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Finding My Better Self and the Strength to Dream: The Impact of the Honors Experience

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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.

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Honor.

It flows throughout the thread of life and shapes a path at every stage. It serves as an inner compass that navigates through growth and identity to find the destination of a better self. My experience as an honors student represents an important part of this journey and established a foundation of intrinsic values that continue to guide me through my professional and personal landscape. Looking inward today, I recognize these values in the mosaic of my belief system and how they became a driving force in my ongoing evolution as an individual. By honoring the values of critical thinking, continuous improvement, self-trust, and maintaining an active voice, my path remains anchored in wonder and discovery as I pursue my continued development.

Critical thinking represents the cornerstone of my methodology for evaluating situations and information in both personal and work settings. Cultivating this skill was a consistent theme in my honors classes and offered

the opportunity to explore diverse subjects and concepts. I gained new insight into the complex congregation of thoughts, ideals, and actions through a thorough examination of literature enriched by open and engaging discussion. This also strengthened my research skills with an enhanced ability to analyze and synthesize information to ascertain its validity, relevance, and connection. Honors instilled the drive to know more and remain fully informed so that I am prepared to make mindful decisions while proactively assessing for bias or misunderstanding.

Another important lesson that inspired me was discovering that perfection in one attempt is not the important objective. Continuous improvement offers a more empowered way to accomplish a goal or project and strengthens perception of the self. One simple phrase imparted during an honors class that I still embrace today embodies the beauty of this concept: writing is rewriting. For the trajectory of my writing skills, this changed everything and soon infiltrated many other parts of my life. Discovering that I learn more and expand my skills and knowledge by continuously evaluating and identifying ways to improve has removed the fear of the unknown and helped me understand that transformation and growth are the true objectives of the journey.

As my honors education continued to unfold, nurturing self-trust became a necessary focus that enabled me to challenge myself and stay strong in my views while engaging with others. This also gave me the control to let go of restrictive boundaries and make time for visionary and strategic thinking. Staying safe in what I know and neglecting to make time to envision new goals prevent me from creating a blueprint that transcends the day-to-day rather than mapping out a strategy for removing limitations and believing in myself without fear of failure. This encouraged me to dive into my ideas and interpretation of a subject with full conviction and commitment, trust the integrity of my argument or analysis, and go beyond my comfort zone.

Gathering these values together leaves space for the last and most influential. The paramount importance of an active voice and how this encompasses far more than action and the selection of words transformed my approach to communication. This guiding principle awakened me to the power of listening to the meaning of each word and understanding the driving force behind it. Modifying the intention and reception of a phrase by changing a passive expression into one of action was a revelation to me. In addition to improving my writing and communication skills, this guidance deepened my understanding of the economy of words and how it can help me fine-tune what I share with and comprehend from others.

The honors experience had a profound impact on me and shaped the arc of my future. It offered a great mirror that empowered me to see into myself, identify my beliefs, and enhance my understanding of the world around me and my role in it. The core values that honors introduced anchor me in a formative foundation as I continue my pursuit of personal and professional growth and excellence. Together, they weave a thread throughout my life that reveals the most valuable lesson of all: how to find my better self and foster the strength to continuously learn, serve, and dream.

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