

The Evaporating Guise: A Reflection on Honors

Wow, so this is honors. It is a milestone that somehow feels both really cool and entirely foreign, shifting gears almost completely from previous years. Looking back over the past few months, I find myself still deciding whether the year has been harder or easier. Maybe it is more accurate to say that the emotional rollercoaster I have grown up experiencing as a student simply steepened; the highs got higher and the lows much lower. The achievements felt vibrant and electric, but the disappointments carried a heavier, sobering weight.

In a strange way the year felt the most “real”. What I have learnt outside of the curriculum is probably the closest reflection of what people in the workforce actually experience. The protective guise of simply being a learner is quickly receding. I am no longer simply a student waiting for the next person to tell me what to do or how to do it, what to learn, or how to allocate my time and energy. We were given freedom, more so than previous years, which is saying something.

This freedom was liberating, but also exposed the raw mechanics of independent research and problem-solving. I saw the peak of liberation when I built a functional asteroid game from scratch. I had no idea I was capable of creating something like that! Watching the code stack and come to life did not just feel like a passing grade, it felt like genuine belief that I could build something new and cool.

But the rollercoaster always dips. The lowest point came from a structural biology assignment that still makes me squirm. Confronted with completely alien software (ChimeraX, WinCoot, Phenix) I ran into a wall. There were no answers to copy or search up. It felt like a real-world problem, where I was forced to tread and figure it out all by myself. In hindsight, maybe I am glad I sat through it. Even though the lecturer, bless his heart, granted me a two-week extension to submit, the true win was not the extra time (I still barely got a passing grade), it was the endurance. The final molecular model was far from acceptable, but I came out at least feeling familiar with the software.

As the days pass, the entire experience feels bittersweet. The year has moved frighteningly fast. While academic freedom is liberating, it has brought me to acknowledge the fact that what lies beyond is not neatly outlined in a rubric or assignment booklet. If honors has taught me anything it is that I and others can survive the transition awaiting all of us in honors. The training wheels are coming off, but I feel I am more ready than I realise.