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UNION
HONORS

UNION HONORS

is a program for high-achieving, academically motivated students who attend and graduate from UCNJ and then transfer to a four-year institution.



35+

Programs of study to choose from



40+

Classes offered as honors sections



3.64

Average GPA of current Union Honors students





Students in this program enroll in a UCNJ degree program and take honors courses to fulfill their general education and program requirements. Honors classes are limited to 20 students and are taught by dedicated faculty who emphasize critical thinking, analytical writing, and effective communication. Students who take these classes are exceptionally well prepared to transfer to four-year colleges and universities, to earn scholarships, and to be successful at their transfer institutions.



Union Honors students receive personalized advising and wrap-around professional support to ensure their success in the classroom and in the college community. Students in the Union Honors program are engaged with a community of scholars. They collaborate daily

with similarly focused peers in the Honors Lounge, at Honors events, and on projects in and out of the classroom.

Union Honors students serve as leaders of on-campus organizations, including the Academic Learning Center and Phi Theta Kappa. They frequently take advantage of research opportunities with faculty and staff. Union Honors students have also participated in Princeton University's Transfer Scholars Initiative. This engagement helps students build strong resumes and competitive applications when they apply to transfer institutions. Many Union Honors students have received scholarships, including the highly selective Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship, to support their studies.

For more information, visit www.ucc.edu/honors or contact a Union Honors Admissions Officer at honors@ucc.edu



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www.ucc.edu/honors



SEMINAR-STYLE CLASSES

Honors classes are small, seminar-style classes that promote student engagement. Classes are limited to 20 students and are taught by UCNJ's most distinguished faculty. Honors classes focus on a learner-centered pedagogy, enhancing critical thinking and inquiry.

Students are invited to present their work at an Honors Symposium held each Fall.



COMMUNITY

The Honors Lounge serves as the center of the Honors program. Students gather here for study sessions, game nights, meetings, and events.

Workshops, social events, alumni transfer panels, and faculty meet and greets are just a few ways that students can build relationships with faculty and peers.



ADVISING

Honors students have a dedicated advisor who offers personalized guidance to support their success. The advisor assists students from registration through graduation, helping them navigate campus resources and the transfer process.



TRANSFER

Graduates of the Union Honors program at UCNJ have transferred to top schools, including Columbia, Cornell, Princeton, Dartmouth, Rutgers, and Georgetown. These students receive significant support when applying to colleges and universities.

WE ARE PROUD TO INTRODUCE OUR DISTINGUISHED FACULTY:



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Academic Specialist
John Agar

John Agar earned his Bachelor's degree in Information Technology and Master's in Information Systems from the University of Phoenix. Currently, he is working towards his Doctorate in Management with an Information Systems concentration. His research area is applied artificial intelligence. He is a Level 1 certified Python programmer from the Python Institute, a certified Associate Software Developer from the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, and a certified Google Cloud - Generative AI Leader.

Agar has taught almost every computer science course at UCNJ including Algorithms, Systems Analysis and Design, Database

Management Systems, and Computer Programming Fundamentals. He serves as co-advisor for the Computer Science 2 Cybersecurity Club and regularly mentors undergraduate research. Most of his courses focus on real world-based activities culminating in group projects in place of written exams. He enjoys seeing the creativity and collaboration from his students as they develop working applications. Teaching honors students allows him to continue this practice while also encouraging additional collaboration between Computer Science and non-Computer Science majors to tackle real-world problems and needs.



Dr. Mandana Ahsani

Dr. Mandana Ahsani is a Senior Professor of Psychology. Dr. Ahsani has a BS in Psychology from the National University of Iran, a MEd in Computer Assisted Instruction from the University of Illinois, and a MA and PhD in Cognitive/ Experimental Psychology from Rutgers University. She has served as the Chair of the Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee, the Co-chair of the Professional Development Committee, and advisor to Psi Beta and the Psychology Club. Dr. Ahsani was the Co-chair of the Middle States Accreditation Study and a former advisor for Iota Xi chapter of Phi Theta Kappa international honor society. She is the winner of the 2011 Paragon Award for New Advisors from the Phi Theta Kappa International Headquarters and the recipient of

the Neblett Award for Educational Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

Dr Ahsani's classes include General Psychology, Child Psychology, Lifespan Development, Social Psychology, and Social Research Methods. Her honors classes are seminar based and encourage critical thinking, problem solving, and communicating through research, presentations, and group projects. Honors students find this approach challenging, yet stimulating, and are ultimately well-prepared for their future academic and career endeavors.



Dr. Len Anyanwu

Dr. Len Anyanwu earned a PhD in Economics in 1990 from the University of Texas at Dallas, where he also completed his MA and BA degrees. He joined UCNJ in 1999 and currently serves as the Senior Professor of Economics and Business Management in the SSBH Division. He is also the president of the UCNJ chapter of the American Association of University Professors. Previously, he was a Research Professor at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) in the School of Industrial Management. His consulting work includes collaborations with the Economic Directorate of NATO, the Nigerian Ministry of Science & Technology, the Educational Testing Service (ETS), and various corporate and public entities.

Dr. Anyanwu's scholarship focuses on technological change, competitiveness, and globalization. He served as Co-principal Investigator for a substantial multi-year Pew Foundation grant involving a comprehensive and longitudinal analysis of inter-sector technology transfer in the U.S. His research has been published in major journals, including the *Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Transactions on Engineering Management*. His recent publications address fiscal and monetary policy reforms in Nigeria, as well as new technology-driven global competitiveness.

In his Economics and Business Management courses within the Union Honors program, Dr. Anyanwu strives to cultivate an environment where students become active learners who critically engage with real-world complexities through evidence-based scholarship. He remains dedicated to connecting economic theory to practical applications and is consistently motivated by the positive feedback from his students.



Dr. Joyce Maxwell

Dr. Joyce Maxwell is Professor of English at UCNJ Union College of Union County, NJ, where she has been teaching for twenty-six years. She holds a doctorate in English Education from Teacher's College, Columbia University. At UCNJ, she teaches Introduction to Composition, Introduction to Literature, Dynamics of Communication, and Public Speaking. She is a qualitative researcher specializing in narrative inquiry, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, and (auto)ethnography.

As well, Dr. Maxwell is a Fulbright Specialist with a background in Peace Education. She has taught, conducted research, and facilitated workshops in Poland, Rwanda, Uganda, South Sudan, and South Africa. On campus, Dr. Maxwell co-advises the Iota Xi Chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the Caribbean Culture Club, and the College Novel.



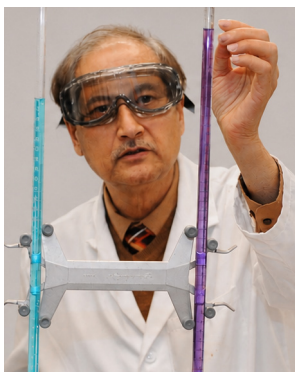


Academic Specialist
Alexis Bouza

Academic Specialist Alexis Bouza earned both a Bachelor of Science and a Master's Degree in Chemical Engineering from Simón Bolívar University in Venezuela. Prior to joining UCNJ, Bouza served as an Associate Professor in the Department of Thermodynamics and Transport Phenomena at Simón Bolívar University for 27 years. His primary research interests include Prediction of Fluid Properties through Equations of State, Process Separation, and the Modeling of Refining Reactors for Hydrotreatment and Hydrocracking processes.

At UCNJ, Bouza is dedicated to teaching foundational and advanced physics courses, including PHY 111 (Mechanics), PHY 111 (Mechanics Lab), and PHY 201 (Electricity and Magnetism). He plays an active role in mentoring STEM majors through research projects and is a strong advocate for undergraduate research

initiatives. Bouza focuses on integrating real-world applications and daily life examples into the curriculum to drive student engagement. He particularly values the “physics studio” model and honors tracks, as these learner-centered environments foster the critical thinking and scientific reasoning skills essential for future engineers and scientists.



Dr. Mushtaq Khan

Dr. Mushtaq Khan earned his three post baccalaureate degrees in chemistry (PhD, MPhil, and MSc) from Aligarh Muslim University, India in 1986, 1983 and 1981. He worked as a chemistry instructor at Wesley College, Hyderabad, India for two years and then came to the United States in 1989 to work as a post-doctoral research associate at South Dakota State University. He worked at Ferris State University and Oklahoma State University before coming to UCNJ in 1993. His research involves isolation, identification, and synthesis of natural products, and he has published several research papers in peer-reviewed journals.

Dr. Khan teaches Organic Chemistry I and II in the Union Honors program. Organic chemistry is a tough subject for the majority of students, but Dr. Khan encourages students to first understand the fundamental concepts, apply logic and critical thinking, and then explain how and why organic reactions occur. His approach to teaching organic chemistry includes group presentations, a research paper, and poster presentations. Dr. Khan's goal is to prepare his students to shake off their initial jitters and get ready to confidently and logically solve organic chemistry problems. His Honors students consistently perform well above the national average on the national exam developed by the American Chemical Society.



**Academic Specialist
Michael DePaul**

Academic Specialist Michael DePaul teaches courses in Music Appreciation, Musicianship, Music Theory, and Keyboard Studies at UCNJ. He also teaches an Honors Music Appreciation course, providing an enriched academic experience for high-achieving students. Since joining the college, Michael has developed and established the music program at UCNJ. He oversees program operations, mentors the Music Club, and collaborates with the Dramatics Society in support of its annual spring musical productions.

As a composer, DePaul has written music across a variety of mediums, including choral, piano, and electronic works. His compositions have been performed at venues throughout the United States, with notable performances at the Kimmel Center and Carnegie Hall. DePaul holds a Bachelor of Arts

degree in Music Composition and Music Technology from Temple University and a Master of Music degree from The Boston Conservatory.



**Associate Professor
Sherry Heidary**

Associate Professor Sherry Heidary began working at UCNJ in July 2007. She has held several leadership positions at the college including serving as the Chair of the Chemistry Department, Chair of the Standard I Middle States Self Study committee, Faculty Advisor to the Student Government Association, Faculty Advisor to Phi Theta Kappa Honors Society, and Faculty Advisor to the American Honors Council. She is currently a commissioner to the Union County Commission on the Status of Women, Union County YWCA Board member, and a Trustee on the Union County College Foundation Board.

Professor Heidary is the first recipient of the prestigious Fiat Lux Award in 2017, and a two-time recipient of the Dr. Richard and Barbara Neblett Prize Award for Educational Excellence in Teaching and Learning. In

2015, she was awarded the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) Excellence Award in Teaching, Learning, and Leadership at Community and Technical Colleges. She was also awarded the Association of Community College Trustees "ACCT" Northeast Regional Faculty Award in 2023 and the New Jersey Council of Community Colleges "NJCCC" Distinguished Faculty Award in 2024.

Professor Heidary holds a BS in Polymer Engineering, and a MS in Polymer Science from Penn State University. Her interest in STEM courses was nurtured by her chemistry high school teacher and her love of teaching by her mother. She finds teaching STEM students interesting, challenging, exciting, and extremely rewarding. Her mission in life is helping her students achieve their goals and dreams. She is an avid ballroom dancer and loves to travel.





Dr. Yohan Kim

Dr. Kim is engaged in teaching General Biology I and II, as well as Introduction to Biology. He plays a mentorship role in research projects for STEM majors, actively advocating for undergraduate research endeavors at UCNJ. Dr. Kim particularly appreciates teaching honors courses due to their capacity to provide students with research-based experiences within the curriculum, thereby nurturing scientific reasoning and critical thinking skills in the academic environment.

Dr. Yohan Kim attained a PhD in Molecular and Cellular Biology from the University of Iowa and an MA in Biology from Eastern Washington University. He also holds a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) license after completing Veterinary Medicine School in Korea. His doctoral research concentrated on the investigation of intracellular signaling pathways pertinent to brain development and Alzheimer's disease (AD), leading to published findings. Following this, he served as a post-doctoral fellow at the Nathan Kline Institute, New York, where his work delved into the extracellular vesicle-mediated pathogenesis of AD.

Dr. Kim is engaged in teaching General Biology I and II, as well as Introduction to Biology. He plays a



**Associate Professor
Larry Kwon**

Professor Kwon teaches a wide range of mathematics courses from Remedial Mathematics to Differential Equations at UCNJ. He uses active learning instructional strategies to promote student engagement by incorporating videos and mathematical modeling research projects. His educational background and diverse teaching experiences help Union Honors students better connect mathematics to different industries.

Associate Professor Larry Kwon earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Aviation Technology Maintenance from Vaughn College in New York and a Master of Science degree in Mathematics Education at Columbia University. During college, he discovered that mathematics is connected to every discipline and was inspired to become a mathematics teacher. He presented "New technology of students' assessment and its positive outcomes" at the 2017 Faculty Showcase hosted by NJEdge focusing on how well-prepared learning objects and the learning management system can be used both inside and outside the classroom to promote student engagement and learning.

Professor Kwon teaches a wide range of mathematics courses from Remedial Mathematics to Differential



Dr. Rama Lohani-Chase

Dr. Rama Lohani-Chase is a faculty member in the Social Sciences, Business, and History Division. An interdisciplinary teacher-scholar, she received her PhD in Women's and Gender Studies with concentrations in Sociology and Anthropology from Rutgers University-New Brunswick, and has researched and published on the topics of social movements, gender and sexuality, and socio-cultural issues. Among her various contributions at UCNJ, she has served as an advisor to the college's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa. She is also a recipient of the 2018 John and Suanne Roueche Excellence Award from the League for Innovation in the Community College.

Dr. Lohani-Chase teaches sociology courses such as the Principles of Sociology, Social Problems, Gender and Work, Minorities in American Life, and Marriage and the Family. In her Union Honors courses, she encourages inquiry-based discussion and collaborative learning in the belief that an environment in which students learn from and appreciate each other is conducive to growth.



**Academic Specialist
Joseph M. Margiotta**

Joseph M. Margiotta, MA is a historian, educator, and Academic Specialist in History at UCNJ with more than twenty-two years of experience in higher education. He teaches courses in American, Western, and World History, as well as political science, and is recognized for his work in experiential and object-based learning through the History Lab. Margiotta actively incorporates archival materials, artifacts, and museum-style instruction into his courses, while mentoring students through College Archives projects and HIS 290 research initiatives that emphasize primary-source analysis and public history. He has also served as a mentor and advisor through History Club programming focused on civic engagement, historical inquiry, and student leadership.

Margiotta's scholarship and public history work center on American intellectual history, Egyptology, and community history. As a Borough Historian connected with Staten Island historical initiatives, he contributed to *Discovering Staten Island: A 350th Anniversary Commemorative History*, published by The History Press, and is the author of the forthcoming *Charles Edwin Wilbour and the Birth of American Egyptology*, to be published in 2026 by The American History Press. In addition to his publications, he has directed museum and public history initiatives, including the Smithsonian Institution "Voices and Votes: Democracy in America" exhibition project, further connecting students and the community to hands-on historical scholarship.





Dr. Mary Meeks

Dr. Mary Meeks has a PhD in Modern History and Literature from Drew University and a BA in Psychology from Brooklyn College. She is a Brontë scholar with an interest in the intersections of life and literature. She joined the faculty at UCNJ in January 2007 and enjoys learning in various disciplines. Dr. Meeks is also energized by College Life activities outside the classroom. She has served as an advisor to multiple clubs and believes that campus involvement is important to student success. She is a 2019 recipient of the Neblett Prize for Educational Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

Dr. Meeks enjoys teaching honors classes because the students are willing to go the extra mile to delve deeper into the analysis of literature, thus keeping her on her toes. She finds that the students in the Union Honors Program tend to be particularly hard-working and creative, which is inspiring. Her students comment on her caring approach to supporting their learning.



Dr. Melinda Norelli

Melinda C. Norelli, PhD is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at UCNJ. Dr. Norelli started at UCNJ in 2012, beginning as an adjunct faculty member before joining full-time in 2013. Throughout her tenure, she has held numerous leadership roles, including Interim Dean of the Elizabeth Campus and Institute for Intensive English, and Dean of Social Sciences, Business, and History (SSBH), where she served for nearly a decade. Committed to student success, Dr. Norelli has advised the Student Government Association, Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society, Psi Beta National Honor Society in Psychology, and the Psychology Club. She co-led the implementation of the state-funded Guided Pathways to Success initiative and served as Director of the Community College Opportunity Grant, leading its implementation at the College.

As a faculty member, Dr. Norelli teaches General Psychology, Personality Psychology, and Social Psychology. Her contributions to teaching and leadership have been recognized with the Neblett Prize for Teaching Excellence and the John and Suanne Roueche Excellence Award, which honors outstanding contributions and leadership in community college education. A proud graduate of UCNJ, Dr. Norelli earned an AA in Psychology before completing a BA in Psychology from Drew University, an MA in Psychology from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, and a PhD in Psychology with a concentration in Organizational Leadership and Behavior.



Dr. Marie C. Montes-Matías

Dr. Marie C. Montes-Matías holds a BS in Industrial Microbiology from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus and a PhD in Microbiology and Molecular Genetics from Rutgers University, New Brunswick. Her area of expertise is environmental microbiology, and her thesis was focused on the analysis of novel enzymes involved in the metabolism of hydrocarbons. Her research interests are in the area of environmental and industrial microbiology with molecular biology and biotechnology applications. She is very passionate about teaching and received the 2018 John and Suanne Roueche Excellence Award from the League for Innovation in the Community College. She also enjoys working with student organizations and previously served as co-advisor to the college's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa.

Dr. Montes-Matías teaches General Biology I and II, Microbiology and Introduction to Biology. As a mentor of research projects for STEM majors, she is actively involved in promoting undergraduate research at UCNJ. She enjoys teaching honors courses because they offer her the opportunity to provide students with course research-based experiences while fostering scientific reasoning and critical thinking in the classroom.



Dr. Phillip Papas

Dr. Phillip Papas is a Senior Professor of History in the Social Sciences, Business, and History Division at UCNJ. He earned his BA (History/Political Science) and MA (History) from Hunter College-CUNY, MPhil (History) and PhD (History) from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. In addition to journal and newspaper articles, book reviews, and blog posts, Dr. Papas has authored *That Ever Loyal Island: Staten Island and the American Revolution* (2007), *Renegade Revolutionary: The Life of General Charles Lee* (2014), which earned several awards, and co-authored *Port Richmond* (2009). He has also been featured in the documentary film *Loyalty & Rebellion* (2019), which was inspired by his book *That Ever Loyal Island*.

Dr. Papas enjoys teaching in the Union Honors program and challenging his students to appreciate the history of their communities and to think critically about the past. He encourages students to visit museums, historical sites, and online exhibits and to ask questions about the way these platforms present history. Dr. Papas fosters a learning environment that opens students to new research and experiences, makes them comfortable critiquing how history is taught and presented to the public, and helps them develop the skills necessary to become successful in their professional careers and as members of society.





**Associate Professor
Marc Postiglione**

Associate Professor Marc Postiglione serves in the Social Sciences, Business and History Division where he works with our Sport Management students. He has a BA from Long Island University and a MA from St. Joseph Seminary and College. Professor Postiglione has served on many college-wide governance committees, including Strategic Planning and Curriculum, and as Chair of the Governance and Leadership Council. He recently served as a Tri-Chair for the College's 2025 Middle States Accreditation visit. Professor P. is also the Head Golf Coach at the College and has been working with the Golf Team since 2002. Professor Postiglione volunteers to coach golf at his children's school, Koinonia Academy in Plainfield.

Professor Postiglione teaches a wide variety of Sport Management classes including Introduction to Sport Management, Evolution of American Sports, Sport & Law, Sports in Society, and Current Issues in Sports. He also teaches philosophy classes including honors sections of Ethics and Introduction to Philosophy. Professor Postiglione enjoys working individually with his students to help them reach their academic and personal goals.



Dr. Michele Rotunda

Dr. Michele Rotunda earned her MA in History from the Rutgers-Newark/NJIT Federated Program and her PhD in History from Rutgers University. She is the Faculty Coordinator for the Union Honors program and serves as an advisor to the History Club and the UCNJ Archives. She was a 2015-16 Fellow at the Metropolitan Colleges Institute for Teaching Improvement (MetroCITI) at Teachers College, Columbia University. She has won several teaching awards including the New Jersey Studies Academic Alliance Teaching Award, the Neblett Award for Educational Excellence in Teaching & Learning, and the ACCT Northeast Regional Faculty Award. Her book, *A Drunkard's Defense: Alcohol, Murder, and Medical Jurisprudence in Nineteenth Century America*, was published in 2021.

Dr. Rotunda teaches History and Government classes including U.S. History, Women in American History, and American Government and Politics. She encourages students to engage in disciplinary thinking through various active learning projects that have included presenting and publishing original research. She enjoys being a part of Union Honors and looks forward to challenging and being challenged by her students every day.



Dr. Vikul Rajpara

Dr. Vikul Rajpara is an Associate Professor of Chemistry at UCNJ. He completed his Bachelor's in Chemistry at South Gujarat University, and his Master's in Organic Chemistry and Doctorate in Materials Chemistry at the University of South Dakota. Dr. Rajpara is a recipient of the Neblett Prize for Educational Excellence in Teaching. He is also the recipient of a Gold Lapel pin from the President for his dedication to students and the college. Dr. Rajpara is very involved in Union Honors events and collegewide activities.

Dr. Rajpara teaches various chemistry courses including honors sections of General Chemistry and Organic Chemistry. He incorporates various group projects in his honors course with a focus on developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills in students. As part of the honors project, students are required to prepare a video explaining a concept or experiment. Additionally, Dr. Rajpara incorporates topics related to sustainable lifestyle and green energy in his classes.



Dr. Karen Zielony

Dr. Karen Zielony, Senior Professor at UCNJ, earned a PhD in Applied Linguistics, with a specialization in Composition Theory and Rhetoric, from New York University in 1996. She also holds a MA from NYU in English Education and a BA, Magna Cum Laude, in English Literature from Queens College, CUNY. Her doctoral dissertation focused on cultural difference in rhetoric as seen through composing processes in writing. Dr. Zielony taught undergraduate writing courses, an undergraduate teacher-training class, and a graduate course in Sociolinguistics at NYU. She taught undergraduate English writing classes at Ben Gurion University of the Negev, in Israel,

where she also designed and taught a course for Arab teachers of English working in the Arab sector, and a writing course for graduate students writing their doctoral dissertation in varied disciplines at the university. Dr. Zielony also worked in the business sector, writing technical instructional manuals for an international software engineering company, based in Palo Alto, CA.

Dr. Zielony began teaching at UCNJ in 2004. Her courses currently include English 101 and English 102, and a 200-level course in Literature and the Arts in the Twentieth Century. Dr. Zielony's classes are highly student-centered, as she views the writing and learning process as idiosyncratic and individualistic for each student.





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