

From Community Service and Advocacy to a Life of Civil Service

AUTUMN BARSZCZOWSKI

Point Park University, 2015–2019

Personnel & Finance Analyst: City of Pittsburgh's Department of Permits,
Licenses, and Inspections

Abstract: As part of the *National Collegiate Honors Council's* (2022) collection of essays about the value of honors to its graduates (1967–2019), the author reflects on the personal and professional impacts of the honors experience.

Keywords: higher education—honors programs & colleges; civil service; Point Park University (PA)—Honors Program

Citation: *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, 2022, 23(1): 127–29

The value of an honors education goes far beyond a specific honors course or project as students gain valuable skills that impact both their personal and professional life. In the almost three years since graduating university, I still find that my honors education has impacted my outlook on life and how I approach various situations in my day-to-day life.

After graduation, I decided to pursue a career as a civil servant instead of pursuing a traditional public relations career. While I enjoyed communications work, I knew from my honors education that I wanted to partake in work that made a positive impact on the community.

During my time at Point Park University, my honors education allowed me to explore and learn about various social issues impacting my local community. From the moment I walked onto campus as an honors student, our director began educating us on the importance of giving back. We participated in community service projects and donation drives during our first-week orientation. My fellow students highlighted the organizations we

worked with by hosting these events and explaining the impact that these organizations had on the city of Pittsburgh and its surrounding areas.

When I attended my first regional honors conference, I realized that the value of giving back to the community extended far beyond the walls of my university and my city. Not only did the Northeast Regional Honors Council (NRHC) highlight the importance of the local community, it highlighted the social issues faced by people on a national and even international level. Through the research projects presented at the conference, students were able to share the issues faced by their local communities and discuss how those same issues impact other areas of the region and world. Of course, these same ideals carried over from my regional organization to the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). On all levels of my honors experience, I was able to witness how people put effort into researching the impact social issues have on everyday life and proposed ways to give back to those affected communities.

The desire to continue giving back to my local community led me to apply for several city of Pittsburgh positions. I landed in my first role in the city in 2019 as a clerical assistant and was promoted to another department as a Personnel & Finance Analyst in 2021. After two and a half years of civil service, I've experienced what it's like to work with our local community and see the impact that our organization's services provide to our residents.

You would think that the projects presented at conferences end with the final presentation, but they don't. My own presentations based on feminism and the LGBTQIA+ community have given me a basis for understanding how to be inclusive and provide equity to minority communities. Not only that, the research has encouraged me to seek out where the processes I interact with on a daily basis may be lacking in equity and inclusion.

As a civil servant, I continue to strive for ways that best serve not only the public, but my internal communities as well. I want to ensure that we are best supporting the public as well as my fellow civil servants in the city of Pittsburgh. We strive to do right by our communities and make our processes as efficient as possible, without losing the integrity of our hard work and dedication.

Honors is not only about educating yourself academically, but civically as well. Not every human we come across is going to be well versed in academia, so we have to use that education to learn how to communicate with a diverse group of people. The values of diversity, advocacy, and the focus on

strong research allow us to grow into not only better students, but also better humans.

The author may be contacted at

Autumn.barszczowski@pittsburghpa.gov.