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2015

## The Unique Role of Two-Year Honors Colleges and Programs

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Armstrong, J. David Jr., "The Unique Role of Two-Year Honors Colleges and Programs" (2015). *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive*. 445.  
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## The Unique Role of Two-Year Honors Colleges and Programs

J. DAVID ARMSTRONG, JR., PRESIDENT

Broward College

HONORS DIRECTOR: SHEILA JONES

As President of Broward College, I am proud of the honors education we have been offering our students since 1982. As we commemorate the important fifty-year milestone in the National Collegiate Honors Council's history, we celebrate the value of honors by recognizing the impact that our work has on our students. Simply put, it is transformational.

Two-year colleges play a crucial role in higher education, having experienced extensive growth in the past few decades and with honors as an important part of that growth. Broward College was founded in 1960 to support the rapid development of the local community, and today we remain committed to that mission, providing accessible, affordable, and high-quality education to more than 60,000 students annually. For many in South Florida, Broward College offers a clear pathway to a college degree and a better future, and we believe that an honors education should be available to anyone who wishes to have it. Honors represents much more than an academic curriculum:

it is an experience, an opportunity; and a community. We are proud to be able to offer our students access to a world-class curriculum, dedicated faculty, and financial support through the Robert “Bob” Elmore Honors College.

Like many honors programs around the country, ours has attracted the attention and support of major donors, who appreciate our unique mission, which in our case includes serving students who might never have thought of themselves as honors students. Our honors college is named for the late Robert “Bob” Elmore, a Fort Lauderdale business owner and philanthropist who, along with his widow, Joan, became our program’s benefactor in creating scholarship endowments for our students. They were moved by the benefits our honors college provides in helping students, many of whom had at first thought that earning a college degree, let alone an honors education, was out of reach. One of their scholarship funds supports part-time honors students who often work to support their families while completing their coursework. Along with Honors District Director Sheila Jones, I take this legacy seriously and remain committed to inspiring all of our students to consider honors and the unique way our program supports and encourages students, serving as an important foundation for their future.

When speaking with our outstanding students and hearing their stories, I see this legacy in action firsthand. One of our sophomores relies on our scholarship funding for his education and has excelled during the short time he has been at Broward College; currently, he is completing an internship at the Small Business Administration’s Office of Economic Opportunity in Washington, D.C., through the Capital Semester’s public policy program. He is one of the very few sophomores admitted to the program and is the first of our students to have this experience.

I have also recently met a young international student who took the initiative to conduct her own interdisciplinary research project on the sociological and psychological factors that influence international students’ educational experiences here in the United States. Our honors college provides the access for these students to fulfill their goals.

We also look to the stories of our recent alumni to measure the value of our honors education. One of our 2008 Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship winners transferred from Broward to New York University and recently completed a master’s degree at Harvard University. Now she is working for Facebook as a product designer.

I think that all of these students would agree with one of our May 2015 honors graduates, who explained that “attending Broward College was the

best decision” he ever made and that our honors college “greatly helped to mold [him] into the exceptional student and leader that [he] is today . . . with people who have supported [him] throughout [his] entire life journey.”

Given these comments, I must stress that our honors faculty are at the core of what we do. We have seventy-five honors faculty members who are dedicated to our honors college, spending countless hours helping our students succeed inside and outside of the classroom. The courses they teach are rigorous, small, seminar-style classes that prioritize interdisciplinary thinking and original research. Our faculty, many of whom hold PhDs, are dedicated professionals who regularly publish in their fields and receive awards for teaching excellence. Among them are faculty members who have also served NCHC and the honors community at large, publishing articles in NCHC journals, presenting sessions at conferences, and holding offices at the state and national levels.

What is most exciting from my vantage point is seeing how students are transformed by their experiences at state and national conferences. We recently heard from an honors graduate whose story is representative of many of our students who are the first in their family to go to college. She was a shy sophomore who pushed herself to present at the 2012 NCHC conference, graduate from Broward College with an Honors Certificate, and then enroll at her transfer university’s honors college. She recently returned from a study abroad trip and credits the Broward College Honors College with giving her the confidence to pursue goals that she had previously believed were unattainable.

As an open-access institution, everyone at Broward College takes seriously our responsibility to provide an education for anyone who has the desire to succeed. Recipients of our first-year Irm’s Honors Scholar Award, named for former honors director and NCHC Fellow Irmgard Bocchino, receive full tuition waivers plus a book stipend that allows them to finish their Associate of Arts degree and earn their Honors Certificate at no cost. For students who do not qualify for this award upon their high school graduation, we offer a path to honors admission and additional scholarships through the Elmore fund as well as funding from other generous donors. In all, we award over half a million dollars in tuition waivers, book stipends, and scholarships each year. We also have different pathways for students to qualify for honors admission and earn their Honors Certificate directly out of high school or after taking a few college courses; these multiple pathways serve our college’s mission of inclusion, diversity, engagement, and empowerment. More importantly, they

offer any student a chance to become an honors college graduate and take advantage of the life-changing experiences we offer.

Honors offers numerous benefits to our students. They receive specialized honors orientation programming, tailored advising, and guided assistance as they plan their transfer degree. They are part of a vibrant community where students are engaged in such activities as leadership retreats, on-campus colloquia, study abroad, and community service. Honors students have been recognized as award winners at our state conference and have worked with faculty on research projects. Through the work of the Honors Student Committee and representation on the Faculty Honors Committee, they also make their voices heard and play a role in the future direction of our program. In addition, the success of our honors college is evident in the fact that sixteen Broward College honors graduates have received the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship—the second highest total in the nation.

Whenever I get the chance, I boast about our honors students and the value of the education provided by Broward College's Robert "Bob" Elmore Honors College, which represents a community of over 1,200 of the best and brightest young minds at our campuses and centers in South Florida as well as our international partnership centers in Sri Lanka, Peru, and India. Our honors students graduate as critical thinkers in a global society with an appreciation of and enthusiasm for their role in shaping the future. They inspire us and remind us that everyone involved with honors education helps to build our students' confidence and open doors to new dreams and possibilities.

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