

SCHEDLER Honors COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
[Hanna McElduff] Oral History Interview Transcription

Narrator Name: [McElduff, Hanna]

Interviewer Name: [Triplett, Cam]

Date of Interview: [03/29/2022]

Location of Interview: [Home] (Remote Interview - Zoom Recording)

Acronyms:

[HM = Hanna McElduff (narrator)]

[CT= Cam Triplett (interviewer)]

[UCA = University of Central Arkansas]

UALR= University of Arkansas- Little Rock

RSO= Registered Student Organization

ASU= Arkansas State University

Interview Summary

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Hanna McElduff conducted by Cam Triplett on March 29th, 2022. This interview is part of the Schedler Honors College Oral History project.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

CT [00:00:02] This is Cam Triplett with the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project. Today is March 29th, 2022, and I am interviewing Hanna McElduff, who is at her home in Columbia, Mo. We will be talking about Hanna McElduff's experience leading up to, during, and after their time in the Schedler Honors College. Please state your name and age for the recording.

HM [00:00:34] My name is Hannah McElduff. I am 25 years old.

CT [00:00:39] And what year did you enter the Honors College

HM [00:00:42] Fall 2014.

CT [00:00:46] And what year did you graduate?

HM [00:00: 53] 2018

CT [00:00:54] I just realized that I slightly mispronounced your name, and I am so sorry.

HM [00:00:58] Totally fine. I get it all the time. It is totally fine. No worries [laughter].

Speaker 2 [00:01:14] Where are you from?

HM [00:01:20] I was born in Helena, Arkansas, but I spent most of my life in Maumelle, Arkansas. Before moving to Conway for UCA.

CT [00:01:33] Did you like Maumelle? Was it a good place to grow up?

HM [00:01:37] Yes. Yes, I would not live there now, but it was it was fine [laughter].

HM [00:01:49] Yes, it is just your typical lake white flight suburban city.

CT [00:01:54] I lived in Maumelle and went to school there for a little bit. I went to the charter school there.

HM [00:02:03] My brother goes there. Did you have a good experience or a bad experience?

CT [00:02:13] As a minority, probably not the best.

HM [00:02:16] Yes. Yes, that is I have heard issues. There are issues. Yes, I am sorry about that.

CT [00:02:26] It is fine, it was only for a brief time.

HM [00:02:28] OK. Yes.

CT [00:02:31] So who are your parents?

HM [00:02:34] My parents are Mary Jo McElduff and Joe McElduff. They are both from Helena, Arkansas.

CT [00:02:44] And what did they do?

HM [00:02:47] My dad's a social worker and my mom's a nurse. She works at Children's Hospital in the oncology unit. My dad works at the VA, in Little Rock, and they have been doing that for as long as I can remember.

CT [00:03:05] Did their occupations have any impact on what you wanted to do?

HM [00:03:11] Sort of. So, growing up, I never could imagine myself having an actual job. I remember thinking before I knew what Sociology was at all. I remember thinking, "Man, I wish I could just learn about people." Then so finally, when I went to UCA, and I took a Sociology course, I was like, "Oh, this is what I have been wanting to do." I guess my dad's career. Well, I guess I could see myself being a social worker because that involves being around people and just making a difference in the world. I knew I did not want to be a nurse because I am super nervous about like health-related stuff [laughter]. I am not like a science and math-oriented person. It is very difficult for me to understand stem-related concepts. And so, I kind of like gravitated more towards humanities and social sciences. Once I started going to school.

CT [00:04:33] Do you have any siblings? Oh, You had a brother.

HM [00:04:36] Yes, exactly. I have an older sister. She is four years older than me and a younger brother, and he's currently 15. Yes, he is at the charter school. I am like 11 years older than him, so there is a little bit of a difference. But I and my sister are closer in age, we are just four years apart.

CT [00:05:05] What impact did your parents have on your education, like where they heavy on education?

HM [00:05:14] No, I mean, yes, like they encouraged me to like, you know, do my best. But I always loved school like I always really liked school. I enjoyed learning as a kid. I think I got a lot of self-esteem from being [finger quote] good at school [finger quote] because I was good at spelling stuff and like that. So, I think part of it was I enjoyed school because I just sincerely enjoyed it, but also I felt good about being quote-unquote good at school. So that also made me like it a little bit more.

But my parents, they encouraged that. I mean, but they were not like, super strict about it. My sister had a little bit of a more challenging time with school because she had an undiagnosed learning disability that they did not find out about until she was like in college. The focus on her on our family school-wise was on her because she was struggling and I kind of did my own thing because they did not really have to worry about the grades that I was making and stuff. Yes, I felt like I did not feel a whole lot of pressure from them to do all because I knew that if I did not do well, I would be fine because my sister did not make A's, but they still supported her and loved her and stuff.

CT [00:06:54] Did you have a favorite subject?

HM [00:07:00] [sigh] Yes. I loved English because I loved reading. I loved history; I did not really get to take a history class until high school because they teach social studies. I like social studies, but like I kind of wanted to go a little deeper with it. I remember feeling that way as a kid. So my subjects in elementary school and in high school and stuff, it was mostly English and History. Whenever I go to college, I was like, Sociology is my thing.

CT [00:07:42] And what was your high school experience like?

HM [00:07:46] Um, it was fine [laughter], it was high school. I went to Maumelle High School. I graduated in 2014. I went to North Little Rock High School for ninth grade, and I enjoyed it, but I transferred back to Maumelle high school because it was like the first year that the school opened, and it was like close to my house and I wanted to go to school with the people I had gone to school with for most of elementary school and middle school.

I would not say that the education prepared me well for college. Yes, and a lot of that just has to do with underfunded public schools, lack of resources, that sort of thing. But yes, I had really great history teachers and English teachers. I was lucky because those are the classes that I was interested in, the subjects I was interested in. But as far as my science classes and stuff, I did not really learn much of anything. And there were some classes that we did not do anything all year. We just kind of hung out [laughs]. Going from high school to college was kind of a shock. And I was very lucky because feel like school-type skills come naturally to me, so I was able to like catch up fairly quickly. But I know a lot of other people who graduated from Maumelle High had a really rough time transitioning to college because they were like totally unprepared for that level of studying and research and that sort of thing. I do not know. It was not a negative experience, necessarily, but I definitely think that I was not well-prepared for college by my high school.

CT [00:10:13] What was your experience like picking a college?

HM [00:10:19] It really came down to getting into the Honors College because I had applied to some schools. I think I applied to ASU and Arkansas Tech. I know I wanted to stay in-state. I also applied to John Brown University in Siloam Springs. I applied to UCA, heard about the Honors College from a friend, and heard that they do tuition remission and or waived tuition. I was like “cool, I would love to not have student debt,” and it just came down to that. That was the thing that

sold me. And I was like, OK, not having to have student debt would be a huge thing in 2014. So that was probably the main draw, getting into the Honors College.

CT [00:11:28] So Conway to Maumelle is not super far. So going a far distance, it was not really important to you when it came to College?

HM [00:11:40] No, I actually wanted to stay close to Maumelle mostly because my little brother was so young. When I went to college, he was about seven. So I wanted to stay in his life and be able to visit my parents. So that was another huge part of it was that I wanted to be close to them and be able to come home for his birthday or just like for the weekend or whatever. That was a huge part of it, too.

Speaker 2 [00:12:12] Awe, that is very sweet.

HM [00:12:15] He is my friend. We are pretty close.

CT [00:12:20] That is how I feel about my younger siblings. They are two hours away, but I love going home and seeing them.

So the application process, do you remember what that was like and what that entails?

HM [00:12:35] Yes, I was so stressed. I do not remember applying to any other Colleges except for applying to the Honors College because of the essay requirement. Did you still have to do that, the Elbow essay when you applied? Yes. So, I will never forget that because I remember getting frustrated because I was like, "These other Colleges are not asking me to do all this like. I really do not feel like doing this." I really did not want to do it because I was just being lazy. I just did not want to do the work. I remember sitting down and reading the Elbow essay. These are huge words

that nobody uses and stuff, and then I remember moving from like resentment and annoyance to this was actually kind of interesting.

I actually have I have my students now read that essay when I teach classes, sometimes. I have only done it in some classes. Trying on an idea and seeing how it fits. It does not necessarily mean that you adopt that idea, but to just like fill it out. I think that it has been hugely valuable for me.

Even now, as I am navigating grad school, encountering all of these complex ideas and like some stuff. I feel like I go back to that essay, and it is so different from how I navigated learning before the Honors College. Before that, when I thought about critical thinking skills, I always thought about being presented with an idea. Like, OK, which part of this idea do I agree with? Which parts do I not agree with?”. I remember that essay itself like changed the way that I thought about being presented with the information, and I do not know if any of that makes sense. I feel like I am a little bit all over the place [laughter].

I think that was the first time I had been handed a complex idea or a new way of thinking about something. I was frustrated at first because I did not understand it, but I slowed down and I read it a little longer. Then I like asked myself, “What do I think about this? How am I reacting to this? How am I responding to this information?” I feel like that was the first time I have encountered learning that was curious, I guess, rather than just being presented with information and memorizing it. It was more I want to explore this idea; I want to like test it. I want to get creative with it. I feel like that is pretty illustrative of how my experience in the Honors College was is like, there is so much creativity, so much taking risks, and trying on new ideas. And it was just exciting. And I really love that about it. I forget what the original question was. I kind of went off on a tangent [laughter].

CT [00:17:00] Elbow had a similar effect on me. I have never been presented with an idea that I really had to think through. Yes, it is great.

CT [00:17:26] Do you remember much about I² day?

HM [00:17:34] Yes, I do [laughter]. I was so nervous. I remember I was late. I remember coming in late and sitting down, sitting at whichever was the first available seat. And I was like, “Oh my gosh, I hope nobody noticed that I came in late.” Well, it turns out I sat down next to Donna Bowman, and she gave the main speech. I was like, “Oh, no, I am not going to get it.” [laughter] Obviously, that was not the case, but it was like a roller coaster of emotions that day.

I remember the interview was with Allison Wallace. It was like a roundtable interview. I do not know if they still do that. But it was like a group of us, I thought it was to be one on one interviews, I think. And so I was really nervous about sitting in a room with one other person and a professor. Since they structured it like a class was, it alleviates all of the anxiety for me. I do not remember all we talked about, but I just remember having fun. I remember being like, “This is fun. I am really enjoying this.”

Allison is great. She just had a way of presenting something in a way I had never even thought about before. I think I remember one thing that she said was she asked us— I do not even remember the relevance of this to the topic that we were talking about. But she said something like “How do we measure space?” Like if you are driving somewhere, how do you measure how far it is? I was like, “well, I guess miles.” And she was like, “Well, yes, but also in time.” Maumelle is 30 minutes away from Conway or whatever. That is a small thing, but I was like, Oh, wow, you are right. That was interesting.

I just remember that excitement of thinking of something in a new way. Also, Allison, I was super intimidated by her because she is so smart, and she is Allison. But then I also remember her making the discussion feel open. I remember that asking questions, asking for clarification, and just having a discussion were encouraged. I had never been in a context like that. I had only been in the context of learning where it was, just like you sit in a seat and listen to a lecture. I had never taken

an active part of it, so that was really exciting for me. So that part is the part of the I² interview that stands out the most because I went in super nervous, and then I kind of got lost in the excitement of the discussion that we were having in the group interview, and I was like, “that was pretty fun.”

I also remember the group lecture. I remember that Donna spoke, and she did a lecture on the Elbow essay, she did a lecture on that. Then the metaphor of the wardrobe and going in and trying on the sweater to see if it fits right. I remember really enjoying that, too. At that point, I was also very nervous because we had to write a pencil and paper. I remember being super insecure about what I wrote because I was like, this is not right. I am not interpreting this right. Then I went back years later when they uploaded the essay that we wrote on-site to each HCOL [Honors student portal] and I looked at it and I was like, “That is not great, but it is not bad [laughter].” It is hard look at something you wrote years ago [laughter].

CT[00:22:37] It was seven minutes.

HM [00:22:41] Yes [laughs].

CT[00:22:42] And I was scared.

HM [00:22:46] Oh man. Yes, I remember I was so nervous. That was probably the most like, nerve-wracking part of it. I expected the interview to be way more nerve-racking, but that was the part that really got me was like, I am not getting in [laughs]. They are not going to let me in [laughs].

CT [00:23:07] I was the same way. So I² day, it offers your first look into Honors. You get to look at the dorms, you get to sit in your interview, which is like the classes. The big group is the lecture that Donna does, it mimics that. What were your first impressions of the Honors College?

HM [00:23:29] I was pretty intimidated because I was around a bunch of smart kids and I was like, Oh my gosh, these guys are all smarter than me. I was also really excited about the range of weirdness that the Honors College has. There are people that are interested in all of these, like really obscure things. I found that really exciting because there were people who were just like— There was a person I met who was super into plays and musicals and knew a whole bunch of stuff about that and I did not know anything about that. There are people who are super into science and medicine and like all of these developments in the field. I think I sensed from the other people around me that there was just excited about learning. That was really cool because I had never been in a place where weirdness was celebrated, and it was what made you interesting. So that was very exciting to me. It kind of made me want to be more weird like I want a super obscure interest [laughter].

I do not know. Yes, it was cool getting to meet new people. Also, I was super fascinated by the professors and that we could call them by their first names. I was like, What? What do you mean? I can call you Doug. I can call you, Allison? I am not used to that. I think, also my interaction with the professors on I² day, I felt like they treated students as equal contributors to the knowledge, if that makes sense. Like they are presenting something and now we get to interact with it. Fill it out. But they are also playing with the idea and making sense of it along with us. They are still leading the learning, but everybody's perspective is valued, and you are encouraged to ask questions or criticize or to whatever. That was really exciting to me, too, was to be around adults who thought that you had something valuable to contribute to the discussion.

CT [00:26:39] You mentioned a little bit about having imposter syndrome st I² Day. Did that stay with you while you were in the Honors College?

HM [00:26:51] It still happens [laughter]. Imposter syndrome is probably something that everybody experiences. I definitely experienced it at a maximum on I² day because I was like going, they are not going to let me in here. All these kids are smarter than me [laughs].”

I do not know. As far as the Honors College. That went away a little bit towards the end, as I got to know more people, got to like learn where people were coming from, and also realized that they also felt the same way. They also felt like they did not fit in or they did not belong, or they did not deserve to be here, or whatever. When you realize that everybody feels that way, it feels a little less scary [laughs].

CT [00:27:53] I was going to ask, did you have any advice for those that are dealing with imposter syndrome? Because I know the cohort before me, after me, as well as myself deals with it, even though I am a Junior in the Honors College?

HM [00:28:07] Yes. As far as advice, I do not know because I still feel like it. I am in my fourth or fifth year in the Ph.D. program. I do not know when they are going to find out that I do not belong here, but I am just putting that off for as long as possible [laughs]. I guess my advice would be to recognize that everybody feels like an impostor. Also, I am not saying be vulnerable with every single person but sharing that you do not feel like you belong or maybe you feel like an impostor. There is solidarity in that when you share with somebody else, because more than likely, they also feel the same thing. I have not run into one person who feels like they are not faking it, you know [laughs]? I do not know. I guess it is nice to feel that way with somebody else. Then if you can

laugh about it, I feel like you can get through anything. That is kind of how I deal with the hard things, I just find a way to laugh about it [laughter].

CT [00:29:41] That is mine, too. As long as you can make a joke about it, it is fine.

HM [00:29:46] Yes, exactly [laughter].

CT [00:29:49] Do you have any advice for potential applicants?

HM [00:29:53] I think everybody should apply because even just the process of applying is super valuable, even just reading that Elbow essay. Even if I did not get into the Honors College, that still shapes how I think and how I learn. There is so much impact that the Honors College has had on the way that I think about complex topics or even like day-to-day stuff. Even how I interact with new ideas. I think there is no drawback to applying. Even if you do not get in, it is always a good idea to put yourself out there. If it does not work out, at the very least you learn something about yourself and you learned something about what you want and what you do not want. That sort of thing.

CT [00:31:08] So did you attend Retreat?

HM [00:31:13] Yes.

CT [00:31:15] Do you remember Retreat?

HM [00:31:19] Yes, we went to Petit Jean. I do not remember a whole lot of it. I remember playing Murder in the Dark. Have you ever played that?

CT [00:31:28] I have not, but I am interested

HM [00:31:30] It is so fun. We went into one of the— I think there were like cabins or something. I am going to see if I can remember this correctly [laughter]. It was so much fun. So you have one person who is the murderer and you turn all the lights off and the murderer goes around and taps people in the head. If you get tapped on the head, you are murdered. If you get murdered, you lay down on the floor until somebody bumps into your body. After they find your body, you scream “murder in the dark” and then everybody has to guess who the murderer is. It is so much fun [laughter].

CT [00:32:15] That sounds really fun.

HM [00:32:17] We used to do it in the chapel on campus, but then they started locking the door. Have you ever been to the chapel at UCA?

CT [00:32:26] I forgot you can go in there.

HM [00:32:28] They started locking the door at night because we used to go in at night and play Murder in the Dark [laughter]. I do not know if it was because of us. But, I remember playing a game at Honor’s retreat, t was super fun.

CT [00:32:46] Now I need a reason to get some Honors people together.

HM [00:32:50] I highly recommend it. It is so fun [laughs].

CT [00:32:54] It sounds great.

Housing, where did you state your years at UCA?

HM [00:33:04] I stayed in Farris for the first two years. So, all the freshmen are on the fourth floor, right? Is it the fourth floor?

CT [00:33:17] Yes. Well. It is mixed.

HM [00:33:20] OK, well, whichever one it was, I was on the one below it so I actually did not interact with a whole bunch of other Honors kids until like later on. Not my freshman year, me and my suitemates just kind of hung out with each other. But later on, I got to know and make friendships with more Honors kids. But yes, I was in Farris the first two years, the third year I moved. I lived in an off-campus house that I shared with too many people. Then the fourth year, I moved back to campus, but it was the Bear Village apartments.

CT [00:34:16] What did you like about living in Farris, if anything?

HM [00:34:19] I liked it. Looking back, I wish that I would have participated more in the stuff that the other Honors kids were doing because everyone was always doing something like games or just hanging out or whatever. Me and my suitemates just kind of stuck to each other. We did not really branch out that much. So looking back, I wish I would have branched out a little bit more. But I really like I love my sweet man. We had so much fun and some of my favorite memories are from that year, or those two years, I was living in Farris. I enjoyed it.

CT [00:35:00] Did you all have peer coaches and mentors?

HM [00:35:04] Yes. And I am trying to remember who mine was. We saw a lot of Caleb Denton and Colton Reinke, but I do not know if they were officially assigned to us. I just remember seeing them a lot and they were the year ahead of me. There has got to be someone else, but I can not remember [laughs].

CT [00:35:34] Do you still talk to your freshman suitemates?

HM [00:35:38] Yes, I do. I do. We still have a group chat. I check in every now and then. One of them is my best friend since second grade, so we talk all the time. The other two, I do not talk to quite as much, but we all still chat every now and then.

CT [00:35:56] That is nice that you got into Honors with a friend.

HM [00:35:58] I know we got so lucky. It was actually really special for us because we kind of drifted apart in high school and did not talk to each other much. We were best friends, second grade, all throughout middle school, but in high school, we drifted apart. Then we both found out that we were applying to the Honors College and both of us got in. We were like “we are rooming together.” So it kind of reignited our friendship and we were best friends again after that, so it was really sweet

CT [00:36:33] Yay. Did you room with her for all of your time in Honors?

HM [00:36:39] Yes, I think there is just one year that we did not live together. I think that was the second year. We both had different roommates, but then we came back the third year and lived together.

CT [00:36:55] So were you involved in any of the like organizations that Honors has like Honors Council? Or were you a peer coach or a mentor?

HM [00:37:06] I do not think so. I feel like I might have been a mentor, but I do not remember if I was not or not. I feel like I applied. I feel like I remember applying, but I do not remember if I was or not. So that is probably not helpful, but that is all I remember [laughs].

CT [00:37:31] Were you a part of anything outside of Honors?

HM [00:37:35] Oh no, just the academic Honor societies, like I was in the Sociology and the History Honors societies, which we did not do a whole lot except for like host speakers and attend presentations and stuff like that.

CT [00:37:58] Did you have a favorite speaker?

HM [00:38:01] Yes. Outside of the Honors College? Yes, Alpha Kappa Delta, which is the Sociology Honors program, hosted Dr. John Kirk from UALR to come and speak about race and racism in Arkansas. I am trying to remember what exactly the topic was that he spoke on, but I remember it was 2016, so there was a lot of conversation about the Trump election and just a lot of feelings. I remember him presenting the history and being like, OK, this makes sense that this would happen. It is not unsurprising that something like this would happen, or that it is not unsurprising that racist things would happen in the United States because this is a pattern. It is built into the structure. Like I said, I do not remember exactly the topic of the lecture, but I remember being like, OK, like this makes sense. And it helped me to process that because like as a white 19, 20 year old, the narrative that had been fed about American history is like, "That is not who we are. We are not racist. We are not all these things." I think hearing that lecture was like, OK, that is just

a narrative that I was fed, and these other things that are true. Which is that racism is embedded into the structure of all of our institutions. This is why things are happening that are frightening or surprising.

CT [00:40:26] Are you frozen?

HM [00:40:34] Sorry about that. I do not know what happened.

CT [00:40:39] I wanted to ask you a little bit about going to College when Trump first got in, that was a really big event. How was that?

HM [00:40:53] I remember the day after he was elected and just being shocked. Like, I really did not think that that would happen. I remember I was over at some friend's house. We had some people over, just watching the results live and I was like, This is not happening. Like, this cannot be happening. This man cannot be the president of the United States. Are you kidding me? I remember just being just absolutely shocked. I remember everybody around me was shocked too, at least the people that I encountered.

I remember I was taking a Spanish class and went to class that day, and my professor was like, "Hey, guys, nobody's thinking about Spanish today. It is fine. Do not worry about it. If you need space to talk, let's do this. If you want to leave, you can leave. We are going to work through this." And that was really nice because it was really difficult to do normal things that day because it was all anybody was talking about or thinking about. It was it was nice to just be able to express that shock and see that other people felt that way too. I think we had one person in the class who had a more conservative viewpoint. I have always been super anti-Trump. This person was just like, "well, I do not think it is the end of the world." He was not pro-Trump. Other people in the class expressed why this is actually really scary. Like people of color, LGBTQ people were super

frightened, rightfully so. Just because after his election, just the spark in hate crimes and the hateful rhetoric that followed in 2016. I feel like we had a really interesting discussion where I felt like this person, who was a white male— And I went to high school with him and he is a really sweet guy, but I saw him think about other people's perspectives on this and how it affected them, and then I think he was like, OK, like I can see how like, you might have a different perspective on this because I am not in danger because of this, but another person might feel threatened because this person who represents all these things is the president now.

This was a big thing, I forgot to mention this in the pre-interview, but I did try to start a—

CT [00:44:49] [Interruption] No.

HM [00:44:55] Can you hear me okay? I am so sorry about that. What did you say?

CT [00:45:04] I said we are good [laughs].

HM [00:45:06] I have got a really cheap internet plan [laughter]. Where did I? Where did I get lost?

CT [00:45:20] You tried to start something.

HM [00:45:23] Yes, a registered student organization called the Student Political Action Resource Committee. Which was really exciting, is not it? I forgot about this. It kind of flopped [laughs]. But it was nice to do something at the time in 2016. So, me and my friend Lillian McEntire, who was also in the Honors College, we really wanted to do something. I was like “I feel super powerless at this moment and like, I hate this. I just want to do something.” And she is like a superstar. I do not know if this is still active at UCA, but she started the Food Recovery Network chapter at UCA to eliminate food waste. She is super good at like organizational skills, like getting stuff done. So I

was like, she is going to be the person, if want to do something, I want to do it with her [laughs]. So she and I emailed Donna and, we were like, “Hey, we have this idea. We feel super powerless as far as our political power and like our voice, we want to do something, but we do not know what to do. I also feel like a lot of other students do not know what to do, but also probably feel the same way. Like just powerless, I guess. And we really want to learn together how we can participate in the political process and make our voices heard.” And Donna was amazing, she was super excited about the idea. She also had like similar kinds of feelings, obviously like and she is also super knowledgeable about how to interact or do public advocacy stuff like that. She had lots of connections. She had like people come and talk to us and like and train us. So basically, what the organization was, was we were going to meet together and write emails and make phone calls to our senators, representatives, that sort of thing. Get involved in local politics as far as Conway as a city. Just figure out what is going on there. So to what extent can we do something? It was really exciting and also really like cathartic because it ended up kind of flopping because it was like our junior or senior year and people got busy and life happens. That was like how we as friends, or as members of the Honors College, tried to make sense of that. So it was cool when it was active. I am still surprised that we did that or that I would do that because I have always been kind of like a passive, quiet person, but I have like big feelings about the things that are happening in the world. So I am still proud of my 19-year-old self for doing that because I know that it was really hard for her [laughter].

CT [00:49:27] It takes a lot to create an RSO, especially when dealing with that during that time.

HM [00:49:33] Yes, I learned RSOs are difficult.

CT [00:49:40] Yes. I felt like that organization should be brought back. I hope this somebody does bring it back. I think it would be very helpful.

HM [00:49:48] Yes, yes, for sure. I learned so much like just getting together. We did not really do anything too complicated, we just got together and were like, OK, I am going to contact this senator because I am worried about this bill that is happening. Or even if somebody came and were like, I do not know what is going on. Then people were there who could be like “this is happening, and I do not like this” or “I do like this”, and I am going to call them. It was an opportunity to learn about stuff that was happening in the government. So it was cool.

CT [00:50:24] I am going to pitch this to somebody.

HM [00:50:28] Good, that would make me so happy [laughter].

CT [00:50:31] I want to bring this back because I know there is a big push for young adults to get into politics or at least know what is going on around them, but a lot of us do not. A lot of us do not understand the political jargon.

HM [00:50:45] Or even where to start. Yes, because that was what my thing was like, I do not even know what to do. I know that is how most people feel because we do not learn about it. Like, you have to really go out and look for it if you want to now.

It does feel empowering to know that you can do something, even if you know that your impact is limited, but at least it is something.

CT [00:51:25] And I wanted to ask you a little bit about your Honor's education, the Cores, right? Those are the four that remain the same for everybody. Do you have a favorite or most memorable Core?

HM [00:51:40] Oh, yes. I do not know which one to pick. They were all so memorable. The core was the first four semesters, right? OK, so that does not include junior year, that helps me.

I had Core I with Allison Wallace. Am I breaking up?

CT [00:52:13] No, you are still good.

HM [00:52:15] My screen kind of slowed down for a second, I just want to make sure.

Probably Core I with Allison. It was super formative for me because it is like I had never read Philosophy before and I was like, Philosophy is not for me because even if I try to read it, I am not going to understand it and it is not going to be exciting to me. But I learned that it actually was really interesting. I just remember being really excited about new ideas and like how thinking has changed over time and how people centuries ago, were wrestling with the same stuff that bothers us in the present day. So that was really cool. It felt like we were talking about something that really mattered. I also really enjoyed the fact that we could take such unexpected, interesting classes. I think it was Core III that I took Organic Gardening with Allison. That may no be right, is it Core III? I do not know.

CT [00:53:49] I think that is when you can start taking the customized classes.

HM [00:53:56] Is that not a Core one?

CT [00:54:00] I do not know if she still teaches Organic Gardening. Or if I just did not take it.

HM [00:54:08] Okay [laughs].

CT [00:54:10] But I took her for Core IV.

HM [00:54:14] Do you know if Donna's film class is one of the Cores? III or IV?

CT [00:54:23] I do not know if it currently is, but I do know I have had people in the past talk about it. That is was a thing.

HM [00:54:33] OK, I think Donna's film class, I think I took that as a core class. I think it was Core IV. I could be wrong about that, but I loved that class and I also loved the gardening class like both of those were, oh my gosh, so fascinating. I felt really cool. Taking those classes was like, I am doing cool stuff and I am learning interesting things. I am learning about the world. I do not know. Those were those are two of my favorite classes, at the Honors College.

CT [00:55:12] Did you have a favorite reading or favorite project?

HM [00:55:20] That is a good question. I really enjoyed doing the film analysis essay for Donna's class. I remember I procrastinated for that final project. I was supposed to compare two movies, and I think it was Rushmore and the Virgin Suicides. I had seen the movies. I remember I stayed up all night, watching the movies and writing my essay, and I was so mad like, I should have done this. I hate staying up all night, I hate pulling all-nighters. I am miserable. But I really enjoyed just watching both of those movies straight through and then just writing an essay. I still remember when I watched those movies. They were ways of portraying youth or music or that sort of thing. So it was really cool to be able to like practice interacting with media and asking questions about what it represents and how are these forms of media portraying this same thing, but differently? I felt like I gained a lot of really practical skills from that film analysis class that I still benefit from.

I am trying to think of the more classic Core I and Core II readings I remember we read an excerpt of Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison. Well, I started getting interested in race and racism in

the US, probably like sort of in high school after Trayvon Martin was killed, but my interest grew in College. But I remember reading *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, and it really affected me. That was one that, like I said, go back to you sometimes in like just the way that it is portrayed. Now I know more about sociological theories of race and Dubois' double consciousness and stuff that is more theoretical. But the way that Ralph Ellison portrays it in the novel through a fictional story is really moving, and it is really powerful. I am really glad that they said they had us read that because it really shaped the way that I think about experiencing race and racism from the perspective of a black man. I do not remember when it was written, but it was one of my favorite readings.

CT [00:58:55] *Invisible Man* was one of my favorites as well.

HM [00:59:01] Yes, it is so good.

CT [00:59:03] It was really good. Oh, before we move on from the Cores, I feel like it is very important to ask somebody who went to Core I, the search for the self. Where is this self-located? Where is the self-located for you?

HM [00:59:24] I will never forget that essay. That is another one that I have my students read when I teach *Self in Society*. Well, I do not have them read it, but I explain the story about like the guy existing inside his brain and stuff. I do not know the answer [laughter]. I have no clue. From a sociological perspective, I think that a lot of myself is shaped by my history and my experiences, and the social structures that I was born into. But I also know that my sister was born into those very same like structures and history and stuff, and she has a very different personality than I do, so I do not know [laughter].

CT [01:00:38] That is fair. I want to talk a little bit about your Capstone. What was your thesis?

HM [01:00:44] It was called— Let me see if I remember the title, it was too long. The Historical Construction of Whiteness and its Impact on College Students Attitudes Towards Race. I think that is what it was called. I could be wrong about that. Have you ever read Racism without Racists by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva?

CT [01:01:19] I have not, but I will make note of it.

HM [01:01:21] It is so good. It is called Racism without Racists, and the author is Eduardo Bonilla Silva. I am trying to think of the subtitle. Let's see if I can look it up. Yes. The subtitle is Colorblind Racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States.

CT [01:01:55] I know that one is going to be good.

HM [01:01:57] It is so good. So basically, I modeled my thesis, more or less, after that book because when I read it, it changed everything. It changed the way I think about race and my racial identity and my place in the history of race in the United States. It also helps me to understand how the way that I think about race has been shaped by my upbringing and by my culture in a way that has trained me to not think about race or to think that I am neutral, I guess if that makes sense. So what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva does is he conducted a bunch of interviews with a bunch of white folks and asked them what they thought about racism, social problems, and social problems relating to race, and then he analyzed their responses. He basically argued that the white folks that he interviewed had, he called colorblind rhetoric towards race, where they explained like disparities in opportunities between white people, people of color in a way that absolved them of the responsibility to address race. It would be something like he might ask one of the white people that he was interviewing, “So how can you explain the lack of access to resources that black folks in the

United States face compared to that of white folks like or maybe like the discrimination faced?"

There are statistics that show that black people in the United States are less likely to get called back.

I might get this wrong, but the statistics are a black man is less likely to get pulled back from an

interview than a white man who has been imprisoned. So he would present them with these

problems and he would ask them, "Well, how do you make sense of this? How do you explain it?"

What he noticed was the white people that he was interviewing would often explain this problem by

saying, "Well, it is the individual's responsibility, they did not work hard enough."

Sometimes they would argue that people who came from black culture did not know how to

work hard. It would draw on these racist stereotypes, but it was in a way that did not sound racist. It

was really weird, complex, like the rhetoric that was happening that was totally upholding like a

racist understanding of the world. But to the white respondent, it was like in a way that did not

make them feel racist or it did not make them feel like they were saying anything that was wrong.

So that is Bonilla- Silva's work.

I wanted to do more formal interviews, but I was not able to do that. I did a survey. My

advisor was Doug George in the Sociology department, and I went to all of his classes and gave my

survey to all his students. It was open-ended questions that they could respond to in their own

words. I tried to frame it like Bonilla- Silva's questions like, "did you experience segregation in

high school, or did you notice racial segregation?"

{Interruption}

CT [01:07:20] I got so scared [laughter].

HM [01:07:23] I thought someone was going to murder me. I am going to shut that. Cats are so

creepy [laughter].

Anyway, so the other part of the project was that I was starting to understand whiteness and

more specifically, white normativity. So the idea is that on a day-to-day basis, I am not required to

think about my racial identity. The situations I am in did not demand that I acknowledge or think

about it. So there is this idea that white people from the time that we are born, are not made to feel out of place in social situations because of our race. We are socialized by parents, by educators, by the media, all of these agents of socialization that say “you are a neutral person. Your racial identity is whatever.” As a white person, it feels optional to think about race, and that is not the case for people who are not white.

I think this was it was either Pamela Perry or Robin D'Angelo who talked about white racial literacy. It kind of paired with this colorblind racism rhetoric. I was really interested in people, white people around me who were not confronted with uncomfortable ideas about race in the United States until they were like 18, 19, 20 in 2016, which was my context. I was surprised by how emotional people got when talking about race. I mean, I was not surprised because I have felt that emotion before. I think it was Pamela Perry who talked about white racial literacy, but it is this idea when a white person is not being in a situation where they have to talk about or confront racial dynamics until they are like 19 or 20 is way behind a person of color who was in a situation where they were confronted with racial dynamics at the age of two, three or four.

I would get frustrated by all of the white folks around me. Obviously, I was at the same, I had the same learning because I did not start thinking about these things still way later on in my life because I did not have to. But like these are the things that Bonilla- Silva and Pamela Perry and all these sociologists were interested by was like the vitriol, the emotions that come out when white folks are confronted with uncomfortable truths about race and the history of racism in the United States.

So I was really interested in that at the time in 2016 because of the Trump election. It, caused people to really show their true colors. I wanted to explore that. So some of the questions that I asked in the survey were like, What, to you, does it mean to be white? What does it mean to be a person of color?” I remember in Doug asking the class “What is what does it mean to be white?” And I was like, “What? What do you mean? Like I do not know. I did not think it meant anything.” I do not have any like ideas in my head about like what whiteness means. I just thought

it was normal. And so that made me realize that in my brain, I imagine White as the default. Like when I am reading a book, if the author does not clarify whether this character is black or white or Asian or indigenous, my brain will read it as white. That is why I love Doug because he totally changed the way that I thought about— Oh, I do have a race, and it has shaped the way that I think about everything. It is all a part of the way that I was socialized. I do not know. That is kind of the gist of the project, but I really loved doing it. It really was so fun, and I learned a lot.

CT [01:13:29] I was able to pull up your thesis, and it looks incredibly interesting.

HM [01:13:34] Thank you [laughter].

CT [01:13:35] I will be reading it.

HM [01:13:47] I just tried to copy Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. I highly recommend *Racism without Racists*. I recommend it to every white person I encounter because he notices what is going on in our heads because of the way that whiteness is socialized. Not to get off on a tangent, but it made me feel like, oh, this is what I am doing. I feel exposed, but also like, it is good because I am learning, it is an uncomfortable read as a white reader, but it is very informative.

CT [01:14:40] I am definitely looking forward to reading both the book and your thesis. It sounds amazing.

So a little bit about after Honors, I wanted to ask, how do you think the Honors College has impacted your success as an adult after leaving?

HM [01:15:04] Oh my gosh, I did not realize how much of an impact the Honors College has had on me probably until pretty recently. So obviously it made me want to keep going to school because

I enjoyed it. Let me think about this. Not to get to on a tangent, but my upbringing was fairly evangelical white Christianity, but I was fairly steeped in the idea, even up until in College, that there is one truth. One objective truth. And if you do not believe in or accept that objective truth, then you are wrong. And there is something wrong with you.

The Honors College was the opposite of that because the Elbow essay asks you to try on ideas that maybe you do not fully agree with or maybe that do not feel good at first or maybe that do not make sense. It asked you to take on the perspective and to see what is true or what resonates or which parts you want to keep, I guess. You try it on, and you realize it does not feel so great.

Even now, I am thinking back to some of those times in the Honors College where I was confronted with an idea that was like, oh, if these people knew that I was thinking about this, I would be in trouble. People would be worried about whether I am going to hell or not, if I am thinking about like LGBTQ inclusion or whatever. That is just one example.

I feel like the Honors College helped me to learn how to maybe accept things that might seem contradictory. To not be afraid to explore new ideas. To not be afraid to confront scary ideas that may seem scary or unfamiliar. It helped me to not be afraid to confront the foundations of what I have always believed if that makes sense. I might be being a little vague, but basically, I think that the Honors College has given me tools to interrogate like, what exactly do I believe? Where does that belief come from? What is it founded in? What is it informed by? How has that belief been shaped by history and by different interpretations? How knowledge changes over time, that sort of thing.

And just being comfortable with like not settling on a black and white answer. I felt in the Honors College, I was always encouraged to keep digging and to be ok with uncertainty and to be ok with not finding a Clean-Cut answer to whatever question I had or whatever concept I was exploring. That might be kind of like a roundabout answer a little bit. But yes, that is kind of what I have been working through right now is just like questioning or deconstructing some of the religious beliefs that I have held for most of my life, which is like super hard. I feel like the Honors

College gave me really valuable tools to be able to do that and to not be afraid to ask scary questions [laughter].

CT [01:21:09] Before we closeout. Is there anything that you would like to go on the record or to go down in Honors history?

HM [01:21:19] Oh. Maybe just the Murder in the Dark [laughter]. It should be an Honors tradition because that is where I learned it and it is so much fun. I am trying to think of something else.

My time in the Honors College was so, so valuable. I want to be a professor and I want to create a classroom environment like that is my model for what I want to emulate in the future as a professor. To encourage students to ask questions and to be participants in their own learning and not just absorb the information and then write it. Because that was so different for me and so exciting for me as a student. I learned lots of valuable things, but it was the experience of doing the learning, like going gardening or watching a movie in Donna's class and writing a reaction to it. I felt like I was participating in my own learning, and I think that was the thing that I really want to try to emulate in the future as a professor.

Also, just the collaboration and the mentorship, and the professors being so open to just talking about whatever and exploring ideas further. I have never been in a university setting, so far, where that was normal, where people are just talking to their honors professors about some weird thing that they are interested in, so I think that that is really, really, really valuable. I hope to find it somewhere else, but it is a rare thing, and it is special, so it is really cool.

CT [01:23:47] Would you come back and teach at the Honors College?

HM [01:23:49] That would be my dream. Absolutely [laughter]. I would love that.

CT [01:23:58] I definitely believe that if there is an opening then you should try.

HM [01:24:03] Yes, absolutely. Without a question, I would. I would definitely apply [laughter].

CT [01:24:09] Before I say the outro, I just want to know how to pronounce your last name.

HM [01:24:14] Yes, it is McElduff.

CT [01:24:21] So I would like to thank you for your time, Hanna McElduff and this concludes our interview.

HM [01:24:28] Thanks so much.