

Honors College student conducts research in Bolivia, recognized with senior thesis awards

Honors College member and 2017 graduate Jessica Esch has been awarded Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Linguistics for her senior thesis, a requirement for all Honors College students.

Esch spent a summer in Bolivia doing research for her thesis, studying language structures and generational language variety within Ayoré (eye-or- RAY), an indigenous group in Bolivia. She examined color and kinship terms within various generations and tested for differences among the generations.

The results found were different than what she expected. Names for colors are sparsely used in Ayoréo (Eye-OR-ray-OH), the language of the Ayoré. They only had four basic colors: black, white, red and yellow, and any additional colors that could be seen had no name. Since many Ayoré are able to speak Spanish as well, they utilize Spanish color names to describe items if the name doesn't exist in Ayoréo.

Of receiving departmental awards, Esch says, "It was impactful to me because a lot of people have done language acquisitions, but no one has done fieldwork that hasn't been done by the department already, so it was cool to be acknowledged for that."

She is grateful for the support that the Honors College and Dr. Graeme Harper, dean of the Honors College, have given her throughout the process of writing her thesis.

"To have opportunities to do research and explore my own passions and to have support to do that, not just from my department, but also from the Honors College, has been amazing," Esch said. "It's great to have a place where you are encouraged, supported and able to explore topics that pertain to your interests and career goals."

One of the things she will miss most about being at OU is being a resident assistant for Oak View Hall, the Honors College dorm.

"Being in the Honors College has been one of the best experiences of my life," Esch said. "Honors College students have a certain type of ownership, and it is a community that, despite different backgrounds and personalities, they are able to connect with each other. All the residents I had really bonded with each other. They knew that the other Honors College students would be there to take care of them."

Esch hopes to continue her education by getting a Ph.D., with the possibility of continuing her research as well.

Here is the complete list of Thesis Award Winners:

- Aleena Hajek – Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Biomedical Sciences
- Melissa VanderMuelen – Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Exercise Science
- Molly Green – Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Modern Languages
- Alexandria Seeger – Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Environmental Sciences



Recent OU graduate Jessica Esch was awarded Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Linguistics for her senior thesis in the Honors College.



Esch, wearing the blue flannel shirt, is pictured during her time in Bolivia.

- Jessica Esch – Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Linguistics
- Elizabeth Hendra – Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Social Work
- Matthew Bloom – Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Engineering
- Aaron Garofalo – Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Engineering
- Brian Neumeyer – Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Engineering
- Matthew Michalewicz – Thesis with Distinction and Thesis Award in Engineering