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JNCHC

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council

Forum Essays on
"The Value of Honors to its Graduates"

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Journal

OF THE National Collegiate Honors Council

THE VALUE OF HONORS TO ITS GRADUATES

JOURNAL EDITOR
Ada Long

University of Alabama at Birmingham

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ON THE COVER

The cover images, courtesy of Chloe Margulis, show her journey from high school to her current career as a patent attorney. A long-distance runner and versatile athlete, she participated in two Partners in the Parks adventures.

Motivated by extreme challenges, she will be running the New York Marathon this year and training for longer races. An alumna of the LIU Post Honors Program, Chloe has an essay in this volume titled “Honors Lessons Learned Outside the Classroom.”

CALL FOR PAPERS

The next issue of *JNCHC* (**deadline: September 1, 2022**) invites research essays on any topic of interest to the honors community.

The issue will also include a Forum focused on the theme “Honors Beyond the Liberal Arts,” in which we invite honors educators to examine the NCHC’s exclusion and inclusion of preprofessional honors programs within its community. We invite essays of roughly 1000–2000 words that consider this theme in a practical and/or theoretical context.

The lead essay for the Forum (available at https://cdn.ymaws.com/nchc.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/docs/pub_board_essays/Who_Owns_Honors.pdf?utm_source=Direct&utm_medium=Informz&utm_campaign=Bulk%20Email) is by K. Patrick Fazioli of Mercy College. In “Who Owns Honors?” Fazioli points out the historical role of the liberal arts as the cornerstone of honors, starting with the introduction of honors into the United States in the early twentieth century and continuing through and beyond its statement of the Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program. He cites evidence in NCHC publications and conference sessions of the minor role within the organization of preprofessional honors programs, and he advocates strategies to increase outreach to such programs. Fazioli acknowledges the arguments that have prevailed over the years for privileging the liberal arts, and he respects the value and often the validity of such arguments. Nevertheless, given the NCHC’s emphasis on inclusion and diversity, the absence of professional programs seems antithetical to its mission. Further, now that the number of preprofessional students is far outnumbering liberal arts majors in American higher education, excluding the professions seems especially short-sighted. He concludes by suggesting strategies for outreach to preprofessional honors programs and students.

Contributors to the Forum on “Honors Beyond the Liberal Arts” may, but are not obliged to, respond directly to Fazioli’s essay. Questions that Forum contributors might consider include:

- What would be the advantages and/or disadvantages of including a preprofessional track (or tracks) at NCHC conferences?
- What strategies have your (or other) liberal arts/college-wide honors programs adopted to better serve the unique needs of their preprofessional students?
- What models have worked successfully on your campus in integrating the humanities, sciences, and professional programs in areas outside of honors, and how might these models be adapted to the context of NCHC?

- What part, if any, is NCHC playing in how preprofessional honors programs develop their curricula and co-curricular experiences?
- Do you agree that the NCHC should broaden its focus beyond the liberal arts and, if not, why?
- Should the NCHC follow the lead of an organization like Phi Beta Kappa, which privileges the liberal arts as a way of awarding them prestige while the professions award status and income?
- Given the decreasing popularity and status of the humanities in contrast to the dramatic rise of the professions in higher education, should the NCHC acknowledge and reflect this contrast?
- Is there an inherent difference between university-wide honors programs and disciplinary (including preprofessional) honors programs that justifies a continued focus on the liberal arts in the NCHC?
- Should honors programs expose all their students to the liberal arts, perhaps especially the humanities, as fully as possible and not dilute them through a shared focus on the professions?
- What pedagogies and values do preprofessional honors programs share with honors programs that foreground the arts, humanities, and sciences? What are the differences?

Information about *JNCHC*—including the editorial policy, submission guidelines, guidelines for abstracts and keywords, and a style sheet—is available on the NCHC website: <<http://www.nchchonors.org/resources/nchc-publications/editorial-policies>>.

Please send all submissions to Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu.

NCHC journals (*JNCHC* and *HIP*) and monographs are included in the following electronic databases: ERIC, EBSCO, Gale Cengage, and UNL Digital Commons. Both journals are listed in Cabell International's Directory of Publishing Opportunities.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC) is a refereed periodical publishing scholarly articles on honors education. The journal uses a double-blind peer review process. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology, discussions of problems common to honors programs and colleges, items on the national higher education agenda, research on assessment, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education. Bibliographies of *JNCHC*, *HIP*, and the NCHC Monograph Series on the NCHC website provide past treatments of topics that an author should consider.

DEADLINES

March 1 (for spring/summer issue); September 1 (for fall/winter issue)

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We accept material by email attachment in Word (not pdf). We do not accept material by fax or hard copy, nor do we receive documents with tracking.

If documentation is used, the documentation style can be whatever is appropriate to the author's primary discipline or approach (MLA, APA, etc.), employing internal citation to a list of references (bibliography).

All research based on data from human subjects should include IRB approval or other ethical review from your institution.

All essay submissions to the journal must include an abstract of no more than 250 words and a list of no more than five keywords (not repeating words in your title).

Accepted essays are edited for grammatical and typographical errors and for infelicities of style or presentation. Authors have ample opportunity to review and approve edited manuscripts before publication.

There are no minimum or maximum length requirements for research essays; the length should be dictated by the topic and its most effective presentation.

Essays in the Forum for Honors should be roughly 1000–2000 words long.

Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu or, if necessary, 850.927.3776.

DEDICATION



Anne N. Rinn

In the early 2000s, Anne N. Rinn produced seminal scholarship on the origin of honors education in the United States. In 2003, she published “Rhodes Scholarships, Frank Aydelotte, and Collegiate Honors Education” in the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC 4.1)*, followed three years later by “Major Forerunners to Honors Education at the Collegiate Level” (*JNCHC 7.2*). In these essays, she focused primarily on Frank Aydelotte, President of Swarthmore College, who in 1922 started an honors program based on his experience as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. The primary methods he promoted in honors were tutorials; active learning rather than lectures; academic independence; individual responsibility for reading; and the seminar method. Rinn points out that Aydelotte’s program is commonly considered the foundation and progenitor of honors in the U.S. and that its values and methods started to spread quickly across the country. Having provided this important history to the honors community, Rinn is one of the most-cited honors scholars in the history of *JNCHC*.

Since that groundbreaking early work on the origin of honors, Rinn has gone on to an important career focused primarily on gifted children and adults, often branching out into a broad range of related topics. She has

published over fifty articles in refereed research journals; she has given at least as many if not more conference papers; she has written numerous editorials and encyclopedia entries; and she recently published the monograph *Social, Emotional, and Psychosocial Development of Gifted and Talented Individuals* (Routledge, 2020).

Rinn has also had a distinguished career as a faculty member and administrator, most recently at the University of North Texas (UNT), where she is Professor of Educational Psychology, Interim Chair, and Coordinator of Graduate Programs in Gifted and Talented Education. She is also Director of the UNT Office for Giftedness, Talent Development, and Creativity. She has won the College of Education Faculty Service Excellence Award and also its Faculty Research Excellence Award.

We are grateful for Anne N. Rinn's many contributions to the NCHC, especially her scholarship on the origins of honors in the United States, which has served as an important resource for many future honors scholars and which gives us the inspiration and occasion for this issue's 100th Anniversary Forum on "The Value of Honors to its Graduates."

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Ada Long

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

In 2015, while celebrating the 50th anniversary of the National Collegiate Honors Council, we published a Forum on “The Value of Honors” (*JNCHC* 16.2), with essays by 39 college and university presidents that had been solicited by honors director and deans who were NCHC members. This year is the 100th anniversary of Frank Aydelotte’s introduction of honors education into the United States from England, so we again called on honors administrators and also faculty to solicit essays, this time from former honors students, on “The Value of Honors to its Graduates,” and we are publishing 44 responses. Both the presidents and the graduates represent all regions of the country and all types of institutions, from two-year and liberal arts colleges to research universities.

In my remarks about the presidents’ statements of “The Value of Honors,” I wrote that their institutions “differ in their admissions and retention criteria, curricular requirements, methods of selecting faculty, extracurricular opportunities, scholarship offerings, and fundraising goals. From all this diversity, though, emerges remarkable unanimity about the value of honors in higher education.” What the presidents valued were critical thinking, community, access and diversity, active learning, innovation, institutional advancement, pride, and transformation, along with “interdisciplinary teaching and learning, leadership opportunities, and lifelong learning.”

Except for “institutional advancement,” primarily a presidential priority, the 44 former honors students also demonstrate “a remarkable unanimity.” They echo all the presidents’ values and much more, including authenticity, respect, a sense of belonging, self-confidence, excitement, and fun. Better than a list of all the abstract values that graduates describe in their essays, a few of their voices below show both their diversity and what they have in common:

Being part of the UHP gave me the green light to transform my fairly standard university education into something that was authentic to my life.

—Ahmed

The true value of these programs is that they act as rock tumblers. They bring together individuals—rocks gathered from fields and streams and beaches and mountains—and tumble them against one another in an environment which promotes a sense of shared

humanity and a desire to see the beauty in the world and in other people.

—Donovan

[The honors program] helped me to clarify what it meant to be a Crip-loving, ‘Pac-quoting disciple of Christ in a Black Gangster Disciple neighborhood who gave space to LGBT spokespersons and Far-Right advocates in the city where Dr. King was jailed.

—Cooper

An honors program also encourages boldness and creativity. There is no hiding in the back of a 15-person class. It is time to step up, maybe make a mistake or two, but keep going. That’s what you’re here for, right?

—Keller

If honors programs are going to be anything, they must be places where wisdom is the highest value. Are we pursuing the wisdom to see each other as whole beings, to become people worthy of honor, or are we cogs in the wheel of institutions that have prided themselves on whom they exclude rather than whom they include? Wisdom, seated on the throne of compassion, those are the people who shine a light in an otherwise dark world.

—Gazing Wolf

Within the Honors Program, I found more than academic challenges and leadership opportunities—I found friends, people who cared about me beyond my grades, a sense of belonging, acceptance and understanding, a place that felt like home—and where I found my next steps.

—Matos

A philosopher no less than John Lennon reminded us that “Life is what happens while you’re busy making other plans.” At sixty, I find myself less focused on what those plans *were* than what my life *is*. Time and again, I return to Honors Semesters, now nearly forty years ago, grateful to have a set of tools that continue to help me excavate the world around me *and* to have passed them along.

—Major

Energized by student attention and creativity, professors shared their passions for their own areas of study. Such energy is contagious. Student enthusiasm reawakens enthusiasm in instructors and thereby enriches the honors community.

—Messner

The program was not a competition but a place where being at the top of your game was table stakes, and together we made each other stronger. I doubt I knew it at the time, but the idea that people are always doing their best stuck with me.

—Panuccio

I'm grateful to all honors programs that prioritize the value of community and teach students like me how to bring that value to life every day. I'm also grateful, on this 100th anniversary, for the opportunity to reflect as it affords us a critical moment of clarity on our past, present, and future. Our experiences in honors programs nationwide and across the years connect us as a community and, whether we realize it or not, these types of connections exist all around us. We must dare to seek them out.

—Schroeder

[H]onors gave me a sense of rootedness, a sense of place. A sense of the Earth's place in time and of our species' place in the story of life on Earth. A sense of Western culture's place in the history of humanity and of our nation's place in that culture. A sense of my place as a citizen of our republic, my responsibility to my local community, and my responsibility to my professional community. That sense of place, of connectedness across time and location, is sometimes burdensome but always comforting—and it makes apathy impossible.

—Walker

[B]eing an Honors Scholar provided me a pass, a sort of permission, to explore ideas and better understand what I thought, while providing connections to challenge and reinforce those thoughts and ideas. I became a part of a community of people who were just as intimidated by the power of their own minds as I was, yet we continued to show up and do the work that never really felt like work. All the while, we lifted each other up, filling sagging sails with the winds of our encouragement.

—Watson

[Honors is] simultaneously challenging and nurturing

—Wechter

A reader could compare these essays by region or institutional type, but here they are organized to focus on chronology. The essays are ordered from the earliest attendance in honors to the most recent, with years of admission progressing from 1967 to 2019. The NCHC has gone through a lot of changes

since its inception in 1965, but just a quick scan of the titles suggests a continuity in the value that students have found in honors throughout the past half-century.

* * *

One of the primary themes to arise from the graduates' essays is that the sense of community among a group of students engaged in learning and focused on doing their best leads to a shared commitment to academic excellence. Moving now to a stunning example of such excellence by an honors student, one who has now recently graduated, we can see demonstrated the high quality of this important value.

Each year the NCHC sponsors Portz Prizes for the finest research essays written by honors students submitted during that academic year, and occasionally one of these essays is so outstanding that it belongs in the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* along with research essays written by honors faculty, administrators, and scholars. In 2021, such a Portz Prize winner was Samantha King-Shaw, graduate of Washington State University, for her essay "Refusing Erasure: Nugent, *Fire!!*, and the Legacies of Queer Harlem." In a rigorous, in-depth analysis, King-Shaw compares Richard Bruce Nugent's story "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" from the Harlem Renaissance with Marlon Riggs's film *Tongues Untied* of the late 1980s. King-Shaw shows how the work of Nugent and Riggs, separated by more than six decades, constitute "queer interventions in the larger movement toward racial equality, making visible racial and sexual oppression and positing connections between racial justice and queer liberation." She shows how "each artist subverts dominant racist and heteronormative ideologies in mainstream society and Black communities." Combining sophisticated background research with original textual analysis and insightful cultural investigation, King-Shaw shows that both authors "rejected racial uplift politics that excluded representations of queer identity from Black cultural production" and "disrupted the dominant discourses that invalidate, erase, and kill queer Black communities." In addition to learning about the strategies, consequences, and influences of defying cultural norms, readers will learn about two important artists and about a dynamic literary tradition that has remained largely invisible to most audiences.

* * *

While research skills and academic excellence—such as demonstrated in Samantha King-Shaw's essay—ranked high among the benefits that graduates found crucial to their honors experience, few alums mentioned that such assets were beneficial to them in the early stages of their career or in getting

a job. These benefits were, however, crucial to them once they got a job—in both the performance and enjoyment of their work—and at least as important to them in the quality of their personal lives. These perceptions are relevant to the two research essays that follow, both of which examine how much, if at all, graduates think that the values of honors facilitated their competition in the job market. This research foregrounds and complicates the role that honors programs play in helping students enter and succeed in the job market.

In “‘Best of Both Worlds’: Alumni Perspectives on Honors and the Liberal Arts,” Angela King Taylor of the University of Missouri, Kelsey Daniels of International Literacy and Development, and Molly Knowlton of Drexel University describe their qualitative study based on interviews of 16 recent honors graduates at an unnamed university. Their study aim was “to build a deeper understanding of the extent to which skills acquired through the liberal arts curriculum of an honors college help alumni reach their first destination post-graduation.” After discussing the learning objectives of this honors college—“intellectual engagement, critical reasoning, disciplinary methods, communication skills, intercultural competence, interdisciplinary inquiry, and research competence”—the authors describe the importance that employers assign to each objective, in general indicating a positive sense of the objectives but a more negative impression of how well honors students apply them on the job. In their interviews of the recent graduates, the authors found that, like employers, most of the 16 interviewees valued the objectives but expressed mixed feelings about their application to job performance: while the honors college students “obtain liberal arts skills that help them reach their first destinations, they are often unable to articulate, recognize, translate, and apply the liberal arts skills they have acquired to their career settings—especially non-academic ones.”

A quantitative research study in the Netherlands came to different conclusions: namely, that most businesses there were unfamiliar with honors programs and that an honors education did not substantially increase a student’s success in attaining a job. In “Dutch Honors Alumni Looking Back on the Impact of Honors on their Personal and Professional Development,” Arie Kool, Elanor Kamans, and Marca V. C. Wolfensberger present the results of a longitudinal, cross-sectional survey of 79 graduates of extracurricular honors programs, called Honors Talent Programs, at Hanze University of Applied Science, Groningen. In the survey conducted from 2017 to 2021, the respondents acknowledged the importance of learning goals like the “ability to look beyond boundaries” and “ability to show initiative and guts” to their

professional and personal development, but they were “uncertain about the role of the honors certificate in their applications for jobs.” The nine learning goals of the Honors Talent Programs resemble those of most honors programs in the U.S. and are like those described in the previous essay. In evaluating the effectiveness of the learning goals, graduates rated them all “on or above the midpoint of the scale,” with “the ability to look beyond boundaries” and “the ability to show initiative as well as courage” as most important to their personal and professional goals. The authors suggest, however, based on their results, that “a useful addition to the honors programs would be to provide some training in the way alumni can use honors during an application. Alumni do mention the positive effect of honors on networking and projects in the work field, but it is not evident that they learn to present themselves favorably during applications.”

Both research studies suggest that joining an honors program in order to increase the likelihood of getting a job after graduation is a risky business. This suggestion substantiates the stated objectives of most honors programs, which typically focus on the values described in the 44 essays by graduates in the Forum: values like critical thinking, sense of community, diversity, active learning, interdisciplinary studies, lifelong learning, and personal transformation—values that lead to personal and professional satisfaction but not necessarily to a job.

The final essay in this issue of *JNCHC* has a more peripheral but nevertheless relevant connection to the Forum on “The Value of Honors to its Graduates.” Many of the Forum essays describe the authors’ initial doubts and anxieties upon joining an honors program but then the transformation of that stress into confidence once they joined a community of supportive and like-minded peers. In “Perfectionism and Honors Students: Cautious Good News,” Jennifer S. Feenstra of Northwestern College did a comparative study of two kinds of perfectionism—maladaptive evaluative-concerns perfectionism and “more adaptive personal-strivings perfectionism”—in honors and non-honors students. Based on a quantitative assessment of 147 college students, 27% of whom were honors students, the study determined that both honors and non-honors students evinced roughly the same signs of evaluative-concerns perfectionism, in which students base their sense of self-worth on how they perceive themselves to be judged by others and resulting in anxiety and stress. However, honors students showed greater signs of personal-strivings perfectionism, “which involves setting high standards for oneself and being strongly motivated to reach those standards” and is associated with “high well-being and lower stress.”

While Feenstra's study did not examine the precise causes of this higher degree of adaptive perfectionism among honors students, the Forum essays might suggest that it arises from the sense of acceptance and belonging that so many honors graduates consider to have been a key value of their honors experience. Remarkably absent from the essays by honors graduates was a recollection of feeling pressured or judged by their teachers or peers; on the contrary, the consensus was that they felt motivated and supported in their honors community—a consensus that should encourage honors administrators and faculty to feel pride in their personal commitment to cultivating their students' well-being, not just while they are in honors but throughout their lives.

