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Fall 2002

The Computer Based Honors Program At The University Of Alabama

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Randall, Cathy, "The Computer Based Honors Program At The University Of Alabama" (2002). *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive*. 104.

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Short Pieces

During the preparation of this issue of the journal, Ada Long sent out a message on the NCHC listserv, requesting brief submissions (approximately 300 words) "...about the use of technology in honors, ideas [people might] have about imaginative (or unimaginative) uses of technology in an honors setting, and/or other topics that [could] contribute to a national dialogue on the topic of technology in honors. These brief pieces might...be valuable sources of information, inspiration, and even some harrumphing."

What follows are the twelve pieces we received:

THE COMPUTER BASED HONORS PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

CATHY RANDALL

The first university-wide undergraduate research program in America was founded at the University of Alabama in 1968 with a grant from the National Science Foundation. The Computer Based Honors Program chooses 20 outstanding incoming freshmen each year and gives them an opportunity to learn how computing technology is used in their major fields of study. The Computer Based Honors program serves as a minor for students who major in any discipline. They receive an accelerated introduction to computer technology in their freshmen year. In their sophomore, junior, and senior years, they choose computer-oriented research projects being conducted by members of the faculty in their major for whom they serve as a research assistant. Six or seven in each class receive full-tuition scholarships. Many students are included as co-authors of papers published as a result of the research.

The University of Alabama faculty members enthusiastically submit proposals to secure the services of these top students (average ACT=32; average HSGPA=3.9), who receive 3 hours of credit each semester. Most faculty report that these undergraduate students often contribute as much as graduate students. There is no computer laboratory on campus faster than the CBH lab, which is open 24 hours, 7 days each week to CBH students.

The value of technology in this honors program is that the students learn invaluable research and project management skills much earlier in their college careers than most students. The National Institute of Education cited Computer Based Honors as one of the six most intriguing honors program in America, in part because of its imaginative use of technology in an honors setting.

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