



Best in the Nation



The college's Alcor Chapter of the national Mortar Board national honor society has received the organization's highest honor for a collegiate chapter, recognition for exemplifying the society's ideals of scholarship, leadership and service in the most outstanding manner.

Pictured from left to right with the chapter's display during the Mortar Board National Conference this summer are Kelsey Bos, this year's chapter president; Phoebe Burtless-Creps, this year's chapter treasurer; and Andrea Eddy '10, 2009-10 chapter treasurer.

Hope students have earned a top national award for their commitment to helping others.

The college's Alcor Chapter of the national Mortar Board college honor society received the organization's highest honor for a collegiate

chapter, the Ruth Weimer Mount Chapter Excellence Award, during the 2010 Mortar Board National Conference, held on Friday-Sunday, July 23-25, in Chicago, Ill.

The award is presented to the chapter that exemplifies the society's ideals of scholarship, leadership and service in the most outstanding manner. The recipient is chosen on the basis of criteria including chapter operations, campus visibility, member participation, advising, communications and chapter projects.

It was one of multiple honors that Hope received during the national conference. The chapter also earned its fourth consecutive Golden Torch Award for overall excellence; eight service-oriented Project Excellence Awards, a record equaled by only one other chapter; and an additional commendation for having been the top chapter in the national "Reading is Leading" Virtual Book Drive in both 2008 and 2009.

The Hope chapter's recognition as the national winner this year follows having been among the finalists for the award annually since 2007 and having received a variety of other national awards from the society during the past four years.

The Chapter Excellence Award reflects a strong tradition of commitment and countless hours of dedicated volunteer service by the chapter's student members. Faculty co-advisor Dr. Dianne Portfleet also believes that chapter

thrives because the national organization's ideals are well represented at Hope.

"Mortar Board stands for scholarship, leadership and service, and that fits so well with the mission of Hope, to train servant-leaders," said Dr. Portfleet, an adjunct associate professor of English, who co-advises the chapter with Martie Tucker '63 Bultman, the wife of Hope College president James E. Bultman '63.

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"That's where we have an advantage over many, many colleges, because they do not emphasize that service," she said. "It just seems to go so well here."

In that respect, the Hope chapter embodies a trait that runs true throughout the general campus community. The college's service ethos manifests itself campus-wide in multiple ways across the school year, from the "Time to Serve" day of service designed to introduce new students to the concept as the fall semester begins; to major student-led, all-college efforts such as the Relay for Life for the American Cancer Society and the Dance Marathon held on behalf of Helen DeVos Children's Hospital; to service projects coordinated by the college's fraternities and sororities and other student organizations; to individual service by students throughout the community.

"They're students who've done this at Hope for three years already," Martie Bultman said of the chapter's members.

"They apply to Mortar Board because they've been students who've been in leadership in service," she said. "It comes naturally to them because it's what they've done."

Mortar Board itself gets involved in a variety of the other efforts in addition to the several that it coordinates, and the individual members are all frequently involved in myriad other service projects as well.

The national Mortar Board society recognizes college seniors for outstanding achievement in scholarship, leadership and service, and provides opportunities for continued leadership development, promotes service to colleges and universities, and encourages lifelong contributions to the global community. Since its founding in 1918, the organization has grown from four founding chapters to 228 collegiate chapters with nearly 250,000 initiated members across the nation.

The Alcor Chapter has existed at Hope since the 1936-37 academic year, although it did not become part of the national Mortar Board organization until 1961. The chapter had 37 members during the 2009-10 school year, and the president was Abbie Gowman '10 of Rochester Hills, Mich.

While election to the society is an honor, the Alcor Chapter views membership instead as a starting point. "Before they ever accept their invitation, we tell them what they're getting into," Dr. Portfleet said.

The eight projects from 2009-10 that received "Project Excellence Awards" during the annual conference demonstrate the breadth of the group's work. This year's awards recognized the chapter's First Book Alumni Book Drive; Last Lecture Series featuring faculty members; CASA pumpkin carving, stocking stuffing, tutoring and Borders gift cards; Relay for Life fundraising for the American Cancer Society; full college scholarships for eight students in Tanzania; Mortar Board Project Week; the "Jungle Safari" Disability Prom; the Kiva Project to loan funds to support primary education in Sierra Leone; and the Wearing of the Blue Brunch for freshman and sophomore students named to the dean's list.

Each project is chaired by one or two students, with others—maybe even the entire membership—getting involved based on their interest and the need.

"One of my favorite events was the Disability Prom," recalled Andrea Eddy '10 of Coloma, Mich., who was the chapter's webmaster last year and was among those attending the conference on Hope's behalf. "Members from area group homes came to campus for a fun night of dancing and pictures. We all enjoyed dressing up for the jungle theme and dancing to songs from *The Lion King* and other popular favorites."

"I felt that the chapter was really able to bond with each other and our guests," she said. "It was a night to let go of all inhibition and embrace diversity. Disability Prom was a huge success, and I hope the future chapters will continue to hold and enjoy such a fun event."

With the chapter's honors having been so plentiful, it's helpful to remember that the

degree of achievement is anything but common.

The Alcor Chapter has consistently been a leader in receiving multiple "Project Excellence Awards," and received eight of the awards last year as well as this year. Only 38 Project Excellence Awards were presented to 19 chapters during the July national conference.

The Hope chapter led the nation in Mortar Board's Virtual Book Drive in both 2008 and 2009, for which the chapter received the "First Book Hero Award Plaque" during the conference. The national effort has raised a total of \$50,000, of which \$12,000 was raised by Hope's Alcor Chapter. Hope's effort benefited West Michigan specifically, supporting not only campus-based CASA but also the Van Raalte and Pine Creek elementary schools.

The Alcor Chapter has received the "Golden Torch Award" every year since 2007. Only 22 chapters received the recognition this year.

In addition to the other honors that the chapter has earned in the past four years, Dr. Portfleet received one of three national Excellence in Advising Awards during the conference in 2007.

With each fall a new start, such a storied history could seem daunting, but that's not the way that the chapter works. The accolades aren't the goal, but instead an outcome that follows getting things right, and Dr. Portfleet knows that the new members care about the process every bit as much as their predecessors. Already last year, newly inducted, they were participating in some of the spring projects, and during the summer she was hearing from members eager to get together and plan for 2010-11.

"I'm excited about this year," she said. "It's a good group."



The Alcor Chapter is a highly visible presence during the Homecoming game as it conducts its annual book drive. The chapter led the nation in Mortar Board's Virtual Book Drive in both 2008 and 2009.



The annual Disability Prom organized by the chapter each year provides an opportunity for members from area group homes to enjoy an evening of dancing and socializing with each other and the Mortar Board students.

