

1. Provide a brief abstract or summary of your Honors in Action Project including the following components: academic research into and analysis of sources related to the Honors Study Topic, action that addresses a need in your community that was discovered through your research and analysis into the Society's current Honors Study Topic, and the impact of your project. (NOTE: Recommended word count for the abstract is no more than 300 words.)

Alpha Nu Sigma members began our project by reviewing The Art and Science of Play Honors Program Guide. We chose different research topics and narrowed our focus to Theme 1: Essence of Play. To better conduct academic research, we attended a workshop with Horry-Georgetown Technical College's (HGTC) research librarian and completed Research Edge. Our research indicated play benefits both parents and children. Our research librarian created a play-themed library guide for us and was invaluable at helping us locate academic sources on play throughout our research process. Yogman (2018) concluded a shift in the natural foundations of play, including less parent engagement and more digital distractions, negatively affected the development of executive functioning skills and stated, "Play is not frivolous." A committee member shared information about STAR (Sensory Teaching And Recreation) Academy, a local play-based facility. The founder shared her expertise during a committee meeting, and we attended a presentation at her facility. We surveyed our college community and discovered 20% of parents did not identify how play affects their children. To share our research and engage parents and children, we created a PLAY (Play & Learning 4 Adults & Youth) event and included STAR Academy as a collaborator. We created eight play stations and 50 people attended. As we learned to collaborate and set realistic goals, we became a team, accomplishing specific project tasks. We created a fun environment for parents and children to explore the essence of play together.

2. What theme in the current Honors Program Guide did your chapter focus on?

Theme one

3. Summarize your research objectives. In other words, what did your chapter set out to accomplish in terms of its research? (See Research Objectives Rubric in the HiA Rubrics for more detail.)

We reviewed Honors Program Guide themes during officer training and identified areas of interest. At our next meeting, we shared preliminary research and

discovered our interest in focusing on how children with disabilities play. We developed the following research objectives:

1. Review the Honors Program Guide and choose a theme
 2. Complete Research Edge
 3. Attend a research workshop conducted by HGTC's research librarian
 4. Review at least 40 sources, including global perspectives
 5. Identify eight academic sources
 6. Survey HGTC students, faculty, and staff to assess knowledge about play
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4. Describe your academic research into the Honors Study Topic, your research question(s), your analysis of your research findings, and your research conclusions.

Officers investigated different themes in the Honors Program Guide. Our initial research focused on the impact of play on neurodivergent children. Research into autistic children provided the most promising avenue for exploration. It demonstrated play improved autistic children's development and higher executive functions. Marwick's research (2022) revealed playboxes containing random objects such as paper, crayons, string, etc. helped engage play between autistic children and adults. We quickly realized autism was both too broad and too narrow a focus for a feasible action component, so we broadened our scope to neurotypical children. The Su (2020) study compared autistic and non-autistic children and found playboxes improve collaboration and communication among both groups.

We chose theme one, Essence of Play, and developed our research question: To what extent does active play between parents and children serve as a foundation for skills development?

Yogman's (2018) article focused on the importance of building foundational coordination, socialization, communication, and executive functioning skills needed to be successful. It also revealed constraints in home environments, such as time and finances, impede developing these skills. We interviewed a special education, play-based teacher, who supported these findings. She acknowledged parents need to play with their children at home. The Harris (2022) article supported the concept of floor play where children and adults become partners in play. According to Metafarria (2021), despite cultural differences between Ethiopian and Hungarian parents, both encouraged play for their children as a learning method. Watson's (2017) research focused on the impact of physical activity and the connection to academic performance, while Eimer's (2020) Chinese study utilized LEGOs™ to improve mathematics test scores. After

reviewing our research, committee members learned play was integral to childhood development, yet most children do not get enough play time, especially with parents.

HGTC's Institutional Research Department reviewed a survey we developed to assess the level of importance parents placed on play and the amount of time they spend playing with their children. We surveyed 373 students, faculty, and staff across three campuses. A total of 115 replied yes to whether they had children. The majority of these parents agreed playtime with their children is very important. About 25% of those surveyed stated they spend 3 hours or less per week playing with their children. Our final question assessed the effects of engaging in active play with their children, and 20% did not reply. We recognized a need for parents to learn about the importance of playing with their children.

5. List the 8 academic/expert sources that were most enlightening regarding multiple perspectives of the Honors Study Topic theme you selected. Briefly explain why these were the most important sources and what you learned from each of them as you researched your theme. (NOTE: Please use full, formal APA citations for your entry.)

Eimer, T., Aleksić, G., Zhang, Q. (2020). The Role of LEGO in Numeracy Development: A Case Analysis. In: Xu, S., Marsico, G. (eds) Social Ecology of a Chinese Kindergarten. Cultural Psychology of Education, vol 12. Springer, Cham.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59735-1_8

This Chinese study examined LEGO™ construction and math proficiency. Results indicated the more complex the LEGO™ construction, the higher the performance on mathematics tests. This led us to include a LEGO™ play station at our event and a LEGO™ set as a grand prize.

Harris, K.I. (2022) Through a Child's Eyes: Using Floor Play to Connect with Children and Families. Journal of National Association for the Education of Young Children, 17(2), 36-42.

This article focused on how floor play can be a time for families to engage with their children by connecting with them to understand their emotions and behavior. This information helped us create our survey questions and the idea to add a free play area to our event.

Marwick, H., Jarvie, K., Cowie, H., Johnston, L., Hammond-Evans, N., & Cockayne, R. (2022). Developing Pretend Play in Autistic Children Using the Playboxes Joint Play

Approach as Part of Ongoing Practice. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 52(7), 3050–3060. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05156-9>

This article demonstrated the importance of creating and using playboxes of random items to assess and promote engagement between children and adults. This led us to design a PLAY kit for children and parents to take home from our event.

Metaferia, B.K., Futo, J., & Takacs, Z.K. (2021). Parents' Views on Play and the Goal of Early Childhood Education in Relation to Children's Home Activity and Executive Functions: A Cross-Cultural Investigation. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 646074.

This Ethiopian and Hungarian study indicated preschoolers with parents acknowledging the importance of play for the overall development of children and frequently engaging in pretend play have better executive functions. We used this information to focus our research on the importance of parents playing with children and create our event.

Su, W.C., Culotta, M., Mueller, J., Tsuzuki, D., Pelphrey, K., & Bhat, A. (2020).

Differences in cortical activation patterns during action observation, action execution, and interpersonal synchrony between children with or without autism spectrum disorder (ASD): An fNIRS pilot study. *PLoS ONE*, 15(10), e0240301.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0240301>

This article addressed how autistic and non-autistic children learn through imitation and the use of playboxes. A member managed each station at our event so children could imitate each activity.

Watson, A., Timperio, A., Brown, H., Best, K. & Hesketh, K.D. (2017). Effect of classroom-based physical activity interventions on academic and physical activity outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. [*The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*](http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12966-017-0569-9) 14(1), 114. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12966-017-0569-9>

This article focused on physical activity and its positive impact on academic performance. It inspired us to create the coordination station for our PLAY event.

Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., (2018). The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children.

Pediatrics, 142(3), e20182058. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2058>

Less parental engagement due to work requirements, fewer safe places to play, and more digital distractions, limit play opportunities for children. Play provides opportunities for adults to help their children build foundational motor, social–emotional, language, executive functioning, and math skills needed to be successful. This led us to plan an event to help parents better understand how play impacts children's growth while also providing examples of activities to do at home.

Zosh, J.M., Gaudreau, C., Golinkoff, R.M., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2022). The Power of Playful Learning in the Early Childhood Setting. *Journal of National Association for the Education of Young Children*. 17(2), 6-13.

Free play encourages children to choose and direct their play, fostering initiative, independence, and problem-solving. Guided play is chosen by the adult and directed by children to embrace critical and creative aspects of learning. This led us to explore the benefits of parent-guided play.

6. Summarize your project action and collaboration objectives. In other words, what did your chapter set out to accomplish in terms of its collaborations and action?

Our overall goal was to educate HGTC parents that playing with their children is important to overall development and can be fun and easy. To accomplish this, we developed the following action objectives:

- Apply for Mellon HiA Grant
- Plan event to educate parents on the benefits and accessibility of play
- Produce tri-fold brochure to share our research (attached)
- Design advertisement flier and email invitation
- Create handout about low or no-cost games (attached)
- Prepare PLAY kits for distribution
- Conduct exit survey

We accomplished our action objectives through collaborating with:

- HGTC Lead Research Librarian
- STAR Academy founder

7. Describe the service or "action" components of this Honors in Action Project that were inspired by and directly connected to your Honors Study Topic research. (Action can also include promoting awareness and advocacy.) Be sure to include information about the people and/or groups with whom you collaborated, why you chose these collaborators, and the impact they had on the outcomes of the project.

We planned a two-hour event to engage parents and children in active play and present our research on the benefits of actively engaging in play.

To better understand the benefits of play, we collaborated with the founder of STAR Academy, a local play-based learning center. She asserted children do not get enough play time at home and corroborated our findings that play is an integral part of a child's development. There is no charge for parents to play with their children at her facility.

We developed PLAY kits based on Su's (2020) research. A committee member developed a spreadsheet, including costs and quantities, to help us choose what items to purchase. HGTC generously donated branded reusable shopping bags, and our advisor ordered the items. Each kit contained items encouraging imaginative free play between child and parent: sensory toys, coloring/activity books, crayons, Rubik's cubes, ribbon wands, miniature drawing tablets, puzzles, jump ropes, dominoes, card games, LED bracelets, brain teasers, and a no-cost games handout. Additionally, kits included a craft bag of paper plates, pipe cleaners, cotton balls, popsicle sticks, feathers, colorful pom balls, sequins, and toilet paper rolls.

HiA team members created a digital event flier, which was approved by Student Affairs and emailed to our college population. Another member created a separate printed flier using Canva. Our print shop could not use this file format, so a chapter officer converted it into a PDF, and 100 colorful fliers were printed and placed across three campuses.

Using our research, committee members created a tri-fold brochure to explain our play stations: Collaboration, Imagination, Coordination, Communication, Deliberation, and Free Play.

The Collaboration station allowed exploration through building marshmallow and spaghetti towers. LEGO™ free form pieces allowed parents and children to create together.

The Imagination station included craft items allowing parents and children to create imaginative artwork.

The Coordination station consisted of hopscotch, designed with painters' tape on the auditorium floor, a Velcro ball toss, jump rope, and "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" cards promoting physical challenges for parents and children.

The Communication station contained over 100 donated books for all reading levels. Parents and children selected ones to take with them, and remaining books were donated to STAR Academy. We created note cards (doctor, airplane, cowboy, astronaut, volcano, tree, etc.) for parents and children to act out or draw utilizing oversized Post-it™ notes which we hung behind the station.

The Deliberation station engaged parents and children in critical thinking skills through constructing and designing paper airplanes. We provided Dominoes and Battleship™ to encourage critical thinking and enhance parent/child play and dialogue.

The Free Play area included empty cardboard boxes, paper plates, plastic spoons, twine, plastic cups, markers, and foil cake pans for parents and children to imaginatively create scenarios. One child turned a box on its side and wrote “hot oven” on it and used small plates to create a pizza and chocolate chip cookies to share with parents. Another child created a telephone utilizing plastic cups and twine and had a conversation with his father.

We invited a local speech therapist to host a station. She brought Mr. Potato Head, plastic animals, small interconnecting tiles, and a memory game and explained how playing with them improves children’s communication skills. She expressed her excitement at the number of participants and the event being well organized.

Two members of STAR Academy brought hula hoops, arts/crafts, an extra-large chess set, sensory toys, and Play-Doh™. This station was one of the most popular.

We met at the auditorium the day before our event to assemble PLAY kits and design our event space. We created and hung giant Post-it™ notes on the wall to identify each station, including suggested activities to maximize play benefits.

A chapter officer greeted parents and gave them our tri-fold brochure and a Bingo card as they entered the auditorium. The Bingo card was created at an HiA committee meeting, to be stamped as they visited each station. Participants took completed Bingo cards to the grand prize station to exchange for a PLAY kit, a ticket for the grand prize giveaway, and an exit survey. Grand prizes featured items reflecting our research and included: Spirograph™, LEGO™ set, Play-Doh™ set, a backpack with books and a large writing tablet, paint set, Velcro ball toss, jump rope, a guessing game, and Backgammon™. Our survey contained two questions to gauge what parents learned that day.

8. What are the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of your project? What impact did your project have on the problem addressed and on opportunities for chapter members and others to grow as scholars and leaders?

All HiA members completed Research Edge and learned the importance of setting realistic goals. We worked together to transition large ideas into a manageable project,

and became well-rounded leaders. Developing academic research skills enabled us to become lifelong learners.

We learned to use software programs including Canva and Excel and how to compile survey responses and create graphs. Our teamwork skills improved as we listened to each other, learned to be flexible, collaborated on changes, and appreciated each other's skills. Committee members were excited to share new knowledge with HGTC parents about the impact of play on developmental skills.

We prepared 52 PLAY kits weighing 2 pounds each. Our plans identified cost as a barrier to creating them, so we learned how to write a \$1,000 Mellon Foundation mini-grant application, which we received. The total cost for our kits was \$1,230 and chapter members raised the additional funds to successfully complete our project.

The chapter paid \$205 to rent a 3,552 square foot auditorium on campus. Fifty HGTC parents and their children attended.

Parents shared the following comments in our exit survey:

- "You likely have inexpensive items at home that can serve as toys, and you do not need to spend large amounts on toys in stores to have fun with kids!"
- "Awesome event! PTK did a great job! They did a wonderful job explaining the stations."
- "I learned ways that play can help me better understand my child and how to help them grow and communicate their perspective to a variety of people."
- "Family game time is some of the best time that we can spend."

Upon reflecting on our event, we learned play doesn't have a price point. It is a powerful concept even without toys, which we demonstrated in several stations. We were amazed to see the variety of spaghetti and marshmallow structures (attached) and overjoyed at the level of creativity in the craft area. We learned the importance of playing with children, not just watching them play. This reminded us of a Carolinas Region Honors Institute speaker who encouraged us to play as adults. We grew as scholars and leaders by bringing parents and children closer together through play and sharing our research with them. We created lasting change for families who played together during our event.