The Honors Passion Project: Costuming for Charity with Erica Hawvermale

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This semester the Utah State University Honors Program introduced The Honors Passion Project, a series of virtual lunchtime discussions with Honors alumni and friends about their passions, pastimes, or pursuits beyond work and academics. The second event in the series took place on Wednesday, October 14, with Honors alumna Erica Hawvermale, who discussed her experience as an "Anthropologist by Day, Mandalorian by Night."

Erica graduated with Honors from USU in 2017 with a Cultural Anthropology major, and she mentors current students as a volunteer in the Honors Alumni Mentoring Program. After graduation, she completed an internship at the University of Arizona’s Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology. Erica then earned a Master’s degree in Applied Anthropology and a Geographic Information Systems certificate from the University of North Texas in May 2020. She is currently employed as a market research analyst for Aperio Insights in Dallas, Texas, where she interprets quantitative and qualitative data about customer needs to inform product innovation.

In keeping with the goals of The Honors Passion Project series, Erica’s presentation explored not these academic and career accomplishments but her true passion for creating costumes and volunteering at charity events.

Erica began her presentation with a question: “What do you do with a screen-accurate Star Wars costume when you’re not at a convention?” She explained the value of costumes in connection to charity work, from hospital visits to library readings. While she was a student at USU, Erica volunteered with HEROIC, a Utah-based charity that brings fictional characters to life for community events, and she connected her charity-based cosplay to undergraduate research in her Ignite USU talk.

Erica shared with Honors students her current volunteer work as a member of the 501st, Rebel Legion, Mandalorian Mercs, Dark Empire, and Saber Guild. After her presentation, Erica talked with students and answered their questions about her costume design process, how to get involved with similar work, and her favorite Star Wars movie. This discussion in The Honors Passion Project series brought to life for Honors students the value of pursuing a passion while connecting to your community. Erica shows how passion can be a force for good.