

## College Honors Programs and Honors Colleges

### Summary

National Collegiate Honors Council provides a list of Honors Colleges located at larger public and private universities: <http://www.nchchonors.org/memberinstitution.shtml>. The goal of the colleges is to give top students enriched resources and opportunities within the larger university setting. At many universities, this includes special housing, priority registration, extra consideration for merit scholarships, and other benefits such as special opportunities for internships and research projects. Another important benefit of many programs, however, is access to smaller classes and a stronger sense of community within the large university setting.

The following information is taken from the National Collegiate Honors Council website:  
<http://www.nchchonors.org/>

### What is Honors?

Honors education is a general term that covers a wide variety of courses, teaching styles, and even educational objectives. While an introductory chemistry course may be basically the same everywhere, one Honors course may be very different from another equally distinguished Honors course, even if they have similar titles or subject matter. This is because Honors programs and Honors courses may attempt to fulfill diverse goals, utilize different teaching approaches, and employ a variety of ways of mastering subject matter.

Always however the central goal of Honors education is academic enrichment; the ways to this goal are defined by the specific institutional context, the faculty teaching in the program, and the needs of the particular students. In general, Honors programs are based on the belief that superior students profit from close contact with faculty, small courses, seminars or one-on-one instruction, course work shared with other gifted students, individual research projects, internships, foreign study, and campus or community service.

For students filled with ideas, longing for creative expression, and ready to take on career-shaping challenges, an Honors education is the way to go. Honors programs and Honors colleges offer some of the finest undergraduate degrees available and do so always with students in mind. The essence of Honors education is personal attention, top faculty, enlightening seminars, illuminating study-travel experiences, numerous research opportunities, and career-building internships - all designed to enhance a classic education and prepare students for a lifetime of achievement. And there's a bonus: many Honors programs and colleges have their own scholarships that help pay for a student's undergraduate education.

**You can find Honors education at community, state, and private schools; at two-year and four-year schools; at large schools and small schools; at schools that focus on research and those that focus on teaching.** What they share in common is a commitment to excellence. Honors education teaches students to think and write clearly, to be excited by ideas, and to become independent, creative, and self-confident learners.

Are you thinking about Honors? Maybe you're a high school student preparing your college applications. Maybe you're a community college student thinking about transferring to a four-year school. Or maybe a student already at a four-year school - and doing better than you expected. Honors may well be right for you. Honors programs and colleges admit students from every background and with every educational goal. Do you have a major and career in mind, or do you need direction and advice? One of the great strengths of an Honors education is that it offers a nurturing, supportive environment in which students can develop and grow.

**Although every Honors program is different, a typical Honors program consists of a sequence of seminar courses that either supplements or substitutes for a student's general education or distribution requirements.** (There are also a growing number of Honors colleges in the United States.) **Many Honors programs and colleges include a capstone project or thesis.** Honors programs are available for students in most majors,

and rarely require students to take more courses or credits than non-Honors students. **Students who complete an Honors program or college typically receive Honors designation on their transcripts and/or diplomas.**

## The Difference Between High School Honors and College Honors

Most of the differences between high school honors classes and a college or university Honors education stem from the distinction between quantity and quality. High school honors classes tends to be distinguished from non-honors classes by the greater amount of work that honors students are required to do, or the faster ("accelerated") speed at which they progress through their course work. Indeed, often when high school honors students first consider a college or university Honors education, they may feel some reluctance to take on what they believe will be extra work or little more than an accelerated version of an already-fast-paced college education.

**But college Honors is not designed to be about more work or harder work. It is truly student-centered education.** It is meant to provide students with an education that helps them develop their own ideas rather than simply having them feed back information. It is about discussing issues and encouraging innovation in an atmosphere of open exchange, where students' views are respected. Honors programs emphasize diverse perspectives, interdisciplinary course work, small classes, and greater interaction between students and professors. Honors education is about learning to think clearly, to write well, to argue thoughtfully. It is about developing the student's fullest intellectual potential.

Finally, students should bear in mind that the majority of their courses in college will not be Honors courses. They will be courses in their major or free electives.

## The Value of Honors Programs and Honors Colleges

The value of Honors programs and Honors colleges for students cannot be overemphasized. For high achieving students, Honors programs and colleges offer many opportunities to make the most of their higher education.

For the bright and talented students, participating in an Honors program provides the challenges necessary to stay motivated and stimulated. Honors education promotes lifelong learning through personal engagement, intellectual involvement, and a sense of community.

**Honors classes are generally smaller, allowing students to engage in thoughtful discussion with their professors and with each other. Honors education encourages independent learning, often involving undergraduate research or creative projects.** National and regional Honors conferences provide opportunities for students to present their research. Participation in co-curricular activities is also an integral part of the college Honors experience. Honors programs and colleges encourage students to develop their leadership skills, to assume mentoring and teaching responsibilities at their institutions, to study overseas, and to take internship positions. And scholarship opportunities abound in Honors!

## Honors Programs at 2-Year Colleges: Two Plus Two Equals a Winning Combination

For any freshman, starting college can an extremely exciting and sometimes frightening experience. Academically talented students are faced with the usual freshmen pressures. Like other freshmen, they can be overwhelmed by new social freedoms, but they have the added pressure of high expectations for their academic performance. Honors programs and Honors colleges offer some very special opportunities for these talented students to ease into college bolstered by a sense of community that comes from the Honors environment.

One option that thousands of students have benefited from is to begin the college experience in a community college Honors program for the first two years and then transfer to a college or university after the sophomore year. The

advantages of Honors programs and Honors colleges described elsewhere on this website are also offered in community college Honors programs.

In addition, courses at community colleges tend to be smaller than those at many four-year institutions. Smaller classes combined with lower tuition make community college an attractive option. For many students, community college provides the opportunity to establish a strong academic record and become comfortable with the college experience.

Rather than starting college away from home, students at community colleges often continue to live with their families. The financial advantage is obvious, and once they have completed their first two years, students transfer to a four-year school with increased confidence and maturity. Within the security of community college Honors programs, students can truly develop their own abilities, examine new ideas, and explore their world.

Many community colleges have established formal relationships with regional four-year institutions to provide a "seamless transition" for transfer students who have completed a two-year degree. Typically, the four-year school accepts all the credits the student earned at the community college, may offer scholarships to transfer students, and welcomes eligible students into their Honors programs.

Resources:

- National Collegiate Honors Council: <http://www.nchchonors.org/>
- *Peterson's Honor Programs and Colleges*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. , 2005
- *The College Finder: Choose the School That's Right for You!* by Steven R Antonoff, Ph.D., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2008 (Honors colleges listed under the section entitled "Academic Calendars, Consortiums, and More: What Kind of Learning Environment Do I Want?")