

CHAPTER 3

Do Your Homework First, and Then Go Play!

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In the fall of 2006, after five years of planning, the Kent State University Honors College inaugurated in the heart of the campus a new honors center: two residence halls framing an office, library, and classroom space came to life. The new center overlooked the Commons, an open green space home to student games and student protests. The hill above the Commons was the site of the National Guard shootings of May 4, 1970, and the relationship of this tragedy to honors at KSU became an important part of the thinking about this new location.

The Kent State University Honors College had occupied a consolidated center for 17 years. So how did this new center come to be? The purpose of this essay is to focus on the process that led to the creation of the center and the lessons that might be drawn from this process.

BACKGROUND

Honors at KSU began in 1933 as a program, expanded to a broader curriculum in 1960, and became a college in 1965. Kent State participated in early activities and discussions of the Inter-university Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS) and the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). Inspired by the ICSS's advice, embodied in desiderata that later evolved into the NCHC's "Basic Characteristics," the KSU Honors College sought honors space, establishing not only an academic office but also honors residence halls.

Housed at first in an academic building, the college office and student lounge moved in 1970 to a two-story wooden barracks building facing the Commons and adjacent to the sister building housing the ROTC. That building was burned down in the May 1970 protests. In the mid-1970s, the college moved to a nearby academic building shared with Pan-African Studies and part of the School of Art. This third-floor office complex was flanked by a small lounge and two classrooms. One of the latter served also for meetings of the Honors College Policy Council (HOCOPOCO), which consisted of 12 faculty and 12 students. The same decade saw the optional honors occupancy of two residence halls, one for men and one for women, in a group of three-hall complexes constructed in the 1960s at the east edge of campus. The halls had a spirited sense of community even as students complained—perhaps a bit proudly—of the long winter walk to classes across what they called the "frozen tundra." College staff found that honors students flourished under the opportunity to live, study, and play together and that good facilities generated a sense of pride and identity. These office and residence facilities served the college through the 1980s.

Having grown to over 750 students in the late 1980s, the honors college argued for the need to bring residence and office together in a consolidated center that could offer expanded spaces for a library/seminar room, lounge, conference room, computer lab, workroom, storage, a large reception area for three secretarial staff, and rooms for six advising and administrative staff and a graduate student. The project idea took the form of a proposal for a state

Program Excellence Grant. Receiving that grant for \$146,500 in 1988 persuaded the university to provide for the move to another three-hall residence complex on the edge of campus. The middle building anchored the center with one wing for upper-division students and the other for the new office and student-support spaces. The adjacent two halls were to be divided by gender. Although as a member of HOCOPOCO at the time I voted against the idea, these three modest, three-story halls, housing 279 students, were required to have at most a 70% honors occupancy. Staff and faculty feared the effects of an ivory-tower-like separation resulting from an all-honors environment isolated from the rest of campus. At the same time, in an agreement with Residence Services, non-honors students were required to have at least a 3.0 GPA so as not to dilute the character and identity of the halls too much.

The Honors Center, 1989–2006

The location and facilities turned out to be felicitous for the honors college for a number of years. The support from the central administration acknowledged not only a well-deserved reputation for quality but also the importance of several non-honors services the honors college provided, such as overseeing the general education requirements and the high school early-admission program. The honors college felt fortunate to have a space commensurate with its size and mission. Several honors classes met in the library, with its long seminar table alongside shelves holding an extensive reference collection. At that time, a large television, VCR, and white board offered ample visual-aid support. A small desk with a computer enabled a student worker to help students in the computer lab and to supervise the library as study lounge—and the premises in general—in the evening. Students—primarily those living in the honors halls—appreciated the computer lab with eight stations and, for many years, free printer paper.

The reception area was warm and welcoming when students came for their semester advising appointments or had questions. Each of the two clusters of three staff offices apiece had doors facing one another for ready communication. The secluded conference

room, used also for thesis defenses, included storage cupboards and a white board for writing agendas and brainstorming ideas. The dean's office included a sofa and overlooked a flourishing garden with small trees and, across the perimeter driveway, a high-rise off-campus apartment building. A photocopier and filing cabinets for student and college records enjoyed ample space. Overflow historical records were stored in a small room in the residence wing until, some years later, a new storeroom was created off the conference room. A fairly large lounge overlooking a plaza offered a coffee machine and eight round tables with chairs, and it was used for some meetings, including the annual Neighborhood Breakfast, to which the honors college invited all who worked in the complex (faculty, staff, RAs, custodians). All three buildings were air-conditioned. Crowning this honors space was an isolated apartment on the second floor of the residence wing for guests in the university artist/lecture series coordinated by the honors college and for high-level university guests, such as new provosts and presidents during their housing transition. Four years into this new center, in 1993, I became dean.

This facility confessed to a few drawbacks. Secretaries had no windows, no view of the outside world. When students crowded in to sign up for advising appointments or hovered over the receptionist's desk with questions, she easily felt invaded. The furnishings of the lounge, especially its metal and plastic chairs and bare floor, seemed cold, not cozy, and few students used it for studying or hanging out. For several years the university's sign shop occupied the space on the other side of the library wall and provided a pounding and whining industrial accompaniment to class discussions. The staff clusters occupied opposite ends of the office space, creating a small communication barrier. Boxes of records stored in the residence hall were damaged by a water leak and were so tightly packed in that information retrieval was challenging. Students did not seem to use the library reference works, and increasingly during the 1990s they brought personal computers to campus and no longer used the lab. The halls were also inaccessible to wheel-chairs; steps abounded, even to the plaza and garden framed by the three halls.

Most worrisome of all, eventually, was the distance from the academic center of campus and the loss of honors identity in the residence halls. By the late 1990s, the percentage of honors occupancy was plummeting. Although students originally enjoyed the relative seclusion of the center, more and more were complaining that the honors complex was too far from the hub of campus: the classroom buildings, student center, and library. The exodus of honors students was exacerbated by, in some years, the university's "dumping" of a number of late freshman applicants with poor ACT scores into the honors halls. The number of roommate problems and rules infractions rose. In the first years of the new century, honors occupancy had shrunk from the recommended 70% to 24%–27%!

The Turning Point: Eviction

While flailing for a solution to the low honors occupancy rate as the millennium turned, the honors college discovered that the university's long-range plan called for the demolition of its buildings and all the other small-group residence halls on the perimeter of campus. Against that eventuality, the staff began to ask themselves how the honors college could sustain or improve, through a move to a new location, the current level of facility support that it had enjoyed. Discussions took shape at staff meetings and at monthly meetings of HOCOPOCO. Since no one from the university administration was forthcoming in 2001 about a mandate to move or a date of projected demolition, the honors staff decided to take the initiative and begin planning. Projects requiring state support for capital construction required a six-year lead time, so I immediately asked if a new center could be placed on the list. The provost's office decided that other priorities were more important but looked to private fundraising to support the honors center. While a new honors residence hall could be built with bonds, academic space within it would have to be leased. The preference was to pursue an independent academic center. An alumni survey helped to identify desirable amenities for a new center. A pattern of taking initiative proved to be one of the keys to our later success in creating a new honors center.

DOING OUR HOMEWORK

By spring of 2002, the facilities planning office identified two sites that might be available for a future honors center. One would be the empty tract of land following the razing of a 500-bed residence hall (Terrace) on the front campus facing East Main Street, demolition scheduled for 2005 and rebuilding by 2007. The other would be a smaller space in the center of campus squeezed among several older residence halls (including Stopher and Johnson, slated to be rebuilt by 2005) and proximate to several academic buildings, the gym, the student center, and the library. By June the honors college had established a task force comprising staff members and representatives of HOCOPOCO, residence services, the provost's office, and alumni and held a retreat to discuss what was needed and wanted in a new center. To generate additional ideas in July, the task force toured two new residence halls on campus with the director of residence services. At this point Charles Harker, architecture professor and long-standing member of HOCOPOCO and honors liaison in the School (later College) of Architecture and Environmental Design, offered to assign the design of a new honors center as the semester-long project for his fall 2002 master's class. The task force readily agreed, and the chief campus architect, the associate vice-president for facilities planning, the vice-president for business and finance, and the director of residence services at meetings in July and August expressed a lively interest in the outcome of the class project.

The Architecture Class

Prior to the first architecture class meeting that fall, the task force wrote a one-page outline of "Honors Values," with examples, to guide these master's students unfamiliar with honors culture. The task force also communicated to Professor Harker its space needs and some additional desiderata, such as a fluid gathering space for students, a "quirky" non-symmetrical plan, privacy for advising, and quality residence accommodations that would encourage students to remain there all four years. At the outset of their course,

the eight architecture students toured the existing honors center, where they participated in a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the facility as well as the “Honors Values” statement. The group also toured the Terrace site. A week later members of the task force and the architecture class went in a chartered campus bus on a one-day tour of two reasonably close honors centers: a fairly new one at the University of Toledo and one undergoing remodeling in the College of Literature, Sciences, and the Arts at the University of Michigan. After interviews with the honors staff about the facilities, the planning process, and their satisfaction, the architecture students and I took photos and jotted notes. In both cases the honors residence halls were separate from the office and classroom space, adjacent in the case of Toledo and at some distance, in an older hall, in Ann Arbor. On the way home the task force members discussed this experience with the architecture students and among themselves to sort out the pros and cons of each facility as well as what to emulate and what to studiously avoid.

The master’s students began designing possible centers for the two locations offered tentatively by the university. Five students chose the central location near Stopher Hall (a residence), and three chose the soon-to-be-defunct Terrace Hall. The criteria included a combined residence, classroom, and office complex in a single structure, with residential occupancy for at least 350 students. Offices had to serve a staff of 10; other features were seminar-style classrooms, a library, a multi-media computer lab, a lounge, a guest apartment, and ample workspace and storage. At the mid-semester point, the master’s students presented progress reports on their plans to honors staff, representatives of HOCOPOCO, and the campus architect and associate VP for facilities. They answered questions about their floor plans and received feedback on their ideas. The enthusiasm of the two administrators was gratifying.

The end-of-semester design presentations by the architecture students were enlightening, imaginative, and useful. The Terrace Hall site on Main Street possessed the advantage of high visibility to the public, but replacing the capacity of the existing 500-bed facility with just honors students would be difficult and would again put

the honors college in the position of sharing it with non-honors students, thus diluting its identity as an honors center. Further, a facility here would abut or subsume a current ROTC building, again something of a threat to the identity of the honors college.

The Stopher site, on the other hand, promised a quieter and more central location close to a number of important buildings at the heart of things and sitting on a new pedestrian esplanade. During the discussion, the designs for this site won over the campus architect and facilities planner, as well as the honors staff, particularly for the way these opened up a new direct walkway from the esplanade to the Commons. The upshot of the master's class experiment was a mutual decision to adopt the Stopher site and to begin serious planning with the architect's office in spring 2003.

I cannot overstate the importance of this architecture class project. The honors college is forever indebted to the efforts of the eight students and the professor who volunteered them. The project showed the campus architect, facilities VP, and ultimately the VP for Business and Finance that the honors college was serious about the prospect of a move and the creation of a new center and that it was taking steps quickly to move forward. The specific designs, though from master's students and not from the professional architects who would eventually design the center, helped these administrators visualize the future facility and prompted discussion of various pros and cons. Finally, their experience of the student designs led directly to the Stopher decision and quickly produced a new stage in the planning process.

The Steering Committee and Preliminary Rendering

Meanwhile, early in that semester of the architecture class, a questionnaire designed by a student on HOCOPOCO about honors students' reasons for living or not living in the current residence halls confirmed that the distance and age of the existing honors halls put them off. Despite their overall honors satisfaction rate of 81%, respondents expressed a 62% dissatisfaction rate with the current honors housing.

Later in the semester, under direction from the architect's office, a steering committee was formed to proceed further with planning. The committee comprised the associate VP for facilities planning, the associate provost for budget, the director of residence services, the campus architect, his colleague architect now assigned to the project, another colleague in charge of specific physical space allocation, the associate director of development, and me. Clearly more administrators than anticipated were going to be crucial to achieve success. Each member of this committee had a specific and important role, and open discussions were critical to making decisions.

The steering committee first requested that the honors college respond in depth to a questionnaire used in all planning for new academic facilities. The working assumption in completing the form at that time was the large Terrace Hall site, which would require sharing the new facility not only with our existing partner, the McNair Scholars Program, but also with several new learning communities, such as the language floor and international house, compatible with the honors mission. Thus the honors staff held several discussions with the leaders of these groups. A required four-page document described the college in prose and statistics, culminating in a vision of the future. Several things became clear in the first two meetings of the steering committee. The cost of the new academic center would have to rest entirely on private funds, but the provost had approved the project for his short list of high-priority academic projects for fundraising. The development director urged a highly focused campaign that would include paying the salary of a dedicated fundraiser and offering naming opportunities. The development office would do a feasibility study to determine whether private fundraising could succeed. Uncertainties about filling a large Terrace Hall site largely or entirely with honors students helped seal the decision on the Stopher site. A student survey by email showed that the most important amenities desired in a new residence hall were comfortable study spaces and a computer lab. Finally, the architect's office was prepared to hire an outside consultant to do a rendering of an academic center adjacent to a rebuilt Stopher residence hall.

In January of 2003, three student focus groups discussed what students wanted in a new facility. An email survey that included alumni also showed a nearly unanimous preference for the Stopher site. After a thorough list of desired spaces was submitted in February, the space planner now asked for priorities in three levels: the absolutely necessary, additional strongly desired spaces, and desired spaces that, if necessary, could be eliminated. Naturally the wish was to achieve at least the same spaces the honors college already enjoyed, but in reality compromising on some items might be necessary. The honors college also provided steering committee members an expanded list of honors values, with examples from its activities.

Soon the architect's office had determined costs of various spaces in the proposed center, and a preliminary budget outlined the elements for two different facility sizes. Because the two nearby residence halls, Stopher and Johnson, were to be rebuilt, one of them destined for honors, this budget plan called for only an academic building. An external architect created a rendering of a floor plan and external view of a possible new center that could be used in fundraising. At the same time I worked with a writer in the development office to develop a case statement to present to potential donors.

At this point in the process, other offices of the university were becoming heavily invested in the project. The leadership and earnest goodwill of all of these non-honors staff members inspired the honors staff to proceed despite the daunting challenge of raising private funds. At the same time, the KSU Honors College took another initiative without being asked: extensive investigation of other honors facilities across the country.

Research into Other Honors Centers

After the September visit to two other honors centers, I had begun to see the value of consulting other honors deans and directors and visiting as many facilities as feasible, given time and distance. Over the course of a year and a half, I visited a number of campuses, often in conjunction with vacation trips or NCHC

conferences and board meetings. I took photos, talked to honors staff, and wrote notes immediately afterwards. I then compiled two three-ring binders, one for honors and one for the architect's office, containing notes, photos, articles, and some floor plans representing 35 other honors facilities. (See Appendix.) I also incorporated information and advice from NCHC conference sessions on facilities, relevant articles in honors publications, and emails responding to my queries. I shared the notes with the task force as well. The notes provided descriptions but also highlighted elements to be emulated or avoided. For example, I admired the radial arrangement of staff offices at the University of Maryland because it encouraged ready sharing of ideas while still providing closed-door privacy for advising. The honors college had already enjoyed the benefits of such a design. For a while this arrangement became the desideratum in a new center as opposed to a lateral layout with offices off a corridor. Many honors centers offered student lounges with access to kitchen facilities, including coffee or vending machines. Such an informal student-focused space was an attractive feature. Honors centers in historical older buildings and those in new constructions both had their appeal. In several cases a highly visible and central location confirmed the value of residing at the heart of campus. The double-occupancy rooms at one program convinced the committee that they should be the dominant room choice for the residence halls. At another facility the huge back deck plus a brick courtyard led to requesting a usable outdoor gathering space. One interviewee recommended lateral instead of vertical filing cabinets.

On the negative side, some facilities placed student residence in a separate, sometimes distant location, whereas the honors staff sought to combine them in a single building or at least in abutting structures. One new honors center had created adjoining classrooms that opened up into a larger space by having folding partitions, but students and faculty complained that sound leaked through the partitions. The committee vowed not to have any such dividers but to have all solid-walled rooms. Another center comprised only offices and resided invisibly in a large building designed for another purpose, and its corridors and offices seemed cramped

and partly windowless. Still another one placed the receptionist inside a window, limiting visibility and suggesting a fortress rather than a welcoming area. This configuration confirmed the desire for simply a high counter before the secretaries' desks to provide some separation and a degree of privacy.

Particularly valuable advice came from one honors director in a newly achieved office and academic center in an ideally central location on campus. Echoed by an honors dean elsewhere, she warned about the need to stay on top of the entire process of planning, design, and construction, and she cautioned about picking battles thoughtfully if cuts or changes loomed. She noted a tradeoff in her case—the separation of student and staff spaces by floors, which spelled the loss of casual student drop-ins that her staff valued. Another tradeoff noted at another campus was a relocation closer to the honors residence hall at the expense of proximity to academic buildings. In various interviews with honors administrators, I learned much by asking those in older facilities what their priorities would be if they had the opportunity to create a new one and those in newer facilities what compromises they had made and what they regretted.

Again, I cannot overstate the importance of doing our homework. Not only did we learn a great deal, but we also impressed the architects and facilities planners with our initiative, our informed thought process about what we wanted, and the raw information about other honors centers of which these administrators would otherwise have remained ignorant. What other honors leaders deemed most valuable in a facility bolstered our own list of desired spaces. Such research is even easier now because so many honors programs post photos and descriptions of their spaces on their websites, but site visits and discussions with honors administrators are still critical.

Funding

So much preparatory work—cost estimates, a rendering for a two-story academic center, and a case statement arguing the benefits of a new honors center—was done, yet the most daunting

challenge lay ahead: funding the project. The notion of selling bricks for \$100 or \$500, to be carved with donors' names, had been lurking for some time. Over the years the honors college had accumulated several thousand alumni, and the connection with them was strong through the alumni newsletter, update system, creation of an alumni council, and a stream of regular small donations to the honors college scholarship and discretionary funds. In terms of major donors, however, the feasibility study by the development office was not promising. One name clearly emerged, that of an alumni couple who had already endowed two scholarships. This couple had the capacity not only to fund the new building but also to endow the honors college itself.

Later in 2003, with the guidance of a major gifts officer, the honors staff decided to go for broke by expanding the draft case statement to personalize it for these prospective donors and to include the building for \$5 million in a larger package that requested \$20 million to endow and name the KSU Honors College—that being the development office's price tag then for naming rights to a college of our size. Other pieces of the package were funding for a scholarship program, faculty support, and the artist/lecture series. With some confidence and much trepidation, the major gifts officer and my wife and I traveled to meet the prospective donors. This meeting was extremely cordial—they were gracious hosts—but their straightforward answer was no. Their philanthropic interests lay elsewhere, much as they valued their association with honors. (Footnote: before long they did add to their existing two endowments.)

With no other prospects in view, the honors staff despaired of creating a new center with the required private funds. Rescue was at hand, however. The VP for business and finance and his associate for facilities planning, who had been impressed by the efforts and commitment of so many people who strongly supported the project, realized that the rebuilding of Stopher and Johnson residence halls would require some ground-floor construction between them for utilities and maintenance. They reasoned that with only an additional \$1.5 million they could expand that space into a new honors

center attached to the two halls and facing the Commons instead of the esplanade. This plan would be a far more cost-effective solution than a separate two-story building. With the provost's and president's blessings as well, and ultimately the approval of the Board of Trustees, the university would foot the bill for the new center. The problem was solved! And construction would be completed a year earlier than if the choice had been the Terrace site. This stunning support from the upper administration rewarded not only the current efforts but also the decades of proven excellence and the citation of the honors college as a "flagship program" of the university and "jewel nationally" in a 1994 accreditation report.

Planning and Constructing the Final Version

What remained to be seen, however, was whether this space could accommodate the needed and desired facilities. At first the amount of classroom space seemed quite limited. The footprint of the cafeteria currently occupying the site, like that of the attached residence halls to be razed and rebuilt, was constrained by the site integrity of the May 4, 1970, shootings. Despite a lengthy protest ("tent city") in 1977, the university had already impinged on the historical site with a gym annex, and it was not prepared to do so again. The honors college shared this sensitivity to the historical integrity of the site through a long connection with that tragic event. One student in the honors college, Allison Krause, was one of the "four dead in Ohio." Shortly after the event a curriculum of experimental pass/fail courses on social issues was created under the aegis of honors, and the name of the college was actually changed, for the next decade and a half, to the "Honors and Experimental College." In the late 80s this program became the Experimental and Integrative Studies Program under the KSU Honors College. Having been on campus at the time of the shooting and having used books about it in my honors courses, I had recently inaugurated a new course on "May 4, 1970, and Its Aftermath," taught in this program each spring by various guest faculty. A new facility facing the Commons and the hilltop from which the National Guard fired its lethal rounds seemed appropriate for hosting this new course. In 1990 the

provost had also awarded the honors college four full-tuition “May 4” scholarships that were later expanded to full rides, becoming the largest and most prestigious scholarships awarded by the college. Thus the center’s design clearly respected the constraints placed on this historic location.

The university now asked the external architectural firm hired to design the new residence halls to add the new center with as many as possible of the desired spaces on the wish list. Preliminary designs provided only a single classroom, but a push for some additional space on the adjacent ground floor of four-story Johnson Hall netted space that the judicial affairs office had occupied. Once the honors college was granted this space, the architect revised the plan to provide a slightly ramping corridor up to the floor level of Johnson and added three interconnected seminar rooms along a corridor, which could be opened to a double- or triple-sized room. Despite the earlier pledge never to tolerate partitions, having these flexible spaces featuring high-end folding wall panels made far more sense than constructing the large lecture hall included in the earlier rendering, and sound did not leak much between rooms. Although the university required the honors college to share these classrooms when not filled with honors classes, it granted full control of the fourth and larger classroom in exchange. Each of these three seminar rooms was designed to accommodate a freshman seminar course with 15 to 17 students, but the room could comfortably seat a maximum of 20.

The final plan meant sacrificing several things. A guest apartment was off the table; in retrospect that now seems like a very low priority. My radial arrangement of staff offices gave way to a lateral lineup down a corridor in order to preserve the original footprint of the building that previously occupied the space. The conference room would be cramped. A computer lab was axed because of a growing number of nearby labs on campus and the trend toward personal ownership. The compromise alternative was retaining three computer work stations in the large library/study area. Toward the end of the planning process, the committee realized the impossibility of comfortably making the kitchen available to students. They

would have kitchen facilities in the attached residence halls, and having food and drink carried into the lobby and library on a regular basis was a concern. One problem was that allowing others to use the classrooms after 5:00 p.m. would require a student monitor on the premises because there was no way to secure the secretaries' work spaces given the multiple entrances and pass-through to the classrooms. Finally, in an ideal world the facility would have been as "green" as possible; although the university was pursuing green design gradually, the costs beyond basic energy conservation for this already designed complex would have been prohibitive. Earlier thoughts, such as music practice rooms, a design studio, a gazebo, a two-story atrium, were long gone.

On the other hand, the center featured a large lobby, with room for art exhibits; generous staff work space; a huge storage area; a fourth classroom serving also as a meeting room for several university committees coordinated by the honors college; a kitchen; and a library overlooking a terrace framed by the office wing and classroom wing. The interior wall of the library was entirely windows to maximize the natural light coming through the opposite plaza windows into the corridor and lobby and to give the secretaries more of an outside view. Continuing discussions of the draft floor plan with the steering committee and the architect led to design changes in the reception area because the lobby needed two main entrances, one from outside and one from Stopher Hall. The solution eventually came with a partially closed office for the administrative assistant and a curving counter fronting the desks of the two secretaries. Finally, as in the current center, the staff was happy not to be located directly under the trampling feet of resident students but under an open outdoor plaza.

Of the two four-story residence halls to be rebuilt, Stopher was at first designated as honors, but in 2005 the plan changed to Johnson, with its slightly greater capacity of 224 students and its better classroom location. Residence services also agreed to place any overflow honors students in Stopher. That spillover did not happen until several years after move-in because Stopher was at first reserved for another learning community. Several handicap-designed rooms

were available in each hall. Although the architect had already designed these two halls, further discussions with residence services led to the construction of a few single rooms on the top floor for juniors and seniors. A modest desire for these had shown up in the survey of students. The result was a set of more expensive “deluxe” singles, the size of doubles, thus preserving the economic efficiency of identical rooms with plumbing lining up. Each room in the two halls would have a private bath, a high priority for students; as a result both halls could be assigned to a gender room by room. Stopher would also have two classrooms, where honors and other freshman orientation classes could be held. A bridge lounge would connect the two residence halls over a plaza that was situated over the academic center on the ground floor, which opened out on one side of the slope onto the Commons. The entire facility, residence halls and academic center, was wheelchair friendly and air-conditioned and offered wi-fi as well as hard-wired Internet access. In the academic center only the kitchen, storage, and work areas would be windowless. A cordial relationship with the director of residence services was critical because honors would not “own” the residence halls and would not govern their décor choices, rules, room assignments, or RA selection. By working together, the honors college could swiftly exert influence on values and amenities while recognizing that this self-supporting auxiliary operation needed to fill beds with non-honors students if the Johnson building could not be filled entirely with honors students.

Once the university approved the final design, the existing buildings were razed and the two-year construction process began. A camera mounted on the nearby architecture building captured the process for the university website. The honors staff and students strolled past the site frequently to watch it take shape. All seemed to be going according to plan. (Granted, I am oversimplifying the complex process of permissions, schematics, and subcontracting, which was not the direct responsibility of the honors college.) Once the center’s academic structure and internal walls were in place, the architect invited the honors staff to do a walk-through, wearing hard hats. While walking down the hallway between staff offices

and the workroom, the group suddenly found a cement-block wall where a back door into the workroom was supposed to be, for ready access by staff. The campus architect said, "Better to correct it now than later." The doorway was cut through the blocks.

Through the 2005–2006 academic year, special planning committee meetings with residence services staff helped to monitor the progress of room reservations and to plan programming. The committee created an Honors Community Council to plan honors student activities and a mentorship program in addition to the work of the hall council for all residents. Honors staff also dealt with décor, selecting paint colors, carpet, and furniture for classrooms, offices, library, and lobby, using a \$170,000 furniture allowance. Fortunately a coordinator working with the architect's office for this purpose helped to narrow the choices, and the group looked at recent furniture purchases for the university library and a classroom building. The classrooms would feature comfortable, cushioned, fold-up, and stackable chairs on casters and handsome tables whose tops folded down for easy moving and storage. One table in each classroom was adjustable vertically to accommodate wheelchairs. The electronic systems and placements for the classrooms were approved.

Each staff office contained an L-shaped desk, a lateral file cabinet, a bookcase, and chairs for advisors and students. After trying out several samples, the staff selected work chairs and conference-room chairs that were adjustable in two directions. The office furniture plans and accent colors were adjusted to suit individual preferences. Comfortable armchairs in the lobby included fold-down writing arms. Study tables and chairs, modeled on those of the main library, would populate the honors library in addition to the computer stations and several rows of tall bookshelves. The workroom and kitchen would have ample cabinet space and tables. The storage room would utilize the heavy-duty wooden shelves from the old honors center. Small, suspended lights over the reception counter would highlight that area and provide extra light to the secretaries. By summer of 2006, after all the floor plans and furniture layouts for all the spaces were examined and approved, the new

honors center was complete without further glitches, the furniture had arrived, and the honors college staff moved in and prepared for the opening ceremony that fall.

Again, staying constantly involved at every stage proved critical, from working through several problems with the architect and correcting the walled-in doorway to ensuring sufficient parking spaces outside Stopher for the honors college employees and selecting décor that would please and inspire the honors community. Key steps were securing a full set of architectural drawings as a guide and then maintaining a stream of email correspondence with architects, project coordinators, and furniture coordinators. During the final year images of the soon-to-be-completed center were used as a main attraction to recruit the incoming class of 2006 and to generate publicity for the campus newspaper. In April a “farewell celebration” to the existing honors center included remarks by the president, provost, and me; a “nostalgia” slide show; a scavenger hunt; and tours of the three buildings. In my remarks I expressed an appreciation for a sense of place and love for the old center:

This has been home to our office staff, a comfortable place where we have stood in doorways developing an exciting new idea, where we have argued with each other and complained that we should be running the whole university, where we have worked closely with our students and faculty, where we have entertained our children, where we have supported each other in times of sorrow and crisis. We will miss this place.

Celebratory events—even a valedictory one such as this—are important and require careful thought.

GOING OUT TO PLAY

In the beginning of the fall semester of 2006, two years before the 75th anniversary of the honors program, the honors college literally did go out to play at the new center by welcoming students to a celebration on the patio with volleyball and basketball at the edge

of the Commons. (The former basketball court had been restored at the end of the office wing.) The new president and I even batted the volleyball back and forth for our respective teams. In early September the honors college held a formal grand opening ceremony with a ribbon-cutting and remarks by the new president, the provost, and the vice president for enrollment management and student affairs. The provost noted that “it is appropriate that the Honors College stand physically at the center of the University. . . . [It] is our standard of excellence and achievement. It inspires us to do better, and it calls on us to measure up.” All of the staunch allies—the architecture professor, the architects, the associate VP for facilities, and the VP for business and finance—took public bows for making the completion of the new center possible. Besides the printed program, the audience received souvenir bookmarks showing the new center with a timeline of our facilities history on the back. At homecoming alumni toured the center, and the advisory board and alumni chapter began holding meetings in the new home. Later in the year the honors college also hosted a reception and tour for members of the university’s board of trustees.

For the first time almost all of the 18 yearlong freshman seminars and several other honors classes could meet in the center, thus strengthening its academic identity. The students living in Johnson Hall had ready indoor access to classes, to their advisors, and to the honors library. Faculty and students alike reported satisfaction with the intimate classroom facilities and the spacious, welcoming lobby. The proximity of the building to that of the English Department meant that the instructors of the freshman seminars had only a short walk from their offices and their antiquated former seminar rooms to the new ones. The honors versions of the university’s freshman orientation course took place in the classrooms in Stopher Hall.

Johnson Hall was completely filled with 223 honors students, despite the higher room cost of a brand-new building, and all six RAs were honors students. Floor lounges and main lounges offered quiet study spaces, and the latter also hosted pianos and ping-pong, but the second-story bridge lounge between the buildings, with its

window seats, fireplace, large-screen television, and commanding view of the Commons, proved to be the most popular gathering space. Each hall provided not only a kitchen and laundry but also a card-swipe bicycle room accessed from outside, with a compressed-air tire pump on hand. Stopher also became the area office, a hub for four residence halls. Students enjoyed the coziness of carpeted rooms, the convenience of micro-fridges, and the flexibility of “loft-able” beds.

Soon after the move, however, a few small problems needed to be corrected. I noticed that the lateral filing cabinets in my office were a handsome wood matching the rest of the furniture, while the files in the other staff offices were gray metal, an objectionable symbol of differing status. And because the non-returnable metal files could be moved to the storeroom to provide easier access to alumni folders, new wood files for those five offices were immediately ordered from the honors college’s own budget. Staff members were happier with the attractive matching furniture and readier access to alumni folders. Students disliked the low-armed chairs in the library, so they were switched with the higher-armed student chairs in the staff offices. Unfortunately, the latter did not fit as well under the tables. Puzzlingly, the cabinets in the workroom came without doors, so they had to be ordered. The larger classroom did not have the white board planned for it, so a portable one had to suffice until a large one was installed on the wall.

Other minor glitches and emendations included ordering missing signage at the interior entrances from the residence halls, fixing non-working automatic toilet flushes, re-programming door locks, and correcting a water leak that damaged some ceiling tiles in the lobby. The handicap-access door-opening button inside the external entrance was operable only by card-swipe, proving a problem for our three wheelchair students. An annoying air vent over the receptionist had to be relocated, and uneven temperatures in the classrooms forced adjustments. A drainage problem on the basketball court needed attention. Finally, the secretaries soon found that the small suspended light fixtures over the reception counter were so bright that they were distracting and annoying; moreover,

they were not amenable to a dimmer switch. They never turned on those lights, thus losing the effect of small pools of light highlighting the counter, and only seven years later did a way to shade them emerge.

In the years since the new center opened, everyone's satisfaction has only increased. The lobby has accommodated a new annual BFA honors art show as well as a commissioned student painting, a whimsical sculpture by a faculty member, a hanging by an alumna, and several pieces by local artists. A growing collection of 24 painted wooden "art" chairs provides conversation pieces in the lobby, the library, and corridors. A small storage room provides space for boxes of books for the book sale students ran each semester for several years. In the library a large poster flip-rack preserves in photography the amusing and whimsical murals students had painted on the walls of the old honors center. The alumni publications shelf has expanded, and games and puzzles have been added to the mix. Bound senior theses going back to 1934 are now easily accessible on open shelves. The student corridor displays framed photographs of the annual Distinguished Honors Faculty Award recipients. The workroom space is luxurious, with ample room for the photocopier, storage cabinets, counters, and filing cabinets.

The residence hall occupancy has been especially gratifying, given the diminishing honors presence in the former center. Within two years, the demand for honors housing by a growing population, then around 1,300, meant using much of Stopher Hall, too, as an all-honors residence. The capacity of Johnson rose slightly as several triple rooms were created to meet the needs of a burgeoning university freshman class. For four years the honors occupancy of Johnson remained at 100%, but in the next three years that percentage gradually declined to about 82%. At the same time, the honors occupancy of the 200–223-bed Stopher slightly declined from about 97% to about 91%. The total number of honors students housed in the center jumped gratifyingly from 223 to 424 by the third year and then dropped from a high of 452 the next year to 376. The recent decline seems, from anecdotal evidence, to result from the continuing cost differential in these leaner times. The problem of

hugely declining honors occupancy at our former center had been solved—the percentages were still strong—but a further decline, especially in the originally all-honors Johnson, could be worrisome. The total number of honors students housed in the complex, however, far exceeds that in the old center, even in its initial heyday. The majority of the RAs continue to be honors students, and the resident directors continue to be supportive of honors activities.

Before long the shortage of staff space, however, became a problem. The number of staff offices was limited to the current staff at planning time and by the constraints on the footprint of the office wing. When a shared development officer was hired, creating new office space became a necessity. First she shared the graduate assistant's office, but after another year under the new dean, the conference room was converted to an office for her, and staff met in the library or the larger classroom. When the college hired an additional graduate assistant, she could share the other one's office, but when a newly hired advisor took over the GAs' office, a smaller, windowless storeroom, at some distance from the rest of the staff, was the only option for the GAs. Finally, four years into the new facility, the spacious workroom was cut in half to create a new office for two of the now three GAs. That office sports a full window wall onto the staff corridor, and in the other GA office, previously claustrophobic, a window was cut into its corridor wall. The loss of a dedicated conference and thesis defense room remains a sacrifice in return for added staff to deal with the now 1,500 honors students.

Opportunities for donors to name the center or its individual spaces are still available. The development office has divided the namable 8,560 square feet of space (excluding kitchen, storage, and corridors) into areas for individual naming, each with a price tag that is based on the cost of construction, but that may increase as the years pass.

Ironically, the former honors center was never demolished but has now been refurbished for other purposes. Although this original impetus to action faded over time, our ability to seize the moment during the impending threat of eviction gave us the momentum to carry through and create a far more satisfactory new home.

CONCLUSION

The new honors living-learning center has become a valuable fixture in the center of campus, where it visibly represents academic excellence and the university's pride in this excellence. Visitors find it a handsome, welcoming, and surprisingly whimsical place. The result has been a revitalized honors community.

What was learned from the process of creating a new home can be reduced to two simple precepts. First, early initiative through widespread discussion and research not only provided a head start in the planning process but also helped gather support from the upper administration, ultimately in the form of covering the cost of construction. Second, the constant oversight and attention to detail during the design and construction phases, as well as in the first semester of occupancy, prevented mistakes by others and solved the many small problems that emerge in any complicated construction project. Because of the honors college's past reputation, analytical engagement, and never-failing goodwill, it won favor and support in its many happy collaborations. The new center represents a new era in the long history of the Kent State University Honors College.

APPENDIX

Other Honors Centers Consulted

Adelphi University
Arizona State University
Brigham Young University
Clarion University
Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne
Iowa State University
Jackson State University
Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus
Long Island University, C. W. Post Campus
Louisiana State University
New Mexico State University
Ohio State University
Oklahoma State University
Pennsylvania State University
Randolph-Macon College
Salisbury State College
Texas A&M University
Towson State University
University of Florida
University of Hawaii
University of Iowa
University of Maine
University of Maryland

ANDREWS

University of Massachusetts Amherst

University of Michigan

University of Mississippi

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

University of New Mexico

University of Pittsburgh

University of South Carolina

University of Toledo

University of Utah

Valparaiso University

Western Michigan University