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Honors Ceremony Welcome
October 20, 2008

Welcome!

I am delighted to be with all of you this evening and to extend warm greetings and congratulations from the UConn upper administration.

I was asked to make some remarks this evening about the importance of the Honors Program. In our current economic circumstances, where everyone is looking for a place to cut back or how to do things more frugally, one might well ask why it is important to have an honors program when it costs more to give these students smaller classes and many individual academic enrichment opportunities. Wouldn't it simply be more economical to do without?

In my mind, this depends on what we mean by the word "economy." Many of the students in front of me now have read, are reading, or will read Henry David Thoreau's American literary classic *Walden*, the first chapter of which is called "Economy," and Thoreau himself lived in some economic hard times in the first half of the nineteenth-century. On the most basic level, Thoreau's book could be considered a "how-to" manual: how to live on practically nothing at all by building your own cabin, growing your own food, and doing without just about everything that

isn't an absolute necessity. Although Thoreau gives us the details of his economy right down to the last pennies, *Walden* isn't really about economy in the sense of money and budgeting, but about spiritual economy.

Thoreau believed that most people throw away their minds and their lives on accumulating money and possessions; while they seem to have a great deal, Thoreau believed that they really have very little because they wasted their minds and their spirits in the pursuit of material things. Here is Thoreau's real definition of economy: "The cost of a thing is the amount of what I call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run." Thoreau may have been eating beans and living in a cabin, but he had his books and his writing materials and the time to spend on them because he did not have to earn money for a fancy lifestyle. Here is Thoreau's definition of true riches: "Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations."

So to continue in economic terms, we have a UConn Honors Program because we want to invest in the future. Thoreau said that he was cultivating himself as he cultivated his bean field. In the Honors Program, we are allowing our students the opportunity to cultivate themselves as they go about their studies. We have all heard stories about geniuses making important discoveries while doing something apparently inconsequential. Thoreau himself was considered the town ne'er do well as he

sat in his cabin reading and writing instead of holding down a full-time job.

We cannot say with any certainty exactly what important benefits to our society our honors students will produce, but we know that they will do good and important things, and so we invest in them. Some of their discoveries and activities will help us in a material way, but some will make contributions to our culture and thoughts which are equally valuable. Through our honors students we are insuring the spiritual and material well-being of future generations.

So I want to express my deep appreciation to the donors in the audience who support our students in their endeavors, and my gratitude to our faculty and staff who nurture their talents. You are wise investors, indeed, no matter what the stock market is doing.

Students, I congratulate you on what you have accomplished, but as we all know, "To those to whom much is given, much is expected," and we expect a great deal from our investment in you. Enjoy this evening's celebrations of your achievement; you deserve it and have shown that our investment in you is beginning to pay already. Congratulations!

Honors Dinner Remarks

Thank you again for joining our celebration this evening. I will keep my remarks extremely brief

since you all heard enough from me earlier when I spoke about what the word "economy" means. Now I want to turn to a more generous word, "giving" and quote Winston Churchill: "You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give."
Donors, you are indeed making lives through what you are giving, and we are all deeply grateful. Thank you.