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# The Secret of Honors Education: Driven by Discourse, Depth of Disciplines, and Dedication to Diversity

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**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; diversity in education; Adelphi University (NY)—Honors College

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The Dean of my undergraduate Honors College disguised a very clever secret right in plain sight of his students. What we thought to be a well-rounded, four-year education was, in reality, so much more: a carefully cultivated undergraduate program that propelled us into an engaged adulthood driven by meaningful discourse, appreciation for a breadth and depth of disciplines, and an unyielding dedication to diversity.

My honors educational setting was marked by seminar-style classrooms that were notably divergent in aesthetics and engagement from other classes on campus. The energy upon entering an Honors class session was palpable—whether you wanted it to be or not. There was no lying low in a back row. Each student was a valuable voice contributing to conversation that simultaneously amplified each other's learning and required us to get uncomfortable. Our education taught us to see beyond a traditional didactic dynamic and become learners whose intellectual curiosities were driven by discourse.

This discourse, though, was never simply performative or isolated to one class's roundtable. In fact, the more meaningfully engaged we became with our peers in any one class discussion, the greater we could translate our interpersonal understandings into broader contexts. We frequently found ourselves in different seminar courses with familiar classmates, which allowed us to both continue and expand our mutual learnings into other disciplines. We could seamlessly intersect the psycho-social principles learned in Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination with discussions of ancient classic texts or character tropes and representation in children's media. These interdisciplinary discussions weren't limited to students, however. Frequently, our in-class conversations spilled into hallway conversations between our various professors and deans who found common ground in the Honors College as well. We witnessed curious, thoughtful exchanges of ideas between these scholars and perhaps learned as much from them in those moments as we did in their classrooms. The breadth and depth of course topics, accompanied by their respective thought leaders, available to us within the walls of the Honors College was deliberate and fostered a true appreciation for diversity.

"Diversity" is a, well, diverse word in this case. There might be nothing so impactful to an Honors education as diversity—of courses, cultural experiences, and community. Classrooms were full of thought exchange, but the relationships and contexts created therein blossomed in the learning experiences outside of our Honors College building. We were required, though happily so, to engage in cultural events to supplement and enrich our education, and our lives. The various theatrical performances, ballets, operas, symphonies, art exhibits, and lectures we had the opportunities to experience broadened our personal proclivities and brought to life the magnitude of the world beyond our campus. Reciprocally, that very same worldly magnitude came to life within the diverse community of Honors students right inside our campus.

Our community of students was incredibly, beautifully diverse not only in various American identities, but in a coalescence of cultures from around the world. Classmates from Ukraine, India, Jamaica, Poland, El Salvador, Bulgaria, Israel, Trinidad, and others brought global experience to life in real time. It always amazed me, and sometimes even shamed me, to hear the various worldviews that my peers contributed to our classroom discussions. While our hometown experiences differed wildly, we all found our way to the same roundtable at which we now sat, eagerly seeking the shared experiences of our diverse education. The world never felt simultaneously so big and so small as inside an Honors College classroom.

This very duality brings me back to our dean's well-kept secret, which is now so plain to see. We enrolled in what we knew would be an engaging, enriching, four-year undergraduate education, but we could not possibly know how deeply impactful the lessons we learned during that time would be on our lives. Years after graduation, I can look around my own communities of peers and recognize those who have engaged in thought-provoking roundtable discussions, those who were challenged to find meaningful intellectual intersections, and most importantly, those who were immersed in a microcosm of our big, complicated, but beautiful world within their own classrooms. I believe that no matter where we find ourselves today, our Honors education has given each of us the foundation on which to confront life with drive, dedication, and an ever-present desire to engage deeply.

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