

# Honors College

## “Smart / Wise”

Professor David Lyle Jeffrey

“Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”

“The Rock,” T.S. Eliot

All of you visiting Baylor with your families and considering entering Baylor’s prestigious Honors College are here, to put it plainly, because you are smart. To your native intelligence you have doubtless added a measure of discipline and a desire to learn, or you wouldn’t have gotten so far, but your intelligence is a sure factor in your success to this point.

Most of us think it is cool to be smart. It is fashionable even to act smart. We use the term widely: to invest shrewdly is to deploy “smart money”; to dress fashionably is to appear in “smart” clothes. We talk a lot about “smart” people; we try to recruit “smart” students. One of my colleagues likes to refer to humans merely as “smart primates.”

What I want to say to you tonight is that as wonderful as the gift of intelligence is, it isn’t enough to get you where you need to go, and to grant you the kind of success we all want you to have.

When I was a kid in middle school I didn’t much like report card day. I would bring home those dreadful blue cardboard documents for the required parental signature with a bad feeling in my stomach. It wasn’t my academic grades I was worried about; it

was the section at the bottom labeled “Social Comportment.” My dismal mark there – and the principal’s predictable comments – invariably drew down upon me some very dark parental judgments (to put the matter mildly). I would defensively point to my “A” grades in math and English, but to no avail.

One such day my father looked up sadly from my report card and said: “Now look, laddie: there’s two things here, not one. There’s smart, and there’s wise. And the trouble with you is that you don’t seem to know the difference between them.” He was right; I didn’t. If you already have a sense of the difference, you will anticipate the point I am wanting to make.

The degree to which you are “smart,” after all, doesn’t have much to do with you – unless, perhaps, you have found some way to take personal credit for having chosen your parents wisely.

Moreover, at eighteen years of age, if you haven’t pan-fried your brains with substance abuse, fallen off your motorcycle too often without a helmet (a real risk in Texas) or been completely anesthetized by the blue light screen, you’ve got about as much in the way of “smarts” as you are going to get until after the Resurrection. At this point in your life, you have no substantive choices concerning your basic equipment – except destructive ones. You do, however, have a lot of choices about how you will use your intelligence and the opportunity presented to you by a university education to develop that which is above and beyond merely being “smart.”

Wisdom, for example, is always a choice; it doesn’t come automatically with those high SAT scores. A key difference between “smart” and “wise” is that “wise” is not merely cerebral. This is why one often meets people with little in the way of formal

education who, on the whole, it would be better to go through times of trial or suffering with than a lot of folks like me, who have Ph.Ds. It isn't that getting a Ph.D. renders one ineligible for wisdom; rather, it is that wisdom includes also the necessary practicality of common sense.

The Bible itself makes this pretty clear. In the Old Testament, wisdom (*chōkma*) implies an educated discipline of mind coupled with a skillful practical discernment (*binah*) in daily affairs. It involves thus both theory and practice working together, and is never purely one of these without the other (cf. Exodus 28:3; 31:1-5; Deuteronomy 34:9; Proverbs 1:2-7; Isaiah 10:3).

At Baylor and especially in the Honors College, we are concerned that the “smart” you bring with you is here added to by knowledge, certainly – the specific knowledge and means of knowledge in the discipline or disciplines to which you will most be attracted. But we want for you more than that: we want you to add to intelligence and knowledge qualitatively higher and integrative achievements such as understanding and wisdom.

Our concern for the practical dimension of your learning produces in our programs such features as a student involvement in faculty research. Such collaborative student-faculty research has very high participation rates that, in sciences, engineering, social sciences and humanities disciplines particularly, frequently results in undergraduate students producing or contributing to peer-reviewed publication before they graduate. It is a measure of our concern for the practical application of learning that leads Baylor to produce top-ranked debate and College Bowl teams, excellent International Study programs, well-regarded pre-professional programs in Engineering,

Business, and the Social Sciences, and superb clinical options for pre-med students, the vast majority of whom get placed in medical schools after graduation. Our alumni include graduates of Harvard Law School and Emory University School of Law; Baylor College of Medicine and Columbia University Medical Center; Princeton University, the University of Cambridge, the London School of Economics & Political Science, the Queen's University Belfast, and the National University of Ireland. And in recent years, Honors College students have won Fulbright, Goldwater, Marshall, and Truman scholarships, in addition to fellowships from Rotary World Peace, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, and the French Embassy.

But we seek to provide along with these practical dimensions a richly integrative and synthetic intellectual foundation. This is evident in our commitment in the Honors College to core curriculum, to interdisciplinary and personalized curricular formation, to qualitative enrichment such as small, intensive tutorial and colloquium experiences and the writing of an Honors thesis, all of which push the fruitfulness of your learning to a more mature level of engagement. All of this learning we quite literally situate in a tremendously lively experience of student life in a caring Christian environment, especially the opportunity to live in a place such as Brooks College, the North Village, or the new Honors Residential College (amalgamating the old Alexander and Memorial residence halls). These "Living – Learning Centers" provide a far richer integration of all aspects of your undergraduate experience by putting in one space lecture halls, seminar rooms, faculty offices, faculty living quarters, dining facilities, chapels and dormitory space. In such environments conversation regularly goes above and beyond mere matters of course content and individual performance on tests and papers. The big questions of

life get the kind of sustained exposure that makes for deeper understanding – and, yes, the possibility of wisdom. Traditions in the Honors Residential College include Dr Pepper Hours, community dinners, a European cinema series, and soon, evening prayer in the newly renovated Memorial Chapel.

At Baylor we have conscious and considered goals for your education. One of these is to include you, as students, in our own ongoing learning as faculty and staff. That is to say, we see ourselves as lifelong students. In this context faith is not, for us, severed from the learning experience, but is rather quite naturally, as a tradition of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, a part of it. As another of my colleagues likes to say, “we are educating for eternity, not just for the here and now.” That is, we see each student not only as a developing citizen, to be formed according to the needs of the state, but *imago dei*, in the image of God, as a child of God. For us you are not only a person *sub specie civitas* but also *sub specie aeternitas*.

Another way of saying all this is simply to affirm that we highly value all information and skill development that leads to excellence in performance: these are the instrumental goods of a sound education. But they are not the highest goals of the education to which we aspire. The kind of education we try to provide is not just about the transmission of information. It is about intellectual transformation and the formation of character. Therefore we seek to cultivate in ourselves – and in you – an affection for the *intrinsic* goods of a higher education: such things as may be called virtues: for example, wisdom, understanding, justice, humility and love.

You can get a sense of how all this comes together for us if you take time to cross campus to the small quadrangle outside the Great Hall and enter Robbins Chapel. When

you enter that beautiful small sanctuary for prayer and worship consider how it is that the intellectual and moral virtues exemplified and reflected in the stained glass windows on either side of the nave lead naturally to a focus on the God in whose image we are to grow and mature. Likewise in the Honors Residential College, you will soon be able to go to Memorial Chapel, where through the generosity of these and other donors an old chapel is being beautifully restored. The stained glass windows there are on one side dedicated to knowledge, understanding, and wisdom; on the other, to faith, hope and love. The intellectual and theological virtues together, there too, directing us toward the One we worship and the One to whose measure, by diligence and faithfulness, we are daily being drawn (Ephesians 4:13).

We agree, thus, with Max Planck, the father of modern quantum physics, when he says that contemporary science

impresses us particularly with the truth of that old doctrine which teaches us that there are realities which exist apart from that which we can validate by our sense perceptions, and that there are problems and conflicts in life where these realities come to have a far greater value for us than the richest treasures of the world of physical experience.

We agree likewise with the Apostle Paul, when he says (in words you will see engraved above the eastward pillars of our science building) not only that “by Him all things are made” but that “in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17).

And we agree, too, that if students like yourselves come here, apply your intelligence to knowledge and understanding, that what Baylor and the Honors College can help you to acquire in ways that perhaps few other places can is progress in wisdom.

That is in part because we are reflectively and most earnestly engaged in seeking it for ourselves. I hope that many of you will join us for the great conversation that characterizes a Baylor education, and that through it you will grow from knowledge to understanding, through smart to wise, and ultimately to that order of knowledge which is highest of all.