

THE MEANING OF AN HONORS STUDENT

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By [hhen2998](#) , Downers Grove, Illinois

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The problem with trying to define an honors student is that it isn't a homogenous group with set characteristics. Honestly an honors student can be anyone from "jocks" to "nerds" to just the seemingly "average" kids. So how are we supposed to make the distinction between honors students and non-honors students? How can you really decide if someone is honor student material or not?

Everyone has the potential to be an honors student but only some will actually rise to the challenge. But with the competition of applying to college, it has become more and more important for students to be honors students and really rise to the challenge. Because of this competition, more students are becoming honors students. And I don't really know if this is a good thing. Today, schools are filled with what I would call "fakers."

While I was walking down the halls of my school one morning, I saw what I always see. Some kids talking to their friends, others talking to their teacher about an assignment they didn't do, and of course the cheaters. And what was worst of all is that these kids were some of the ones from my honors classes. They were copying other kids' homework or typing the answers into their calculator or even looking at a test from a previous year. These kids are the "fakers". Do they really care about their learning or just the college application? The truth is college is a vicious world and kids will do anything to be able to fill the spots on their application. So how do we separate the world of the real honors students from the one of the fakers?

The official definitions of an honors student are someone who is recognized for academic achievement, is enrolled in honors courses, and may be in an honors club like National Honors Society. Well obviously honors students and fakers are smart and enrolled in honors classes because that's how they got the "honors" part in the first place. They couldn't have gotten to where they are if they weren't, so that cannot be a difference in the two. And about National Honors Society, it is a great organization, don't get me wrong, but half of the points would only need a simple forged signature and the other half you can pay \$20 for a function and get points. The society promotes community service but the only thing most of the students want is the points so they can be inducted.

So that definition doesn't really apply to the true meaning of an honors student. Sure it's the concrete meaning of an honors student, but what is it that separates the fakers from the real honors student? The answer is simple. Character.

Of course things like aptitude, GPA, your ACT score, and work ethic contribute to the overall idea of an honors student. But does it even matter if you aren't a person of good character? I'm not trying to degrade academic achievement but it's not all that is important in life. Your character is what will define you, not your GPA in high school. But if this is true then why are people even in honors classes?

For me, it's obvious. I actually enjoy learning. It's a tad embarrassing to admit but I'll say it, I'm a nerd. That is the main separation between honors students and the fakers, not that they're nerds but that they want to learn. Shocking I know. Students that actually want to learn. Augustine "Og" Mandino, an American author of the best-selling book *The Greatest Salesman in the World*, once said, "Take the attitude of a student, never be too big to ask questions, never know too much to learn something new." To be an honors student, you need to let yourself be taken over fully by the educational process and start thinking outside of the box and letting yourself learn even more. Honors students need a thirst for education, super cheesy I know but it's true. And let's be realistic, every topic you learn in school won't be interesting. But even if you find only one subject that you really enjoy and latch onto, you're an honors student. You have the drive and the strong character to put yourself out of your comfort zone, to strive to do better and to learn more.

My Spanish teacher is constantly harping on my class about us just wanting the grade. And honestly, it's Spanish. I'm not going to major in Spanish or live in Spain so why should I care? I only care because I need three years of a foreign language to get into college. Zing. I would consider that another separation between honors students and the fakers, taking a class to learn and taking a class for the grade. With the competition in college real honors students are hard to find. And I'll be the first one to say I'm not always an honors student. I have my moments of being a faker and an honors student. Someone the other day asked me why I'm taking AP Macroeconomics? And I responded that it was an AP class so duh I'm taking it. We're all guilty of just taking a class because it has the AP and weighted grade. But that shouldn't be what it's about. Sure it looks better on college applications the more honors classes you take, but how much are you really getting from it if you don't want to take the class and want to learn something new. It's like when you have to take those cumulative tests at the beginning of the year and everyone gets an F on it. Studying your butt off in school means nothing if you can't really retain and use the information.

So what does character have to do with academics and being an honors student? Besides the fact that strong character is what gives you the will and desire to learn, it makes you a well-rounded person. I don't think the best honors student is necessarily the smartest or the one who has to out-do everyone. You rarely ever see the completely stuck up smart kid getting the honor of valedictorian. And this isn't just because they might be socially awkward but because they don't have a compelling character. The valedictorian is someone who is supposed to be a role model, and I'm sorry but if you think you're smarter than everyone else no one wants to be like you.

People may think that honors students only care about their grades but that is a common misconception of a true honors student. We've all seen the depiction of a "nerd" all cooped up in their room reading a book. But now more than ever, honors students are everywhere. From student council to sports to every other club there is at school. These true honors students understand that to do nothing but study for four years of high school is not a way to meet new people and expand your thinking. Meeting new people can change the way that you think and add to your intellect. Sharing ideas, sharing thoughts, sharing experiences. Experiences help you to learn the most important lessons in your life.

Speaking of clubs and activities, good character helps honors students to want to expand not only to their school but to their community. True honors students are not the students in NHS who buy their way to their points or forge their mom's signature on a tutoring form. They are the kids who do 10 extra service activities not for points but for enjoyment in service. And sure not every activity is great. I don't really enjoy picking up trash on the side of the road or standing and judging a science fair for five hours but I know that I'm helping someone. I have a good enough character to understand that sometimes you have to be selfless. Do you really think that honors students enjoy every minute of tutoring a freshman in Algebra? Most likely the answer is no. They do it because they care more about other than themselves.

Leading me to my last point. Cheating. You can call it academic dishonesty, or helping out a friend but there's no need to sugar coat it, it's all cheating. The main separation between the fakers and the honors students. Again a question of character. Would you be willing to throw away your moral compass simply for a grade? The sad truth is that students do it everyday. And more often than not it's the honors students. They are stretched so thin between sports, school work, and other activities that there is simply not enough time in the day. I get it. I'm in the same position as you. But why does that give you the excuse to cheat or use someone else's work?

Most likely, the pot head in the back of the room is not likely to cheat because he doesn't care. He doesn't care about his grades or college or anything like that. He won't try and cheat off someone else, he just won't do the work. But honors students need to do the work. I'll admit I'm a perfectionist and cannot stand to not do my homework, it drives me crazy. Something is instilled in my programming forcing me to do my work. And most honors students are like me. But they take the easy way out. "Oh you had that worksheet last night for homework can I borrow it?" and "You have all your AP tests from last year? Can I have them? I know Mr. Smith uses the same tests every year." That's cheating. Writing the answers on your legs, water bottle, calculator, hand, and even a small piece of paper. Guess what? That's cheating.

Honestly, I'm not going to put myself up on a high horse but I could not stomach being a cheater. Cheating is wrong and all true honors students have a strong enough moral compass to not cheat. To have a strong enough character to know what is wrong and right. And that's the true separation between the fakers and the honors students.

Anyone can take honors classes and be in NHS. Don't get me wrong, that is a fabulous accomplishment. Having a GPA above a 4.0 and an ACT score of about 30, that's great. But it's not the most important thing. Honors students are role models for their school and community not only because they are smart but because they have excellent character. Sure they'll slip up every once and a while because we all do, but they will pick themselves up again and keep going. Their character is what keeps them going towards knowledge and selflessness.