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Robert Burns, Peter Sederberg, and Higher Education Administration

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While Peter Sederberg starts his description of managing growth with a quotation from Kenneth Boulding, I prefer to start with lines from Robert Burns' "To a Louse": "O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us / To see oursels as others see us!"

I think it is fair to say that, at the time Peter took over the program at the University of South Carolina, the national honors movement had, for the first time, reached some consensus about what honors and the National Collegiate Honors Council were vis-à-vis higher education. This was accomplished with the crafting of the "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program," which owes much of its creation to the masterful work of John Grady and Richard Cummings. This effort continued, of course, with the subsequent document on honors colleges, upon which Peter himself did yeoman's service: "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College." By articulating these honors characteristics, NCHC was defining itself and its values.

Like all consensual documents, the "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program" was not universally loved, but in the thirteen years since its adoption, it has been a major factor in how we see ourselves and hope others see us. The observation by Burns clearly applies to honors: the viewpoint of those within honors education is frequently at variance with those administrators working outside the framework of honors. In the last decades, as Peter points out, honors has returned to the main stage at many flagship public universities, and his school is clearly one. This vitality and centrality are reflected in the transformation to honors colleges from already existing programs and the creation of totally new honors colleges. He points out some of the difficulties that were created for him when he should have been ecstatic about the metamorphosis. The issue is not simply one of growth; it goes beyond that. The place of honors at institutions is being distorted by people who are too often intoxicated by their own perceptual filters. He addresses some of these filters; for example, growth in honors makes us

look good as an institution. The problem becomes what happens once growth is the policy *du jour*. Therein lies the rub: growth requires new resources.

People who are planning a new program or dramatic changes in growth go awry when they confuse acorns and oaks. That which is an acorn is not an oak yet, nor are programs functioning just because they exist on paper. Frequently administrators may desire, as in Peter's case, to expand the program for institutional ends. Although they have expectations that seem reasonable to them, they have little familiarity with how the program functions. I would argue that, when new initiatives begin, two kinds of errors creep into even the best-planned expansions: unrealistic errors in both planning and budgeting as well as interactive problems, once the program has been launched, that could not be anticipated when the plan was brilliantly conceived. Therefore, I always recommend starting small, with a test group in year one rather than starting with a full-blown expansion that would, for example, double enrollment immediately. Someone typically pays a high price when this simple advice is ignored. As Peter reminds us, growth in honors does not take place in a vacuum; rather, it occurs in a highly structured setting. Adding honors students requires adding honors sections, faculty members, support staff, co-curricular programming: resources. Without doubt, most academic administrators are bright and savvy enough to understand the ramifications of growing a program, but somehow they forget that insight when it comes to honors. They need Burns to remind them about the importance of perspective.

Unfortunately, too many college and university administrators have long perceived honors as an ornament—an intellectual one but an ornament nonetheless—and thus susceptible to outside tinkering. Problems with growth are, of course, exacerbated when administrators at many levels do not communicate well with each other and especially with the administrators responsible for managing growth areas at the institution. The consequences of this breakdown and the disparities in perception are noted by Burns in the next two lines of his stanza: "It wad frae monie a blunder free us, / An' foolish notion . . . "

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