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Chloe Salome Margulis

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Honors Lessons Learned Outside the Classroom

CHLOE SALOME MARGULIS

LIU Post, 2014–2017

Patent Attorney

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; Long Island University, Post (NY)—Honors College

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As an immature high schooler, I thought Honors would be a stamp of excellence on my résumé. However, I graduated Honors with a far more valuable gift—an education outside the classroom full of social and intellectual reflection and growth.

At my high school, self-worth and popularity hinged on which Ivy League you got into, so my eyes were never set on LIU Post Honors. However, I considered alternatives once I received eight rejection letters in the mail. Desperation to go to *any* college caused me to begrudgingly ink my name on the acceptance letter to LIU Post Honors. When I attended a meeting with the Honors Director, Joan Digby, she could feel my defeated attitude, but instead of giving up on me, Joan saw my potential to grow into a person with meaningful values and a healthy drive towards success. She looked past my arrogance and played into my desire for impressive résumé builders by listing what I could do in Honors: study abroad at Cambridge University, free travel and immersion in national parks, and graduation in three years.

This was not mere puffery. During my time in Honors, I found myself having philosophical conversations with prestigious professors while punting down the Cambridge River. I tested my physical limits backpacking in

the Sawtooth Wilderness Area with ten strangers, all honors students from around the country, and relying on them for my survival. I scrambled over volcanoes and scrambled away from cockroaches in Hawaii, again with honors students who were all strangers. And lastly, I graduated early as valedictorian candidate in computer science with an acceptance to a top-20 law school.

Honors unraveled the confidence I had in the classroom and exposed my vulnerabilities outside in the real world, teaching me lessons and skills that cannot be learned from a textbook. For example, backpacking the Sawtooth Wilderness Area was a major turning point in my life. I learned to trust people and my abilities to survive by overcoming the mental hurdles of hunger, coldness, and fatigue. I developed grit, which has helped me train for months on end and persevere through countless marathons, ultra-marathons, and 48-hour running challenges. Honors has helped develop the mental strength needed to balance and succeed simultaneously in my running endeavors and professional career.

A year from graduating college, I was challenged intellectually to choose a thesis topic that bridged the gap between computer science and law. I struggled because Google did not provide an easy answer. While Googling, I inadvertently fell down the rabbit hole of *Apple v. Samsung*, which exposed me to my version of *Alice's Wonderland*: the world of patent law. I knew in that moment that I belonged in the patent world and would make my professional career there. I wrote a hundred pages of patent law analysis and software engineering solutions to advance efficient, unbiased resolutions in patent cases. My passion brought me to present my thesis to a board of LIU trustees, publish my thesis in an international law journal, and write other articles on this topic.

Honors helped me reach another major turning point in my life: becoming a patent attorney. Being the only female student in the LIU Computer Science Program, I walked into law school with humble confidence that I could make it in an industry crowded by nerdy, male engineers. I knew I had the strength and grit to persevere in this professional world—and I did not have to be cocky or arrogant to make it. Two years out of law school, I am at a world-renowned patent law firm. I have my dream job, and every day I am reminded of the self-growth journey in Honors that helped me find my way to this career.

My life could have panned out a thousand other ways had I received one acceptance letter from the Ivies. However, thanks to Honors, *this is my life*. Although I did not see the potential for growth in myself, Joan Digby did.

She sold me on Honors, and Honors gave me the chance to grow into the person I strived to be. The Honors coursework was consuming and stimulating, but the best things about Honors were the countless opportunities to develop grit, mental toughness, courage, and humility. These characteristics have shaped me into a dedicated athlete, a passionate young professional, and a good human being.

The author may be contacted at
musikhan15@gmail.com.