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Soar Higher History Wall created through the lens of a public relations-communications student

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to create a history wall as a way for the Eastern Michigan University and Ypsilanti communities to learn more about the development of the Honors College. By reviewing previous history wall projects from outside institutions and exploring background research and graphic design ideas, the vision for the wall was formed. The history wall includes information about where the Honors College previously resided, past and current directors and deans, the creation of programs and clubs, and relevant news clippings gathered from the EMU Archives. The EMU Honors College Soar Higher History Wall Project serves as a reminder of what has been accomplished over the years and what the future may hold for this important educational resource for high achieving students.

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SOAR HIGHER HISTORY WALL CREATED THROUGH THE LENS OF A PUBLIC
RELATIONS-COMMUNICATIONS STUDENT

By

Brooke Whittaker

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to create a history wall as a way for the Eastern Michigan University and Ypsilanti communities to learn more about the development of the Honors College. By reviewing previous history wall projects from outside institutions and exploring background research and graphic design ideas, the vision for the wall was formed. The history wall includes information about where the Honors College previously resided, past and current directors and deans, the creation of programs and clubs, and relevant news clippings gathered from the EMU Archives. The EMU Honors College Soar Higher History Wall Project serves as a reminder of what has been accomplished over the years and what the future may hold for this important educational resource for high achieving students.

INTRODUCTION

From its inception, the Soar Higher History Wall Project was formed as a Senior Capstone assignment. My Communication Capstone course (COMM 495L2) in the Fall 2022 semester required students to participate by volunteering at one specific organization and working on a specific project. Professor Nick Romerhausen required students to volunteer for 30 hours throughout the semester. I was required to assemble a portfolio of my work by creating a website to store all of the History Wall content.

The Honors College has been my second home ever since I became a Student Fellow on the marketing team in 2021. Throughout my time here, I have learned a great deal about how to market to a specific audience and ensure that an organization's content is cohesive across the board. The more I learned about marketing within the Honors College, the more I wanted to understand how the organization came into existence. I felt a desire to do this project because of how much I enjoy creating graphic content and of course because I already started my research in my Capstone course. It was clear that more research needed to be done and I did not want to leave the project half finished. With this in mind, I started planning how I was going to continue with the wall.

Some of the goals I set for myself during this project were to have at least two different versions of the wall that I could present to my advisor, Dr. Moore, and to finish the process of installing the history wall before my graduation in the Winter of 2023. This would allow me to leave my mark (figuratively and literally) at EMU, as it has been a significant point of growth for me both professionally and personally.

The purpose of a history wall is to convey how an institution was formed and the impact that it has and will continue to make on society. History walls can be used as a way to tell a

founder's story and demonstrate the benefits that the institution has to offer. It can showcase growth over the years and provide inspiration for future generations, highlighting efforts to increase diversity and inclusion. History walls serve as a way to provide information to the public through a creative perspective connecting the past to the present and future. A university institution can utilize history walls to gain the attention of students and demonstrate how and why they could help in their pursuit of higher education.

RESEARCH

HONORS WEBSITE

The EMU Honors College website was a great place to start, as it includes background information about the college. This is the first place I checked for any historical facts on the college as I knew that it would likely contain a lot of the information that I was looking for. I found out where the college used to reside, the background of the current building (511 W. Forest Ave.), and previous members who held leadership roles.

The website also states the institution's mission, core values, and learning outcomes. All of these elements allowed me to showcase all that the Honors College has to offer. Students and alumni are featured on the platform and that is how I gained photo content for the current dean of the college, (Dr. Ann Eisenerberg).

EMU ARCHIVES

After the website, I spent several hours digging through archives full of photos and documents about the Honors College at Halle Library. Before this project, I had never explored the EMU archives. It was rather difficult to obtain any substantial information regarding the

college, as there were not many stories written about it. Much of the information that I found pertained to the previous directors and deans and their accomplishments while working at Eastern Michigan University. I managed to find an interesting story about the first Director of the Honors College, Dr. Robert Holkeboer when he took Honors students on a camping trip and actually saved the students' lives when several canoes flipped over in the cold water of a fast-moving stream.

As I rifled through the files, I found detailed information about extended families related to members of the college and old photo albums of various Deans. Some of the articles and photos I found were so old that I had to use a lightbox to read the content clearly. Once I found material that seemed to be relevant, I made copies and sent them digitally to my google drive in order to keep track of all the information recovered.

THE HONORS COLLEGE

A great deal of useful information was gathered from inside the Honors College building. The Dean and the Associate Dean both had files and photo albums replete with flyers and brochures of historic events, news articles, statistics, proposals, and more that they were willing to share. I busied myself flipping through the photo albums and documents to gain a better understanding of how the college was originally formed. I was able to utilize much of the information found in the files and scanned some of the documents to put onto the digital wallpaper.

I often asked the staff and other student fellows for advice regarding the project and sought their opinion on what information may be relevant or interesting for both faculty and

students to view, as well as input on my design for the wall. Both the students and faculty thought that the design correlated well with the vision and mission of the organization.

GOOGLE IMAGES

When trying to find inspiration for the history wall, I explored similar installations at a variety of institutions from universities, museums, and more. I pulled ideas from the different walls and incorporated some of the ideas into my design. I also tried to incorporate the main colors and text that we use on our social media content to maintain the same visual theme across the board from online to in-person.

From the beginning, I knew that I wanted the wall to stand out. When looking at Google images at the various history walls I learned what I did and did not like visually and adapted my history wall design accordingly. This can be shown through the watercolors and geometric designs that I applied to the wall. I saved the photos from Google and added them to a Google document. After that, I added a description of what I found to be alluring/captivating versus what I did not.

HISTORY WALL DIGITAL PROCESS

CONCEPT

The concept stage of the history wall project was exciting, as this is when I was able to come up with the overall vision I had for the project. At first, I thought about the possibility of painting the wall since many of the history walls I found were like when I was doing my research. I ended up having a discussion with my advisor about the possibility of painting and we both decided that due to the budget, time limitations, and my lack of painting experience, it would be more efficient to create the wall digitally and then print it out onto wallpaper.

Printing out the wallpaper would prove to be beneficial as it would be easier to apply, more cost-effective, and would allow me to work on my graphic design skills. Using wallpaper will allow us to take it down and reapply it wherever the college ends up moving to in the future. We are also hoping that this will allow for an easier way for people to add new dates to the timeline in the future to hang up on the wall.

BREAKDOWN

After having the information needed for the wall, it was time to play around with the design. At first, I tried to put together the timeline by utilizing Google Slides; however, the dimensions for the wallpaper proved to be rather difficult to create through that software. I decided that it would be more efficient to use a creative website called Canva to make different drafts of the project. Through Canva I was able to make the document the size that I needed it to be and had access to a lot more geometric shapes, artwork, colors, etc.



Figure 1. An early iteration of the digital history wall.

The most enjoyable stage of the project was creating graphic designs for information to come to life visually. Being a Student Fellow on the Marketing team at the Honors College, I am often tasked with putting together graphic content for the organization's social media platforms, so this aspect of the project was second nature to me.



Figure 2. A first draft of the digital history wall before dates, visuals, and information was updated.

The main part of the project that created some difficulties was having to move around the content previously created in order to make it aesthetically pleasing and accurate. Some of the information gathered was not able to be verified, so it was removed from the timeline. This led to a need to rearrange the dates and find new information with new dates. It was difficult to incorporate all of the visuals and text due to having to figure out proportion sizes. I tried to imagine what the digital wall would look like once it was printed out, so I reminded myself that text and photos could be smaller because they would be expanded once it was printed on the wallpaper.

CLEAN UP

I continued to revise the drafts to fit the new information and graphics and eventually came up with two different versions of the same product. The differences between the versions were a few minor layout and design pattern changes. I presented the options to my supervisor (Dr. Megan Moore) and we ended up coming up with the final product.



Figure 3. The final approved digital draft was printed as a physical copy onto wallpaper to hang up in the Honors College.

Some of the changes that were made that can be shown in the figure above is the sizing of the text to match throughout the entire timeline. I also made sure to verify all of the facts that I gathered for each year just to be sure that everything was historically accurate.

REFLECTION

By the end of this project, I gained knowledge both in relation to Public Relations and Communications. Before this project, I had never created anything to this scale before. From the beginning, I was nervous to do this project because I wanted to do the organization justice by

representing its brand to the best of my ability for a wide audience to see. Despite my reservations, I had a wonderful support network to assist with any concerns or challenges encountered. My friends, family, co-workers, professors, advisor, and the dean of the Honors College all helped in the development of the wall and I could not have done it without them.

EVALUATION

At the beginning of this process, I had set three goals: presenting two different versions of the wall to my advisor, finishing the process of putting up the history wall before my graduation in the Winter of 2023, and leaving my mark on Eastern Michigan University because of how much this part of my life has meant to me. So far I have been able to accomplish two of these goals being that I was able to present different options to my advisor to pick from and I was able to leave my mark on Eastern. The wall was delivered on April 13, 2023, and installed on April 18, 2023, before graduation!



Figure 4. The final printed wallpaper displayed inside the Honors College.

I was able to accomplish so much throughout this project and I am proud to be able to see this project come to fruition. It was surreal to see the final product hanging up in the college. I have never before been able to see my digital work transitioned into a physical product. At the end of this journey, I gained additional skills in editing, graphic design, historic research, and imagining transitioning the graphic to scale/proportion sizes. I will be able to apply everything I learned to my future endeavors, personally and professionally, so I am very thankful to have had this opportunity to expand my knowledge in my field of study.

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