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## An Honorable Journey

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## An Honorable Journey

By Hannah Rainous



L-R: Mrs. Laura Kline (Office Manager), Jake Rogers (Quiz Bowl Coach), Hannah Rainous and Wesley Pena (Honors Student Workers), Dr. Jim Nutter (director).  
Missing: Drs. Brenda Ayres and Marilyn Gadomski (Assistant Directors)

All great things must start small, and every story has a starting point. For Liberty University, that starting point occurred in 1971 when Pastor Jerry Falwell, Sr. founded Lynchburg Baptist College, renamed Liberty Baptist College four years later. At its start, Liberty was not much to look at in terms of size or available degrees, but now, over four decades later, it hosts 14,000 residential students and 100,000 online students, 16 colleges and schools of study, and over 500 degree programs. In the process of building this new college, a need was felt for a program for students with exceptionally high grades who thirsted for greater challenge. With this, our story begins.

In 1985, the same year as Liberty Baptist College became Liberty University, the Honors Program started its recruitment. As with the school it came from, the start of the program was not really that impressive; the budget for the program was shared with the Provost, extra academic scholarships were not offered until later, and not many students joined. Michael Travers served as the first Honors Director, followed a few years later by Pauline Donaldson, and a few years after her, Robert Littlejohn. By the time the current Director, Jim Nutter, started heading the program in 1995, the program included fewer than 100 total students, 16 National Merit students, and only

four honors seminars, and two levels of scholarships were available: \$3,200 for students with a 3.5-3.674 GPA, and \$3,600 for students with a 3.675-4.0 GPA. The offices were in the process of being moved from the first floor of Demoss to Dorm 17, and the program now had one Honors Assistant Director in addition to the Director himself.

The program continued to grow; shortly after Dr. Nutter was named Director, Honors split off from the Provost office to form its own distinct program, complete with its own budget. The distribution of the scholarships changed from two amounts based on GPA, to one amount for all Honors students, with the scholarship amount set at \$3,500. As the members of the program expanded, so did the number of workers and opportunities it could offer. A Quiz Bowl team was formed in 2005. (For those who do not know what Quiz Bowl is, it can best be described as Jeopardy! with teams.) It went on to win competitions against such universities as William & Mary, Ohio State, UPenn, and many others. Growth continued, and in 2011, the first round of scholarships for National Merit Commended winners were offered.

Now we reach the present. The amount for yearly scholarship has reached \$4,000, and 719 students take advantage of this offer. National Merit students, whether finalists, semi-finalists, or commended, enjoy a full-tuition scholarship. The Honors staff includes two student workers, two assistant Honors directors, and one Quiz Bowl coach in addition to Dr. Nutter. In 2014, the offices moved yet again, now to the third floor of the new Jerry Falwell Library. Computers, printers, rooms for group projects, a conference room, and a private balcony overlooking the LU lawn became easily accessible. In 2015, the Quiz Bowl team ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in the country and continues to get better. Research funding for students presenting at conferences is now provided. Graduates from the program have gone on to top Ivy League graduate schools, and one, Catherine Hardee, even earned the distinction of a 5-time Jeopardy champion.

Our story is now at a close. However, the Honors Program's journey, and the journeys of its graduates, is far from over. In the words of the Honors Director, "the sky is the limit once [you] graduate from our program."