't seem like a difficult request. But at the same time, Tausaga — competitive as always — remains focused on outdoing what she's already done on the track, even if the recognition isn't there.

Tausaga is an underappreciated athlete in an overlooked sport. She doesn't face the flurry of fans Garza or Lee do when they compete in front of the Hawkeye faithful.

Most Hawkeye fans don't travel to the Recreation Building or Cretzmeyer Track to watch Tausaga throw on weekends. Track meets are not something the university builds entire weekends around like football games in Kinnick Stadium or wrestling duals at Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

Tausaga knows that's not going to change. But she also grows tired of being tagged on Twitter in order to be thrown into a discussion she belongs in already. To Tausaga, there's a time to be humble, yet also a time to know your worth.

"Are [fans] going to remember me the same way they are going to remember these other athletes like Megan Gustafson or Spencer Lee?" Tausaga said. "They probably won't. And that's probably going to be the thing that hurts me. But I have to understand that my coaches know, my teammates know, and I know who I am."

So, beyond one of the premier Hawkeye athletes in recent memory, who is "Lagi" Tausaga?

"She's a rock star not only athletically but as a person too," Werskey said. "Huge heart, goes out of her way for people. Anyone she discusses things with or interacts with, they walk away with, 'You know what, that's a very special person.'"

And, knowing Tausaga, they'll probably walk away with a grin, too.

She was bound to have said something funny.

A career to remember

Sports

Iowa thrower Laulauga Tausaga is seeking to close out her Hawkeye career by doing what the pandemic made impossible a year ago: Defend her NCAA discus title.

BY ROBERT READ
robert-read@uiowa.edu

As soon as Iowa thrower Laulauga Tausaga found her balance after spinning through her discus routine on a humid Austin, Texas, day in June, 2019, she let out a scream. As the disc flew through the air at the University of Texas track, Tausaga yelled as if the passion and fury in her voice would push the projectile a little farther.

Tausaga couldn't make out the number flashing on the scoreboard off in the distance, which indicated what her mark was. But as the disc hit the grass 63.26 meters away from the throwing ring, Hawkeye throwing coach Eric Werskey let out a yell of his own.

The excitement she heard from her coach confirmed what Tausaga had been thinking the moment the disc left her hand: She was about to be crowned a national champion.

As a junior, Tausaga won gold in the discus at the 2019 NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships. Donning her gold "IOWA" shirt, Tausaga's second throw of the competition stood atop the leaderboard throughout the remainder of the final

round. By making it to the top of the podium, Tausaga became the Iowa women's track and field program's first national champion since 1985.

Now in her fifth year with the Hawkeyes, Tausaga, who will celebrate her 23rd birthday on May 22, owns six All-American honors and four Big Ten individual titles on top of her NCAA gold medal.

To break a personal record, Tausaga also needs to set a school record. She already boasts the program's top all-time marks in the weight throw, discus, and indoor and outdoor shot put. A banner, which captures the moment Tausaga became an NCAA champion, already hangs in the same indoor facility she still practices in.

For the finale to her Hawkeye career, Tausaga is back in 2021 to do what the pandemic made impossible in 2020: Defend her discus title. Tausaga may already be the most accomplished athlete in her program's history. Her resume rivals that of any other Hawkeye athlete — past or present.

One day, she might represent the University of Iowa on an Olympic podium.

So why is Tausaga afraid that, when her time wearing the black and

gold passes, she's going to be forgotten?

"Will I become this unsung hero?" Tausaga said, speaking with the same passion in her voice, although now in a softer tone, as when she was admiring her title-winning throw. "Will I become this person who is going to be completely forgotten about? I've made a mark on Iowa, but it is invisible. And that's what is frustrating. Because when I leave here, I'm going to take so much with me about how much I love Iowa. And I'm going to remember that.

"But will Iowa remember me?"

A first attempt at a senior season

Tausaga completed her pre-meet lifting routine on March 12 of last year, and her throwing uniform rested on her hotel bed in Albuquerque, New Mexico, ready to be worn the next day at the 2020 NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships.

Before locking into the challenges the event would present, Tausaga and Werskey scanned the area for a sandwich shop. Traveling to a local eatery while on location at an away meet had become a tradition for Werskey,

Tausaga's coach since 2017, and his throwing group.

Ahead of the final indoor NCAA meet of her Hawkeye career, Tausaga was in contention to win titles in the shot put and the weight throw.

A week earlier, the right-handed thrower was named the Midwest Regional Female Field Athlete of the Year by the United States Track and Field and Cross Country Coaches Association for the second year in a row, becoming the first athlete in program history to earn that honor in back-to-back years.

Around the same time, three Hawkeyes — wrestler Spencer Lee, men's basketball player Luka Garza, and women's basketball player Kathleen Doyle — earned Big Ten Athlete of the Year honors for their sports. But while fans publicly praised those athletes for their accomplishments, Tausaga's teammates were forced to come to her defense, commenting on Twitter posts where Tausaga wasn't mentioned alongside her peers.

"Track athletes deserve better recognition," Tausaga tweeted March 9, 2020. "Tired of being forgotten."

But Tausaga wasn't going to let the lack of recognition get the best of her. It was nothing new to her, or many

track and field athletes overshadowed by more "mainstream" U.S. sports. The focus instead was on the competition ahead.

Until both Tausaga and Werskey received a notification.

Werskey turned his phone to Tausaga at the sandwich shop table and said "I'm really sorry." Tausaga saw a message from Iowa director of track and field Joey Woody on the screen. An immediate team meeting was called, and the Hawkeyes were heading back to Iowa City that night.

"I was about to just demolish this sandwich," Tausaga said, "and I remember instead of eating, I was crying."

The Big Ten had announced that, in response to growing concerns over COVID-19, its teams would not be participating in NCAA championship events. Throughout the rest of the day, all spring sport seasons were canceled.

Tausaga's last collegiate indoor season was over. A chance to become a back-to-back national champion in the discus was, at the time, crushed when the outdoor season was canceled. Eventually, the U.S. Olympic

SEE TAUSAGA, 27



Jenna Galligan/The Daily Iowan
Iowa thrower Laulauga Tausaga competes in the women's shot put premier during the fourth annual Larry Wieczorek Invitational at the University of Iowa Recreation Building on Jan. 17, 2020.