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From Honors Student to Honors Coordinator

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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; transformative learning; College of New Rochelle (NY)—Honors Program

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Every time I begin a new semester, I often think about how my honors professors began their classes. There was a palpable excitement in their voices as they discussed how we would explore the given subject through a variety of lenses, uncovering nontraditional perspectives and allowing the conversation to flow freely. I remember the conversations continuing among my fellow honors students long after the class ended. The interdisciplinary seminars I took as an honors student continue to inspire my teaching today.

The coursework in my honors program pushed me to embrace research and academic writing. My honors professors instilled the practice to always “dig deeper,” going beneath the surface level of any given subject. I took many classes that transported me to other worlds, be they Ancient Greece, 90s hip hop, geopolitical landscapes, or the deep writings of authors like the Woolf sisters, Plath, and Austen. Worlds that can easily be forgotten made my education exciting.

Today, I not only strive to lead my students in interdisciplinary explorations and to bring the same sense of adventure in uncovering new knowledge, but I also get to run the day-to-day operations of the honors program at the college where I am now employed.

I sometimes reflect on how the honors student became the honors coordinator, especially since a career in academia was never my original aspiration. But my honors mentality always stuck with me. The rigor in research and investigation served me well when I worked for *Reader's Digest*. When I did enter academia as an adjunct professor, I discovered the joy in seeing students grow intellectually. The pathway to my current position unfolded naturally after that. Given where I am now, still in honors, but as the administrator, I feel like I can relate well with my students. I remember the struggle in achieving academic excellence (that perfect 4.0 GPA) and the frustration in fully grasping a difficult concept. I remember attending and presenting at an NCHC conference for the first time. I've been in their shoes.

But I also remember when my professors gave me critiques and encouraged me to focus on ways to improve and grow and *not* to focus the grade on the assignment. When I was in college, I thought the measure of my success came from “earning the A.” I can now say, many years later and after investing over a decade in running an honors program, the value of honors isn't about perfection, mastery, or elite status . . . it's about always taking on the challenge and learning as much as you can along the way. I seldom ever think about my final GPA from college because the string of As isn't what has contributed to my success but the skills honors taught me and the resiliency honors built in me. I think about how my professors always pushed me further and farther; I attempt (not always successfully) to push myself in the same ways now.

I love my job—partly because I get to lead students in their honors journeys but also because my job reminds me to be an honors student all times. And while my honors program no longer serves students since my college is now closed, I have not forgotten the lessons my honors professors taught me. My honors experience continues today, and I feel privileged to lead honors students and watch them embrace challenges and surprise themselves with what they can accomplish. The value of honors came from my professors and their courses. They taught me to always step up to the task at hand and to know that the outcome isn't about the “A”—it's about how you transform along the way.

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