FIVE REASONS TO JOIN AN HONORS PROGRAM

(From the web site of NextStepU)

You have the grades, a high SAT or ACT score and the motivation to work hard in your classes. So it's no surprise that you're looking at honors colleges and programs at the schools you're considering.

Should you enroll? Here are five reasons why you should at least consider an honors program.

It prepares you for grad school

When Kelly Ross starts her graduate degree in psychology at the University of Alabama-Birmingham, the Gonzaga University (gonzaga.edu) honors program grad will already have experience writing a thesis, presenting on a research topic and working closely with an adviser.

Those weren't little projects, either. Her thesis presentation was an hour and a half long, the paper required to be at least 40 pages.

"Going into graduate school, I feel much more prepared for the work I'll be doing there," Ross says.

Honors students get perks

Priority registration is a big perk for Mansfield University's (mansfield.edu) honors students.

"The minute registration opens, they get first crack at everything," says Dr. Sharon Carrish, who was director of the honors program there for six years.

Honors students are also considered for special scholarships, receive a notation on their transcripts and get to participate in day trips and other social activities. And did we mention the special study abroad options? At Mansfield, two honors students earn a most-expenses-paid trip overseas. Last year, it was to China.

Honors students also have something to tell potential employers.

"It shows, 'I was not the typical student; I went above and beyond," Carrish says. "You're going to have a heck of an opener in the interview."

You'll experience a different kind of teaching

Alex Scott, director of admissions at Felician College (<u>felician.edu</u>), says that small, lively classes and social activities are great reasons to join an honors program.

"But the biggest reason," he says, "is the support of a group of people who are highly interested in learning."

Honors professors know they're teaching the college's top students. So their classes are often discussion-based, seminar-style classes instead of lectures.

"The professors assumed you already did the reading," Ross says. "They might clarify a couple of things, but it's about taking the lessons a step further."

Instant community

Honors students at the University of Denver take some of the university's required classes in small, honors-only courses.

"This gives students the chance to meet and mingle with their peers in the classroom, and take classes that are perhaps a little more challenging," says Eric Gould, professor of English and director of the University Honors Program there.

At Gonzaga, Ross took classes with just 17 students.

"Your professor and classmates know you really well, so you can't blow it off," Ross says.

It's different—not necessarily more—work

"They don't take additional classes; they take other classes," says Carrish of students in Mansfield's honors program. "A typical student would need six hours in humanities; a typical honors student would take six hours of honors humanities."

"Technically, the classes that we're taking have the same names as the classes other students are taking," Ross says.

At the University of Denver, the honors sequence partially fulfills the university's general education requirements and includes classes in writing, social and natural sciences and the humanities.

Honors students who are looking to earn a distinction in their major must also take 12 to 16 hours of coursework and complete a thesis.

"These 12 to 16 hours are usually required for the major anyway," Gould says.

Your next step

"Honors means such different things at different colleges," Ross says. "Find out as much as you can. If you're really considering it, visiting the college and talking to students is huge. ... You don't want to be in a program where people are just trying to be the smartest. You want people to be able to respect what you have to say."