

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors  
Council –Online Archive

National Collegiate Honors Council

---

2022

## The Value of Honors: Defined by Quality and Cost

Christopher Kotschevar

Nicholas Arens

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchcjournl>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Liberal Studies Commons](#)

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the National Collegiate Honors Council at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council –Online Archive by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

# The Value of Honors: Defined by Quality and Cost

CHRISTOPHER KOTSCHÉVAR

South Dakota State University, 2014–2018

Associate Director of Stakeholder Engagement for a national pharmacy association

NICHOLAS ARENS

South Dakota State University, 2013–2017

Patent Agent for a law firm

**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 authors reflect on the personal and professional impacts of the honors experience.

**Keywords:** higher education—honors programs & colleges; educational outcomes; South Dakota State University (SD)—Van D. & Barbara B. Fishback Honors College

**Citation:** *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, 2022, 23(1): 111–13

Value, simply defined, is quality divided by cost. Cost, whether it be in terms of money, time, energy, or another expense, is relatively easy to measure. Conversely, quality proves challenging to measure, regardless of the context. Typically, measuring quality is pursued with the purpose of quality improvement, such as in manufacturing or healthcare, and/or for the purpose of comparison, as demonstrated by the ever-growing industry of consumer ratings and reviews. Thus, the question of what the value of honors education is requires us to define what the cost of an honors education is and, perhaps more importantly, how we define the quality of honors education relative to other higher education modalities.

In an honors education, cost may come in several forms and is likely dictated by the university. The largest costs that are likely most prevalent are

time and money. Some institutions may require a monetary investment into the honors experience while others may also include a credit requirement or other time investment. The university may institute myriad costs for a student to participate and engage in the honors experience, and it is up to the student to determine if the enhanced educational experience provided by honors is valuable enough.

Defining quality within an honors education is abstract in its nature, virtually independent between students. There is a plethora of measures which could be utilized to define the quality of a graduate's education. For the purpose of this paper, rigor, student growth, and subsequent job or graduate placement will be discussed.

In terms of rigor, honors students could perhaps best describe their pursuit in language reminiscent of John F. Kennedy: they pursue honors not because it is easy, but because it is hard. They expect that programs will challenge them and encourage students to challenge themselves and one another. Honors students often invite the struggle, and the struggle rewards them. Honors graduates have not only learned to live comfortably but ultimately to thrive in the uncertainty of the professional world. Honors programs live in the abstract, facilitating critical thinking and the pursuit of novel approaches to the grandest challenges.

The facilitation of a rigorous education ultimately leads to the second measure of quality: growth of the student. Challenging coursework breeds discomfort, and with discomfort comes growth. Discomfort stems from two major sources: the first-time failure or rejection, and wading into uncharted academic territory. One author remembers his first true academic rejection occurring with the submission of his honors capstone for publication. His work was rejected in its first submission. This humbling experience, while viewed as a failure in the moment, led to robust growth in his comfortability with utilizing rejection as a driver to pursue being better. Each author is trained in the hard sciences, pharmacy, and engineering. These fields require one to pursue both precision and accuracy, and they reward correct conclusions. Most often, one must know what the most right answer is, not what the absolute right answer is. For the authors, comfortability in a most right answer has proven to accelerate them in their pursuits as higher levels of professional work prove necessary to the knowledge of what is both known and unknown.

This leads to the final measure under discussion: job or graduate program placement. Each author carried on learning beyond graduation with honors

distinction. One pursued a Doctor of Pharmacy while another pursued his Master of Engineering and now a Juris Doctor. Both have proven to have successful early careers that are unique among many peers in their field. Having a PharmD enables practicing pharmacy in the context of patient care, but this author has shifted gears and successfully pursued a role with a national healthcare quality organization working to impact the quality of patient care. The other author has led a successful early career honing his expertise in patents, first working on the patent team for a major powersports manufacturer before transitioning to a role as a patent agent with a major law firm. These two stories are not uncommon in honors; countless honors colleagues have successfully pursued roles in nontraditional careers. Honors programs prepare students to be lifelong learners. Ultimately, graduates are spurred on to pursue the struggle associated with new challenges and to positively change the shape of the world along the way.

An honors education is valuable. Metrics can be measured, analyzed, and reviewed, but at the end of the day, you need to look no further than the impact a single honors student has on the world.

---

The authors may be contacted at

[cmkotsch@gmail.com](mailto:cmkotsch@gmail.com)

and

[nicholasrarens@gmail.com](mailto:nicholasrarens@gmail.com).