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Students Facilitating the Future – What students think of Talent Development.

Student essays for the INTED Oslo honors conference 2025

Editorial review:

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Introduction

This unique collection of 20 notes is comprised of essays from honours students all over Europe and the United States. The essays were submitted for the upcoming Honours Conference 2025, organised by Oslo University's Centre for Interdisciplinary Education (INTED) and supported by the European Honours Council. This collection reflects and reinforces the conference theme 'Students Facilitating the Future'.

The notes in this collection engage with this theme in at least two ways. Firstly, many students explain how their – often inter- or even transdisciplinary – programs are shaped around current complex problems of the world. When confronted with the complexity of many societal issues, students discover the necessity of working over disciplinary boundaries, intercultural and with voices from outside of the university. In many cases, the incorporation of real-world issues finally allowed students to see abstract learning outcomes be translated into concrete actions. Moreover, these types of projects are experienced challenging due to - at start - open ends and therefore their inherent unpredictability – which is specifically appreciated in many of the notes.

On a deeper level, the essays reflect a strong feeling of ownership and responsibility of students over their own development and the drive to take agency over their own education and take on new challenges behind the offerings of their regular program. They often just miss that challenge in their regular education.

Notably, many student essays explicitly value the strong communities and intensive peer to peer collaborations they experienced in their honours programs. For them, their education is not just about realizing individual growth, but especially about learning with other (likewise thinking and working) students and building strong bonds while working on these challenging issues. They experience that they need each other's knowledge and creativity. These relationships exist far beyond the classroom alone and are credited to attribute to an overall experience of the university – effects that last even after graduation.

These dimensions – inter- or transdisciplinarity, real world issues, ownership and strong student communities – will resonate during the upcoming Oslo Honors Conference 2025. The program will not only involve important keynotes about interdisciplinarity, but especially also spotlight students’ own projects and finally aim for the foundation of a new inter-European student network – as a strong embodiment of these students’ voices.

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Wojciech Sowa, Poland, enrolled in The Netherlands

As a student from Tilburg in the Netherlands, I believe education reaches its fullest potential when it pushes us to seek beyond simple answers and accept uncertainty. Through various local and international experiences, including a summer school in China, a public speaking project with Model United Nations Netherlands, and an interview project with a close friend, I have seen how open-ended problems, interdisciplinary thinking, and cultural understanding reveal what students can truly achieve.

Students best show their potential by tackling issues that don't have clear, ready-made solutions. I experienced this during a summer school program offered by Jiangnan University in Wuxi. Our broad task was to explore the urbanization challenges faced by rapidly developing cities, focusing on sustainability and social equity. This type of problem-based learning is central to interdisciplinary education. Traditional education often separates knowledge into distinct categories, such as science or history, but the world operates differently. I discovered the impact of combining disciplines during an interview project with a friend from global law course. We aimed to interview interesting personalities from our university and ask them about the world to show other students how interesting world may be.

Honors programs especially encourage this kind of investigation. Throughout my honors stream, we were urged to create our own projects, experiment, lead, and think critically. Unlike typical courses, where assignments and goals are set, our learning was full of experimentation and curiosity. In this setting, I joined the public speaking training program of Model United Nations Netherlands. What began as a way to improve my speaking skills turned out to be much deeper. We had to speak persuasively on tough topics, often under time pressure and from diverse viewpoints. This was not just about mastering a skill; it was about building confidence, enhancing empathy, and learning to navigate complexity gracefully. Meetings governed by representants of Model United Nations gave us a chance to unlock our full capabilities. We learned how to participate in academic discussions, it is a thing which is not possible to learn during standard course at University.

However, the most transformative aspect of my educational journey has been the people I've met along the way. Sharing learning experiences with students from all over Europe and beyond has broadened my perspective far beyond what textbooks can provide. Whether discussing development in Shanghai, debating with fellow MUN participants across Europe, or talking with honors students in other Dutch cities, I felt at home. European community based on communication and understanding helps us reflect not just on what we learn but also on who we are becoming. It encourages personal growth and helps other students choose the best possible solution for their future. During meetings with students from other universities you can ask them about their opinions about their universities and later decide which university has the best offer for you to study master course.

In short, students achieve their full potential not by memorizing texts, but by facing uncertainty, connecting across disciplines, and learning in multicultural communities. From urban challenges in China to home interview projects, and from public speaking to casual discussions, I have found that our greatest growth takes place when we are challenged to think beyond borders and given the freedom to shape our own learning paths. Honors programs and interdisciplinary study create the framework while community and collaboration bring it to life.

Miguel Pérez Hernández, Spain, enrolled in The Netherlands

When I started my International Business studies at Saxion University of Applied Sciences, I had already lived in different regions of Spain, studied engineering, and worked alongside people from diverse backgrounds. What truly changed my perspective, however, was being part of the honours program. It encouraged me to take risks, pursue interdisciplinary projects, and focus on real-world challenges that matter not only to me but also to my generation. One of those challenges is youth unemployment. My motivation to attend the International Honors Conference in Oslo comes directly from this experience, and I am excited to present the project I created in response to it: Career Journey.

I come from the Canary Islands, a region with one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe. For many young people in my community, finding meaningful work is not just difficult; it often feels impossible. Too often, talented students are stuck in cycles of unpaid internships, temporary contracts, or jobs that do not match their education. I experienced this reality myself, and so did many of my friends. Rather than accepting this situation, I wanted to understand it better and look for ways to change it. The honours program gave me the tools to do just that.

Career Journey was born out of a simple question: What if finding a job could be more transparent, fair, and even inspiring? I began by researching the root causes of youth underemployment, not only in Spain but across Europe. I discovered that many job platforms are designed for employers, not for young applicants. They focus on technical skills and CV filters, but they rarely consider motivation, potential, or personal growth. I also found that responsible companies that care about fair work practices often go unnoticed by students. There was a gap that needed to be bridged.

To address this, I designed Career Journey as a platform that supports both students and responsible companies. It helps young people reflect on their values, skills, and interests while discovering employers that are committed to fair treatment, diversity, and long-term growth. At the same time, it offers companies a space to define what kind of people they are truly looking for, beyond the usual checklists. The platform includes a guided chatbot that leads users through a journey of self-discovery and matches them with job opportunities based on alignment, not just keywords. It also highlights company practices, transparency metrics, and reviews so that students can make informed choices.

The project started as a concept in the honours classroom, but it quickly grew into something more. I assembled a small team, launched social media pages, and began reaching out to organizations and youth associations. We are now preparing a pilot in the Canary Islands and speaking with stakeholders at the European level. I have presented Career Journey at sustainability events, consulted with social impact mentors, and worked with other honours students to shape its narrative and vision.

Attending the conference in Oslo is a chance to share this project with a broader audience and learn from others who care about meaningful education and innovation. I want to meet

honours students from across Europe, hear their stories, and explore how we can collaborate across borders. I believe that when students are trusted with complex problems, they rise to the challenge. The more we connect and support each other, the greater the impact we can have.

What also motivates me is the focus of the conference on interdisciplinary methods. Career Journey is not a traditional business project. It combines elements of psychology, design thinking, social justice, and technology. It is exactly the kind of initiative that grows from breaking down the barriers between disciplines and focusing on what students can build when given autonomy and guidance.

My personal journey reflects this spirit. I have worked on consulting projects through Interreg, attended international summits on diplomacy and security, and led my university's international student association. But Career Journey is the most personal and meaningful project I have ever worked on. It is not just about launching a platform. It is about creating hope for a better transition from education to work, especially for those who feel left behind.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to apply, and I hope to contribute to the Oslo conference by sharing my experience, learning from others, and strengthening the community of honours students committed to making a difference.

Plato Derksen, The Netherlands

Moving From the Cave to Clarity by Embracing Unexpected Dialogue.

There is something thrilling, and slightly terrifying, about being handed a question with no clear answer. No framework, no checklist, no obvious path. Just you and a problem, and the freedom to explore. That is the space where I have felt most alive as a student. It is also where I have learned the most, not just about science or research, but about myself. Through my honours programme in addition to my bachelor's degree in Biomedical Sciences at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and especially through the choices I made beyond its initial structure, I have seen how students can really unlock their potential when challenged to think across disciplines and cultures.

At first, I followed the expected path. I enrolled in honours courses like Brain and Behavior, Drugs That Alter Your Mind, and Scientific Programming 101. These courses were fascinating, and the students around me shared a similar academic background. We understood each other quickly, which made discussion easy. However, I started noticing how often we settled into familiar thought patterns. There was little disagreement or surprise. It was safe, and that safety became limiting. I missed the friction that comes from diverse thinking; the creative energy that arises when your ideas are challenged.

So I began to look elsewhere. I signed up for Roma Caput Mundi, a summer school outside my field, focused on heritage studies. I researched ancient Roman bathhouses through my own lens while learning to appreciate archaeological and historical perspectives. It was unfamiliar and at times uncomfortable, but it made me feel intellectually alive. For the first time, I was not just applying knowledge, I was helping create it.

Later, a research module on multiple sclerosis brought me even deeper into open-ended work. I designed my own research question and explored immunohistochemical staining in MS tissue. This was my first experience with real-world research. Nothing was simplified, and the outcomes were not predetermined. I worked directly with researchers and felt that I had a voice and a role. That experience taught me to take responsibility for my learning and made me feel part of something meaningful.

Currently, I am taking part in the Netherlands-Asia Honours Summer School, where I work in a student consultancy group on waste reduction at Schiphol Airport using AI and robotics. We started with nothing but a broad problem and a set of tools. The process has been unpredictable. Some ideas worked, others did not. What has made it worthwhile is the team itself. We are students from all over the world, from different academic and cultural backgrounds, working together to imagine something new. Sometimes we are placed in groups, sometimes we form them naturally, but in every case, I have seen how quickly trust and creativity grow when people bring different perspectives and remain open to each other.

That, to me, is the strength of honours education. It helps students to learn differently, more so than only allowing students to do more. When students are given agency and invited to solve real problems, they do not just show what they already know. They discover what they are capable of. In addition, interdisciplinary methods strengthen academic depth by asking students to connect, translate, and rethink what they know. And when these methods take place across international contexts, something even more valuable happens: students start to feel part of a wider community that values exploration and collaborative thinking.

These experiences have shaped my academic path, but also my identity. I believe this is what education should make possible. On top of structured learning, it should provide opportunities to grow through challenge, diversity, and meaningful exchange. I would be excited to continue that journey at The Honours Conference 2025, to contribute to the conversation while also listening carefully, and to connect with others who are just as curious and open to unfamiliar settings. After all, solutions emerge not from the shadows of the cave but from the courage to step into the unknown and from the kind of unexpected dialogue that helps us see the world and each other more clearly.

Ires van der Eijk, The Netherlands

Honours Able Education - stimulating curiosity in individuals and diverse classrooms

“But why is it like that?”

“Oh, don’t worry. You don’t have to know that for the test.”

In the current education system, there seems to be a primary focus on teaching pupils to memorize information simply to reproduce it in tests. Endless lists of historical data, sentences in a foreign language or mathematical formulas were quickly learned, filled in during a test and often forgotten a week later. For someone who struggled to learn from books and sit still, this method led for years to grades just high enough to pass. Not being able to memorize everything made me feel stupid. This was until I found out at age 16 that I have an IQ of 133, something that felt unbelievable at that time.

I went to college and soon felt under stimulated, which is when my teacher told me about honours programs. Overly excited, I joined the student council and started taking extra honours courses on the side. Expecting it to soon be too much, I surprisingly started to thrive. Although I only ‘needed’ five honours stars to earn my honours certificate, I graduated with fourteen stars for extracurricular courses and projects. In other classes, I had always felt stupid for having ideas different from those of my fellow students. In group projects this would usually lead to adapting to the ideas of the others, because my ideas were too creative, too unrealistic. But in the honours programs, I found like-minded students. There was room for creativity, questions that led to more questions and coming up with solutions outside the box. Working together with students from different disciplines broadened my horizons. Honours courses such as mindfulness, playfulness and leadership offered me a safe space for personal growth. I remember someone in my leadership course telling me: ‘You always ask others the right questions to help them further, but do you dare to ask those questions to yourself?’. This space for deep personal reflections and interpersonal connections is something I had always missed in my regular classes, but found in the honours programs.

The absence of predefined solutions and the opportunity to tackle complex problems make it possible for students to demonstrate their full potential. It provides a space where students can be creative and use their own knowledge, combined with curiosity to find solutions. For example, I did a project in which I created workshops for health care professionals to learn how to communicate with people with speaking limitations due to aphasia. Another dramatherapy student and I worked together with two speech therapy students. They came with ideas on how to use spoken language in a way that people with aphasia would understand and be able to reply, whereas the two of us thought of non-verbal ways of communication. One solution was not better than the other; it was the combination of disciplines that made these workshops into a success.

Honours programs contribute to student agency by providing opportunities to collaborate with other motivated students. In regular classes, the general motivation of students can be low. They want to do the bare minimum which is needed to pass. Such an environment drains me. Students in the honours programs are intrinsically motivated, because they voluntarily chose the course. There is a shared energy, fueled by collaboration, that leads to creating something greater than any individual could have achieved alone.

Every encounter we have with someone from a different background, we learn something about ourselves and the world around us. A cross-European honours network could therefore enhance students' educational journeys and personal growth. When I imagine an interdisciplinary, cross-European group of honours students, all motivated to work together, my heart starts to beat faster. It is almost impossible to imagine the remarkable projects and solutions that could emerge if we channelled the energy of curious students in the same direction. In a world filled with war and environmental challenges, these honours students are exactly what we need to drive meaningful change.

Josefine Løken, Norway

When asked how students can demonstrate their full potential by solving complex, open-ended problems, my immediate response is to question the very premise of the question. The idea of "unlocking full potential" often stems from a neoliberal discourse that assumes individuals possess some hidden core of genius that can be "activated" through the right challenges. But as I see it, no one solves complex problems alone - nor should they. Our greatest insights emerge not in isolation, but through collaboration, dialogue, and shared effort.

This has become especially clear to me during my first year in the honours program at the University of Oslo, where I'm specializing in sociology. Alongside deepening my understanding of sociological theory and methods, I've had the opportunity to apply this knowledge in practice through interdisciplinary project work. A central theme this past semester has been artificial intelligence. We've explored not only how AI functions technically, but how its development intersects with war, climate crises, knowledge production, and social inequality. These discussions have underscored for me that no discipline can fully grasp these issues alone - and no student can find meaningful solutions without others.

The honours program has given me space to engage with exactly this kind of complexity. Through interdisciplinary seminars, we've worked on projects where we define our own problems within broader themes. This freedom is both exciting and difficult. It's challenged me to ask sharper questions, to listen better, and to accept that uncertainty is part of the process. What has surprised me most is how similar we students are at this stage—despite our different disciplines. We all bring curiosity, insecurity, and a desire to contribute. It's in the interaction between these differences that real learning happens.

A key success factor has been time, time to think, to fail, to research, and to share perspectives. The honours program isn't built around rapid results or rigid deadlines. Instead, we're given the chance to develop ideas gradually, with support from supervisors and peers. This has allowed me to slow down, reflect more deeply, and recognize value in perspectives far from my own. Equally important is the environment we've built together. Being part of an honours cohort means being surrounded by students who study everything from informatics to philosophy. Outside of formal settings, we've gone on cabin trips, shared meals, and had late-night discussions about everything from climate anxiety to AI ethics. These social experiences are not just "extras"—they are essential. They help us understand one another as whole people, not just representatives of a discipline. And that understanding makes it possible to challenge one another more honestly and support one another more fully.

Looking beyond our national context, I believe a cross-European student community could further amplify this learning. The major challenges we face; climate change, forced migration, misinformation, geopolitical instability - do not respect national borders or

disciplinary boundaries. To address them, we need not only interdisciplinary knowledge, but intercultural collaboration. Imagine students from Oslo, Berlin, Warsaw, and Barcelona all bringing their unique academic and cultural perspectives to a shared project. The disagreements would be inevitable and productive. In negotiating them, we would develop not just better analyses, but deeper empathy and stronger democratic skills.

Moreover, sharing learning experiences across borders reminds us that education is not just about individual success or national competitiveness. It's about building the capacity to act collectively, across difference, for a shared future. That's the real potential we should be trying to unlock—not just within each student, but between us. In the end, my honours experience so far has taught me that potential is not something hidden inside individuals, waiting to be discovered. It is something we build together, through openness, curiosity, collaboration, and care. And that, perhaps, is the most important lesson of all.

Șurubariu Ioana, Romania

In a society perceived as a complex adaptive system, driven by diversity and unpredictability, where conformity is prioritized over creativity, I've often felt a constraint in my development. After learning about honors-programs, I realized that they aren't an elitist perspective on education, but rather an imperative call to see things holistically, beyond a rigid curriculum, and in a way that turns weaknesses into strengths. Although honors-pedagogy is sporadic and lacks rigorous systematic support in Romania, as well as coherent and relevant policies to promote excellence, luckily a small group of dedicated teachers from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași volunteered to effectively integrate the mechanisms specific of this philosophy in the development of educational praxis in some projects for motivated students from different faculties. Therefore, during my years of study, I had to create various projects and interdisciplinary programs (policy papers, micro-research, optional subjects, training programs for teachers and educational actors etc.). All these requirements were strongly rooted in current contexts and relevant in the most unpredictable future. While I was solving, I realized that these methods are not just for extra-credit, but for something more - to make students involved improve. Tackling these complex assignments without a predefined answer has been the basis for the development of a unique, well-structured critical thinking that transcends classical boundaries by challenging us to understand how the present influences the future. This approach has taught us to adopt a broader perspective, enabling us to respond to the needs of a dynamic, constantly changing society. Simultaneously, through these challenges we stimulated our creativity and cooperation skills, creating substantial connections between standard and various transversal competences. For me, these methods were an opportunity to empower myself, and encouraged me to want more - to discover new ideas, to understand in depth various mechanisms of society and interdisciplinary educational praxis, and to understand how I can go from being a passive beneficiary of the educational system to an active actor of change and innovation.

Moreover, I had the opportunity to get closer to excellence through projects and conferences promoted within the university (ECOLAH, EC2U, CoTalent, STEAM+ etc.). By participating in workshops and different meetings, I met resource-people with unique perspectives that motivated me even more. Through discussions, I understood what the purpose of this conference is: to promote a transnational culture of excellence that embraces uncertainty, the “state of imponderability” of the future, embodying a complex interdisciplinary perspective (e.g., the implementation of A.I. in education, the importance of neuroscience for a harmonious culture of excellence etc.).

The honors-pedagogy promoted by professors succeeded in satisfying my thirst for knowledge and innovation. My interest has been progressively shaped through various reflections of Journal of the EHC. The articles that I've read have enhanced my comprehension of the importance of excellence-promoting programs in enabling students to realize their full potential and in the creation of authentic hubs that can be transformed into Living Labs - valuable for the development of a dynamic, responsible and inclusive academic

community, in a shared effort to achieve common objectives: excellence through education and societal innovation. Because of this, I want to contribute to the growth of research on creativity and talent, and also, I want to get a PhD in talent development policies and STEAM+/ honors curriculum models. Thus, another experience that set me on this path and proved to me, once again, that excellence is more than dynamic, was participating in a STEAM+ model study presented at the M-CTRAS Conference, held at Johannes Kepler University Linz. Experience for which I am still grateful today.

Therefore, my motivations for participating in these activities, hackathons, projects, and programs of talent cultivation are the lack of honors opportunities, the limited palette of talent promotion and transdisciplinarity in Romania, and the desire to become a member of an international interdisciplinary network to enrich my skills and to develop, later, with the help of teachers and teams developed during my professional training, programs and projects specific to the honors-pedagogy in Romania. By building trans-European professional communities and exchanging best practices, we strengthen international relations and add value to innovation, ensuring a future in which education and society transcend the limits of the unpredictable.

Kamile Salaseviciute, Lithuania, enrolled in The Netherlands

While volunteering in my high school's student-led tutoring initiative, I saw how the learning process transforms when youth personally relate to the material. Although I have heard of this idea many times before, I truly understood it only when I noticed my peers grasping concepts faster with age-relevant examples. Seeing teachers struggle to explain the same theory for months raised a question that stayed with me: Why is education not more student-centered? Years later, this question resurfaced when I enrolled in the Honours course Rebuilding Education, challenging us to rethink how courses are designed. Whether coordinating university orientations or co-creating curricula, I have come to believe that students are an essential part of shaping learning. For education to be meaningful, it must feel relevant, and for youth to contribute meaningfully, their voices must be heard and valued.

Students' competency to solve problems at times might exceed that of professionals when they are trusted and given freedom. The Honours course Rebuilding Education allowed me to experience it firsthand. We were asked to solve an open-ended challenge from scratch: how does one emotionally engage 300 students on a topic as vast and anxiety-provoking as climate change? I contributed by developing emotionally resonant lecture openings and a series of reflective, real-world assignments connecting planetary health to students' everyday experiences. The ambiguity of the task encouraged expansive thinking and risk-taking, which was a rare opportunity in traditional education. This creative freedom led to a course design that was both practical and rewarding to develop. Thus, students thrive when treated as capable contributors and challenged with complex, real-world questions.

Honours programs support student agency by offering real decision-making power and encouraging independent thinking. The idea behind the Rebuilding Education was originally intended to be about redesigning one of the university courses. However, our professor decided to take it one step further by trusting us, the students, to co-create a completely new third-year elective at the University of Amsterdam. This level of trust was unusual, but also empowering, since we were no longer students completing an assignment, but collaborators redesigning education itself. We surprised ourselves with what we could achieve with the freedom to follow our interests. The structure of the course, combined with this autonomy, helped reveal our potential and build confidence. When students are treated as partners, they can actively contribute and engage, rather than just passively participate.

Building a cross-European student community allows students to move beyond individual perspectives and grow through co-creation. It promotes adaptability and a sense of purpose, both of which I have experienced in multiple instances. For example, during an Erasmus+ project in Slovenia, I saw how quickly shared learning across cultures can spark creative momentum and how differently students from across Europe approach similar problems. The impact that a diverse community can have on an educational journey and personal growth was even more apparent in the Rebuilding Education course, where we participated in a "feedback carousel" that invited stakeholders and other students to engage with our

early-stage ideas. This collaborative process challenged us to refine our thinking, deepen our engagement, and communicate our vision. The sense of belonging and appreciation I felt when we were invited to present our project at the Anthropocene Conference as the best example affirmed how meaningful student voices can be and the worth of the community's support. A network as rich as the European honours community not only supports and appreciates what students are doing but also helps them grow by offering diverse perspectives and shared purpose.

When students are trusted, given freedom, and surrounded by diverse perspectives, they often exceed expectations of their own and others. The Honours program gave me the chance to step into roles I never imagined, such as a course designer and even a presenter on an international stage. These experiences not only reshaped how I approach learning but also how I see my place in the academic community. Student agency, when supported through interdisciplinary opportunities and cross-European collaboration, can become a powerful force for educational innovation and personal transformation.

Eman Ghazniwal, Norway

My interest in interdisciplinary education has grown significantly since joining the Honours program with a specialization in political science, where collaboration across disciplines is at the core. Working in interdisciplinary groups has sharpened my ability to listen, adapt, and engage with perspectives beyond my field.

One transformative experience was participating in an INTED workshop on AI and climate. In a diverse team, we developed an AI-quotas model — a theoretical policy limiting AI usage to prioritize sustainable applications. Drawing from political theory, environmental science, and technology studies, we created a comprehensive state budget proposal. This out-of-the-box solution would not have emerged without our interdisciplinary collaboration. Applying theory to real-world challenges and watching abstract ideas take shape in practice was both exciting and empowering.

More recently, I worked on a summer research project at INTED alongside two other first-year Honours students. We analyzed three interdisciplinary bachelor's programs at the University of Oslo: Development Studies and Sustainability, Philosophy–Politics–Economics (PPE), and Informatics: Design and Interaction. We created an “interdisciplinary checklist” as an analytical tool to classify course literature as mono-, multi-, inter-, or transdisciplinary. In addition to document analysis, we interviewed program leaders to understand how different faculties—Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences—interpret and implement interdisciplinarity.

This project was deeply enriching. We were not only learning about interdisciplinary methods—we were practicing them. Although I specialize in social sciences, I contributed to the analysis of Informatics as well as PPE, gaining insights I wouldn't have encountered otherwise. Being an interdisciplinary team enabled us to integrate our diverse perspectives, challenge our assumptions, and propose practical suggestions for strengthening interdisciplinary competence across the programs. Some recommendations were program-specific, while others applied across faculties.

The most important lesson from this project was understanding the challenge of finding a common starting point in interdisciplinary collaboration. Academic languages and assumptions vary widely between fields. Yet, once common ground is established, the process becomes highly productive—and the outcome, far more nuanced and substantial. As Honours students, we are trained to navigate these challenges from the very beginning of our studies, and this training clearly paid off. Our shared academic rigor and openness allowed us to turn disciplinary differences into a collective strength.

Both the AI-climate workshop and the INTED summer research project demonstrate how Honours programs and interdisciplinary education foster student agency and unlock potential through collaboration and innovative thinking. These experiences not only reflect INTED's core goals, but also showcase the value of bringing together students from diverse

academic backgrounds to co-create meaningful and innovative solutions. Presenting these projects at the Honours Conference would highlight the power of interdisciplinary learning in action—and the transformative impact it can have on students, institutions, and society.

Bente Hankamp, The Netherlands

Unlocking Potential Through Honours and Interdisciplinary Learning in Skin Therapy: A Perspective From A Skin Therapy Student

As a skin therapy student passionate about honours courses, I have discovered how tackling complex, open ended problems, while combining them with interdisciplinary methods, can help students like me reach our full potential.

When students are given open ended problems without readymade solutions, they can fully demonstrate creativity, critical thinking and self-direction. From my experience in the honours program Personal Leadership, we tackled leadership challenges in both a personal and professional sense. This allowed me to reflect deeply on my strengths and values using Covey's 7 Habits, such as "seek first to understand, then to be understood." Before, I tended to view situations only through my skin therapy lens. By working with peers from other professions, I learned to consider multiple perspectives. This enriched our shared solutions and broadened my own ways of thinking. Confronting these open-ended challenges helped me unlock useful abilities, including effective communication, critical thinking and adaptability.

Honours programs, like the Personal Leadership course, give students real authority: the freedom to choose topics that interest them and the space to shape their learning. These courses foster confidence, self-management and deep engagement. Interdisciplinary teaching extends this impact. When students from different health professions learn together, we develop collaboration, respect and shared problem-solving skills, qualities that are essential in modern healthcare.

Scientific research supports this experience. A mixed methods study in public health training found that students who were regularly exposed to interdisciplinary learning felt better prepared for complex professional roles and were more satisfied with their career prospects (Lim, 2024). Such evidence underlines how honours and interdisciplinary learning unlock not only academic capability, but also professional confidence. These approaches also helped me take initiative in group projects, listen actively and integrate knowledge from other professions into my own practice. I became a more reflective and versatile healthcare student.

Building a cross European student community in honours and interdisciplinary education offers unique benefits. Sharing experiences internationally shows how honours and interdisciplinary teaching work in diverse cultural and institutional settings. Exchanges like these deepen intercultural understanding, expand learning networks and inspire new ways to apply knowledge in skin therapy and broader healthcare contexts. They also support personal growth: seeing peers across Europe take agency in their education reinforces a sense of belonging to a wider, motivated community.

My goal is to broaden my knowledge not only within Hogeschool Utrecht (Utrecht University of Applied Sciences), but also through international experiences. Attending events such as the INTED Honours Conference 2025: Students Facilitate the Future would allow me to learn how honours programmes are used globally and how other students experience interdisciplinary collaboration. By connecting with international peers, I could bring back innovative practices to improve both my own study and my future work in healthcare.

I believe that engaging in this international honours community, will allow me to grow as a healthcare professional and as a person. I want to become a globally minded skin therapist—someone who can integrate diverse perspectives, embrace collaboration and approach complex healthcare challenges with creativity and confidence. Honours and interdisciplinary learning have shown me that my potential is much greater when I look beyond my own perspective and I am eager to continue this journey on an international stage.

Lars-Martin Brubæk Gihle, Norway

In the summer of 2023, I went to a business school in the United States. Now, I'm a mathematics + computer science student, so this was understandably a bit outside my area of expertise, but for me, that was actually the reason to be there. Studying a different subject than what I mainly focus on helps me to see outside perspectives and find applications for my main coursework. This is exactly what has happened in the first year of the honours program at UiO as well. I have been able to see the larger societal implications of machine learning and write about it. It helps contextualize the methods I learn about in subjects.

At the school in America, we worked on an independent project creating a mock business proposal for a company, in our case Chipotle. We created a plan for an expansion to Europe. This allowed us to work on a project that could be similar to what you would see working for an actual company. This is key to how I think interdisciplinary subjects should be structured. Ideally, they should be ways for you to explore problems without defined solutions, that let you apply your skills to real life scenarios. The projects we have had in our honours subject fit this mold quite well, allowing us to analyse ethical and societal impacts of new technologies. I also look forward to being able to work on more projects here in the future that relate closely to business, something I think we will do in the third year. Working on these kinds of projects allows us to find our full potential, particularly through collaboration with those interested in other disciplines as well.

One of the most impactful parts of doing summer school in another country was meeting new people. I think this should be a central part of any interdisciplinary education. Though our western countries may be superficially similar, it is quite striking how different the experience was. In America, there was a larger focus on entrepreneurship, and people were exceedingly outgoing. I think our European countries are just as different too, and that finding ways for students to exchange social moments and professional experiences across the continent, like a larger cross-European honours community, could be extremely valuable. Not only because it is fun, but because it, again, helps you put what you learn into the context of a bigger world. It can help you find opportunities and incorporate different perspectives into your work. And after all, isn't that the point of an interdisciplinary education? Isn't the point namely putting our subject into a larger context, and incorporating other perspectives to improve our work?

Patrick Styll, Austria

Question #1: How can students demonstrate their full potential when given the opportunity to tackle complex, open-ended problems without predefined solutions? This is a difficult question to answer, as it probably varies with each person. But I think we can reframe the question as: “How can students do good research?”. In my experience, there is no concrete guideline, and in some ways, science is something that happens naturally. But there are some general rules to follow. First of all, I think it’s important to stay curious about the problem you are tackling. This is the drive you need to actually persevere - research is difficult, and you can go long times without achieving anything. Secondly, you need to stay critical. Abstractions are important, but try not to fall into a type of “cargo cult”. An important part of being critical is also being self-critical. Sometimes, you simply need to admit you have been wrong and accept other opinions - staying humble is an important personality trait. Lastly, discussion and sharing of ideas might be one of the most vital aspects of good research.

Quite often, I would catch myself being too focused on specific parts of a problem to miss the general picture. Discussing your projects or ideas with other people will give you fresh and different viewpoints, which is exactly what you need for finding new things.

Question #2: In what ways do honours programs and interdisciplinary teaching methods support student agency and help unlock their full capabilities? This is, once again, something that heavily relies on the individual. In my opinion, the Honors program (as implemented by TU Wien) is only as useful as the student makes it to be. At TU Wien, the Honors program offers you an additional year to your Bachelor’s degree, where you will need to earn between 45 to 60 ECTS. An academic mentor (e.g. a professor) is another requirement. You will also have the possibility to conduct a research internship or be part of a summer/winter school, for which you can get additional credits. Although a mentor is a requirement, you could possibly go through your whole Honors program without engaging with them. You could do your courses, get your degree, and after all that have not conducted any research - in my opinion, that completely defeats the purpose.

The program relies on the students’ engagement and enthusiasm. It relies on getting hands on experience and getting in touch with various researchers. And if you do that, it might be one of the best self-discovery journeys that the academic environment has to offer. Thanks to that one additional year, I was able to explore different research areas, even under different institutes, where I was able to discuss research and ideas with a large variety of people. I now have a much better grasp of what research is interesting to me and where I want to go with it in the future.

Question #3: How can building a cross-European student community and sharing learning experiences enhance students’ educational journeys and personal growth? In my Honors program, I was incredibly lucky to both study and research in countries such as Spain, Japan, and South Korea. These experiences were amazingly rewarding, not only for my academic

development but also for my personal growth. Meeting peers and supervisors from different backgrounds, exchanging ideas, and essentially making unforgettable memories together taught me lots about myself and how I deal with new environments - many of these amazing people I met have since even become close friends.

For this reason, I believe a cross-European student community can be a powerful platform, not only to enhance academic learning but also to create personal connections outside your close circle. In fact, think that such communities would benefit even more from being international.

William Tomren-Berg, Norway

Demonstrating Student Potential through Open-Ended, Complex Problem-Solving.

To harness their students' full potential in a setting of problem-solving, especially with larger issues the likes of climate change or anti-democratization-processes, universities should aim to connect different disciplines in cross-disciplinary activities to take full advantage of each other's strengths and perhaps gain a broadened perception of the problem at hand along the way. I like to compare the process of finding solutions to complex problems to the process of a band composing a song. Each band member normally has their own unique set of tasks and areas of expertise, and yet they typically still influence each other greatly. Me being a bass player for many years and having extensive experience composing bass lines, I might still want help from a vocalist with melodious aspects, or maybe the drummer or the guitarist with rhythmic aspects. Working together and being open to other's feedback and ideas allows for the creation of songs that would not have seen the light of day otherwise. Likewise, working in cross-disciplinary teams, new solutions are found that would not have been possible before.

Honours Programs and Interdisciplinary Methods as Catalysts for Student Agency.

The Honours program at the University of Oslo is an excellent example of how universities can facilitate such processes. Meeting fellow students with different backgrounds and perspectives yet with a similar desire to solve today and tomorrow's problems is highly beneficial in several ways. Firstly, as mentioned before, one quickly gets a broader perspective on things. Being in a room with likeminded people from your own field will get you only so far because your own beliefs will not be challenged as often. Secondly, one learns to work with all kinds of people. Working in teams with others can be a real pain if the group dynamic isn't working. Being able to overcome or adapt to differences in workflow, methodology or even personalities in order to reach the end goal is a skill that should never be underestimated. Lastly and perhaps obviously, complex issues most of the time demand complex solutions. As I have already discussed, many times problems need to be tackled from different angles in order to be successfully solved.

Meeting students from other universities and cultures can be hugely beneficial and eye-opening, much like meeting and working with people from fields other than your own. They might have different experiences than you, more effective ways to do things or simply more experience in general with interdisciplinary education, which is also natural given the fact that none of the honours programs are built exactly the same way. Students from other universities in Europe might have positive experiences with different fields collaborating successfully than you are used to, or they may have useful tips from working with a specific topic that you have yet to learn about but want to get into. Meeting people from other cultures can also help with general people-skills, as you very simply get to know different types of people, and of course, networking is a well-known resource that is never to be underestimated when building a career and creating possibilities for yourself down the road.

Mere Wolfensberger, The Netherlands/France

Transdisciplinarity, Talent, and Honours: Unlocking Potential through Open-Ended Challenges.

When students are given the opportunity to work on complex, open-ended problems without predefined solutions, we are pushed beyond familiar academic routines. Instead of following a set path, we must decide what matters, how to approach it, and how best to communicate findings. This can be challenging, but it also creates space for genuine intellectual and personal growth.

I experienced this first-hand through the CIVICA alliance, a partnership of leading social sciences European universities designed to promote cross-border learning and research. As part of my London School of Economics degree, I spent a year on CIVICA exchange at the Stockholm School of Economics. Alongside my regular courses, I took part in two CIVICA modules and produced a flagship report, each of which took a different approach to interdisciplinary, student-led work. The modules I followed in this context were Decision Making (SSE), and Poverty, Inequality & Social Policy (LSE).

Simultaneously, the flagship report pushed me to engage with an undetermined societal challenge. This encouraged me to select topics that interested me, design my own methods, and present my findings in a format of their choice. This was a collective effort, structured in a module bringing various CIVICA students together to research and propose policy ideas on cross-border issues. Other students drafted reports addressing topics such as sustainable fashion and European train networks.

I focused on youth civic engagement among disadvantaged young people - an issue not covered in the curriculum but one that felt both timely and relevant. Being in Sweden, where youth participation is among the highest in Europe, gave the project additional depth. I chose this topic as civic engagement, defined as meaningful engagement in relation with social, political, environmental, or economic issues (Yohalem and Martin, 2007), is a driving force to ensure that young peoples' needs are met and their rights are recognised and enforced (UN DESA, 2007). Civic engagement amongst young people has been demonstrated to have positive effects such as improved socio-political awareness, increased social responsibility, and improved planning and communication skills (Morsillo and Prilleltensky, 2007). Overall, self-efficacy increases amongst young people who engage in civic action. Combined, civic engagement can lead to a healthier and better performing democracy.

Working without a predefined brief was not always comfortable. Deciding the scope, methods, and format of the project required thought and confidence to make decisions without knowing whether they would work. This process built skills that traditional coursework rarely develops: the ability to navigate ambiguity, integrate perspectives from multiple disciplines, and adapt when initial plans needed to change. In the end, I chose to

use interviews with Swedish young people combined with a statistical overview drawn from EUROMOD data, producing a toolkit to support meaningful youth engagement.

The flagship report provided an open-ended challenge. The group setting work how valuable it is to collaborate across academic and cultural backgrounds. As we approached different issues, our methods often differed, too, which made it an enriching environment. Honours and interdisciplinary programmes are well placed to support this kind of learning. They recognise that real-world challenges are rarely confined to one field, and they give students the space to connect ideas and tools from different disciplines.

Equally important is the role of community. Studying in a cross-European setting meant learning alongside peers with varied academic specialisations and lived experiences. These exchanges challenged my assumptions, broadened my comparative perspective, and encouraged me to think more critically about the applicability of different policy ideas. A shared learning community also brings a practical benefit: it builds networks that extend beyond the classroom. By discussing ideas openly and exchanging feedback, we learned to communicate across differences and to value alternative ways of thinking. This kind of collaboration is essential in a globalised and interconnected world.

Looking back, the most valuable part of my Civica experience was not the projects itself, but the way it reshaped my approach to learning. Open-ended challenges meant I must take ownership of a project from start to finish. Interdisciplinary work demonstrated the benefits of interdisciplinarity and a multitude of perspectives. And the cross-European community showed me how much there is to gain from working with people whose experiences and viewpoints differ from my own.

Honours and interdisciplinary programmes facilitate this growth: freedom of choice and methodology, and a community around you. These are the experiences that help students not only develop their skills, but also understand how to apply them in ways that matter.

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Elisa Rommens, Belgium

When education dares to go beyond textbooks and fixed answers, it changes not only what you learn but who you will become.

Honours Programmes gave me that opportunity. In my second year, I joined the Quetelet Colleges, a university-wide initiative that brings together students from all disciplines through lectures, debates, and excursions to explore today's societal challenges. A year later, I also joined the honours programme 'Breaking Frontiers', where I was introduced to scientific research and had the opportunity to conduct research at the Cancer Research Institute Ghent (CRIG). These two programmes could not have been more different, yet together they shaped how I learn, how I think, and how I hope to grow as a future doctor.

One of the most important lessons I took from Breaking Frontiers was learning how to cope with uncertainty in research. During my project culturing sarcoma cells, experiments sometimes did not go as planned despite careful preparation and no clear solution in lectures or books. At first, I felt frustrated, having invested so much effort without the expected outcome. Yet, these setbacks taught me to see challenges as part of the process and pushed me to think creatively. I began asking better questions, seeking advice from teammates, and appreciating the value of collaboration. My mentor encouraged me to search for solutions independently before asking for help, which strengthened my problem-solving skills. These moments showed me that perseverance, creativity and collaboration come to the surface only when there is no ready-made answer. I believe it is in these values that a student's true potential lies.

While Breaking Frontiers deepened my scientific perspective, the Quetelet Colleges broadened my societal one. By discussing topics such as climate change, migration, and technological innovation, I learned to situate myself within larger societal debates. Interacting with students from law, economics, and philosophy pushed me outside of my comfort zone and helped me draw connections between disciplines. For example, reflecting on the societal implications of genetics and biotechnology allowed me to place my research interests within an ethical and political framework. In this way, I believe that honours programmes cultivate student agency, not only by offering academic enrichment but also by trusting students to take ownership of their perspectives, values, and ambitions.

The two programmes complemented each other: while Quetelet gave me the language to engage in societal debates, Breaking Frontiers provided the tools to explore ideas in the laboratory. They offered closer mentorship in smaller groups, encouraging personal growth and fostering confidence. As a future doctor, I hope to connect both perspectives, understanding not only the biology of disease but also the human stories shaped by broader societal challenges.

I also see areas for improvement. True progress depends on strong mentorship, and this is a skill that students and faculty alike should be trained in. Accessibility is another challenge: I

want more students to have access to honour-style learning since I believe its skills are valuable across all professions. One way to address this could be to integrate elements of honours teaching, such as interdisciplinary debates and open-ended projects, into the standard curriculum. At the same time, interdisciplinarity brings its own challenge: with so many perspectives, discussions can sometimes remain superficial, so that we have to keep balancing breadth with depth.

Looking ahead, I believe that building a cross-European student community could take these lessons even further. Sharing experiences across cultures and disciplines will open up new insights on how you can take ownership of your education and personal growth. I am excited to meet peers from different backgrounds, and I am curious to know how they look at the future of education. In this way, cross-European collaboration not only enriches education but also shapes students into professionals who are socially aware, engaged, and capable of contributing meaningfully to society.

To conclude, my journey through the Quetelet Colleges and Breaking frontiers has taught me that true growth comes from embracing uncertainty, from combining curiosity with resilience, and scientific precision with social awareness. Joining the conference would allow me to extend that journey: to share my experiences, to learn from peers across Europe, and to strengthen the collaborative spirit that honours education represents.

Felix Claeys, Belgium

When I started my studies, I often felt overwhelmed by the way mathematics and physics were taught. Many courses relied heavily on long, descriptive proofs of theorems. While these were correct and rigorous, I sometimes felt lost in the details. I could follow the steps, but I struggled to develop a real sense of intuition. To make sense of it, I began making small sketches for myself, trying to picture what was behind this weird formula full of Greek symbols. When I shared this with my professor, it became the starting point of our Honours Programme project: developing visualisations of abstract mathematical and physical concepts, and making them openly available.

Looking back now, this project pushed me to go beyond simply learning material for exams and instead focus on improving the education of future students. Working on open-ended problems with no predefined solutions brought out my creativity and critical thinking, while also reminding me of the responsibility to pass on what I have learned. I realised that if I had felt lost at those desks, many other students must have felt the same way. That awareness motivated me to create something that could help the next generation approach complex topics with more curiosity, and confidence.

The open-ended nature of the project meant that there was no single correct path. We wanted to illustrate concepts from linear algebra, complex analysis, and quantum mechanics, but no textbook provided ready-made figures to guide us. Instead, we had to take a step back and ask ourselves “what is the essence of this theorem, how can we show it visually, and what would make it clear to another student?” Many attempts failed. Some figures made the ideas even more confusing. The freedom to explore without predefined answers gave me the chance to demonstrate my potential not only as a learner, but as a curious student with a pencil in its hand, trying to find intuition in a complex theme and share it with as many people as possible.

The Honours Programme also gave me the space to take ownership of my education. Unlike regular courses that are guided by strict assignments and exams, here I had the chance to set my own goals and design a project from the ground up. That sense of responsibility gave me agency. I was not just following instructions but actively shaping how knowledge could be shared. The project also required me to cross disciplines: programming to create figures, design principles to make them readable, communication to explain ideas, and teaching to share them with peers. Combining these elements helped me discover new capabilities, such as presenting complex material clearly and guiding students in exercise sessions. In this way, the programme encouraged me to unlock potential that traditional coursework rarely addresses.

Equally important was the decision to make all of our work openly available on GitHub. This was more than a convenient way to store code; it was a way to invite others to join in. Visualisations in mathematics and physics are relevant to every university, and many students struggle with the same sense of abstraction that I once did. By sharing our work, we hope others can reuse, adapt, and improve it. More importantly, it creates the possibility of

building a wider student community around the idea of making complex subjects more intuitive. Working together across universities and countries could lead to a shared library of visualisations, new collaborations, and a culture where curiosity and discussion are central to learning.

In summary, what began with me feeling lost in descriptive proofs has grown into a project that combines personal growth with a broader educational purpose. The Honours Programme gave me the chance to tackle challenges without predefined solutions, to develop agency through interdisciplinary work, and to contribute to a community that reaches beyond my own university. I believe that this spirit of collaboration and openness is what honours education is truly about. I look forward to sharing this vision at the Oslo conference and to connecting with students and teachers from across Europe who share the same goal: to make education more intuitive, engaging, and open for the next generation.

Mario van Rijn & René van der Burgt, The Netherlands

Inter- and Transdisciplinary Education for Every Student.

The world is transforming at unprecedented speed. Climate tipping points are accelerating, democracy is under strain and the disruptive rise of artificial intelligence and robotisation reshapes work, learning and society itself. The pace is relentless, and the implications are profound: professions disappear before students graduate, geopolitical fault lines deepen, and ecological boundaries are breached. For higher education this poses an unavoidable challenge: if we do not change, we risk losing relevance. The question is not if transformation is needed, but how fast we dare to move — and whether we have the courage to redefine our role in society to remain meaningful.

At Avans University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands, we have already taken important steps. Two initiatives — OpenX and the Foresight module — are now part of our educational reality, each helping students to unlock their potential by working across boundaries. A third initiative, Next Gen, is currently being developed as a radical rethinking of higher education in the age of AI. Together, they reflect our belief that inter- and transdisciplinary education is not optional, but essential.

OpenX: an interdisciplinary innovation environment.

OpenX is an interdisciplinary innovation environment — an internally facilitated nexus where students, researchers, professionals and societal partners co-create impactful solutions. It activates hybrid spaces for learning, working and innovating that stimulate personal growth while addressing societal transitions. It is a place without predefined answers, where serendipity and collaboration thrive. By engaging with real challenges, students experience the full breadth of their potential: not as passive learners, but as active co-creators of change.

The Foresight module: seeing the bigger picture.

The Foresight module is open to every student, regardless of programme or level. Its purpose is to train the ability to see the bigger picture — to connect global developments and to imagine possible futures. Through macro-, system- and future analyses, students learn to make sense of complexity and to reflect on their own position within it. Each journey concludes with personal “learnings and takeaways”: what does this exploration mean for me, and how do I want to act? Knowledge becomes more than information; it becomes orientation, choice and responsibility.

Next Gen: reimagining higher education in the AI age

Yet the radical speed of AI and robotisation pushes us to think even further. If machines can generate professional products, scientific articles and foresight analyses in seconds, what is the role of humans? What is the value of a diploma if knowledge and output can be automated? With Next Gen, we are developing a radical rethinking: an education where AI is maximised as a super-teacher and co-creator, and where the human side of education

focuses on guiding and assessing the development of knowledge, skills and — virtues, attitudes and professional identity — embedded in living labs and transformation challenges. The balance shifts from knowledge as the basis for occupational competence to a broader focus on pioneering action competence: the capacity to navigate transitions, design solutions and act with integrity in complexity. Students are no longer defined by professions that may soon vanish, but by their ability to act. Identity shifts from what you know for a job to how you create value for society.

For every student

These initiatives reflect our conviction that inter- and transdisciplinary learning should not be reserved for a select group. The challenges of our time are too urgent and complex for exclusivity. Every student deserves the chance to tackle open-ended problems, learn to navigate complexity, and develop the resilience and moral compass needed in an uncertain future. It must become the foundation of higher education itself.

Conclusion

If we want students to unlock their full capabilities, we must give them problems without predefined answers, and trust them to explore. If we want education to remain meaningful, we must embed interdisciplinarity and foresight at its core. And if we want higher education to remain relevant in the AI age, we must shift from delivering knowledge to cultivating wisdom, resilience and courage.

That, we believe, is the way forward: to inspire students to become pioneers of transformation, and in doing so, transform higher education itself — in the Netherlands, in Europe, and together across borders.

Oluwatoni Ikhile, USA

Multiple choice exams are adored by students around the academic world. They provide certainty, a 25 percent chance. Your hope—and perhaps even your saving grace if you failed to study—lies in the four bubbled choices on the paper. Most classes I have taken as a psychology student relied on multiple choice. There was no space for ideas outside of A, B, C, and D. And for quite some time, I was okay with these options. They gave me certainty. I had become used to this routine. At one point, however, I became dissatisfied. The four choices entrapped me in a world that lacked nuance and complexity. Around the same time as this dissatisfaction was brewing inside of me, I was offered a spot in Virginia Tech’s Honors College. Upon taking my first honors class, I was presented with a chance to apply for a scholarship that would open doors for experiential learning: the Odyssey Fellowship, an award meant to aid students in carrying out the concepts they learned in the classroom and applying them to real-world situations and opportunities. In winning the award, I used the Odyssey Fellowship to sponsor conference attendance, giving me the opportunity to conduct independent research and present it to an audience of my academic peers.

Through the Odyssey Fellowship, I was empowered to no longer settle for my classwork, filled with sets of multiple choices and answers to carefully select. Instead, learning became a reflection of the problems I wished to solve. I conducted the research; it was me who would be able to discover the answer to my question, not a predestined answer assigned to a letter. Interdisciplinary programs such as honors colleges allow students to be the ones to solve the problems they come across through their own research. They give students the intellectual freedom to find the answers. The predefined solutions that come across in the classroom do nothing but box students into a world of limited possibilities. In giving students the freedom to find their own answers, they are able to find themselves in the work they do, thus unlocking their full capabilities. For me, I was able to discover what I was truly passionate about researching.

The solutions to the many diverse problems facing the world simply can’t lie in a single discipline. In discovering my passion, I came to the understanding that I had various passions from different fields and wished to converge them all cohesively in the work I produced in order to solve the common problems faced in my major of psychology. It was through Virginia Tech’s Honors College emphasis on interdisciplinary research and teaching that I realized it wasn't necessary to box myself into one category. In encouraging me to apply my learning to experiences outside the classroom, the Honors College prioritized that I focus not just on the learnings from my major, psychology, but also on my interests and experiences that I found myself coming across outside of the classroom. Transdisciplinary learning allows both communication between different disciplines and the ability to form your own unique combination of interests.

I know that the experiences I have come across in the Honors College are too invaluable to keep to myself. That’s why I believe that a transnational approach to communicating with other students will not only expand my worldview and my view on learning but will also have

a reciprocal effect on the diverse body of students I encounter. As an American, I believe being able to experience a cross-European community will give me the opportunity to both interact with worldviews different from my own and also provide knowledge and experience that I can bring back to the U.S. This will further aid the development of a transnational community. In building this community, students will have access to various points of view that will inform their work going forward and will mold them to be global leaders, as their work isn't created in the vacuum of a single mindset.

Ephraim Mortenson, USA

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically, intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.” Reverend Martin Luther King wrote this as an undergraduate at Morehouse College. The duality of morality and reasoning in his statement resounds across generations. Today, a culture of incessant media consumption, cynicism, and isolation permeates the college experience, while a resurgence of fascist ideologies, racism, and ignorance threatens a compassionate and healthy society. In the fight against this, higher education—specifically an Honors education—holds a possible remedy, and thus a great responsibility.

An honors college is unique in that its students actively seek learning in ways other students might not. Honors programs hold a raw enthusiasm in their hands, and must provide the comprehensive education worthy of their students' curiosity. Such interdisciplinary education, combined with a culture of emphasizing human connection, is how Dr. King's ideal is achieved; The integration of science and humanities endows knowledge and integrates morality. The two must exist together, for one without the other is incomplete—and dangerous.

The psychologist Piaget coined the term “disequilibrium” to refer to the mental space wherein a person experiences true growth. “Disequilibrium” occurs when a person's framework of understanding does not explain or align with a new experience. Wrestling within this imbalance produces higher understanding. The problems facing our society are complex and unsolved; they induce disequilibrium. These problems are also innately collective; their solving must be done through cooperation.

I work with a professor in developing curriculum for the General Chemistry series, where our goal is exactly this. Our goal is to make the disequilibrium the curriculum necessitates less unpleasant, by creating a community of learning. We do this by giving the requisite, very difficult, problems to students, then facilitate classroom cooperation to progress towards collective understanding. Engaging with disequilibrium as a group teaches how to function together amid uncertainty. We hope students gain an ethic: not to fear the unknown, but to pursue it.

The process of solving problems with logic can be presented, practiced, and learned. But logic without moral grounding is dangerous. A brilliant scientist may solve a complex problem, but what matters most is directing that work toward societal good. Conversely, an artist may critique the status quo with ethos, but without logic they have an incomplete ability to effect change. This is why interdisciplinarity is so crucial. Broadening the way we see the world results in better problem-solving and in increased compassion and empathy. Learning to appreciate art, the depth of human love and suffering, the integration of humanity, via the humanities... All this moves students towards a co-understanding of logic and morality. Both must exist in tandem, balance. An interdisciplinary education moves students towards this balance.

My experience at the University of Montana, specifically in the Davidson Honors College has been the defining experience integrating a “cultivation of character” into my didactic study of Biochemistry. The first year of College, all Honors students take two classes: Intro to Honors, and Ways of Knowing. In Intro to Honors, a culture of community engagement is cultivated. Students participate in local service projects, engage with their pasts, and probe the overarching question of what it truly means to be Honorable. In Ways of Knowing students are challenged with texts arising from various cultures, religions and time periods. These texts are deconstructed, discussed, and debated in a socratic setting. A myriad of interdisciplinary colloquiums offered each semester create opportunities for further integration of science and the humanities.

What truly accomplishes what Dr. King expressed as education's goal, however, is the community formed in the Honors college. Faculty work tirelessly and conscientiously to create an accepting, open and warm “home away from home” community. Above all, an emphasis on fostering relationships is practiced by professors, administration, and students. It is through community that the cynicism and thoughtlessness of our age are combated. It is via deep human connection that human tendencies of selfishness, othering, and consumption are rooted out of a heart. Ultimately, this is the responsibility, and the wonderful opportunity that higher education can provide: Community.

Ids de Jong, The Netherlands

On the second day of my university's Honours Impact Program, I found myself sitting in the living room of a Pakistani woman I had never met, eating a home-cooked meal that was far spicier than anything I had ever tried. She told stories of her life in Rotterdam, then we got to politics, and at one point she referred to America as "the great satan." It was a viewpoint I had never encountered before, and it stayed with me. That moment, just two days into the program, captured what the year ahead would bring: being pushed outside my comfort zone, learning to listen to perspectives different from my own, and becoming more curious about the world around me.

The Honours Impact Program began with that camp in Rotterdam, where activities challenged us to step outside our routines, followed by a year of biweekly evening meetings filled with debates, workshops, and discussions. Alongside these meetings, students collaborated with research groups for the first half of the year and could either pursue their own project or continue with the research group in the second half. I chose to stay with the Safety and Resilience research group for the entire year, working on a project aimed at helping municipalities fight undermining crime. My role was to make their complex research guidelines understandable for municipal officers. As a Computer Science student, I am used to structured problems with clear solutions: you write code, debug errors, and optimize results. This project was entirely different. There were no instructions or predefined steps, just the expectation to create something meaningful. I drew on principles of interaction design from my studies to visualize information clearly, but most of the process involved understanding the researchers' intentions, translating technical content into practical guidance, and shaping it into a usable program. In the end, we produced a tool that municipalities could use to structure their strategies more effectively. For me, the challenge was not only technical but also creative and communicative: it required empathy and collaboration with people whose expertise was far from my own.

The Wednesday evening meetings were equally transformative. Students from different faculties, engineering, law, social sciences, international business, came together to share ideas and challenge each other's thinking. One of the most striking debates I participated in was with a Ukrainian student who argued that capitalism was the root of all global problems. While I disagreed with parts of his reasoning, I appreciated the courage and depth of his argument. These conversations helped me learn to question my assumptions and to engage thoughtfully with perspectives I had never considered before.

Honours programs and interdisciplinary teaching create space for this kind of growth. They encourage students to take intellectual risks, explore ambiguity, and engage in open-ended problem solving without fear of failure. In my regular Computer Science courses, the focus is often on technical proficiency and correctness; in this program, curiosity and exploration were equally valued. This environment allowed me to develop a broader mindset, better communication skills, and a stronger ability to connect technical knowledge to societal challenges.

Reflecting on this experience, the biggest change is in how I approach learning. I have become more open-minded, more willing to embrace complexity, and more confident working with people from very different backgrounds. The Honours Impact Program was not just an extension of my studies but a transformative journey that deepened both my technical and interpersonal skills. It taught me that growth often happens outside of familiar contexts, and that curiosity, empathy, and interdisciplinary collaboration are essential for solving real-world problems.

Fleur Bosch, The Netherlands

Honours impact program: a mirror of growth, a window to others.

When I first began my studies in Business Innovation, I quickly realized that something was missing. The program was engaging and practical, but I longed for more depth, more space to question, and more opportunities to stretch beyond the boundaries of my own discipline. Joining the honours program was my answer to that search for challenge, it became the place and community where I found the extra challenge, and to connect with others who share the same drive.

Honours education is not about following a pre-written script. Instead, it asks us to step into our own purpose and follow our own path. This felt both exciting and intimidating at first. Yet, it was in those moments of uncertainty that I began to realize my full potential. It showed me that my value as a student is not in memorizing answers and getting high grades, but in developing myself to the fullest.

One of the projects that best reflects this was my involvement in an initiative to do something against loneliness among students at Avans. Together with a fellow honours student, I explored how we could create a community where students felt less isolated and more supported. We started with small steps: volunteering, reaching out to peers, and brainstorming activities to bring people together. While not everything has come to completion yet, the process itself was transformative. It was not about producing a polished “final product,” but about daring to engage with a deeply human issue that mattered to us and our community. Equally important were the people I met along the way. In honours, I found a group of peers who shared my hunger for challenge and growth. Unlike in my regular program, where motivation often felt uneven, here I was surrounded by students who were eager to push themselves and each other. This shared mindset created an atmosphere of energy and possibility. It wasn't just about academics, it was about forming real connections. With two of my honours peers, the bond grew so strong that we even went on holiday together. The fact that collaboration in honours can spark both meaningful projects and lifelong friendships is, to me, its greatest strength.

I saw how honours education fits into a broader European and even global context. For context, my group included international students from all over the world. When motivated students from different disciplines and backgrounds come together, something powerful happens. Each of us brings a unique perspective and those differences become a source of creativity rather than division. In a world that increasingly demands collaboration across borders and fields, this is invaluable. Building a cross-European honours community means that our learning does not stop at our own institution. It allows us to share insights, challenge each other, and support one another's growth in ways that extend far beyond the classroom.

For me, honours education has been both a mirror and a window: a mirror that reflects my own potential back to me when I dare to step outside of my comfort zone (which I struggled with before the program), and a window into the lives, talents, and dreams of others who are on the same journey. It has given me the academic depth I was missing, the friendships I did not expect, and the confidence to face problems without ready-made answers. Most of all, it has shown me that education is not just about what you learn, but about who you become when you are challenged, supported, and connected.