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2022

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Achieving Excellence Through Experiential 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; academic achievement; Monroe College (NY)—Honors Program

Citation: *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, 2022, 23(1): 103–04

Coming from the small island of Trinidad, I had never heard of nor participated in experiential learning until I became a member of the honors program. Being given the opportunities to engage in experiential learning helped me further my understanding of many subject areas outside of my hospitality management major. Of course, honors also allowed me to thrive in an academically rigorous environment, but the value I received from honors came from the camaraderie, friendships, and lessons learned through experiential learning.

The two experiential activities that stand out most to me are my participation in the Northeast Regional Honors Council (NRHC) and the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) conferences. One of my honors classes, World-Changing Discoveries, was the inspiration for my research. Being able to cultivate projects from proposals to presentations provided two unique experiences. For both conferences, I explored technological advances that had nothing to do with my hospitality management major. The ability to

explore subjects outside my major kept me engaged throughout my time in college. The NRHC and NCHC conferences are still a highlight of my time in honors. But these events also allowed me to meet and interact with other students. This further expanded my intellectual capabilities and offered rewarding bonding experiences with my fellow honors colleagues, some of whom I consider lifelong friends.

Before joining the honors program, I did not think I would ever have the aspirations to attain my MBA. Because I was challenged during my undergraduate degree, I wanted to pursue graduate study. Further, the experiential learning components of the program fostered my ability to be open-minded. I continue to carry this with me as I pursue my MBA and in my career as a hospitality professional. Honors certainly instills excellence in academics for students, but the true value of participation in honors came from experiential learning—the ability to present at regional and national conferences, the chance to visit museums and other cultural sites in New York City, the opportunity to give back to the local community through volunteer activities, among so much more. These aspects of my honors experience are invaluable to me, and many of my best college memories come from these adventures. Even though I came to New York as an international student, I graduated with even more worldly experience thanks to the honors program. I continue to view every person I meet with open-mindedness, every new circumstance with curiosity, and every unknown opportunity with excitement.

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