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Dear Honors Freshmen

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DEAR HONORS FRESHMEN,

by Kelly Kramer



Congratulations for surviving the semester so far. I was in your shoes two years ago, and I want to say, first of all, you are beginning an amazing journey. The Honors Program is an awesome place to grow, learn, have good conversations, and meet some of the weirdest, most interesting people ever. However, since I am a few steps farther than you, let me offer you, the class of 2019, these pieces of advice.

1) *Don't stress too much over classes this semester.* Figure out how much work each class deserves and budget your time accordingly; you can't work equally hard in all classes at all times. As a rule of thumb, your upper-level major-specific classes should take the most time and take priority. While studying is important, please don't be that Honors freshman who is up until two in the morning studying for a COMS 101 test a week away.

2) *Take classes in your major as soon as possible.* For one thing, you'll find out sooner rather than later if this is really what you want to study, and if you end up switching majors there's no better time than freshman year. However, it also gives you the freedom to save a few easier GenEd classes for your senior year. You'll thank yourself for it later.

3) *Stay on top of your grades on Blackboard.* If you catch a discrepancy or even a poor test grade early enough, professors are willing to work with you. If you wait until the end of the semester, though, they are tired and frustrated with students trying to wheedle letter grade differences out of them.

4) *Professors are awesome.* Take advantage of that. Just coming up to them after class to ask a question or, better yet, taking the time to visit them in their office, demonstrates to them that you care about learning, not just the grade. If they know you, they're much more likely to give you grace if you misread a deadline or didn't understand the directions. And, they are genuinely interesting people. One of my best college memories is inviting my literature professor to see Into the Woods and having an amazing discussion with him and a group of friends afterward. Furthermore, for your senior thesis, you will need to have at least one reader from outside your discipline, so it's worth staying in touch with your favorite Honors seminar professor.

5) *Don't be embarrassed for being a nerd, knowing the answers, or enjoying the reading.* You can spend a lot of time apologizing to your classmates and trying to act like a "normal" freshman, but if you let a dependence on others' approval dictate your actions, you're going to lose a lot of joy and come back a changed person after freshman year. On the other hand, if you own who you are and what you love, you attract similar people.

6) *Honors kids are interesting.* During these first two years, you'll meet a bunch of them from outside your major in your seminars, something you'll definitely miss when practically everyone in your upper-level English class is wearing a scarf, thick glasses, and skinny jeans. Enjoy the chance to make friends outside your major and hear different perspectives. You'll probably start seeing the same people over and over again in your Honors classes, and they have great film, book, and music recommendations. They make interesting friends and thoughtful roommates.

7) *Don't be too cool to try new things.* As a freshman, I tried a bunch of things that, in hindsight, I can't believe I thought were worthwhile: Football, Scaremare, twerking, joining a knitting group, walking to Walmart at 11:30 pm. However, I also tried some things I can't imagine living without: Indian food, Mumford & Sons, Harry Potter, anime, Skyrim, quiz bowl. And, the truth is, you can't know which will be which until you try it.

8) *Also, don't feel bad about quitting things after you try them.* If you are dedicated to making an effort to try new things, you're obviously not going to have time to keep doing all of them. A typical Honors kid pitfall is committing to too much, and getting burned out after your first month or so. Don't lose your joy in certain things just because you're burdened by overcommitments.

9) *Start thinking about CSER now.* Beginning with your sophomore year, you will have to spend at least 20 hours a semester volunteering at school, church, or in the community. This year, you have a little extra free time to test-drive some different activities, and it's much better to thoughtfully commit to one that you connect with than scramble to find one last minute.

10) *It's a total lie that you will find all your college friends in the first week at school or the first*

month. The truth is, you meet new people at the start of every school year, with a new hall and new classes. However, it is true that it's only acceptable to introduce yourself to random people during the first month or so each year. So, make the most of that buffer time, but don't put too much pressure on yourself.

11) *Find somebody older than you to talk to.* To some extent, student leadership on your hall exists to meet that need; however, just because you don't click with your prayer leader doesn't mean you



don't need an older Christian mentor. Try talking to people at church, people you respect in your classes, or even an older Honors student. While these people don't need to be your best friend, it is worthwhile to develop a support system so that when that first crisis happens, you have someone whom you respect to ask about dating, theology, etc.

12) *Dating in college is cool, because you get to see many more aspects of them than you would in high school.* However, it starts with just getting to know people, doing fun normal stuff with them, and being open with them. Practice that first. Also, just remember that Dr. Nutter is very invested in the personal lives of his students (all 780 of us), and if you do happen to marry another Honors kid, your wedding pictures from Facebook will be shown in Honors convocation to

inspire the next generation. You've been warned.

13) *Commit to a group of people.* It's great to start getting to know lots of different people freshman year. However, it's really advantageous to find, or create, a group of people who are all centered around the same thing. Your group could be an intermural sports team, a class, or a prayer group: just people who are committed to getting to know each other while sharing a common interest.



Photos by Sarah Keller

14) *Make good use of your free time.* You might feel super bored and frustrated right now, but trust me when I say that you will have no idea where that time goes once you're an upperclassman. Using free time to relax and hang out with friends is excellent, but so is investing it in some solitary activity, like practicing a new instrument, language, or art skill. Time alone doesn't just have to be about homework or Netflix.

15) *Don't forget to make time for normal human activities like sleep, eating, laughing.* Sure, college is about learning and making friends, but it's also taking responsibility for yourself. Don't ever feel guilty for taking time to rest and take care of your needs.

16) *Church-shop with purpose.* Take recommendations from people you trust, and don't hold out for a perfect church. Commit to going

consistently and start building relationships there.

17) *Be a self-aware Honors kid.* All students have their own issues, but Honors kids definitely tend toward assuming they don't need to study, prioritizing school over relationships, and talking too much in class. If you ever notice something particularly annoying about another Honors kid, check yourself to see if you're guilty.

18) *Watch out for pride.* Yes, you are here because you are a better student and have a higher GPA and test scores than other freshmen. But don't for a second think that your ability to test-take and decision to put school first makes you superior. Neither does liking Nolan films or reading John Green. If there's anything being in Honors teaches you, it's that someone always has better grades, better taste in film or books, and better writing skills. If your identity is being the best, college will shatter it.

19) *Keep your priorities straight.* So many Honors freshmen come through with grand schemes of starting clubs and building their resume and keeping up their 4.0 GPA and playing a sport and an instrument, and then get really burned out or discouraged. There are a multitude of good ways to spend your time, but if you don't intentionally make building deep relationships with others or Christ a priority, it's not going to happen.

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So many of my thoughts about how to do well as an Honors freshmen stem from fellow Honors kids, especially older ones who came alongside my younger self with advice, encouragement, and friendship. In particular, thanks to Jake Rogers, Sara Heist, and my brilliant roommate Whitney Snowden for their thoughts.