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An Honors Lifetime Love of Learning

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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; educational attainment; West Virginia University (WV)—Honors College

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It was the welcome letter from the Honors program director that drew me in.

I was hesitant to attend a large school, and West Virginia University was a big place. Even though being a Mountaineer ran deep in my family, I was drawn to smaller settings, with a desire for a more intimate education and close colleagues to converse and grow with. I wanted to know my professors and they me. But my skepticism that I could achieve this in Morgantown diminished when I read my acceptance letter from the Honors Director: “Honors courses are different: classes are smaller and the discussion level is high.” With this reassurance, I embraced the Honors program and the first great value I would enjoy throughout my collegiate years: being part of an intimate learning environment surrounded by peers, faculty, and administrators who cared deeply about learning, growing, and community.

It was students teaching Honors orientation that led me to love teaching and learning with others.

Honors orientation courses were taught by Honors upperclassmen. When my chance to teach such a course arrived, I leapt at the opportunity

and immediately fell in love with teaching. I loved planning a course of instruction and influencing the discovery path of others. Years later, that experience proved pivotal in achieving my first faculty position, which beget the second, and then the third. Student teaching was one of many opportunities uniquely available within the Honors program—and with benefits far beyond an undergraduate career. Bespoke opportunities for growth experiences are the second great value of the Honors program: the ability to leverage unique avenues for growth, achievement, and fulfillment, both while on campus and beyond.

It was the sense of discovery that led to a lifetime love of learning.

Everything about the Honors program—the intimacy of academic exploration, the deeply involved faculty, the community of fellow students living, learning, and growing together—created an experience in which I came to love learning itself, for the simple joy of discovering something new and achieving insights previously unknown. This love and joy of learning didn't fade after graduation; rather, it pushed me to continually seek out new and more challenging learning opportunities; in the two decades since I left WVU, I have completed four additional degree programs. I wholly credit the Honors experience with giving me the inspiration, energy, and dedication to continually pursue learning even while managing other life events. Thus, the third and greatest value of an Honors program lasts a lifetime: a love of learning.

As I reflect on the value of Honors over the course of my careers, no other collegiate activity or program had as great an influence on my life as the Honors program. I chose WVU to participate in a special Honors community of students, one that incubated passion, discovery, and intellectual exploration; it was in this special community that I felt at home and welcomed. I explored incredible Honors opportunities uniquely curated for us: opportunities that offered value to me not only while on campus but also after I had matriculated. And Honors fostered in me a love of lifetime learning that has rewards for both my personal and professional pursuits.

Honors doesn't conclude with a cap and gown.

Honors endures, and the value of Honors perpetuates as graduates enter the world and carry their Honors experience with them. Honors graduates can create communities wherever they go and stay engaged in an intellectual network that welcomes all in discovery and growth. Honors graduates create new opportunities for others, allowing others to stand on their shoulders,

just as they once stood on others. And Honors graduates inspire others to continue learning, just as they do themselves.

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