



Joshua McCaslin

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Honors:

Honors Chemistry I

Honors Chemistry II

I – Engagement, Curiosity, and Perspective within the Honors Program

Whenever I first signed up for the honors program, I honestly had no clue what it would mean for me as a student, nonetheless for my first semester. I began my first semester in person at Northwest Arkansas Community College in the Fall of 2025, shortly after I had received my High School Diploma in the Spring of the same year. Throughout my high school career, I have taken many honors classes, including 6 AP courses, and 2 Online NWACC classes my senior year. As a result, I was familiar with honors coursework going into college, but there was one part of the honors that I never could have guessed was going to benefit me as much as it did. One of the most appealing reasons why I chose honors classes and the program was the small class size. I didn't realize it, but it was one of the best decisions I have ever made, because it helped me feel a sense of belonging in my classes, even though I didn't even know anyone's name the first day. Not only this, however, would be a detail of interest for me. I was curious about how challenging the classes would be, about what opportunities I was going to receive, and what friends I would make in the program.

As I walked into the first day of class for my Chemistry 1 lecture, I remember I was nervous at first, but that quickly changed. I wasn't met with an ocean of students, but what felt rather like a home that I had been in before. I felt at ease with the first day's stress, and my classmates no longer seemed like strangers. My class could not have had more than 10 people, including me. The professor, who I am very grateful to have had, was Dr. Glen Akridge. This close-knit community played such a substantial role in my learning during the first semester, as they inspired me to continue to strive for excellence and they gave me a sense of community. Dr. Akridge made class something to look forward to, rather than just another class in the schedule of my life. This class kept me extremely engaged, asking questions, searching for answers, and seeking knowledge. Another aspect of such a small class is that it meant that we could each share with detail our opinions and perspectives. Getting to know how other people think, and where they come from in life, whether they had just graduated high school like me, or whether they were returning to college after experiencing life was eye opening.

I truly and absolutely encourage you, the reader, to join the program, if not a class, and just watch how much of a difference class size truly is for the pursuit of knowledge. Class size is nowhere near the sole reason to join the program however, as community extends far beyond the walls of a classroom. The honors community is united in the pursuit of knowledge and excellence, which gives this same community a sense of belonging.

II – Preparation for University, Life, and developing Skills

As I mentioned previously, I have taken preparatory classes for college, but none of them will come close to the experiences I gained from the honors program here at Northwest Arkansas Community College. The level of professional development I have received in my Honors Chemistry courses will benefit me greatly in my journey for a degree. These classes alone have taught me many things, like how to run professional lab research, how to study better, and one of the most important things in my opinion, communication with professors. I cannot thank Dr. Akridge enough for his dedication to not only his class, but his craft, as he teaches with meaning and passion. I am a firm believer that building a connection to your professors will get you very far in university, as these bonds are the make or break for not only your grade, but for your reputation in the classroom. Improving my methods of studying has allowed me to become a more confident test taker, improving my grades and allowing me more opportunities to excel.

As for the lab research “high school me” would have never believed you if you told me I was going to be performing professional research and analysis, and presenting data to the public community. In Chemistry 1, we grouped up the class, and we performed Gas Chromatograph-Mass Spectrometry analysis on hydrocarbon fuels to determine their chemical composition, and thus their identification (Linked below). This was our honors project for the semester, and I am proud to say I truly enjoyed this task. It was the first time I was ever able to use advanced lab equipment, and it was my first laboratory research work. As I am writing this, I have been sent on another adventure: I have returned to the Gas Chromatograph-Mass Spectrometer to analyze Lipid Profiles in Evergreen trees. It was equally exciting as the first project, and we also displayed our results at CURES night at NWACC and got positive feedback from the honors community. Performing these activities has allowed me to further refine my experience with laboratory equipment, something necessary in university.

III – Experiences with NWACC Honors

Although a lot of people associate an honors class with lots of hard work and long hours studying, I have had some of the most fun I have ever had in these classes. We conduct lab experiments relatively commonly, allowing us to experience the very same principles that the very first chemists themselves discovered. It has been quite a treat to perform these experiments, ranging from measuring simple molar mass, to complex analysis on tree samples. I would always look forward to these lab days because it meant working with my hands performing processes that would fascinate me and leave my curiosity hungry. I talked about the honors project for this semester prior, however this second project was the first time I presented data to the public about the research and analysis that I personally have performed. I was very excited about doing this, even though it was an extremely new experience for me. Overall, my experiences with lab experiments and research have been a cornerstone to my development as a student.

In addition to these activities, I believe that not just the experience with coursework, but experience with classmates, is equally important. During the time I have been here at NWACC, I have made many friends, especially in the small honors classes. I am not a very talkative or outgoing person, so I really enjoyed getting to meet new people without all the pressure of a very large class. Something I have learned with my time at honors is that the bonds you make with professors and classmates provide just as much benefit as the classwork experience.

IV – Conclusions and Advice

To wrap all of this up, my time here at NWACC has been rather short, but I have enjoyed every second of being in the honors program, from the small class sizes fostering community, to the opportunity to perform activities that I normally wouldn't. I absolutely cannot recommend enough for everyone to join the program, not just for the sake of academics, but for the sake of community and purpose, to strive for excellence and pursuit of knowledge.

Honors Chemistry 1 Project:

[Analyzing and Characterizing Fuel Composition Using Gas Chromatography Mass Spectrometry.docx](#)

Honors Chemistry 2 Project:

[Evergreen Honors Project Rev2.pptx](#)