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honors in practice

A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL

JOURNAL EDITORS
ADA LONG
DAIL MULLINS
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

The National Collegiate Honors Council is an association of faculty, students, and others interested in honors education. Executive Committee: Bonnie Irwin, President, Eastern Illinois University; Gregory Lanier, President-Elect, University of West Florida; John Zubizarreta, Immediate Past-President, Columbia College–South Carolina; Rick Scott, Vice-President, University of Central Arkansas; Bob Spurrier, Secretary, Oklahoma State University; Gary Bell, Treasurer, Texas Tech University. Executive Director: Cynthia M. Hill, headquartered at University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Board of Directors: Kyoko Amano, University of Indianapolis; Jamie Beko, University of Indianapolis; Bernice Braid, Long Island University–Brooklyn; Ellen Buckner, University of South Alabama; Elizabeth Callahan, St. Louis University; Lisa Coleman, Southeastern Oklahoma State University; Jerry Herron, Wayne State University; Kim Klein, Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania; Jared Knight, Iowa State University; Jon Kotinek, Texas A&M University; Jaskiran Mathur, St. Francis College; Loren McCollom, Hillsborough Community College; Doug Peterson, University of South Dakota; Elaine Torda, State University of New York–Orange; Audrey Van Acker, Ball State University; Patrick Wanninkhof, University of Florida.
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EDITORIAL POLICY

Honors in Practice (HIP) accommodates the need and desire for articles about nuts-and-bolts issues, innovative practices in individual honors programs, and other honors topics of concern to the membership. HIP complements the semi-annual scholarly journal of the NCHC, Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC). Both journals employ a double-blind review system. JNCHC publishes scholarly essays that stress research in and on honors education. HIP publishes practical and descriptive essays: descriptions of successful honors courses, suggestions for out-of-class experiences, administrative issues, and other matters of use and/or interest to honors faculty, administrators, and students. Essays should present ideas and/or practices that will be useful to other honors administrators and faculty, not just descriptions of “what we do at our institution.”

Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu.

DEADLINE

HIP is published annually. The deadline for submissions is January 1.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

1. We accept material by e-mail attachment (preferred) or disk. We do not accept material by fax or hard copy.

2. If documentation is used, the documentation style can be whatever is appropriate to the author’s primary discipline or approach (MLA, APA, etc.), but please avoid footnotes. Internal citation to a list of references (bibliography) is strongly preferred, and the editor will revise all internal citations in accordance with MLA guidelines.

3. There are no minimum or maximum length requirements; the length should be dictated by the topic and its most effective presentation.

4. Accepted essays are edited for grammatical and typographical errors and for infelicities of style or presentation. Authors have ample opportunity to review and approve edited manuscripts before publication.
DEDICATION

Vishnu Narain Bhatia (1924-2003)

Vishnu (Vic) Narain Bhatia was one of the founders of the National Collegiate Honors Council in the early 1960s, and his influence was prominent in the organization for the next three decades.

Born in Lucknow, India, and having received his BS in Pharmacy from Banaras Hindu University, he immigrated to the United States in 1947. After earning his MS and PhD in pharmacy at the University of Iowa, he was offered a faculty position in the College of Pharmacy at Washington State University in 1952, and he remained on the faculty there for forty-seven years. He became Associate Chair of the Washington State University Honors Council in 1961 and held the directorship of the program from 1964 until 1993. For much of that time (1971-1990), he was also Director of WSU International Programs, but he was always known principally as the architect of the WSU Honors Program.

Vic was one of the first presidents of the National Collegiate Honors Council (1966-67) and served in numerous other positions—including Vice President, Executive Committee member, and Editor of the Forum for Honors—throughout his tenure in honors. He gave dozens of conference presentations and served regularly as a consultant for new and evolving honors programs throughout the United States.

In 1990, Vic was awarded Danish Knighthood by Queen Margrethe II, in part for his outstanding contributions to education in Denmark. We bestow a more humble honor, but we do so with deep gratitude to this founding father of honors, by dedicating this issue of Honors in Practice to Vishnu Narain Bhatia.
Editor's Introduction

ADA LONG
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

John Zubizarreta of Columbia College leads off this volume of Honors in Practice with a revised version of his presidential address at the 2010 annual NCHC conference in Kansas City, Missouri. His speech, entitled “A Penny’s Worth of Reflections on Honors Education,” was, in a characteristic honors mode, interactive. He asked the audience to participate with him in enacting the “challenge, risk, creativity, collaboration, reflection, inquiry, [and] community” of honors education. Zubizarreta, both in his speech and in this essay, describes and illustrates honors education, the NCHC, and its conferences as embodying the “rough magic” of Shakespeare’s Prospero.

Kateryna A. R. Schray provides a fine example of rough magic in her essay “Into the Afterlife and Back with Honors Students,” which is the first of three essays in this volume that describe collaborative student projects in honors courses. Schray describes a team-taught honors seminar—Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory in Literature and Culture—at Marshall University. The primary focus of the essay is a series of collaborative projects in which, for instance, students designed stage sets for hell in a nursing home, prison, and big box store. Readers seeking new ideas for class projects in the arts and humanities will find imaginative ones here.

Another unusual idea is the focus of “The Last Class: Critical Thinking, Reflection, Course Effectiveness, and Student Engagement” by Elizabeth Bleicher of Ithaca College. Bleicher describes the content and context of a final class session in her first-year honors seminar, which is designed to acclimate new students to college life. In her honors version of the course, students anticipate and then, in the last class, accomplish both individual and collaborative evaluations of the course, knowing that their analyses, criticism, and recommendations will shape the course the next time it is taught. These students then stay connected to the class after it is over, helping the next batch of first-year students go through the same process.

Another essay that describes a strategy for student collaboration in an honors context is “Designing a Collaborative Blog about Student Success” by Melissa L. Johnson, Alexander S. Plattner, and Lauren Hundley of the University of Florida. The authors describe an ongoing blog and video blog set up by students in their third semester of a four-course sequence called Honors Professional Development. The students in this course design and maintain blogs that facilitate first-year students’ successful involvement in campus and community life. Readers can easily adapt many ideas here for application and implementation on their home campuses.
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Starting off the next set of four essays about curricular matters, Annmarie Guzy of the University of South Alabama makes an important and compelling argument—in “Why Honors Students Still Need First-Year Composition”—that Advanced Placement courses and exams are no substitute for college-level writing classes. In the format of a letter from a composition teacher to incoming honors students, Guzy writes that honors students especially need to develop writing skills and sophistication that far exceed what can be tested at the high-school level. Guzy’s well-researched and well-reasoned analysis of AP credit on educational grounds serves as a valuable rebuttal to the various constituencies who are pushing AP courses for financial reasons.

Adam D. Frank, in “Rethinking Asian Studies in the Interdisciplinary Honors Setting,” describes three interdisciplinary honors courses in Asian studies at the University of Central Arkansas. This essay will be useful to readers who have a personal or pedagogical interest in Asian history, art, and culture; who are considering new ways to adapt service learning components to their honors classes; and who are thinking of ways that honors courses can influence campus culture. At UCA, the honors Asian studies curriculum has been one way to start exposing stereotypes of “Orientalism” and educating the university population about Asian cultures.

Another subject about which stereotypes flourish is addiction. In “Understanding and Defining Addiction in an Honors Context,” Sarah W. Feldstein Ewing and Bevin Ehn describe an honors class on addiction at the University of New Mexico. Feldstein Ewing, the teacher, and Ehn, a student in the class, provide a detailed account of the purpose, content, and intended outcomes of the course, focusing both on the strategies for defining addiction and the pedagogical approaches to academic and personal development adopted in the class.

In “Team Teaching on a Shoestring Budget,” Jim Ford and Laura Gray of Rogers State University provide five alternatives to full-fledged team teaching. While the authors are hoping and trying to incorporate team teaching in their honors program, the necessary funding is not available. The five alternative options they describe might well be useful to other honors administrators and teachers facing financial cutbacks or chronic constraints.

The next three essays describe different kinds of mentor programs in honors. In “Beyond Formulas: A Collaboration between Liberal Arts Honors Underclassmen and Senior Math Majors,” Alissa S. Crans and Robert J. Rovetti of Loyola Maymount University present an original and useful idea for a collaborative project in which senior math majors work with lower-level liberal-arts honors students, guiding them in a practical, hands-on study of the math necessary to solve questions about perspective, photography, and architecture. Any honors teacher or administrator who has struggled to make math accessible and interesting to non-majors will find inspiration in this essay.

An essay that describes mentoring not across but within disciplines is “Peer Review Across Disciplines: Improving Student Performance in the Honors Humanities Classroom” by Julie M. Barst, April Brooks, Leda Cempellin, and
Ada Long

Barb Kleinjan. The authors suggest strategies that have been successful at South Dakota State University for incorporating peer mentoring within honors courses on composition, history, art, and communication studies/theater. Teachers in these disciplines will find pointers here for specific courses, and most of the ideas are adaptable to any discipline.

In “An Honors Alumni Mentor Program at Butler University,” Jaclyn Dowd, Lisa Markus, Julie Schrader, and Anne M. Wilson describe a recently inaugurated, grant-funded program that pairs current honors student with honors alumni in similar fields. Readers who do not already have such a program will find here some useful information about the benefits and pitfalls of developing student-alumni partnerships.

The next two essays present original forms of honors outreach beyond college campuses. In “The Neptune Academy: Honors Students Give Back,” Douglas Corbitt, Allison Wallace, Corey Womack, and Patrick Russell—two teachers and two honors student in the University of Central Arkansas Honors College—describe a week-long summer academy for rising eighth-graders who are at risk for dropping out of high school or not continuing on to college. The detailed analysis of the recruitment of both honors students and eighth-graders, the preparatory training course, and the academy itself is accompanied by a discussion of obstacles as well as successes, where it becomes clear that the obstacles were often the keys to the successes. The Neptune Academy is an excellent model for honors educators seeking ways for their programs and students to contribute significant service to their communities.

A different kind of honors outreach on another continent is the subject of “Self as Text: Adaptations of Honors Practice” by Michaela Ruppert Smith. She describes an adaptation of City as Text methodology to an orientation activity at the Collège du Léman in Geneva, Switzerland. To prepare a class of International Baccalaureate students for a course called Theory of Knowledge, the teachers designed a field trip to two museum exhibits and one very unusual restaurant in Zürich. The experience they designed was based on NCHC practices and can, in turn, serve as a model for college-level honors in the United States.

The last two essays in this volume present master plans, one for an honors college and the other for a multidisciplinary honors program. In “Preparing a Master Plan for an Honors College,” John R. Vile of Middle Tennessee State University describes the benefits that he and his colleagues derived from developing a master plan. He recounts the process of contextualizing the honors college institutionally and nationally; surveying the various constituencies; and projecting short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals for the college. New honors administrators will find this essay especially helpful.

Finally, in “Some Multidisciplinary Practices,” Kathleen Black describes the admissions process, course requirements, symposia, colloquia, and field trips that combine to meet the multidisciplinary objectives of the honors program at Northwestern College of St. Paul, Minnesota. Honors administrators who are designing new programs or redesigning old ones will find good ideas here.
Presidential Address
A Penny’s Worth of Reflections on Honors Education

JOHN ZUBIZARRETA
COLUMBIA COLLEGE

(What follows is a slightly revised version of the presidential address that John Zubizarreta delivered on Saturday, October 23, 2010, at the annual NCHC conference in Kansas City, Missouri.)

Giving the presidential address is a daunting task. For several weeks already, I’ve been receiving emails and phone calls from some of you, asking how my speech was coming along. “Oh, fine, just fine,” I fibbed, as I juggled the innumerable responsibilities back home that I know all of us share in our demanding roles as teachers, learners, and leaders. In past years, the address was a formidable one-hour-or-more event over sit-down dinners or luncheons. But times change. As the conference has grown steadily, year after year, and hours—no, even just minutes—have become precious, the address has had to shrink in length, but happily it has not diminished in significance. I remember how Kate Bruce used a multi-media slide show to make her presentation interactive and engaging in a brief time slot, and Hallie Savage provided insight into the recent history of the NCHC as a balance between stability and change. Last year, Lydia Lyons did a stand-up job of delivering an inspirational and pithy message to an attentive audience in a short session. Now, it’s my turn.

Those of you who know me well know that I’m not much on lecturing or giving speeches, so get ready in a moment to join me in some interactive work. After all, honors has always placed great emphasis on active learning—in all its guises—as a pedagogical strategy that engages both teachers and students in the kind of significant educational experience shown to transform learning and lives, shown to bring out the best of ourselves as scholars, citizens, human beings.

Educating in order to bring out the best is what honors is all about. The very word education, in fact, derives from the Latin root educare—originally meaning “to lead forth” or “bring out from”—which suggests education is not a forcing in of knowledge or any systematic accumulation of facts but rather a bringing forth of what is already present in the learner, a nurturing of potential. It is the act of Prospero in Shakespeare’s The Tempest, the master magician/teacher whose role is to lead the other characters into their best selves, to bring out the best in their natures, whether they align with the lofty, creative spirit of Ariel or
the rude figure of Caliban. When he is done, when he has finished sharing the authority (and even some of the power) of his students’ learning, he relinquishes his “rough magic”—the rough magic, we might say, of authentic honors teaching and learning—and the order of the island, his classroom, is reaffirmed. The shipwrecked characters know who and what they are: educare at work, honors at its best.

So now let’s model some of what we mean by education, especially when we qualify the term by saying honors education, which, as any honors program or college mission statement will tell you, has to do with challenge, risk, creativity, collaboration, reflection, inquiry, community—educational qualities that come not from a simple heap of knowledge but from the “rough magic” of shared learning and bringing forth what is already living in us as potential.

**Pennies Exercise** (developed by Nickerson and Adams): Individually identify the correct penny among the choices shown below, and circle it. Only one penny in the series of images is the correct choice. Once you have selected your personal choice, form small groups and collaborate with your partners to compare answers, discuss variances, explain the reasons for your individual answers, listen to what other have chosen and why, and then negotiate a consensus opinion.

The exercise is fun (and don’t forget that learning should be joyful), but it would not be worth much as education if we did not critically reflect on how and why we learn not just about pennies (that is, content or knowledge or facts) but about ourselves as learners, as reflective practitioners, as honors people. What did we learn?

**Small Group Reflections and Discussion:** Engage your small group in a reflective conversation about how and why you learned during the course of the pennies exercise. What did you discover about yourself as a learner, about constructive knowledge, about collaborative inquiry, about the process of learning itself?

You can see that this “presidential address” has broken with tradition in ways beyond what Kate Bruce, Hallie Savage, or Lydia Lyons have done in the
past several years. My aim was not so much to deliver a lecture or to relay information about the state of the NCHC or its future. Actually, I think the enormous success of our past conferences and this one in Kansas City is sufficient evidence of the vitality and relevance of our organization. The fact that in the last few years we have had over forty instances of participants or inquiries from the Netherlands, S. Korea, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Japan, Germany, and other international sources is a heartening sign of the growing interest in honors education outside the U.S. Our work is important. We should be proud.

The real purpose of my so-called address was to engage you in a way that would model our exciting and worthwhile enterprise in honors. We handle pennies countless times all our lives, and we feel confident in our “knowing,” but the exercise demonstrates that what we think we know and what we’ve actually learned in deep and lasting ways may not match up. Shared reflections, collaborative work, and active discussion can foster discoveries that may not have occurred to us in isolation, a lesson that is fundamental in the honors enterprise. I hope you have learned something about pennies, to be sure, but more importantly, something about how we learn in an interactive honors environment, something about ourselves as honors educators, students, and leaders, and something practical—a new idea, a new strategy, a new resource, a new friendship—that we can take home to our classrooms to help enrich honors teaching and learning on our campuses. New ideas are part of the benefits of our national conferences and other opportunities in NCHC, and they are part of what we mean by educare in honors, a challenging but fulfilling rough magic, indeed.

REFERENCE


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On Collaborative Course Projects
Into the Afterlife and Back with Honors Students

KATERYNA A. R. SCHRAY
MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

One of the best and funniest student evaluations I have ever received read: “if this professor taught a course on Hell and how to get there I would take it.” This generous compliment sounded like a good course idea, and a year or so later, Dr. Caroline Perkins and I successfully proposed an honors seminar called “Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory in Literature and Culture.” Like other programs described in previous issues of Honors in Practice, the Marshall University Honors Program is built on team-taught interdisciplinary seminars—in this case Classics and English—and emphasizes student leadership and collaborative learning.

Presumably “what happens to us after we die” is one of humanity’s oldest questions. Nonetheless, we wondered about the type of student a class about life after death might attract in the millennial age. While text-oriented Baby Boomers and Generation X professors are likely to seek stories of the afterlife in classical epics and scripture, our tech-savvy Generation Y students, fans of Twilight and players of MMORPGs, may well have other ideas not only about where to find stories about the afterlife but about the definition of the term. Also, while the topic sounds interesting enough, the course implicitly promises to waver between eternal bliss and perpetual damnation, to acquaint students with angels as well as devils, and at some point to evoke terror; after all, we are talking about dying. Most of all, we recognized that, like other college experiences, the course might question cherished beliefs, overtly or subtly, depending not so much on our presentation of the material as on the individual student’s reaction to it. Fortunately my teaching partner skillfully wrapped up our first day’s discussion with a simple summary, which turned out to be a fitting description of our semester: “we bring the literature, you bring the culture.” We have taught “Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory in Literature and Culture” twice now, meeting once a week for two and a half hours and maintaining the momentum of the seminar during the week with postings on our web discussion board.

SETTING UP THE SEMESTER

Our first two seminar meetings were devoted to setting up the semester by broadly surveying works that address the afterlife, articulating our own cultural understanding(s) of the afterlife, and reading two stories that displace common modern western concepts of the afterlife. As a way to introduce ourselves and
the students to one another, we asked each seminar participant to name a work that offers a glimpse of the next world. We recorded each answer on the board in a grid that reflected both genre (literature, visual arts, performing arts) and place (heaven, hell, purgatory). It became immediately clear that not everything fit neatly into a category, an important first principle for the semester. We also gave students time to free-write on their understanding of the general concepts of heaven, hell, and purgatory, and then we formally introduced the course with a PowerPoint presentation that anticipated some of their responses.

Our PowerPoint presentation began with Fra Angelico’s *Christ in Limbo* (c. 1440–1445) and an Eastern Orthodox icon *Christ Enthroned in Heaven* (c. 1700). We followed these calm traditional images with the works of well-known artists: Hieronymus Bosch’s creepy gothic triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1504), which depicts a surreal paradise and a sickening hell; Jan Brueghel the Younger’s *Paradise* (c. 1620), the epitome of lush edenic greenery and animal life in peaceful coexistence; and an engraved illustration of a spiraling heaven from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* by Gustave Doré (1832–1883). We rounded out our collection of the visual arts with two images our students would not have anticipated, a painting of *Reincarnation* in the Hindu tradition and Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *The Blessed Damozel* (1871–79), in which a woman looks longingly down from heaven at her still-living love interest. Our first slide on the performing arts—a still shot of heaven from the film *What Dreams May Come* (1998)—picked up on this idea of someone in heaven pining for someone elsewhere. To bring in popular culture in its most familiar forms, we included a clip from the Fox cartoon *The Simpsons* (Season 5, Episode 1F04), now the longest running comedy in television history; an opening scene from the irreverent Comedy Central animated series *Southpark* (Season 10, Episode 11), as Satan plans “the biggest Halloween party ever”; and a three-minute segment of *Will & Grace* (NBC, 1998–2006), in which one of the characters hallucinates that Cher is God and that heaven is populated with scantily clad male angels. We also showed some predictable cartoons and a 2002 car commercial in which those doomed to hell have to drive minivans rather than the Hyundai Tiburon. We closed our PowerPoint presentation with Cynthia Rylant’s beautifully illustrated *Cat Heaven*, a book written for children but equally appealing to adults, in which cats fly down from trees, sniff catnip in the air, and curl up in God’s bed. This walking tour of high art mixed with popular culture previewed the movement of our course from traditional to modern with numerous permutations in between.

While our first seminar meeting was dedicated to voicing common ideas about the afterlife, our second seminar meeting revisited these ideas from a purely visual perspective. In a nod to our school’s renewed emphasis on different learning modalities, we asked our students to construct sets of collages depicting heaven, hell, and purgatory. This hands-on exercise, low-stakes and ungraded, had the added benefit of ice-breaking among the students, who were now assigned into groups for the first unit. We supplied each group with a
packet of current popular magazines, scissors, glue sticks, and paper. Some groups coordinated their efforts and prepared a trio of collages on a common theme while others constructed three independent collages. We asked students not to label their work and to avoid the words “heaven,” “hell,” and “purgatory.” Groups had fifty minutes to complete their work, after which they taped the finished collages individually on the blackboard. Once our impromptu “gallery” was complete, the students walked around the room to see if they could determine which aspect of the afterlife was illustrated in each collage. We then reassembled the collages into trios to look for themes. Predictably, all groups chose red or black as the background for their hell and lighter colors for heaven (powder blue) and purgatory (yellow). All of the collages depicting hell vaunted grotesque or frightening images; in some cases, students reassembled ordinary photographs into disturbing compositions. Identifying the heaven collages was also fairly easy, but the images here varied widely in theme and composition. Purgatory, on the other hand, was surprisingly consistent: most groups built their collages out of pictures of watches, clocks, and calendars (images of time) or ladders and escalators (images of ascent).

Armed with the earlier discussion and our collage gallery, we completed our introduction to the seminar by reading two brief texts: Plato’s “The Myth of Er” (*The Republic* 10.614–10.621, c. 380 BC) and Robert Olen Butler’s short story “Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot” (1995/1996), the title of which summarizes the plot. Separated by more than two millennia, both works leave modern readers unsatisfied: they elude the now familiar Abrahamic beliefs but propose similarly certain models of the afterlife; they advance the concept of reincarnation but withhold the promise of any final reward; and they ascribe consequences for one’s earthly actions but do so with an unnerving sense of scale. Within this context, we set out to explore the afterlife as it appears in literature and culture.

We were in good company, of course. Odysseus, Aeneas, Innana, and Orpheus served as our first guides, followed by figures from the Bible, Dante (himself escorted by Virgil), Milton, and C. S. Lewis. As these names indicate, our core readings made giant leaps in chronology and were confined to the cultures of Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, Ancient Sumeria, Medieval Italy, and Medieval and Modern England. Our major assignment was designed to balance out the course’s largely Eurocentric nature. Early in the semester we invited students to research the afterlife beliefs of a culture not represented on our reading list and to present a summary of their findings to the class. Popular choices among our students included Japanese Shinto, Ancient Egyptian, Native North American, Native South American, Ancient Irish, Nordic, and Caribbean. While in both semesters our students chose geo-historical cultures, we would have been equally interested to see what they would do with culture in a more nuanced definition (gay culture, biker culture, blind culture, etc).

Once they reported their findings, students met in small groups based on overlapping, related, or geographically-proximate cultures, and identified common beliefs as well as beliefs particular to each culture. Students continued to
study their selected cultures throughout the semester, with their work culminating in a final project: an anthology of ten items that best reflect that culture’s afterlife beliefs selected from paintings, sculptures, architectural drawings, music, literature, prayers or rituals, photographs, ceremonial dress, and popular articles. Students introduced their collections with polished prefaces that expanded on their earlier reports to the class and described the contents of their anthologies, identifying each item and explaining its significance. We encouraged our students to think of this project as setting up a museum display introducing the general public to concepts of the afterlife central to the culture under exploration. On the last day of the semester, students put their anthologies “on exhibit” for the class and answered questions about their collections. This semester-long project built on the skills practiced in the other three formal assignments, which students completed in groups.

CRITICALLY THINKING OUR WAY INTO HELL . . .

Our three group assignments asked students to explore how a well-selected cultural artifact—a medieval play, a work of art, a modern film—reflects ideas about the afterlife. These efforts provided an ideal occasion to focus overtly on critical thinking. Like many other higher-education institutions, Marshall University is revising its general curriculum to emphasize critical thinking. At Marshall, this revision includes putting into place a new first-year seminar and formally designating specific lower level courses as “CT” (critical thinking). In this context, we attempted to incorporate new challenges in critical thinking by moving away from formal papers and inviting students to process the course materials in less academically traditional ways. In addition to requiring critical thinking, this approach drew on the related concept of multiple literacies, encouraging students to extend their talents beyond strictly writing and speaking. We introduced each unit with a hands-on, in-class group activity that anticipated the analytical skills and learning modalities to be engaged in that unit: students plotted a route through our city to stage a series of short plays as we began the medieval unit, illustrated a canto of Dante’s *Inferno* with modeling clay, and sketched a storyboard for the opening minute of a film version of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In each case, my teaching partner and I were more interested in our students’ creative and cooperative processes during these in-class activities than in the resulting products.

The first of our formal assignments, interpreting a medieval play, had the greatest potential for disorienting our research-paper-oriented honors students. We asked our students to process and report their understanding of the underworld as presented in “The Harrowing of Hell” (also called “The Deliverance of Souls”) by designing a costume and stage for the play. Their goal was to integrate the thematic concerns of the text with the practical challenges of performance. The assignment also served as a good reminder that when it comes to drama—whether in ancient Greece or on Broadway—the text provides only part of the story.
“The Harrowing of Hell” appears in all four English Corpus Christi cycles; the version we used is part of the Wakefield Cycle. The plays in Wakefield were performed on outdoor platforms from the end of the fourteenth to the middle of the sixteenth centuries. The play cycles begin with the fall of Lucifer and end with the Last Judgment, essentially staging humanity’s entire history in the course of a single day; they were produced by various trade guilds and performed by the community.

“The Harrowing of Hell” opens as Jesus sends a light into hell to indicate His imminent arrival. The captives in hell—Adam, Eve, Isaiah, Simeon, John the Baptist, Moses, and later Daniel and David—react to this light with great joy, each making personal connections to it; Moses, for example, refers to Christ’s Transfiguration in Mark 9:2–8; Matthew 17:1–3 and Luke 9:28–36. Ribald and Beelzebub, devils in hell, react to the sounds of happiness from the captives and then to the sound of Jesus’s voice as He commands the gates of hell to open. The devils plan to drive Jesus from the gates, and Satan himself arrives demanding to know the cause of the commotion. Daniel and David tell the devils that their efforts to stop Jesus are doomed to failure. At Jesus’s commands, the gates of hell crumble, and the minor devils flee. The dialogue between Jesus and Satan briefly addresses the nature of this hell, during which it is made clear that the righteous souls of the Old Testament were not in hell because of Satan’s power but in anticipation of this moment’s glory. The play ends with Satan asking Jesus to take him as well, and, when Jesus says no, Satan asks that some souls be left behind. The captives proceed out of hell. Jesus’s rescue of souls from the underworld is mentioned in the Apostles’ Creed—“He descended into hell”—and the story itself is found in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus. As British literary scholar David Bevington explains, “The apocryphal account of Christ’s deliverance of souls had become universally accepted in medieval Christianity because it answered an essential question: what happened to the souls of the righteous during those years of Old Testament history from Adam’s fall to the advent of Christ?” (594). Bevington describes Christ’s defeat of Satan as “appropriately comic” and Satan’s followers as “ludicrous”; “they raise the alarm in a noisy panic, shore up useless defenses against Christ’s entry, and turn on one another in an orgy of mutual recriminations” (594).

Bevington clarifies that the play “explicitly differentiates between hell as a place of eternal torment and limbo as a temporary residence for the patriarchs” (594); this distinction is the key to our students’ understanding of how to stage this play. The setting is not a place of fire and brimstone, but rather a place of waiting. Similarly, in his translated edition of The Wakefield Mystery Plays, Martial Rose identifies “the acting areas specified in this play [as] paradise, limbo, and hell” (544). Bevington and Rose recognize this hell as a place where souls are deprived of the vision of God. The Catholic Catechism, which explains the theology at work in the Corpus Christi Cycle, identifies this broad and general hell with the Hebrew concept of Sheol or the Greek idea of Hades (par. 633).
This idea of a general holding place, a type of limbo, is easily transportable
to other periods and cultures, and we posed this challenge to our students as
they worked in small groups to design a costume and stage set for a modern
production of this play. Groups presented their ideas in myriad ways, from
small-scale sets built in packaging boxes to detailed layouts sketched out on
poster boards. On the day the assignment was due, students set up their fin-
ished projects throughout the room for general viewing, after which each group
had six minutes to explain its project’s design and the rationale behind it. This
activity then led to a discussion of the major staging concerns of the play,
which remain constant between the Middle Ages and the twenty-first century:
At what point does Jesus open the gates of hell? How does He do it—with
force? with only a glance? How do the Old Testament figures approach Jesus
when He lets them out of hell?—do they embrace Him? fall in homage before
Him? How does He react? What do the characters do on stage when they have
no lines?

Our students set their plays in modern periods in the U.S.—1960s, 1970s,
present day—and various environments—prison, basement, nightclub, nursing
home, big box store. The period settings had predictable features: the 1960s
hell featured an upside-down peace sign and an overturned VW van surround-
ed with large flower petals and withered roses. One 1970s hell featured a gaudy
disco ball suspended over a brightly colored dance floor dotted with sporadic
flames and posters of period films. A second 1970s hell consisted of an over-
accessorized basement bachelor pad decorated with kitschy patterns and mis-
matched fabrics. Beyond the period references, each setting advanced its own
metaphor: confinement in a dimly lit jail cell, inability to advance in life, obliv-
ion on a crowded dance floor, aimless wandering in endless aisles, lonely
monotony in a common room. While all of the designs were well-executed and
had significant merit, two projects stood out as exceptional.

The most impressive was the nursing home set, which captured the sense
of waiting, a place not necessarily of active pain but of agonizing passivity
(Figure 1). On one side, a staircase leads to a door labeled Heaven in rainbow
letters; a trap door labeled Hell in red letters is located in the middle of the
floor. The set itself is clearly an in-between area, a common room with tables
set up for a perpetual game of bingo with impressive thoughtful details: bingo
cards with no numbers, a wall clock with no hands, and a repetitive checker-
board linoleum floor that appears to go on forever. The walls of the room are
decorated with portraits of Bob Barker, host of the Price is Right Game show
Our students unanimously applauded these details on our discussion board in
the days following the class, and several made personal connections to the
overall concept. One student wrote: “The one that struck me the most . . . was
the nursing home exhibit. This hit home with the experience of having family
members in these facilities, and, along with the discussion, really made me
think about identity and the hours spent in such conditions.” Another student
elaborated on the symbolic value of the setting with touching personal insights: “I thought the idea of a nursing home being hell [as a waiting place in this play] was very fitting. I have been to at least six different nursing homes that I can immediately remember. Most experiences I have had in nursing homes were difficult and painful. Many people in nursing homes must sell their estate to be able to live there, and all the possessions they have left at the end of their life is what can be neatly packed away in a room that they share with someone else. This fits in perfectly with the idea of disenfranchisement after death. There is also a valid connection with the waiting/eternity aspect of a nursing home . . . getting placed in a nursing home often leads to a feeling of loss and disconnection from loved ones—like the denizens of hell [in this play] probably feel.”

Another group set the “Harrowing of Hell” in a big box store, playfully placing the various Biblical figures in appropriate sections: Eve in produce (apple), Noah in pets (ark), Moses in fish (Red Sea), St. John the Baptist in pool supplies (River Jordan), etc. Other sections of the store emphasized the heat and fire traditionally associated with hell, prominently labeled “space heaters,” “water heaters,” “fireplaces,” “stoves,” “grills,” and “saunas,” as well as fictional sections devoted entirely to “fire” and “brimstone.” In this group’s staging, an overweight Satan wears a manager’s vest and patrols the store in an electric shopping cart. His office is in the center of the store, a windowless room labeled “Security.” The store’s layout shows no bathrooms but boasts a
dental practice and an IRS office across from the check-out registers. Fittingly, the store’s automatic doors are open 24/7.

Students also offered some broader reactions on our discussion board. Most of them celebrated the creative opportunities inherent in the assignment: “I was absolutely blown away by the variety of the project ideas. It was quite amazing that after the reading of one single play, it could be interpreted in so many ways.” Another echoed: “I really liked the way this project allowed everyone to present designs and characters in a variety of ways. I was really impressed by the craftsmanship of the sets focusing on visual experience and the clever elements of the ones that seemed more conceptual . . . I think it’s very cool that everyone was able to take such old, loaded concepts and translate them into the terms of more recent time periods while still maintaining the fundamental qualities that make these concepts what they are.” Students also extended their observations to academic work in general: “Each group led me to view the play in a different light and reinforced my own belief that history and literature are about 10% fact and 90% interpretation.”

. . . AND FINDING OUR WAY BACK WITH TRADITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

Delighted as we were with our students’ success in this nontraditional format, neither of us was comfortable completely abandoning time-proven classroom practices. Part of each seminar meeting was dedicated to good old-fashioned textual analysis or cross-textual comparisons. For example, when we read the underworld journeys of Odysseus and Aeneas, we asked our students to look at various modern retellings of these stories and discussed how the later texts transform the earlier ones. Students responded particularly well to Louise Glück’s poem “A Myth of Devotion,” which revisits the story of Hades and Persephone. If we teach this seminar again, we will likely include Rick Riordan’s *The Lightning Thief*, which features a visit to the ancient Greek underworld. *The Lightning Thief* is the first of five novels in the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series, classified as children’s literature but appealing to adult readers as well.

While our first assignment forewent traditional ways of reporting analysis, the two that followed—art analysis and film analysis—were mostly traditional, with critical-thinking activities relegated to warm-up exercises. As with the collages, these warm-up activities served as a way to introduce students to one another and to begin building good working relationships in anticipation of the formal assignment to follow. These assignments also gave us the opportunity to bring in skills from different disciplines and borrow basic materials from colleagues in other departments.

The art analysis assignment gave us the opportunity to assess the familiar saying, “a picture’s worth a thousand words.” We introduced the assignment by briefly identifying the elements of art (line, color, texture, shape, form, space, and value) and the principles of design (rhythm and movement, balance,
proportion, variety and emphasis, and harmony and unity) and then applying these terms to illustrations of Dante's *Inferno* by Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510), William Blake (1757–1827), Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), and Gustave Doré (1832–1883). After this lecture and ensuing discussion, newly formed student groups were given class time to sculpt a canto of the *Inferno* that had not yet been discussed; the class then matched each sculpture to a section of the text, and the artists elaborated on their design choices and how those choices conveyed some crucial element of the poem. For their formal assignment, students were asked to find a painting or stationary work of art that claims to depict some aspect of the afterlife or underworld and to present that work to the class later in the semester. They were to identify the author, place, and time of composition; provide relevant background information; analyze the work's characterization of heaven, hell, or purgatory; elaborate on any implications or statements the artist might be making; and make connections with the class readings.

To our surprise, all of our students chose works from late medieval and early renaissance periods and, with one exception, all preferred working with hell: *Christ in Limbo* (Duccio di Buoninsegna, c. 1255-c. 1319), Punishment of the Envious in Hell (manuscript illustration, c. 1450–70), Purgatory (*Book of Hours*, 15th cent.), Hell (Giovanni da Modena, early 15th cent.), The Last Judgment: the Damned in Hell (anonymous, c. 1500), Hell (Herri met de Bles, c. 1540), and Charon and the Damned (Luca Signorelli, 1499–1504). By contrast, when we offered this seminar in 2003, our students' artworks were selected largely from the later periods: *Haywain Triptych* (Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1490–95), The Burial of Count Orgaz (El Greco, c.1586), Falls of Eternal Despair (Martin Wells Knapp, 1895), The Emerald Throne Scene in Heaven (Pat Marvenko Smith, 1982), Vision of Hell (Salvador Dali, 1962), and selections from Barlowe's Inferno (Wayne Douglas Barlowe, 1998). Our students successfully incorporated art values in their analyses, drawing the class's attention to warm colors and telescopic perspectives in the case of de Bles's *Hell* and symmetry and angles in Modena's *Hell*. Each group also made helpful connections to common symbolism and to our core texts: for example, the group working on Signorelli's *Charon and the Damned* demonstrated how this fresco in the Orvieto Cathedral's San Brizio Chapel is actually an illustration of Canto 3 of Dante's *Inferno*.

Analyzing works of art depicting hell and purgatory generated discussion on the use of images rather than texts to convey an idea. In contrast to the stationary visual arts, films and television programs face the additional challenge of sustaining an image for some period of time and making that image an integral element of the work. For their third group assignment, our students examined film or television programs that claim to present some aspect of the afterlife. Their task was to analyze a film's presentation of heaven, hell, and/or purgatory, select an appropriate segment of that work to show in class, demonstrate how the work furthers (or challenges) our understanding of that particular place in afterlife, and discuss it in the context of our seminar. As with the art analysis
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assignment, our first step was to acquaint our students with cinematography terms and values, and we did this through a brief PowerPoint presentation and two helpful videos available on-line. We then revisited our video clips from the first day of class and asked students to comment on the use of angles, lighting, and framing. Finally, we directed our students to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) to learn more about the films or television programs they were considering and offered a brief list of titles that looked appealing but were unlikely to be successful subjects for this assignment.

Our first group of students did the unexpected by choosing Satan’s Waitin’ (Looney Toons, 1954), a cartoon shown in theaters before the feature film; in this short, Sylvester the cat meets his end while chasing Tweety Bird but has to wait in hell’s foyer while his remaining eight lives run out. Presided over by a muscular bulldog, this hell is uniquely suited for Sylvester; our students quickly made the connection with Homer Simpson’s ironic and person-specific punishment in his hell, citing the scene in which he is forced to eat donuts excessively. One group worked on the hell portions of What Dreams May Come (1998), analyzing hell as vacillating between the massive and general and the intimate and personal; another group worked on the heaven portion, skillfully applying cinematographic values to the film’s brilliant palette of saturated colors. We also had a glimpse of a serene heaven in the 1967 version of Bedazzled in which heaven appears as a blooming botanical garden with a large, glass-domed conservatory. Another group worked on the film Constantine (2005), based on a DC comic book Hellblazer, the story of an occult detective who travels to hell at the request of a colleague; the film reminded our students of the Odyssey and Aeneid, epics in which a hero receives instructions to journey into the underworld, in this case a modern, graphically violent, and grotesque hell. Another group worked on the complex film The Fountain (2006) which interweaves three stories—one from the past, one from the present, and one from the future—around a tree of life and the quest for eternity. The three narratives converge as an ecospheric spacecraft approaches a golden nebula containing the Mayan afterworld, Xibalba. Our last group surprised us by choosing a regional Brazilian film O Auto da Compadecida (2000, A Dog’s Will), a low-budget production that one of our students came across while participating in a cultural exchange. Other films that would have worked well for this assignment include Little Nicky (comedy, 2000) Bill and Ted’s Bogus Journey (comedy, 1991), Defending Your Life (comedy/drama, 1991), and Purgatory (western, 1999). Films to avoid based on our previous run of the seminar are Southpark, All Dogs Go to Heaven, and Dogma.

DISCUSSION AND GROUPWORK

While these four assignments—the anthology and the three group projects—formed the formal part of our seminar, the remaining two components of the semester grade were probably more important and contributed more directly to the success of the course. The first of these was class participation, which
included the hands-on activities and exercises described above. The second
was participation in our online discussion board, a forum we used to set the
stage for our weekly meetings and to follow up on class activities. To receive
credit, each post was to reflect careful consideration of the text in question,
support broader observations with specific references, and be posted by the
date and time specified. Students were also required to respond to a set num-
ber of their classmates’ posts. In this area, students surpassed our expectations,
not only in the length and frequency of their posts but also in their substance;
we expected short-paragraph answers but found multi-paragraph essays. We
were thrilled at the thoughtfulness behind most posts and the spirited discus-
sion in most threads; in fact, the responses to already solid and seemingly self-
contained posts often resulted in deeper exploration of the material. My teach-
ing partner and I were careful to acknowledge each post in a timely manner but
refrained from extensive commenting until the discussion was well underway.

In every unit, we asked students to react to major assignments and class
activities on the discussion board. Students often assigned playful titles to these
posts (“Me enjoy art?? What??”; “I’m not going to be able to sleep for a week . . .”),
took the opportunity to congratulate their classmates on especially
impressive work, and sought out advice on technical glitches. The opening
lines of posts suggested that we were indeed forming a learning community; for
example, one student began her analysis of the week’s work with “Who knew
we could talk about art for 2.5 hours?” These discussion threads not only
helped us gauge student interest on a weekly basis but also provided an occa-
sion to revisit recurring themes and ideas. For example, one student wrote that
the analysis of de Bles’s _Hell_

was an excellent example of how culture affects the interpreta-
tion of a concept. Hell really is just that—a concept. We have no
physical evidence to draw from, therefore it was interesting to see
the distinct infusion of elements from the painter’s culture placed
there. Now that I think about it, it kind of reminds me of the col-
lages we made early in the semester—all about interpretation!

Another student echoed:

It amazes me that each time we have a group presentation in this
seminar how different the paintings or films are when compared
to each other!! Who knew we’d have Sylvester and a Brazilian
film and supernatural detective in just two hours!? It amazes me
that most of the individuals who produce these films can use the
same inspiration and come up with such vastly different ideas
about the afterlife.

This comment led to a discussion of the range of the film genres that portray
some aspect of the afterlife, including horror, comedy, and cartoons. One stu-
dent pointed out that, no matter what their genre, “all [the films] had very
strong ties back to the previously mentioned readings, reinforcing the influence of these literatures on our culture.” Students applauded the choices made by their classmates: “just [by] choosing such different films we further clarified how open the afterlife is to an individual’s own interpretation. On one hand, you have the lighthearted comedies, while on the other you have the terrifying Constantine and The Fountain.” Students also mentioned the critical lenses through which they were to view the paintings and films, citing examples of symmetry, framing, angles, and lighting, and they embarked on a discussion about mass media’s role in shaping cultural ideas: “Until I saw the Sylvester cartoon on Monday, I guess I didn’t realize or fully think about how children in society are forming views about the afterlife so early on in life. It really shows how kids are influenced at such a young age and form ideas about such meaningful topics not only by reading, but also film (and cartoons!) as well!” The discussion list continued to be active well into the next semester.

It is evident by now that much of the work in our seminar was done in small groups. Generally speaking, students dislike group work, and gifted, ambitious students dislike it even more. Still, group work is crucial to an honors program that prioritizes leadership skills and prepares its students for the challenges that await them as they enter the workforce or continue their educations. Numerous studies and journal articles have explored group dynamics in the classroom, and even the most cursory Internet search yields hundreds of websites and discussion forums on how to succeed in group projects, some directed at faculty, most geared toward students. As our students worked with different partners on each of their three group projects, they practiced important professional skills: establishing work timelines, negotiating policies, delegating tasks, identifying individual strengths, and arriving at a consensus. Group work offers practical benefits for instructors as well, enabling us to cite specific and concrete examples for questions commonly asked on reference forms: “ability to work with others,” “ability to work under pressure,” “demonstrated leadership skills,” and the like.

In order to make group work more palatable, we built three principles into our course design. First, we began each unit with a low-stakes group activity (collage, sculpture, storyboard) that anticipated the critical skills necessary for the upcoming assignment. Next, we set our students up for success with mini-lectures specifically addressing the challenges of each assignment, modeled the level of work we expected to see through our own collaboration, and gave our students time in class to set up a timeline for each project. Finally, we turned over a portion of the grading for each group project to our students. One of the chief objections to groupwork is the feeling of powerlessness, of being at the mercy of potentially underprepared, absent, or otherwise preoccupied classmates. To address this concern, we invited our students to participate formally in grading their own work and the work of their group members. The following explanation appeared at the bottom of each group assignment: “All group-members will receive the same grades for the first three items on this list
[variations of selecting and organizing the material, analyzing the work, presenting the project]. With input from the group for each individual for the Group Evaluation category, it is possible that the project grade might vary from person to person.” The Group Evaluation category accounted for 20% of the assignment grade; we determined it by averaging all of the scores submitted for the student by his/her group members. Our groups consisted of three students; in classes where groups have five or more members, we would recommend dropping the lowest submitted score before averaging the Group Evaluation component of the project grade.

Like most good heroes, we made it back from our forays into the afterlife relatively unscathed and a little wiser. We had read about the afterlife from a variety of viewpoints, revisited familiar texts from new perspectives, and attempted to transcend cultures. Along the way, we encountered different genres and explored different academic disciplines. Despite the success of our journey, this seminar generated an even funnier student evaluation comment: “What, no field trip?”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The work of Caroline Perkins, chair of Marshall University’s Department of Classics, with whom I had the privilege of team-teaching this honors seminar, is central to this article; she is an exceptional mentor and collaborator, and the ideas in this article are as much hers as they are mine. Both of us are indebted to colleagues for their help in various aspects of the seminar: medievalist Gwethy Hood; costume designer Joan St. Germain; musician Kay Lawson; and family and consumer science professor Dr. Glenda Lowry. I am also grateful to our students for allowing me to quote from their discussion posts: Michael Bledsoe, Gregory Burner, Michael Elmore, Sammy Hodroge, Rebekah Jamieson, Justin Kazee, Corey Keeton, Alex King, Kamryn Midkiff, Justin Pannell, Lance Pennington, Mallory Price, Craig Riccelli, Catharine Staley, and Shawndra Thompson.

REFERENCES


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APPENDIX

READING SCHEDULE FOR HONORS 483

Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory in Literature and Culture

WEEK 1
Intro to course
Overview of the afterlife, from classic high culture to modern pop culture.
• In-class free-write: What are familiar concepts of Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory? Which of these abstract places holds the greatest interest for us?
• Powerpoint survey of sample works.

WEEK 2
Plato’s “Myth of Er”
Robert Olen Butler’s “Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot”
• Post response on on-line discussion board by class-time: What does Robert Olen Butler imply about the afterlife in his short story “Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot?” What does the afterlife look like in the “Myth of Er?”
• In-class free-write: What questions do you have? What have you learned?
• In-class activity: collages

The Afterlife in Antiquity
WEEK 3 Classical Views of the Underworld
Homer, Odyssey, book 11
Vergil, Aeneid, book 6 (handouts)
• Post reaction to texts on online discussion board by class-time.
• In-class activity: secondary source/modern retellings exercise.

WEEK 4
Innana’s Descent
Ovid’s Orpheus (handouts)

DUE TODAY: A 2–3 page summary of the afterlife beliefs of a culture not represented on our reading list, ancient or modern. Include a “Works Cited” and document your findings in MLA format.
• Post response on on-line discussion board by class-time: What happens to identity in Innana’s Descent and Ovid’s Orpheus, and how does it compare to the other texts we’ve read?
• In-class activity: Roundtable Discussion of beliefs across cultures.
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Medieval and Renaissance Views of the Afterlife

WEEK 5

“The Harrowing of Hell” (also called “The Deliverance of Souls”) (hand-out)

Introduction to the Corpus Christi Cycle Plays

Quick survey of other medieval works with references to the afterlife

• Post reaction to text on on-line discussion board by class-time.

• In-class activity: Form production companies and begin planning presentations.

WEEK 6

“The Harrowing of Hell” presentations and discussion of the play

• Post reactions to “The Harrowing of Hell” projects by the end of this week.

WEEK 7

Dante, The Divine Comedy, Inferno

Introduction to elements of art and principles of design.

• Post response on on-line discussion board by class-time: In Dante’s Inferno, identify the canto that, in your opinion, best captures Dante’s vision of this aspect of the afterlife and explain the rationale for your choice.

• In-class activity: sculpting cantos from the Inferno.

WEEK 8

Dante, The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio and Paradiso

• Post response on online discussion board by class-time: In Dante’s Purgatorio or Paradiso, identify the canto that, in your opinion, best captures Dante’s vision of this aspect of the afterlife and explain the rationale for your choice.

The Afterlife in Modern Texts

WEEK 9

Student presentations on the Afterlife in the Visual Arts

• Post reactions to Art Presentations by the end of this week: identify something you found especially interesting in the presentations and briefly explain why.

WEEK 10

Milton, Paradise Lost, Books 1, 2 (Hell) & 3 (Heaven, Limbo of Fools)

Introduction to cinematographic techniques.
• Post response on online discussion board by class-time: In our readings to date, we have examined the afterlife primarily in terms of its setting. In his erudite epic *Paradise Lost*, John Milton populates Hell and Heaven with otherworldly beings, some of whom the reader expects to encounter (and has encountered in other texts), and others who are not well-known or are invented by the author. For your prompt, prepare a well-supported character sketch of any of the inhabitants of the afterlife (although technically since no one is dead yet, it’s not exactly an afterlife, but you get the idea). In addition to describing the figure in detail, comment on your character’s relationship to his/her/its otherworldly surroundings and significance in these opening books of *Paradise Lost*.

• In-class activity: drafting storyboards of opening minute of *Paradise Lost*.

**WEEK 11**

*Milton, Paradise Lost*

In class, we’ll discuss the epic’s portrayal of Paradise: books 4, 5 (ll. 1–135, 377–512), 8 (ll. 249–653), 9, 10, & 12 (ll. 466–648).

• Post response on online discussion board by class-time: thoughts on Paradise as it appears in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

**WEEK 12**

*C.S. Lewis, The Great Divorce*

Descriptions of the afterlife in collected modern texts

• Post response on online discussion board by class-time: Commentators tell us that one question Lewis considers in this work, and which was also a concern of Dante, is how or whether a deity that is essentially good can send humans to hell. Does Lewis answer this question explicitly or implicitly? Do other authors you have read address this question? Would it be a concern of Greek and Roman authors? Why or why not?

**WEEK 13**

*Student Presentations on the Afterlife in Film*

• Post reactions to Film Presentations by the end of this week: identify something you found especially interesting in the presentations and briefly explain why.

**WEEK 14 Last class meeting**

*Anthologies due*

• Roundtable Discussion: *What about our view of the afterlife has changed most dramatically over the centuries? What might account for these changes?*

Course wrap-up

Evaluations

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Our semester grade was determined as follows (from the Course Policy):

Discussion Board Posts 20%
Group Projects 45%
   Play Design 15%
   Art Presentation 15%
   Film Presentation 15%
Anthology Project 20%
Class Participation 15%
The Last Class: Critical Thinking, Reflection, Course Effectiveness, and Student Engagement

ELIZABETH BLEICHER
ITHACA COLLEGE

For the past four fall semesters, I have taught a first-year honors seminar to help talented incoming students establish purpose in college, take responsibility for their own education, and make the transition to college-level thinking and writing. My strategy in accomplishing these goals is asking students to analyze the systems through which youth in the United States are processed into college students. We spend fifteen weeks studying intersections of youth and student cultures, college honors populations, and U.S. secondary and higher education systems. The objective is to empower class members to become intentional learners who understand the purpose of liberal education and take action to improve the lives of other young people.

Historically, the last class of the semester has not been materially productive. I experimented with giving course evaluations in class and online, and while I strove to make global connections among units in the course to provide an overview of what we had accomplished, I found that in the final sessions I was doing all the work, which was antithetical to the ethos of a course in which students collaborate to construct knowledge for themselves. Two years ago, all that changed.

This article describes a critical thinking assignment that has proven to be so transformative that I have imported it to other courses; graduates of the seminar named it and refer to it as “The Last Class.” It constitutes a metacognitive exercise that requires students to use the critical thinking skills developed in the course to process the educational experience in which they have been mutually and individually engaged. This assignment renders their participation an enactment of precisely the intentional learning we strive to realize all semester.

The course is predicated on the precepts of constructivist learning theory, which posits that learning is best facilitated, or teaching most effective, when students are actively involved in collaborating to make meaning and construct knowledge rather than passively receiving information from a teacher (Marlowe 7). The goals of this educational practice are to foster critical thinking and cultivate motivated, independent learners. Establishing a constructivist learning
environment is sometimes a culture shock for students expecting the teacher-centered, authoritarian, passive learning model with which many enter college.

Having class members actively critique the course they have collaborated to construct is thus a theoretically sound endeavor. Further, they understand participation in the Last Class to be an opportunity for student activism; each member contributes to improving the experiences of students who take the seminar after them. It also constitutes a form of teacher research: the systematic study of an educator’s own teaching practice in which educators experiment with methods and analyze the effects in order to improve students’ learning (Cochran-Smith 85).

THE LAST CLASS CRITIQUE

In preparation for the final week of classes, the homework assignment is distributed well in advance. For the penultimate period, students are required to reread the first page of the course syllabus before arriving. We spend most of this class discussing the extent to which the course met or failed to meet the stated objectives. This discussion helps students write more informed, thoughtful, and potentially useful responses to the two course evaluations my institution requires and to do so more efficiently in a hectic part of the semester, when time is at a premium and surveys for others are of less importance than preparing for final exams. During this session, I take notes and ask questions, but students do most of the talking. We spend the remainder of the period clarifying and answering questions about the Last Class.

Students are warned that the homework for the Last Class is time-consuming; they are required to review their notes for the entire semester, scan our 700-page course reader, and draft a minimum of one page of legible notes to hand in. Grumbling about workload is effectively checked by the disclosure of the objective: they must come prepared to tear apart and rebuild the course they have nearly completed, to critique every reading, discussion, activity, and writing assignment. I propose that students, who sometimes perceive themselves to be oppressed by larger systems in which they are disempowered, use the skills they have honed to dismantle and rebuild the course as its new masters. I then share examples of improvements initiated by previous years’ students from which this year’s group has benefitted, so participants understand that their labor has real effects. Members may bring refreshments to fortify themselves for strenuous work that pays off in power to shape other first-year students’ experiences. When we read the assignment sheet, heads start nodding; some students begin taking notes spontaneously. Others make plans to gather with friends in the residence halls to discuss proposed revisions. All come to the Last Class ready to roll up their sleeves.

By contrast to the students’ labors, the faculty member’s preparation is deliberately quick and simple, not least to free time for grading final papers. It entails gathering a writing marker for each student, a pad of poster-sized newsprint, and a roll of masking tape or, if the budget has been generous,
self-stick poster sheets. The intellectual work is limited to drawing up a list of writing prompts.

At the onset of the Last Class, some students set out snacks and the rest tape sheets of paper around the room, far enough apart to give students some elbow room to jot quick answers. I give the markers to the quietest member of the seminar and tell the rest to go ask for a writing utensil, so even the shyest person is crucial to the success of our endeavor. I then assign a one-word prompt for volunteers to write on the top of the hanging pages; this saves the time of preparing the sheets in advance and heightens students’ anticipation.

The prompts consist only of the words in bold. Prior to setting students to work, I describe the questions for which each stands. This year, there were eleven prompts:

1. **Readings** (2 poster pages since this is the biggest question)

   Which of our assigned readings did you enjoy? Which did you find valuable for your growth? Which should we keep or “kill”? What articles did you see in our course reader that student discussion leaders or I did not assign, but you wish we had? What additional suggestions do you have for readings we could add to the course?

2. **Units**

   What were the most and least successful units of study? Are the units sequenced in the most effective order? Can you think of a unit that would make the course stronger and more meaningful to first-year students or people studying these issues?

3. **Writing**

   Which of the current assignments should we keep? What are your ideas for new ones? How can the assignments or instruction be revised to help students’ writing improve?

4. **Activities**

   What were the most and least successful in-class, transition-to-college, and evening activities?

5. **Suggestions**

   What’s your best suggestion for improving our course? What should we keep, and what should we omit? What worked best? What needs minor adjustment?

6. **Favorites**

   What were your favorite things about the course? What were your least favorite parts? Was there anything you disliked but from which you learned something?
7. Advice
What’s your best advice for next year’s students?

8. Big Questions
What do you think were this course’s essential questions? What big questions embedded in the issues we study in this course do you think we failed to identify and/or tackle?

9. Films
What films do you suggest we include for a public series to get the campus talking about the issues we study in our course?

10. Media
Can you recommend additional artifacts or sound or video clips appropriate for kicking off discussions of our readings?

11. Future
Add your name if you want to volunteer to assist with in-class, evening, or transition-to-college programs when the course is offered in the future.

Once students are clear on the questions, they arm themselves with their page of notes, marker, and a snack, then go from poster to poster writing their responses to the prompts. I play music related to the course themes in the background for the twenty to thirty minutes students require to complete the task. At the start of the semester, we listen to “I Love College” by Asher Roth. We deconstruct the misogynistic video and the lyrics glorifying drinks, drugs, and sexual conquests, then talk about the function of anthems. For homework, students send me links to online copies of songs they think would make better college anthems, preferably ones that will help them stay positive in difficult times. I collect the links on our class website, so students can access them all semester. At the Last Class, I play Asher Roth again, which causes groans and laughter, followed by tracks from their compiled playlist of better choices, including my own nomination. What I call “The Honors Song” is really John Butler Trio’s “Better Than,” the lyrics of which exhort the listener to be “better than” someone who wastes life living in comparison and competition with others. The students often say it speaks to their anxieties.

Despite the fact that they have taken notes in advance, once the students see others’ ideas they expand or dispute them on the hanging pages. Participants are discouraged from speaking so that we can discuss what they are seeing emerge after all have had a chance to record their thoughts. Occasionally there are giggles, guffaws, expressions of exasperation, or indications of thoughtful reflection: “Never thought of that” or “I so agree!” Our studies of the effects of online social networks on education are validated when members realize and remark that they have unconsciously imported the conventions of that medium into the Last Class critique: when one student records a response with which others concur, many respond by writing the word “like,” much as they would click the “Like” button on Facebook.
After students have written their responses, they return to their seats. A student assumes responsibility for one of the posters and reads it for us so we can discern patterns of response and confer for clarification. Participants continue to add to their personal sheet of notes to capture ideas generated during discussion. Though additions are not required, members are eager to exercise as much power as they can and to ensure that their contributions and insights are taken into consideration.

After we have discussed each poster briefly, I ask the students about their experience of having critiqued the course and worked to improve it. This most explicit act of reflexive metacognition enables them to see the structure; to compare the intended objectives with actual results; to make connections to other courses, disciplines and campus institutions; and to determine the potential for evolution within a discrete academic course. This overview of the course repositions students from trekkers among the trees to cartographers high above the forest, mapping the road just taken.

**SAMPLE FINDINGS**

To give a sense of the range and depth of student responses as well as their value for course revision, I have included select findings from the teacher research yielded by this activity. The prompts for a Last Class critique should be tailored to the course content and learning objectives. Thus the prompts about big questions, films, and media that were appropriate for our course are less so for others, so I have omitted their discussion here. What follows are practical descriptions of how I interpret and use student responses to improve the course and student engagement.

**READINGS**

The first Last Class activity elicited an interesting response; when readings were nominated to be “killed,” fierce debates broke out, and quite a few students found themselves arguing for the retention of articles that they actively disliked but that they thought had potential for contributing to students’ development and achieving course objectives. I have subsequently asked students to separate pleasure from educational value in assessing the readings. Thus, respondents frequently list titles followed by the words “keep,” “like,” “love,” “hate,” or “dislike but keep.”

The excerpts we read from John Henry Newman’s *The Idea of the University* are regularly tagged “dislike but keep.” His arguments about liberal education are couched in nineteenth-century prose that most students find challenging to read, but once we excavate his argument for breadth in academic studies, as opposed to specialized knowledge or majors, students come to appreciate it even if they do not agree. Newman’s work becomes a foundational touchstone, as does Mark Edmundson’s famous indictment of contemporary college students as emotionally fearful and intellectually lazy in “On Liberal Education as Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students.”
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By contrast, they passionately advocate retention of the transcripts of three commencement speeches we read toward the end of the semester. All give students practical or philosophical strategies on which to reflect and take action. David Foster Wallace's 2005 speech at Kenyon College exhorted students to “be conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience” (54). Erica Goldson's 2010 valedictorian address went viral on the Internet when she excoriated the system she was being rewarded for mastering and challenged “robotic” student “slaves” to change the American educational system by demanding that learning be cultivated for its own sake and not for the numbing practice of collecting achievements. In Stephen B. Sample's 2010 commencement address, the retiring president of the University of Southern California argued that, if students take the time to answer three simple questions requiring deeply complex answers, they will clarify their values in such a way as to render many of life's difficult choices easier to make.

An article that generates extreme reactions on both sides is worth retaining as a catalyst for informal or structured debate. Titles that regularly generate creative tensions are those that touch on socio-economic class. An excerpted version of Barbara Ehrenreich's “Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America,” Lars Eighner's essay “On Dumpster Diving,” and practically any piece on Affirmative Action or legacy candidates in college admissions will get the fur flying.

Because veterans of the course are solicited for suggestions to add to our course reader, they frequently email or drop off new articles, such as the Goldson valedictorian piece, long after they have completed the Last Class critique. These contributions have proven fruitful in keeping materials current, new class members engaged, and graduates both connected to the course and mindful of the issues we studied together.

UNITS

Students generally approve of the course units. Based on previous years’ responses, I have added, dropped, and condensed units; I have, for example, combined the reading on problems inherent in colleges with those on soaring costs in higher education in order to highlight correlations identified by class members. This year, discussion of “The Wallenda Factor,” Warren Bennis's essay on failure, was so powerful that students asked me to develop a complete unit on the subject. They agreed strongly when I asked if honors students are conditioned to be risk-averse and if this fear-based trait hinders personal and intellectual growth. Some students completed an extra-credit writing assignment by contributing a narrative to the online journal The Failure Project, which strives to transform the perception of failure from destructive personal tragedy into constructive learning experience. Two students' narratives were published online.
Students sometimes suggest that we should “eat dessert first,” as one quipped, and study “juicier” units like the one that included the failure essay earlier in the semester. I do not tell them that it is deliberately positioned closer to the end of the term and must be earned, but with reflection most come to understand that the structure of the course builds intellectual and writing skills, as well as trust among class members, that are needed to grapple effectively with the issues in which they are most deeply implicated and thus most eager to explore. If a given unit comes earlier in the course, students are not yet prepared to engage fully. That said, their good suggestion to reposition a unit on youth as agents of change nearer to the beginning of the course will render it a source of early inspiration and get them thinking about their research projects sooner.

WRITING

The writing assignments for our seminar can be daunting for first-year students, even those in honors. The chief challenges lie in learning to manage ego, time, and a large project effectively. Confidence in their writing, on which many honors students stake their competence and on which many rely for validation, takes a beating when their first college papers are returned. As Robert Sullivan, director of the Ithaca College Honors Program, counsels during Honors Orientation in September, students find it difficult but important to countenance “round grades” when they are accustomed to receiving only “pointy ones.” Students complain throughout the course about how much writing they have to do. But during the Last Class, four sections in two years came to the same surprising conclusion on the posters: more writing, please. When asked to clarify, they indicated that writing about the readings as well as their chosen research issue fulfilled the intended purpose of improving their understanding, reasoning, and argumentation; they also said that reading what others wrote was instructive for their own writing practice as well as informative and interesting. They requested assignments in genres useful for honors students, like academic abstracts, conference proposals, journaling, an additional paper (!), and more online reading blogs/discussions. The addition of the abstract as part of the research paper assignment is an example of students’ small suggestions yielding big improvements for future learners.

In discussion, we weighed the pros and cons of journals and concluded that, since journals are cumbersome, students could keep a record of their intellectual development through the more manageable task of writing a one-sentence position on the issue in their class notes at the start of the period and discovering whether that position evolved over the course of discussion at the end. Next year I will leave two or three minutes at the beginning and end of each class for such note-taking, and one of the poster prompts for next year’s students will be a query about the “three-minute journal” to help us determine whether such a short reflection can achieve meaningful results.

The rest of the responses on the Writing poster relate to the research project. With a fifteen-to-twenty-page paper behind them, many express a sense of
accomplishment and pride in their projects, some of which they present on campus, back at their high schools, and at undergraduate research conferences, and all of which entail primary and secondary research and action to improve the lives of young people. On the Advice poster, students offered practical tips for future students to improve the quality of their writing, including:

- Start the research project early.
- Write a page or two a day and leave time to edit.
- Plan to finish 2 to 3 days early so you will actually finish on time.
- For each paper, write a draft, print it out and attack it with a corrective pen. Be merciless!
- Go to the Writing Center/professor/peer mentor for help.
- Proof read out loud. It makes all the difference.
- Don’t take the optional extensions on deadlines. They are like crack! Totally addictive! They start a domino effect.

None of these suggestions is particularly innovative, but when next year’s students see the actual poster, scrawled by real “survivors,” and hear versions of the same pointers from graduates who have been invited back to speak, the advice will have more impact than if tendered by the professor.

Many students also cited an activity conducted at the end of the course and asked that it be moved to the beginning. Whereas students have traditionally been required to review all their papers, identify their three most pressing writing problems, and create a final essay in which they address these three specific problems, respondents suggested that they generate their “hit list” after their first paper and then revise it over the course of the term as their writing skills develop. This makes good sense as it will enable them to document progress over time, and I can easily build it into the next syllabus.

The tension between discussion and writing instruction remains; some students seek explicit instruction to help them make the transition to college-level skills whereas others arrive fully fluent in the conventions of college discourse. They claim to want specific lessons but resist yielding discussion time with so many compelling units from which to choose and a finite number of weeks in the term. Some but not all make use of the class’s peer mentor (a former student in the class), the Writing Center, and online writing labs. In response to their ongoing frustrations, I plan to implement a weekly mini-lesson derived from their hit lists. For example, if enough students decide, after reading comments on their papers, that they need to work on integrating quotations, I can target that skill in a mini-lesson. I anticipate less resistance if these sessions are built into the syllabus from the start but will not know until the Last Class next fall.

Responses to the writing assignments are not just limited to the Writing and Advice posters. On the Favorites page, class members consistently cite intellectual freedom as one of the best features of the writing assignments and the
course: they must conduct significant primary and secondary research, but the issue they choose to investigate and in which they propose to intervene is one about which they care passionately or feel free to explore. They also cite the first and last writing assignments. The first asks them to reflect on why they are attending college, and the last is a declaration of their philosophy of education; they are thematically linked to enable students to measure the extent to which their beliefs change or solidify over the course of the semester.

**Advice**

As with the writing tips noted above, responses on the Advice poster go a long way toward improving the professor’s and the future students’ experience of the course. The most frequent points on which students counseled next year’s class were:

- Do the readings, even if we don’t get to them in discussion. They tie to other courses and make you understand more deeply.
- Learn for yourself, not for the grade.
- Come to class with an open mind and an opinion. Expect that your opinion may change.
- Have confidence in your educated opinion, but don’t be afraid to listen to others’.
- Take what you need and leave the rest.
- Silence [your] fear. Be brave and bold!
- Whatever you do, do it with passion.

These sheets I preserve in their original form and post on the board during the first week of class the next semester.

**In-Class Activities**

After I model discussion facilitation during the first month to establish the level of intellectual discourse and boundaries for respectful disagreement, students assume leadership of the seminar. They are instructed in a variety of discussion formats, encouraged to vary methods, and urged to create their own. Respondents in the Last Class note the value of variety in discussion methods not least because it serves as a bridge between secondary classrooms offering multiple activities per period and discussion-based college courses typically comprised of one.

Influenced by previous Last Class results, many of this year’s discussion leaders strove to incorporate more media and to connect contemporary cultural artifacts and practices to the issues raised in our readings. Their use of video clips, images, music, and news reports to kick off discussions constituted one of the most successful implementations of previous Last Class suggestions and...
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contributed to the current cohort’s perceptions of relevance and applicability to future studies.

In addition to discussion, other valued in-class activities include impromptu debates, workshops on conducting primary and secondary research, and a networking activity for sharing resources and clarifying theses in preparation for writing the research paper. This year’s class specifically asked that an informal session be added to share findings once research projects have been completed. They also asked for greater involvement and interaction with graduates of the course, describing the value that these veterans can bring to newcomers’ studies. As Melissa Johnson has argued, there is a growing body of evidence that peer mentoring benefits students on both sides of the exchange (189–90). This year’s class asked point blank if some discussion modeling in the first third of the course could be conducted by former students in the course and argued for the importance of student leaders to determine content and facilitate discussion in the proposed film series. Such moves will help realize one of the tenets of our honors program: to cultivate active makers of new knowledge, not passive consumers of given information.

OUTSIDE-CLASS ACTIVITIES

Though students earn course credit for the transition-to-college events required by the first-year experience program of which our seminar is a part, the events themselves are sometimes held on a different day from our discussions. Based on previous Last Class critiques and programs conducted by the Residence Life Division, I successfully replaced a partially redundant panel with one on mental health for honors students entering college. Unlike past years, students were divided on the value of a survey of vocational and academic interests they completed through Career Services; some would prefer an information session on obtaining internships. The survey will stay for at least another year, but in a future class we will consider whether the students’ resistance results from student professionalization or fear of a bad economy in which hands-on experience and contacts are perceived as potentially more valuable than alma mater or degree.

Students strenuously advocated retaining the former-student panel offering advice for success in our course; based on their requests, I will add a panel on successful student researchers. Similarly, we will retain the sessions on initiating online registration as well as the brief but memorable discussion of tensions inherent in going home for Thanksgiving: students often discover that they have changed while friends have not, and parents have a baffling and irksome tendency to treat first-year college students as if they are still in high school.

Numerous course obligations outside normal school hours also come under scrutiny. Though Last Class responses are by no means unanimous, these events are typically reviewed favorably. The honors program’s retreat for first-year students is a sacrosanct favorite. My students have four additional evening events: two guest speakers who have been invited to our campus; a cross-cultural
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simulation game; and a play staged by our theater department. This year’s most popular evening activity was the play, which tied to our course thematically. Most students had never had the experience of studying a script, watching the play, and then analyzing the performance in class. Even science majors cited this experience as an enlightening encounter that knitted “book learning” to their lived experience. Students’ responses have taught me that the key to an external event’s success is relevance, which is best established by helping students make connections among readings, class discussions, other coursework, and campus life.

FAVORITES

When asked to cite their favorite parts of the course, students are being queried not for the ego gratification of the professor but to ascertain what should be non-negotiable in determining course and syllabus revisions. Since class members especially value intellectual freedom and two written assignments that contribute to the course’s coherence, these are the cornerstones on which the academic trajectory is built; beyond these, responses to the question fall into three categories: structure, faculty, and experiential elements.

Among this year’s favorite structural components were opportunities to engage in respectful argument; discussion among fewer than twenty peers rather than a large, lecture-format course; and a scaffolded method for reflection and values clarification. Respectful disagreement is established by a stipulation in the syllabus that we will argue but never fight, and discourse is modeled in the first month. When discussants get fearful or lazy and when the analysis is tentative or insufficiently deep, my responsibility is to demonstrate how to get us to the next level. Similarly, when a class member uses language or engages in behavior that is inappropriate to academic discourse, my responsibility is to establish boundaries that protect our learning environment without shaming or shutting down the student. The assignments—formal, informal, summative, and formative—are crafted to help students generate an informed personal philosophy of education; all are predicated on the assumption that students will be more successful in college if they have thoughtful, tested, and fully articulated goals to accompany their analytical and writing skills.

The faculty contributions students cite as favorite parts of the course are professional, not personal. Members consistently value being held to high standards in writing, verbal expression, and reasoning; being pushed to examine uncomfortable issues in which they are personally implicated or invested; and having electronic and in-person access to the professor and peer mentor outside of class.

The third broad category of responses on the Favorites poster consists of “light bulb” moments: experiences of class discussions, late night sessions with roommates, or encounters with readings that changed an individual student’s perspective on the issues under consideration in our course. These responses are the least useful for course revision but sometimes the most powerful for students’ reflections on what they learned.

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FUTURE INVOLVEMENT

Depending on the year and the section, between 65% and 78% of students ask to be contacted for future involvement in the course; this can mean becoming a highly involved peer mentor, who for a stipend tutors in writing, holds office hours, and conducts some writing and transition-to-college activities. The commitment can be as small as spending one period circulating among and coaching students during a library research session; speaking on a panel about research projects, success in the class, or surviving the first year; or facilitating a cross-cultural simulation game like Barnga or BaFa BaFa in which players are disoriented to cultivate empathy and patience. Integrating eager former students into the initial month of instruction is a possibility worth pursuing.

Course veterans can also participate by critiquing readings for new units. Presently, four are researching articles for the new unit on failure, and twenty-four are gaining practical experience as chapter editors and helping to turn our course reader into a real textbook by assessing and developing study questions for extant units. All will have the chance to co-author a chapter introduction with the professor; all feel they are helping future learners and contributing to the field.

RESULTS

Students profess that the act of systematic, disciplined thinking required by the Last Class critique is pleasurable and gives them a coherent vision of the journey they have just completed. They openly revel in their power as well as their accomplishments. One such student sent an email the day after the most recent critique:

[P]assed your room yesterday and saw it was last class. Good memories. The posters made me remember last year. Wish my other courses did this. We learned so much and got to see it in black and white. [The course] changed how we look at college. . . . Our group keeps in touch. We have our own page on Facebook. . . . I really enjoyed speaking to the students. Let me know if I can help again next September. (West)

The student’s message is revealing on multiple levels as evidence of ongoing engagement with the issues in the course; commitment to activism and continuity that makes graduates of a course valuable resources for current students; community building, in which honors and first-year-experience programs are deeply invested; and summative, self-reflexive critical thinking that affords students the opportunity to synthesize their experiences. Seeking such active involvement from students, however, is not an activity for the faint of heart. If you ask honors students what did and did not work in your course, and if you have created an environment in which intellectual freedom and personal integrity are rewarded, the students will tell you precisely where the holes are in your
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curriculum and teaching practice; but, if you have coached them on making the transition to professional, collegiate discourse, they will tell you with some tact.

When we conclude the last class, all help take down and stack poster sheets, clean up crumbs, collect markers, and gather a single page of notes from each class member. Students say they leave exhausted and exhilarated, with a real sense of closure and of having put theory into action; they have not just read about improving college life but have had a hand in realizing change. I leave with copious documentation and a clear mandate for where to start when I revise the syllabus over the summer.

REFERENCES


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Designing a Collaborative Blog about Student Success

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The term “web log,” or “blog,” was first coined in 1997 by Jorn Barger (Blood). Blogs have been used in education as online journals, discussion platforms, course websites, and alternatives to mainstream media publications (EDUCAUSE, 2005). Two of the more common blogging platforms, Wordpress (<http://www.wordpress.com>) and Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>), are relatively simple to use, requiring no knowledge of HTML to post entries. One of the many advantages of using blogs is that they can foster interaction among peers, thereby building community (EDUCAUSE, 2005; Richardson). For further explanation of how blogs work, Common Craft has created an easy-to-follow video entitled Blogs in Plain English.

According to the EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research’s 2010 Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology, which surveyed close to 37,000 college students in the United States and Canada, 36% of the students noted that they contributed to blogs on at least a monthly basis; 11.6% of the students were using blogs in a course they were taking at the time of the survey, 37.6% of whom were using blogs collaboratively as part of the course; 15% of the students read or contributed to blogs via an Internet-capable handheld device; and 37.3% of the students noted that they liked to learn through contributing to blogs, wikis, and websites.

The primary author has used blogs in honors courses since 2005 to post online discussion questions, course announcements, and project photos as part of a course blog (see Johnson) as well as to prompt students’ personal reflections on their own individual blogs. The purpose of this article is to describe the most recent blogging project in an honors course—a collaborative student-success blog written for and by honors students.

COURSE BACKGROUND

The student-success blogging project was conceived as the primary project for the course Honors Professional Development: Community Outreach for sophomores in the University of Florida Honors Program. This course was the third in a series of four professional development courses available to honors students starting in their freshman year. Students first had the opportunity to take Introduction to Honors Professional Development, a one-credit first-year-
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experience course focusing on an action plan for involvement in undergraduate research, study abroad, internships, leadership, and community service as well as workshops on résumé development and interview skills. Assignments included weekly online discussion topics, faculty interviews, community service and philanthropy projects, activity papers, reflections from the various workshops, and a final action plan. With six sections of the course offered, close to 150 first-year honors students typically take the course during their first semester.

Students who took the Introduction course during their first semester were invited to apply for the second course, Honors Professional Development: Leadership Development. Twelve students were selected for the initial leadership course. While the Introduction course focused on acclimating freshmen to college and campus involvement, the leadership course more thoroughly defined the leadership goals and refined the skills needed to accomplish these goals. The small size of the class was beneficial to the students, allowing them to develop strong relationships with one another and get more personalized feedback on accomplishing their goals. The intimacy of the class also created a sense of responsibility and accountability among the individuals; when students presented their goals as part of weekly status updates, they were expected to follow through on the goals and let their classmates know the results.

In the Leadership Development course, each student was required to create an individual blog. Students developed at least ten blog posts throughout the semester about their efforts to get involved with research, internships, leadership, and other activities. While the in-class status reports were good for creating accountability among the students, the blogs served as a beneficial tool for individual reflection. The blogs forced the students to think about what they had accomplished and reflect on what they did well or what they needed to improve on moving forward; it was also helpful in formulating new goals.

The third semester course was developed by the students enrolled in the Leadership Development course. Ten of the twelve students from the leadership course continued into the third semester. Honors Professional Development: Community Outreach was offered for the first time during fall 2010. Students wanted an opportunity to give back to the general honors community after learning so much about themselves and developing their strengths throughout their first year. Students by this point had developed a strong sense of identification with the program and each other. While the students continued to provide in-class status reports and work on their individual blogs, much of the class was designed to work on a collaborative project for first-year honors students, which has garnered university-wide attention.

The fourth course in the series is being taught for the first time during the spring 2011 semester. In this capstone course, students will continue working on their collaborative project and also develop an electronic portfolio to display artifacts from all four semesters of the course series. Finally, students in the course will serve as mentors to the next cohort of students in the Leadership Development course.
The student-success blogging project was designed to help honors students achieve success in their first year. The students in the Community Outreach course wanted to share the knowledge and skills they had developed in their first year that potentially could benefit younger students. Entitled the Swamp Survival Blog <http://www.swampsurvival.wordpress.com>, this project enabled experienced students to share information about the resources and opportunities available on campus that could foster professional development and facilitate achievement of goals. These veteran students observed that many first-year students had several set goals but lacked a resource for information and assistance in achieving their goals. While the blog was geared towards first-year students in the honors program, the students noted that its content could be helpful for all first-year students.

At the beginning of the semester, students in the advanced course selected a blog as their chosen community outreach outlet. The blog was modeled loosely after the Grade First Aid Blog, produced by Office of Undergraduate Advising at the University of Oregon, which focused on academic advising tips and resources in blog and video-blog form. The class elected to post both regular and video blogs, with content focusing on a combination of personal advice and tips about campus and community resources.

A quick note about the video blogs: According to the 2006 Horizon Report, video blogging, or vlogging, was recognized as a technology to watch, particularly when it came to students being able to create their own content for educational use. The 2008 Horizon Report noted that grassroots video development, popularized by the ease of creating and distributing video via sites such as YouTube, was another up-and-coming educational technology phenomenon. The class thus decided to post their video blogs on a YouTube channel <http://www.youtube.com/swampsurvival> designed by the class.

Students posted content on the blog every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday throughout the semester, with the Friday posts in the form of video blogs. Each of the ten students was responsible for posting two of the blog topics individually and, in pairs, two video-blog topics. At the beginning of the semester, students generated a list of topics they were interested in posting and developed a blog schedule as a group. The class also generated a list of people they could interview for the video blogs.

Other class sessions at the beginning of the semester were dedicated to negotiating the format and design of the blog and to learning about Fair Use and Creative Commons guidelines for adding pictures to the blogs as well as music or external video clips to the video blogs. Fair Use and Creative Commons guidelines can be complex and confusing, but several good resources are available to interpret them (see EDUCAUSE, 2007; Jones; U.S. Copyright Office).
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GENERATING BLOG AND VIDEO BLOG CONTENT

Twenty blogs were posted throughout the semester:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Places to study</th>
<th>Finding your niche</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with professors</td>
<td>Procrastination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting around Gainesville</td>
<td>Local attractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus housing: area governments</td>
<td>Staying involved off campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gator traditions</td>
<td>Following through on goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding mentors</td>
<td>Being a competitive pre-med student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>Adding majors and minors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumés</td>
<td>Cover letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming an active learner</td>
<td>Life outside of class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students used a combination of personal experiences, references, and resources to generate the content of their blog posts. One student commented:

For the resumé blog, I mainly used information I could find online about resumés and my own personal experience of writing, editing, and having my resumé edited by others.

Another student cited different sources:

For the pre-med post, I integrated personal experience, knowledge from older friends and advisors, and information provided by UF (through the pre-health advising department, including the website and information sessions I have attended).

Ten video blogs were also posted throughout the semester:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparing for the career fair</th>
<th>Student Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study Abroad Fair</td>
<td>Center for Leadership and Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Advising</td>
<td>Honors Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Resource Center</td>
<td>Campus Wellness Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the video blogs, students used a variety of equipment and software to create and edit their videos. No one had to purchase any special equipment since they used only equipment and software that they already owned. To shoot the video, they used either their personal digital cameras or a webcam on their laptop. To edit the video, most students used Windows Movie Maker, readily available on PCs, or iMovie, available on Macs. One student used VideoPad, a freeware program.
To generate content for the videos, students scheduled interviews with professional staff and student contacts across campus. They also visited campus events to film footage and interviewed people on the spot. One student commented:

For the first video, we first brainstormed what kinds of things we thought people (freshmen in particular) would want to know about advising, and turned those into questions we wanted to have answered in our video.

Another wrote:

We visited the Study Abroad Fair and interviewed study abroad peer leaders. I used pictures and videos taken from the fair, as well as information from the UF International Center website.

Neither the blog posts nor the video blog posts were moderated by the instructor. A disclaimer was posted on the blog, stating that “. . . the students’ viewpoints are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the University of Florida Honors Program.” The instructor’s contact information was posted on the blog in case anyone had a question or comment about the blog’s content although no comments about the content were received.

**BLOG READERSHIP AND IMPACT**

The Swamp Survival blog was publicized on the Honors Daily Opportunities List, a daily e-newsletter sent to all UF honors students via email by the honors office. A brief description and a link to the blog were posted several times throughout the semester on the Daily. Individual blog and video blog posts also were linked to the UF Honors Program and Honors Professional Development pages on Facebook. The blog was linked on the course website for Introduction to Honors Professional Development, and the instructor distributed links to individual blog postings on Twitter. The instructor also presented on the blog during the Developing in Honors extended session on technology at the 2010 National Collegiate Honors Council annual conference.

Finally, a reporter for *The Independent Florida Alligator* published an article on the blog, which led to increased campus-wide exposure (Peters).

The blog was set up on Wordpress, which provides an in-depth analysis of site statistics. From September 12 (first post on the blog) through December 31, 2010, there were 1,771 views of the blog. The most active day was September 29, 2010, the day the article was published in the *Alligator*, with 226 views. The average number of views per day was 15. Aside from the main blog page, the following individual posts received the most views, with the most viewed listed first: how to be a competitive pre-med student, places to study, getting around Gainesville, UF traditions, and procrastination. The top referrers to the blog were the *Alligator* website, Facebook, Twitter, the course website for Introduction to Honors Professional Development, and the Honors Daily email.
Data on numbers of views are available directly from YouTube. The Swamp Survival YouTube channel itself had sixty views while individual videos were viewed a total of 417 times. The top-viewed videos in order of most viewed were: undergraduate research, preparing for the career fair, and student activities.

At the end of the semester, students in the course were asked to reflect on how they thought honors students might have benefited from the content on the Swamp Survival Blog. They all commented that they hoped their readers had learned from their unique perspectives and experiences as peers. They also believed they had provided content about resources first-year students might not have heard about otherwise. As one student noted, “One thing that I thought was super awesome about the blog is that it’s so much helpful information in one convenient place. Not only that, but this information is peer-to-peer.” Another student reflected that “since our first-year experience was so recent, we were able to think about what questions we encountered and what information we would have found useful throughout our first year.”

**REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

In addition to helping first-year honors students through the blog, the students in the course learned from the project. In their end-of-course reflections, students said they gained experience in researching and planning, in-depth knowledge about campus resources, and awareness of how much information they had learned and retained throughout their first year in college:

By participating in this project I discovered how much I had learned in my first year of college. I did not have an older sibling or friend to guide me, and I was able to see how the blogs written could have helped me the year before.

I learned from everyone else’s blogs, too. Some blogs are inspirational, some are informative, and some are a mix. I learned about the wellness center and how to be a competitive pre-med student, etc. But overall, I learned more about how to make my experience here, at UF, more enjoyable and fulfilling.

The project not only taught me the basics of running an appealing and informative blog, but also gave me an expressive platform to use my writing and video editing skills. The information provided by my classmates made me more aware of resources on campus. Overall, it was a good learning experience, teaching us skills relevant to today’s methods of disseminating information.

Given the success of the project, the group plans to continue the Swamp Survival Blog for the foreseeable future. The current students will continue working on the blog during their fourth-semester Professional Development Capstone course, and then the blog will transfer over to the next cohort of the...
Community Outreach/Capstone class the following year. Many topics remain to be covered for future blog posts, and students can revisit former topics as appropriate. The upcoming priority will be to increase readership/viewership of the blog and videos, as well as to make the blog more interactive by encouraging readers to leave comments.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHERS**

Creating a blog is a relatively simple task since several free blogging platforms are available and no knowledge of HTML is needed to post content. Other honors programs or colleges interested in starting blogs similar to the Swamp Survival Blog need to consider several factors in advance:

- **Who is the audience?**—We focused on first-year honors students, but others could focus on prospective students, all current students, the general campus community, and/or parents and alumni.
- **What is the focus of the blog?**—Ours was student success. Others could highlight honors courses, faculty, or various opportunities within the program/college.
- **Who will contribute content to the blog?**—We used students taking a professional development course. Others might use their honors ambassadors or honors student council members, student employees, or students taking a particular honors course. We recommend allowing students to take ownership of the blog, with a faculty or staff member simply overseeing the project.
- **How often will content be posted?**—We posted content three times a week on a consistent schedule. The consistency allowed readers to know exactly when they could expect to see new content on the blog. Others might want to limit content to once a week, but we would not recommend posting less frequently.
- **How will the blog be marketed?**—The blog content will not be helpful unless someone is reading it. A plan needs to be developed to advertise the blog to the intended audience.

The use of blogs by honors programs and colleges has a lot of potential, and a national honors blog might be a future development. The Swamp Survival Blog allowed students in the course to learn more about themselves and campus resources while creating content to help other honors students.

**REFERENCES**


DESIGNING A COLLABORATIVE BLOG ABOUT STUDENT SUCCESS


The authors may be contacted at mjohnson@honors.ufl.edu.
On Curriculum
Why Honors Students Still Need First-Year Composition

ANNMARIE GUZY
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Dear Incoming Honors Freshman,

Let me be among the first to welcome you to the honors program at Regional Public University. During your orientation today, you will be registering for your fall semester courses, and as you browse through the class listings, let me strongly recommend that you include first-year Honors Composition in your schedule even if you have taken AP English Literature and Composition or English Language and Composition courses and exams.

According to the College Board, the company that administers the Advanced Placement program, enrollment in AP has increased dramatically over the past decade. As you can see in Table 1 below, the number of high schools offering AP exams to one or more students has increased by 34%, and the number of colleges accepting AP credit has increased by 27%. At the same time, the number of students participating in the AP program has increased 140%, and the number of AP examinations has increased 155%.

Table 1: AP Participation, 1998–99 and 2008–09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>High Schools</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Examinations</th>
<th>Colleges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998–99</td>
<td>12,886</td>
<td>704,298</td>
<td>1,149,515</td>
<td>3,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–09</td>
<td>17,374</td>
<td>1,691,905</td>
<td>2,929,929</td>
<td>3,809</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: “Annual AP Program Participation 1956–2009”

In a December 2009 forum titled “The Advanced Placement Juggernaut” on The New York Times website’s “Room for Debate” blog, six educators and administrators discuss these increases and their implications. In her entry on “The Educational Cost,” Kristin Klopfenstein attributes the increases to the fact that the AP program has been transformed from its original purpose of providing college-level material to advanced high school students into something that reaches beyond classroom instruction: “For students, taking A.P. [sic] courses signals academic ability and work ethic to prospective colleges. For high schools, having a lot of A.P. classes signals quality to the community and real estate markets. For educational reformers, offering the program has become a way to provide academic rigor with accountability in the form of standardized end-of-course exams.” In another forum entry on “Promoting Grade Inflation,”
WHY HONORS STUDENTS STILL NEED FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

Saul Geiser attributes the increases to students taking AP courses to earn bonus points for their high school GPAs (for example, the 3.0 “B” in a regular class becomes a 4.0 in an AP class) and thus making their transcripts more competitive during college admissions. Geiser then argues that this tactic “has had adverse consequences for students and schools as well as the program itself. When the original emphasis was on the A.P. exams, students needed to score well to receive credit for college coursework. Today, the bonus point gives students a strong incentive to load their schedules with A.P. classes to raise their G.P.A.s, but then skip the exams.”

Despite these arguments, or perhaps because of them, the College Board is also emphasizing its claim that, in our current economic climate, students can save a great deal of money on college expenses by using AP credit to fulfill general education course requirements, including first-year composition. For example, in a PDF flyer titled “AP and the Cost of College” provided on its homepage, the College Board states, “Most students take five or six years, and sometimes even longer, to earn their bachelor’s degrees at public colleges and universities. Students who take AP courses and exams are much more likely to graduate in four years.” They then follow up with two important financial arguments in favor of taking AP: (1) “Students who take longer to graduate from a public college or university typically pay between $8,000 and $19,000 for each additional year” and (2) “Taking AP increases eligibility for scholarships and makes candidates more attractive to colleges.”

While the arguments above provide a fascinating glimpse into the politics of education, none of them directly addresses the intellectual growth and development of the student. As a composition professor, I can tell you that a multiple choice exam and a timed five-paragraph essay are not equivalent to a fully developed and well-argued ten-page research paper. So, while you may have an AP score that allows you to earn credit for first-year composition, Honors Composition is still essential to your academic career in at least five ways:

1. Students who take both AP and first-year composition courses perform better in future college-level classes than students who take AP alone.

While the College Board makes some powerful arguments in favor of taking AP credit rather than general education courses, research has shown that AP courses and exams do not give students the same educational experiences that college-level courses provide. For example, in his “The Advanced Placement Juggernaut” entry, “Little Effect on College Grades,” Philip M. Sadler discusses a study that he and his colleagues conducted to examine correlations between AP science exams and introductory college-level science courses. Out of 8,594 students, approximately 850 had passed an AP science exam, and those students “did about one-third of a letter grade better than their classmates with similar backgrounds who did not take an A.P. course,” leading the researchers to conclude that “a score of 5 on an A.P. test is no guarantee of a college grade of A in the same subject.”
Research in composition studies similarly demonstrates that AP English courses and exams are not equivalent to college-level first-year composition courses. In 2006, the top journal for quantitative research in English, *Research in the Teaching of English*, published an article titled “Are Advanced Placement English and First-Year College Composition Equivalent?” In this article, researchers administered questionnaires to 497 students in a 200-level (sophomore) general education course, and they chose a subset of 182 students for analysis of the students’ essay assignments. The researchers divided the students into three groups: AP 3 or higher plus First-Year Composition (AP + FYC); AP but no First-Year Composition (AP/no FYC); and no AP or a score below 3 and First-Year Composition (no AP/FYC). The students wrote two three-page writing assignments, each of which was scored twice on a 1–9 scale, with 9 being the top score. As you can see in Table 2 below, the researchers found that the AP + FYC students had average scores at least one full point higher than the AP/no FYC students (Hansen et al. 478).

### Table 2: Essay Scores by AP Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% per group</th>
<th>Mean ± Std error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AP + FYC</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>6.47 ± 0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP, no FYC</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>5.42 ± 0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No AP, FYC</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>5.13 ± 0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>5.35 ± 0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hansen et al. (478)

Students who took both AP and First-Year Composition had an average score of 6.47 while the students who took only AP had an average score of 5.42. The researchers concluded that “exempting students from college writing based on work done in high school may be unwise because more instruction in writing at college appears to solidify student learning. First-year writing courses that build on strong college preparatory work may best prepare students for writing expected in other college classes” (Hansen et al. 461). As an incoming honors freshman, you probably attach importance to not only your grades but also your overall academic performance, so consider carefully how Honors Composition will help to prepare you for future courses in your major and in the honors program.

2. You need time to acclimate to college-level writing tasks.

Just like “regular” students, honors students come to college with a wide variety of high school writing experiences. Depending upon the school you attended, you may or may not have taken AP or International Baccalaureate (IB) classes. You may have taken one or more composition classes, or you may have covered basic writing instruction in your literature classes. You
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may or may not have written at least one formal research paper, and you may or may not be familiar with MLA citation style. Students in the Hansen et al. study completed questionnaires about their writing self-efficacy (worth to oneself), their writing apprehension, and their high school writing experiences, and the researchers found the following:

Students in the study reported that, on average, high school English teachers taught grammar, spelling, and punctuation less than once or twice a week, focusing heavily instead on literature. Fifty-five percent of students wrote research papers only once a year or not at all. The most heavily assigned types of writing were five-paragraph essays, book reports, comparison-and-contrast papers, and answers to questions about reading assignments; 87.3% of these assignments required three pages of writing or fewer. Seventy-nine percent of students reported spending five hours or less per week on writing assignments for all their classes. (481)

To be successful in college-level writing tasks, both in your major and in the honors program (think about that capstone project!), you need to move beyond those types of writing listed above toward lengthier, more fully developed papers based upon scholarly research and argumentation. Honors Composition will give you the time you need to begin developing your writing in that direction.

3. You need time to acclimate to college-level research tasks.

Today’s students are well-versed in widely accessible web-based resources, but college-level research writing demands use of discipline-specific resources beyond the high school library, the public library, Google, and Wikipedia. For example, the assignments in my Honors Composition course focus on becoming familiar with research and argumentation in a student’s prospective discipline. In researching debatable issues related to their majors, my students write five major assignments:

a. an analysis of a website on the topic;
b. a rhetorical analysis of a scholarly book related to the topic;
c. an analysis of the content and format of a professional journal in that discipline;
d. an annotated bibliography with a minimum of 20 sources on the topic; and
e. a formal research paper.

Another problem some honors students encounter in college-level research tasks is academic dishonesty. Anecdotal reporting on our campus reveals a
common attitude among the “regular” students that honors students excel because they cheat. My own experience suggests otherwise in the majority of papers I read, but I do catch the occasional honors plagiarizer. Excuses range from simple laziness and overreliance on work completed in high school to the more problematic issues of pressures to maintain a high GPA (for the scholarship, the family, or graduate school) and to preserve the image of the perfect student.

Honors Composition will give you time to develop not only your research and citation skills but also the time-management skills necessary when advancing from high school to college-level work.

4. Your writing is not as good as you think it is.

When Hansen et al. compared students’ questionnaire responses to their rated essays, they found that “successful completion of an AP examination without subsequent university-level composition experience can lead students to have inflated self-confidence in their writing ability and even to resist further instruction” (485). This resistance has been documented elsewhere in studies such as Sarah A. Henderson’s “Why Do I Have to Be Here? The Advanced Placement Student in First-Year Composition: Problems and Issues in Cognitive Development.” In her presentation at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication, Henderson argued that the writing of first-year composition students who have taken AP English often “is not outstanding or even satisfactory” and that these students “present the strong and disturbing impression of being developmentally stuck” as they resist more challenging college-level instruction and constructive criticism inconsistent with the successes they achieved in AP.

To explore this issue further, I recently reviewed papers from all of the Honors Composition courses I have taught over the past decade to look at frequency and types of errors that honors freshmen make in the first major writing assignment for the semester. I chose the first assignment because it typically represents the high school-level writing skill with which students enter college, and I decided to review errors because (1) they are easily quantifiable and (2) anecdotal reporting in honors education argues that honors students demonstrate stronger mastery of grammar and mechanics than “regular” students.

For the website analysis assignment, my students apply a list of questions from our university library’s webpage on evaluating Internet resources to websites related to their research paper topics. The required format for the paper is three to five double-spaced pages with one-inch margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. From nine Honors Composition courses, I collected a total of 118 website analysis papers. For this study, papers were marked for common errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. As shown in Table 3 below, most papers contained multiple errors in grammar and mechanics.
WHY HONORS STUDENTS STILL NEED FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

Table 3: Honors Composition Error Frequency Statistics

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papers</td>
<td>118.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pages (total)</td>
<td>385.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pages per paper (avg)</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Errors (total)</td>
<td>994.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Errors per paper (avg)</td>
<td>8.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Errors per page (avg)</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can see that the average page length was just over three pages, and students made an average of almost eight and a half errors per paper, or over two and a half errors per page. Table 4 below lists the five most common error types found in these papers.

Table 4: Most Common Errors in Honors Composition Papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Type</th>
<th>#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comma error</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling error</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run-on sentence</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangling modifier</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotation mark error</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comma misuse was the most frequent type of error, constituting 39% of the total errors made. In addition to those listed above, other types of errors included subject/verb disagreement, comma splices (grouped as a sentence boundary issue separate from general comma misuse), conjunction misuse, apostrophe errors, unclear pronoun antecedents, and sentence fragments. In short, your papers aren’t as perfect as you think they are, and even skilled honors freshman writers need to work on grammar and punctuation in their papers.

5. You don’t want to have the writing style of an eighteen-year-old high school senior forever, do you?

Throughout the course of your academic career, your writing style has improved, and it will continue to develop as you move through your degree program and into your career of choice. Look back at papers you wrote during your freshman year of high school, and see how much your writing changed since then. Now, as good as you think your writing is at the moment, picture yourself twenty years in the future: do you want to be a forty-year-old doctor or lawyer or engineer with the writing style of an eighteen-year-old high school senior? Even your professors cringe at articles that they published when they were graduate students or new professors, and these items are in print forever for the whole world to see.
In Honors Composition, you will learn to express yourself in increasingly sophisticated ways through a variety of opportunities. Not only will you gain experience through writing more challenging assignments, but you will do so in the company of a more culturally diverse group of peers than you had in your high school English classes, peers of equal or greater intellectual caliber who will prompt your growth through feedback on your writing and who will challenge your conceptions about argumentation and about the world in general. Also, in addition to the guidance that your honors director provides, I can review your research interests as outlined in your papers and then help you to connect with professors who specialize in these areas and who can mentor you in both your writing and your future professional development opportunities. Opting out of Honors Composition may speed you more quickly toward graduation, but truncating your college years will deprive you of the valuable time and experiences you need to develop into an effective, mature writer and researcher in your field.

Dedicated, thoughtful writing instruction at the college level will push you out of the comfort zone of your old writing habits toward a more professional, scholarly style that is appropriate for undergraduate research and beyond. Even an honors freshman who performs above average for freshman-level writing can still be challenged productively to push his or her writing skills to the next level. As Hansen et al. argue, “To intentionally deprive students of writing instruction with policies that encourage them to do less of it is not unlike encouraging them to bypass healthy foods and consume foods with empty calories: neither course of action is good for the individual or for the nation” (490). As you prepare to register for your first semester at Regional Public, think carefully about the writing tasks you will be completing in your major and in the honors program, such as that capstone project, and make the choice to sign up for Honors Composition.

Sincerely,

Your Honors Composition Professor

REFERENCES


Hansen, Kristine, et al. “Are Advanced Placement English and First-Year College Composition Equivalent? A Comparison of Outcomes in the

2011
WHY HONORS STUDENTS STILL NEED FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION


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aguzy@jaguar1.usouthal.edu.
Rethinking Asian Studies in the Interdisciplinary Honors Setting

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UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS

INTRODUCTION

In an interdisciplinary honors setting, especially at colleges and universities with minimal Asian studies offerings, teaching interdisciplinary Asian studies courses can present a particularly difficult challenge. The problem, as Charles Holcombe notes, is that “Asia is simply too enormous, spanning the better part of the entire Old World, and too diverse, to serve as a very meaningful label” (9). Unless students already have a background in Asian studies, have studied Asian languages and cultures, or are themselves from Asian countries, they often lack the basic, macro-level knowledge of geography, history, and politics necessary to address complex issues, particularly Orientalist stereotypes and jingoistic political rhetoric that the instructor may wish to address at the micro-level.

Teaching interdisciplinary Asian studies courses can also, however, present an exciting opportunity to address preconceptions about race, ethnicity, gender, and cultural personality for the very reason that they force us to re-think fundamental categories like “Asia” and “area” (Holmes; Cohen; Salter). In this article, I begin to address both the challenges and opportunities associated with infusing Asian studies into the honors curriculum through a review of three courses I have developed at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) Honors College. In the second part of the article, I provide a sampling of resources available for faculty who wish to enhance their teaching of Asia either through individual study or through developing Asian studies at the institutional level. The latter discussion draws on my experience from 2007 to 2009 as a co-director of a U.S. Department of Education Title VI grant to develop Chinese language and area studies at UCA. In the institutional context, I will also touch upon UCA’s acquisition of a Confucius Institute, a primarily Chinese-government-funded program which, at UCA at least, has focused on facilitating Chinese language training in Arkansas public secondary schools. While UCA’s Asian studies programming is a work in progress, the university’s experience of essentially creating something from nothing—simply because faculty members have had a passion and interest in doing so—remains, I believe, a useful model for other institutions to enhance their own Asian studies offerings. In our honors college, a faculty line was created six years ago specifically to incorporate Asian studies and anthropology into the curriculum. The courses I describe in
RETHINKING ASIAN STUDIES IN THE INTERDISCIPLINARY HONORS SETTING

this essay are among the half dozen Asian studies courses taught by honors college faculty as part of their regular teaching duties. In this case, therefore, neither outside funding nor course release is necessary.

CASE STUDIES:
THREE HONORS ASIAN STUDIES COURSES

As the faculty member in Asian studies and anthropology at the University of Central Arkansas Honors College, I have developed half a dozen Asian studies courses over the last five years. I focus on three of these courses here as examples of specific attempts to inspire Honors students to “rethink” Asia through pedagogies that combine direct experience, fieldwork, and extensive reading from a critical standpoint. I make no claims about the relative success or failure of these experiments in pedagogy except to point out generally positive student and peer evaluations. The first course, “Asian Theatre,” is an honors sophomore-level performance studies and anthropology of performance course that uses various Asian theatre forms as opportunities to discuss the nature of performance, both on and off the stage. The course fulfills the university’s general education requirement in fine arts, as well as the honors college’s fourth semester (“Core IV”) requirement. The end product of the course is a publically performed “fusion” workshop production of a Shakespeare play, drawing on the various Asian performance styles the students have studied throughout the semester. The second course is “Chinese Humanities through Taijiquan,” a sophomore-level offering (also “Core IV”) that uses the Chinese martial art and exercise system of taijiquan (a.k.a. tai chi) as a vehicle for learning about Chinese philosophy, poetry, and visual arts. The third, taught at the junior seminar level, is “The Body and the Chinese State,” a course that uses the anthropology of the body as the basis for discussing such topics as the history of foot binding, Chinese clothing, ritual in imperial China, bowing, changing attitudes toward sex in China, martial arts, and contemporary Chinese sports. The course fulfills a seminar requirement in the honors minor in interdisciplinary studies. Students in this course conduct their own research from an “anthropology of the body” perspective. Below, I detail the development, organization, and implementation of each of these courses.

ASIAN THEATRE

The course on Asian theatre, which I have taught twice as the fourth semester arts component of our four-course freshmen-sophomore honors sequence, grew out of the Asian Studies Development Program/National Endowment for the Humanities faculty workshop “Asian Culture through Theatre” held at the University of Redlands in spring 2006. Combining lecture with performance workshops, the two-weekend seminar introduced faculty to Japanese, Indian, and Indonesian theatre forms and also provided an opportunity for participants to share ideas for application in the classroom. In online conversation with
workshop participants, I developed the course over the summer and fall of 2006 and taught it for the first time in spring 2007. Because of my own undergraduate and professional background in theatre and my graduate anthropology specialization in folklore and expressive culture, the course was a natural fit for a performance studies approach. We began in the first week with something both familiar and strange: a group reading of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (King Lear in the 2009 version of the course). By starting with a play so firmly identified with western theatre, we began the process of answering fundamental questions about the nature and cultural role of performance in different Asian theatre contexts. We continued this process throughout the term. Before moving into detailed discussion and viewing video of Asian theatre forms, we then spent the next several weeks reading in the fields of performance studies, anthropology of performance, and the anthropology of ritual. In 2007, our texts included Richard Schechner’s *Performance Studies: An Introduction, Second Edition*, though I have since moved toward excerpting from that text and using Henry Bial’s edited volume *The Performance Studies Reader, Second Edition*, as our primary introductory text for the course since Bial has coordinated his text with Schechner’s. Foundational texts are supplemented with lecture and in-class exercises that require students to use a performance studies perspective to analyze specific performances or performative moments in their everyday lives.

The second third of the semester is devoted to in-depth exposure to Chinese, South Asian, Japanese, and Indonesian theatre forms. Excerpts from Brockett and Hildy’s *History of the Theatre, 10th Edition*, anchor the broad factual details about each form, and details are filled in with readings and visual clips about each theatre form. Where texts are available, students continue the tradition of reading aloud as a group, a tradition they began with Shakespeare, and then view clips to see the relative role that text, music, movement, and other production elements play in a particular form. We specifically look at Beijing and kunju style Chinese opera; Japanese noh, kabuki, kyōgen, and bunraku; Indian kathakali; and Indonesian wayang kulit. During this middle third of the semester, I ask students to produce a performance studies field report based on a performance they have observed. It need not be an Asian style form, but students are required to view the performance through the lens of performance studies.

Integrated into the middle third of the semester is all the historical, political, and philosophical background material necessary for students to understand the origins of a particular theatre form, its transformations over time, and its place in contemporary contexts. I have found it helpful to emphasize in the syllabus and verbally throughout the semester that this course is not an Asian studies survey and that our goals are both modest and very specifically geared toward reshaping our visions of Asia through performance. I also share with them my feeling that such an arrangement is inadequate and perhaps, in this case, moves us dangerously close to orientalism. Since all of the students in our program have already read Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in their freshman year,
the reference is not lost on them, and we continue the discussion of orientalism as we move into the practice-centered final third of the term.

This final third is devoted almost exclusively to creating a performance piece that retells our Shakespeare choice through a fusion of Asian and western performance styles. For the 2007 Macbeth (called “East Meets West: Fusion Macbeth”), students created a masked performance that drew from noh, kabuki, and Beijing style opera, and for the 2009 King Lear (entitled “Heads on Sticks”), students constructed life-size puppets and drew heavily on bunraku (a Japanese puppet theatre form) and Beijing opera. In both cases, students created music from “found instruments” e.g. pot lids, homemade clappers, paint bucket drums, and bells. During the rehearsal period, I conducted half-day mask-making (see Figures 1–3)—puppet-making in 2009—workshops with the students, who then continued to construct their performance materials until the final, public performance (see Figures 4–6). Each rehearsal, we spent a few minutes as a group discussing which performance styles might be appropriate to which scenes, and then students paired off or worked in small groups to create the scenes on their own. We shared the day’s work at the end of each class. In both cases, the final performances occurred in open, outdoor spaces so that the final “audience” consisted both of those who intentionally came to view the show and passersby who stopped to watch all or part of it. Each student wrote a final post mortem of our rehearsal process and performance, a paper that required a synthesis of their experience with the performance studies material we had been examining all semester. Students specifically dealt with the question of whether “faking” Asian theatre styles in their fusion production perpetuated or deflated stereotypes about Asia. In both versions of the course, the student consensus was that, by explicitly confronting stereotypes in the program notes and by being respectful of the performance traditions they drew upon, the productions tended to deflate stereotypes.

Final evaluations for the course reflected an initial skepticism that morphed into guarded acceptance for some, enthusiasm for others. Some students felt that we spent too much time on performance theory at the beginning of the term while others felt we did not spend enough. Although students knew they would create a performance going into the course, they expressed some concern about the shortness of the actual performance (about twenty minutes in both cases) in proportion to the amount of rehearsal time we put into it. Nonetheless, evaluations reflected an overall impression that student knowledge about Asian cultures had been enhanced through the focus on theatre and that the element of live performance had added a practical, memorable element to the course.
Figure 1: Honors students Sindy Gomes and Rivka Kuperman in early stages of mask-making workshop for Honors Asian Theatre’s *Fusion Macbeth*

Figure 2: Honors Asian Theatre students applying plaster-of-Paris-saturated bandages in mask-making workshop
Figure 3: Honors students Josh Eaves and Aaron Kopí prepare breathing straws for mask making.

Figure 4: Witches stir the bubbling cauldron in the Honors Asian Theatre workshop production of *Fusion Macbeth*. 
Figure 5: Lady Macbeth pressures Macbeth to take the dagger in the Honors Asian Theatre workshop production of *Fusion Macbeth*.

Figure 6: Macbeth surrenders his crown in the Honors Asian Theatre workshop production *Fusion Macbeth*.
CHINESE HUMANITIES THROUGH TAIJIQUAN

This course initially came into being as an experiment in connecting my research area as an anthropologist (Chinese martial arts and identity; see Frank 2006) with an introductory level course on Chinese arts and humanities that incorporates readings in philosophy, Chinese art history, and poetry. Students who take the course participate in weekly taijiquan lessons in conjunction with in-class discussion of course readings. Each student also participates in one of three groups that prepare a lecture and presentation on one of the three main topic areas. The goal is to use the study of a single Chinese art as a kind of lens through which to view broader Chinese cultural issues. (For a fuller treatment of experiential methods to teach about Asian religions, see Frank 2010.)

Since we begin the course with a four-week survey of Chinese philosophy and religion, we first address the art of taijiquan through our studies of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. How, for example, do the beginning movements of taijiquan reflect Daoist cosmology? How does the social structure of training Chinese martial arts reflect and/or contradict the Confucian ideal? And how do Chinese arts like taijiquan serve as vehicles for Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism to operate side by side for a single individual? Collectively, these questions are geared toward interrogating the boundaries that a Judeo-Christian framework sometimes places between religious-philosophical traditions—in other words, getting the students to see how all three viewpoints can coexist within a single individual.

The course requirements include four primary texts. Patricia Buckley Ebrey’s edited collection Chinese Civilization: A Sourcebook, Third Edition, chronologically ordered, provides a sufficient variety of excerpted history, philosophy, and literary texts to allow the course to flow in any number of directions. Burton Watson’s Chinese Lyricism: Shih Poetry from the Second to the Twelfth Centuries is narrow in scope, but Watson has such a useful approach to translation and does such an excellent job of introducing the Tang poets Du Fu and Li Bai to the uninitiated undergraduate that I have kept the book as a required text for the course. For history and art history, I have combined Michael Sullivan’s The Arts of China, Fourth Edition with Ebrey’s Cambridge Illustrated History of China to provide much of the visual material necessary to make both the art and the history of China come alive, although either text is serviceable on its own. The students use these texts over the course of the four-week visual arts unit to develop literacy in Chinese landscape and portrait painting as well as ceramics and religious art. Supplementing the unit with a visit to a museum collection of Chinese art is ideal, if possible. For residents of Conway, Arkansas, that means a two-hour trip to Memphis to visit the small but interesting collection at the Belz Museum. The 2008 version of the class benefited as well from a visit by Dr. Stanley Murashige, Professor of Art History, Theory, and Criticism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, who visited several classes and accompanied the students to the Belz Museum. Even without the added expertise, however (as was the case in the 2009 version of this
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class), students develop a sometimes surprising degree of literacy in Chinese art, particularly landscape painting. Indeed, since much of Chinese landscape painting is concerned with multiple perspectives, the paintings themselves become a means of rethinking Asia, a process that emerges when the student group concentrating on art concludes the unit with a Jeopardy-style exercise in Chinese visual art.

The final unit for the course focuses mainly on Tang-period poetry. All students in the class are asked to compose a poem in the shih style, following Watson’s technique of literal translation first, interpretive translation next. The students, of course, do not literally translate since (thus far) none of them is trained in classical Chinese. Rather, they learn about notions of ambiguity and imagery in Tang poetry by adopting a purposefully ambiguous technique in composing their own poetry. As with the previous two units, a student group focusing on poetry team-teaches a lesson, focusing in this case on introducing the class to the place of classical poetry in contemporary Chinese culture.

Students conclude the semester with a service project. In the past two versions of the course, we arranged for a one-hour “Taste of China” presentation at a local senior center. We performed taijiquan as a group and did a brief taijiquan workshop with audience members; then, the three student groups presented polished versions of their class presentations to the audience of senior citizens. After teaching the course twice, I have found that the service element keeps students focused and motivated on both practicing their taijiquan outside of class and making sure they have mastered the course material. They know going into the course that they will need to teach this material to a group of strangers, and regular reminders of this fact seem to focus their studies.

THE BODY AND THE CHINESE STATE

Taught as an honors junior seminar for the first time in the fall of 2009, this course draws on readings in the anthropology of the body, Chinese history, and the contemporary anthropology of China to look at the body itself as reflective of evolving Chinese conceptions of self, of state power and resistance to it, and of Chinese interaction with or reclusion from the international community at various points in history. We devote the first several weeks of the class to basic readings on ritual and on the anthropology of the body (Bell; Csordas; Young). Early on, I ask students to identify a public field site to conduct observations about bodily experience. Each student is also assigned a day to teach the class a skill or to introduce us to a practice. So as not to disadvantage students early in the semester who have not yet begun their field research, the in-class workshops need not be related to the field research. In the 2009 version of the course, students’ fieldwork included men’s soccer, coffee house culture, Ramadan in Little Rock, massage, cooking Shaanxi-style noodles, and painting. Student workshops included volleyball training, body language while dating, taking pulses and blood pressure readings, acting, and drawing. Together, the experiential and fieldwork elements of the class are intended to provide a
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hands-on element to body theory, a challenging literature for undergraduates with minimal or no background in anthropology or cultural studies.

The remaining two thirds of the semester is book-centered, including David Palmer’s *Qigong Fever*, Antonia Finane’s *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, and Nation*; Dorothy Ko’s *Cinderella’s Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*; Susan Brownell’s *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People’s Republic of China*; and the Angela Zito/Tani Barlow-edited volume *Body, Subject, and Power in China*. In addition to submitting annotated bibliographies of each day’s reading and completing their ethnographic research paper, students are required to write one additional paper on a practice-related China topic, which they share with the class on an assigned day. In the fall 2009 version of the course, this latter approach turned out to be an effective method for addressing basic information about China that had little room in the syllabus, including the history and theory of Chinese medicine, traditional attitudes about pregnancy and birth, and funerary customs. Student evaluations again reflected some frustration with attacking complex, detailed subject matter without much background on contemporary China and Chinese history (which I addressed, in this version of the course, almost exclusively through lecture at the beginning of each unit) while generally approving of the choice of books and the experiential elements of the class.

The methods I outline in the Asian studies courses above are by no means limited to China topics and, in my view, are applicable to many other types of courses that take “difference” as their central topic, such as our honors Core IV courses, which are linked with the theme “The Search for the Other.” As experiments in interdisciplinary teaching, each course had its successes and its failures, each managed to move students toward new understandings of “Asia” as a category, and each drew on methods that could be applied to other interdisciplinary courses. In addition, as long as I accepted that these courses were not and could not replace introductory survey courses and emphasized that point to students, they in turn accepted the value of an interdisciplinary approach to the subject matter.

RESOURCES FOR ENHANCING INTERDISCIPLINARY HONORS-LEVEL ASIAN STUDIES

Several organizations, publications, training programs, and grant opportunities contribute to the enhancement of individual faculty members’ expertise in Asian studies or to the enhancement of Asian studies offerings at the institutional level. The resources I describe below are not intended to comprise a comprehensive list; rather, they provide a starting place.
ORGANIZATIONS, PUBLICATIONS, AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

I will focus here on three entities that have been particularly effective in recent years in promoting the teaching of Asian studies at the undergraduate level. First, the Association of Asian Studies (AAS, <http://www.aasianst.org>), the largest academic organization in the U.S. focused on Asian studies, promotes K-undergraduate education through its publication *Education about Asia* (EAA). EAA is published three times a year and is often thematically organized (see, for example, essays Sharma in the 2001 issue on Indic teaching Indic traditions; Shultz in the 2002 issue on teaching about the Korean War; and Tong and Bagshaw in the 2002 issue on teaching about Asia through film). Each issue contains pedagogically oriented articles as well as resource lists, book reviews, and media reviews. EAA also occasionally provides publication opportunities for talented undergraduates, e.g. Redman’s essay in 2002. Especially for university faculty who are new to teaching about Asia, the publication is an indispensable starting place for both designing courses and building a general store of knowledge about Asia. The AAS website’s “links and resources” menu includes links to other Asian studies organizations (most of which have their own publications), to study programs, and to grants and fellowships. The “conferences” menu provides links to AAS’s regional conferences as well as the national conference. The AAS’s main academic publication, *The Journal of Asian Studies* (JAS) is also an excellent source of articles for honors syllabi.

The second organization, established in 1990, is the Asian Studies Development Program (ASDP, <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/education/asian-studies-development-program/>, located at the East-West Center, a Title VI National Resource Center on the campus of the University of Hawaii Manoa. Through workshops it sponsors at the East-West Center, through study tours to Asia, and through co-sponsored workshops at ASDP Regional Centers (of which there are nineteen), ASDP is tasked with enhancing Asian studies instruction at two-year and four-year colleges and universities. Attendance at ASDP’s Hawaii workshops is competitive, with various levels of stipends and housing provided, but organizers are very interested in building new relationships with colleges (including community colleges) and universities that are in the process of building institutional knowledge about Asia. ASDP’s annual conference and newsletter also provide outlets and information for faculty new to Asian studies. Unlike the AAS conferences, which are geared toward multidisciplinary Asian studies research, the ASDP conference provides ample opportunities to discuss pedagogy.

In addition to the national conference, ASDP’s regional centers often hold their own symposia geared toward enhancing undergraduate teaching about Asia. My university, for example, held a symposium last year on “Asian Environments,” focusing on environmental issues in China, South Asia, and Japan. The nineteen regional centers around the country provide a wide
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selection of symposia throughout the year that attract experts from the East-West Center and from other centers of Asian studies scholarship around the country.

Finally, and very briefly, the University of Texas at Austin’s South Asia Institute, while generally geared toward academic exchange at the graduate level and above, also runs a series of workshops for enhancing the study of South Asia at the undergraduate level; like the ASDP workshops, they are competitive and provide limited stipends, and, like the ASDP regional center workshops, they are geared toward the non-expert interested in designing a new course with South Asia content or adding to an existing course.

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

In the last several years, the University of Central Arkansas has benefited from a series of successful grant and program proposals. Under the guidance of Raymond Frontain, UCA became a regional ASDP center in the late 1990s. Particularly interested in enhancing the study of South Asia at UCA, Frontain attended ASDP summer seminars with this emphasis in Hawaii and at UT Austin, subsequently designing several courses with Asian studies content. An outgrowth of Frontain’s efforts was the establishment of an Asian studies minor at UCA under the direction of religious studies professor James Dietrich (currently under the direction of Japan historian David Neilson).

Then, in 2007, Hui Wu in the UCA Department of Writing and Rhetoric wrote two successful Asia-related grants. The first was a two-year U.S. Department of Education Title VI Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language Program (UISFL) grant to promote the teaching of Chinese language and area studies at the university. The grant funded ten faculty stipends for new course development, travel expenses for two faculty members each summer to lead a language immersion trip in Shanghai, visits by Chinese performing arts troupes to UCA’s campus, and travel expenses for co-directors to attend an annual UISFL conference. The grant provided programmatic support for a newly hired tenure-track faculty member in Chinese language instruction, supported the existing minor through course development, and brought an interdisciplinary group of faculty members together around the same table to discuss the development of Asian studies on the campus. Several of these faculty members, in turn, helped organize the ASDP symposium on Asia and the environment.

Wu also wrote a successful grant to the Chinese government for the establishment of a Confucius Institute (CI) on UCA’s campus. Funded by the Chinese government office responsible for training Chinese language teachers, several hundred Confucius Institutes have sprouted up around the world. Although their specific goals and programs differ from institute to institute, all CIs have the shared general mission of promoting the study of Chinese language and
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culture. UCA’s CI, for example, facilitated the brokering of an agreement between the Arkansas Education Department and Hanban to bring Chinese teachers from China to Arkansas to teach at the K-12 level (mainly secondary level). To date, approximately two dozen teachers have been placed in small and large communities around the state.

CIs do have their drawbacks. Application for a CI is complicated, and accepting funding from the Chinese government may not be palatable to some faculty members or institutions. Still, the CI can become the first step in creating a feeder system for Chinese language study at colleges and universities. If one is building an Asian studies program around China (which is not a necessary but certainly a popular choice), then a CI can offer vital support.

Finally, the U.S. Department of Education’s Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad program <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/iegssap/sapfacts.html> provides opportunities for faculty members to travel to Asia for intensive study of arts, humanities, and area studies. These grants are intended to provide study abroad opportunities for faculty with little or no experience in a country or region.

CONCLUSION

In taking a case-study approach to discussing the development of interdisciplinary Asian studies courses in an honors context, my intention has been to emphasize the value of Asian studies courses in rethinking Asia while pointing out some of the obstacles that both the Asian studies expert and non-expert might face in delivering interdisciplinary Asian studies courses to honors students with little or no background in the field. I have also noted a few resources, both for the individual faculty member and for the institution, that can enhance the teaching of Asian studies.

Teaching Asian studies as part of an interdisciplinary honors curriculum provides exciting opportunities for experimentation in course design, for including experiential methods, and for service projects. Perhaps most importantly, however, Asian studies courses in an honors context, like other successful honors courses, can have ramifications beyond the honors program or college in which they sit. Adapted for a general education curriculum or for a departmental elective, honors interdisciplinary Asian studies courses can inspire rethinking of Asia within the broader campus community.

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Understanding and Defining Addiction in an Honors Context

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INTRODUCTION

Exploration and development of identity, autonomy, sexuality, academic functioning, and peer relationships are important age-appropriate tasks of adolescence and emerging adulthood (Baer & Peterson; Cicchetti & Rogosch; Erikson). During college, this developmental stage may manifest as questioning prior beliefs and assumptions and exploring fresh philosophies and behaviors (Schulenberg & Maggs). Many emerging adults try out what they believe are different facets of adult life. Some of the requisite experimentation may include risk-taking behavior, including experimentation with alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana (Baer & Peterson; Shedler & Block; Winters). College provides opportunities to experiment with potentially addictive substances at peer-run social events that often include alcohol and other substances (Schulenberg & Maggs). The combination of a mindset poised for exploration and a developmental period with enhanced opportunity for experimental behavior makes college a unique time to explore the high-risk behaviors that are prevalent within emerging adult communities. While large courses may usher university students through the research about what constitutes addictions, honors programs offer an invaluable resource for exploring more fully these value-laden, high-risk, and timely questions. In small, discussion-based honors classes, emerging adults are able to actively explore their questions, thoughts, and previous conceptions about addiction in a manner that would not be possible in larger classes. The students emerge from my 300-level honors class—titled “Yeah, I Like It, but I’m Not Addicted”: Exploring the Meanings and Consequences of Addiction—with a more thorough understanding of addiction as well as analytical skills that will help them navigate both academic and personal contexts in college.

PROGRAM RATIONALE

SELECTION OF THE COURSE TOPIC

As a clinical psychologist trained in addiction and pediatric health, I continue to be drawn to the parallels between substance use and other types of health-risk behaviors. In conducting clinical interventions for people struggling
with such behaviors as severe overeating or pathological undereating, I continue to notice that the relevant empirically supported treatments (ESTs) for these discrepant behaviors are almost identical. For example, across substance use, obesity, and eating disorder interventions, the ESTs include an identification of the function of the disordered behavior (e.g., “What are the things that you like about drinking?,” “How does drinking benefit you?”), a plan for replacing the disordered behavior with a more benign behavior that serves the same function (e.g., going to a non-drinking social event instead of a bar), and a plan for handling cravings and avoiding urges to engage in the disordered behavior (e.g., “What can you do instead of drinking when you feel you really need a drink?”)

Over time I have found that these clinical parallels highlight a common pattern of behavior that is quite similar across substance use, binge eating/overeating, and eating disorders, all of which I see as addictions. The neuroscience literature has recently come to the same conclusion, suggesting that there are common neural pathways across these three types of addictive behaviors (e.g., Volkow & Wise).

The question of what other behaviors might belong in this paradigm continues to intrigue me. In particular, I have been drawn to the work of Jon Krakauer, who explores the stories of people engaged in a variety of excessive and somewhat fanatic behavior, including a death-defying journey to climb Mount Everest (1999), an excessively focused and extremely intense nomadic journey to an untimely death in Alaska (1997), and the violent behavior of a small segment of a zealous religious group (2004). A key question is how these different behaviors might fit a collaboratively generated definition of addiction.

**COURSE CONTENT**

With the support of the University of New Mexico Honors Program, I therefore designed a course to collectively create, assess, and refine a definition of addiction and then to determine how a variety of extreme behaviors might fit that working definition. Specifically, the goal is to examine conventional addictive behaviors such as substance use, overeating, and undereating, and then to widen the definition of addiction in an open, supportive, curious, and non-judgmental manner. In the course, we explore a handful of potentially contentious behaviors such as obsessive involvement with the military and fundamentalist religions, including their confluence and consequences for events like 9/11. We evaluate whether discrepant behaviors are simply extreme or might be better defined as obsessions and compulsions; we question whether such behaviors are in line with the day-to-day typical behaviors of mainstream American culture or qualify as addictions. Some specific questions we address include: Can people involved in the military come to rely on its structure to the point where they cannot live without it? If so, does such military involvement qualify as addictive? Is involvement in a fundamentalist religious group that has limited and reluctant interactions with outside cultures dangerously in its singular focus? Is it potentially addictive?
The potentially addictive nature of military involvement and fundamentalist religions is unknown to me and to my knowledge is virtually unexplored within the social science literature. The goal for the class is to collaboratively generate and modify a definition of addiction based on readings and discussions throughout the semester and to determine how each behavior might fit the students' collaboratively determined definition of addiction.

While addiction is the explicit focus of the course, implicit goals are to develop and hone students' skills in critical analysis, communication of ideas (orally and in writing), and collaborative work. An ancillary, but important goal is to improve their ability to interpret and process social science research. To meet these ends, the class is conducted in a weekly or biweekly format within the sixteen-week semester. The units of the class (and syllabus) explore a series of human behaviors, e.g., “The way we feel,” “The way we eat,” “The way we look,” “The way we believe,” “The way we behave,” “The way we live,” and “Interactions and outcomes” (see Appendix). The first unit investigates the most basic, or at least the most well-known, addictive behaviors, substance use. Subsequent units explore behaviors that are progressively more distant from the commonly held definition of addiction.

In the first unit, the students generate their impressions of what addiction is and how it can be prevented and treated. We work together to generate an initial working definition of addiction, which is actively maintained by an appointed scribe from the class. Students then examine data from the sciences, social sciences, and epidemiology, and they read literature on each topic, giving them background materials to guide their understanding of each behavioral phenomenon that we explore. We discuss texts and supportive films, using the characters' experiences—fictional as well as nonfictional—to explore and evaluate what these behaviors might look like. I invite the class to wrestle with each behavior in order to modify their definition of addiction at the end of each unit and to determine if each behavior fits their definition. At the end of each unit, I ask the class to generate and explore potentially effective, as well as ideal but implausible, prevention and intervention strategies for each behavior. Whether or not they consider the behavior an addiction, this type of problem solving is a useful skill in cognitive development. Additionally, this component of the class demands creativity and becomes progressively more relevant to contemporary events as the semester continues.

The units of the course flow together in two ways. First, the class maintains a parallel structure for all units: (1) we begin with a working definition of addiction, (2) I present external foundational scientific, epidemiological, and/or current-events material, (3) we discuss the target behavior and the assigned reading, (4) we create an updated and amended definition of addiction, (5) we decide if the behavior fits the created definition, and (6) we explore potential prevention and intervention strategies for the behavior. Second, the progressive nature of the class contributes to the flow. As students gain more experience talking about basic addictions such as substance use, they develop a foundation for the subsequent units.
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from which to creatively explore less conventional behaviors such as fundamentalist religions. By the last unit of the semester, the students proficiently toss around reasons to support and refute the fit of different behaviors within their definition and are able to support their arguments with biology, behavior, economics, and current events.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

SHORT PAPERS

Given my goals to include assignments and activities that support and promote diversity (Hu & Kuh) that have relevant, real world applications (Kuh, 1993) and that promote students' sense of self-efficacy (LaChance et al.), one assignment requires that students seek out Albuquerque area resources for a person struggling with alcohol or substance abuse or dependence (e.g., come up with a list of AA meetings with their times, and locations or create a list of area substance use providers, their cost, and the length of their wait lists). Following this assignment, I use class time to discuss the list of area resources. Very quickly, we discover as a class that there is a paucity of available and affordable resources for people struggling with substance abuse and dependence. The class then generates feasible as well as creative (potentially less tenable) solutions to this public health issue. Throughout this type of activity, I encourage students to use their areas of knowledge. I ask economics majors, for instance, why these resources are so expensive and what would happen if they were affordable. I ask anthropology and sociology majors how resources might vary in different cultures. I ask pre-med students what the greater health ramifications are of not receiving substance use treatment when needed. Similarly, in the overeating unit I invite students to obtain the ingredient list from their favorite fast-food or restaurant menu. I challenge students to identify community differences in, for instance, the prevalence of billboards advertising fast food and to notice differences in the number of fast food restaurants or Whole Foods stores by neighborhood. These assignments lead to compelling class discussions about the individual, public-health, and economic implications of healthy and non-healthy eating habits, and they provide a foundation for exploring how these various factors influence the class definition of addiction. For example, if fast food is the only food available to you, does eating it—potentially to the point of overeating—mean that you are addicted?

I also try to include several guest speakers, including a clinical psychologist to discuss the nature of eating disorders, another clinical psychologist to talk about the appearance and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and a lawyer to talk about the societal implications of extreme human behavior in the final unit of the class. For example, last year we were fortunate to have one of the lawyers for Terry Nichols (from the Oklahoma bombing case) talk about her perspectives on people who go to extremes.
My approach to in-class and small homework assignments is fluid and contingent on the skill level that I see during class activities. For example, if a class appears to have a difficult time finding resources in the community, I have them conduct this activity for each unit. If they appear to have difficulty hearing each other’s perspectives, I require more group work and assignments. If they struggle with writing, I require more short papers.

**Specialist Interview**

Students select a target addictive behavior of their choice, a specialist who has expertise in that area, and a set of questions to ask the specialist; then they write a five-page paper. The paper must contain the questions they posed, the interviewee’s responses, and the students’ interpretation of that information.

**Research Paper**

The research paper, which is the most conventional assignment, offers students an opportunity to learn about scientific research through gathering the necessary scientific papers, to reading the research, and then processing, interpreting, and integrating this information into a research paper. Students are allowed to stay with the same topic they selected for their specialist interview or select a new target behavior. The paper should be a ten-page, double-spaced exploration of their target behavior and driving research question, in 2009 APA style. All students present their findings to the class in a five-minute overview and provide a one-page, double-spaced, bullet-point handout to their peers.

Because many students struggle with writing, I encourage them to have me review rough drafts and questions. I offer feedback on each step and/or draft if students want it. I also provide thorough and detailed feedback on each of their writing assignments, which student report that they get too seldom at this large university. In addition to in-class discussion of grammar, I provide students with writing resources such as *Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg and *On Writing* by Stephen King.

**Collaborative Group Project**

Since collaboration is an essential component of most professions, I have students practice working together on an assignment that gives them an opportunity to be expressive in whatever medium is most comfortable for them. In the collaborative project, students apply their expertise from their major to evaluating an addictive behavior. As a group, they pick a target behavior, come up with a driving question to guide the project (e.g., why crack is more prevalent in one socio-economic group and cocaine in another), and then create a ten-minute presentation of their findings using the expressive format of their choice (e.g., video, mock debate, or diorama). As with research project, all students provide a one-page overview of their findings to their peers.
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This project offers a nice opportunity to end the semester by supporting the students’ sense of self-efficacy. Each student is a unique contributor in his or her area of study. Specifically, I compose groups of three from disparate majors, and each student hands in a signed sheet of paper that details how every student contributed to the group (e.g., John: 20% background lit review, 30% discussion of how to approach and create project, 50% assembling the project; 33% class presentation). I have been pleased with the results. Students have felt invested in the component of the project that they completed and tend to proudly report and display the area where they had the most participation.

PERSPECTIVE OF A TEACHING PROFESSOR
(SARAH W. FELDSTEIN EWING)

Teaching this class is the highlight of my professional year. The students in the UNM Honors Program are smart, hardworking, and thoughtful. They are also gifted in expressing themselves verbally and consequently excel in class discussions.

Through the experience of teaching this class, I have learned several practical as well as professional lessons. I have found that teaching the class twice (rather than once) a week makes a tremendous difference in the tenor and tempo of the class; it increases student participation (after an hour and a half, the ability of students to engage and participate is severely compromised) and level of collaboration (students who see each other more frequently do a better job of working together and being invested in the welfare of the group instead of being solely interested in their own grade and success).

I have also learned that, because each unit includes a text to guide the discussion and because some of the texts are content-intensive, having the class watch a film with parallel subject matter is beneficial. For example, during the overeating unit, we read Eric Schlosser’s Fast Food Nation, which includes a detailed history of the development of the fast food industry, and watch Supersize Me (2004).

A third important practical lesson for me involves the reading list. In the beginning, I used texts from a variety of fields, including the Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book, which details strategies for and stories of people who have struggled with and recovered from alcohol dependence, as well as Lawrence Wright’s award-winning The Looming Tower, which provides a thorough history of key American and Al Qaeda figures as well as socio-economic and cultural events that led to 9/11. I found that students were more able to read deeply and process books that had more human perspectives and stories. Thus, I have replaced the AA Big Book with David Sheff’s Beautiful Boy, a painstaking memoir of a father who struggled with his son’s methamphetamine addiction, and Lawrence Wright’s The Looming Tower with Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood, a graphic memoir of her experience in the Islamic Revolution.
The professional lessons I have learned have shifted my teaching approach in this honors course and beyond. I have found that class discussions are critical, but, if left to their own devices, a few vocal students will monopolize class discussions for the full semester. To curb this pattern, I break the students into groups (with revolving members) and request that the quiet ones be appointed as ambassadors to convey the group perspectives to the class, thus yielding a diverse array of opinions, getting students to work with a variety of different people, and hearing the voices of the shy students.

Second, I have found that healthy debate is essential to exploring a topic thoroughly. Even when all students fall to one side or the other on the question of whether a behavior fits their definition of addiction, I divide the class into smaller groups and assign half of the smaller groups to argue the “pro” side and the other half to argue the “con” side. As the psychologists Miller and Rollnick have suggested, the act of arguing for one side or the other causes students to switch their beliefs and perspectives.

Third, even at a diverse university like UNM, diversity of race, ethnicity, culture, social and economic experiences cannot be guaranteed. In line with studies that have indicated the benefit and import of interactional diversity experiences in college classrooms (Hu & Kuh; Kuh, 1993), I try to develop proxies of such interactions. For example, in the unit on obsessive involvement with the military, I divide the students into groups and provide them each with a famous quotation; the students are required to determine what the other groups’ quotations are without using any type of word-based (written or verbal) communication. (They soon discover that they can draw pictures or pantomime). The goal is to see how different political and cultural influences might cause a culture to focus within itself and to misunderstand or fear other cultures when they do not speak the same language. The tenor of the class during this exercise is interesting; the more collaborative classes figure out ways to work with other groups while less collaborative classes try to compete with other groups. I continue to contemplate ways to improve group collaboration and cohesion.

**PERSPECTIVE OF A PARTICIPATING STUDENT (BEVIN EHN)**

While extremely prevalent in university society, addiction remains relatively unexplored in college curricula. One of the few venues where students can explore this subject at UNM is the honors program—an arena where non-science students can explore scientific topics and where many non-traditional subjects are recognized for their societal relevance. In Dr. Feldstein Ewing’s course on addictions, students like me were given the opportunity to immerse ourselves in a journey toward greater understanding of the psychological, physiological, and environmental factors that characterize addiction.

When a complex topic such as addiction is the primary focus of an honors course, the course structure needs to make the subject accessible to students of
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varying educational backgrounds and personal experiences; to accomplish this, the professor structured the course so that students took an active role in learning through participation, enabling the learning process to revolve around the shared knowledge and experiences of the students as well as the expertise of the instructor. Active participation was additionally beneficial because the class was composed of students with different majors. As a student majoring in journalism and mass communication, I entered the first class having minimal knowledge of addiction and psychology. Instead of viewing such lack of background as an obstacle, Dr. Feldstein Ewing encouraged each of us to make the course material applicable to our specific interests by examining addiction within the context of our field of study. For example, when investigating food addiction for my research paper, I used my knowledge of advertising and mass communication to describe the role of the advertising industry in the rapid growth of the fast food industry since the 1980s. Channeling my interests into the study of addiction made the discussions, texts, and assignments have greater personal relevance.

Throughout the semester, assigned texts reinforced the focus of each unit by showing the effects of addiction through the viewpoints of fictional and non-fictional characters. When I was deciding which honors course to take, the reading list inspired me to pursue Dr. Feldstein Ewing’s course among the dozens of honors course offerings. While a text such as the AA *The Big Book* was not surprising to see on the list, I was intrigued when I noted the unexpected titles of *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* by Lawrence Wright and Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven*, the latter of which details the history of the Fundamental Latter Day Saints and the story of two brothers affiliated with this religion. I was curious about required readings on military involvement and fundamentalist religions that turned out to be the focus of the course, in which we evaluated the conventional definitions of addiction as a basis for determining the relevance of unconventional addictive behaviors.

The required films enabled us to experience a visual representation of each addiction topic. For example, after our unconventional unit on religion as an addiction, we watched the documentary *Jesus Camp* (2007), which follows a summer camp for Evangelical youth. Similarly, after our unit on the military, we watched *Jarhead* (2006), based upon Anthony Swofford’s experience as a sniper in the Gulf War. The combination of documentaries and fictional films enabled us to see both factual and dramatic interpretations of each addiction, inspiring debate and discussion about the origin and potential prevention strategies for each addiction and preparing us for our course assignments.

The most important and challenging assignment of the semester was determining the definition of addiction. Although we learned various definitions of addiction through our initial readings and class sessions, we were assigned—as a class—to create an original definition that would guide our assessment of addictive behaviors for the remainder of the semester. In this democratic
process, my classmates and I selected various criteria for what we believed should define an addiction (i.e., addiction requires a loss of control over one’s actions and involves behavior that is harmful to oneself and others). Creating and modifying definitions of addiction throughout the course was beneficial in recognizing the differences between addictions, compulsions, and extreme behaviors.

The class definition of addiction additionally guided our selection of research topics. Dr. Feldstein Ewing adopted an accommodating, yet structured, format for assignments wherein we were given the freedom to choose the area of addiction that interested each of us while maintaining high standards of formatting and accuracy in the execution of the assignments. The first substantial assignment was to interview a specialist in the addictive behavior of our choice and use this interview to write a report on the prevalence of the addiction. Dr. Feldstein Ewing challenged us in each of our following assignments, including a research paper and a collaborative group research project. Of all of the assignments I completed during my time at the UNM, the research paper was one of the most technical, in-depth projects I conducted. Research techniques and technical writing skills were a major focus throughout the semester, and writing the research paper enabled me to improve my writing and research abilities while researching a topic that truly interested me. The result was that I gained lasting knowledge and applicable research techniques.

This course offered several more benefits, the most significant of which was that it produced a meaningful change in my own attitudes and beliefs. The course material and subject matter were presented in such a way that I was learning about the reality of addiction and discovering ways to pursue and maintain healthy lifestyle choices. Specifically, reading Schlosser’s *Fast Food Nation* changed my attitudes about behaviors toward food and addiction.

As with any course, some areas could have benefitted from improvement. I would have liked to delve more deeply into topics that were only briefly mentioned during class discussions such as the Internet, sexual activity, extreme physical workouts, and gaming. Several of the course readings were too time-consuming, although Dr. Feldstein Ewing’s decision to replace Wright’s *The Looming Tower* (the most technical, detail-oriented book on our reading list) with a more accessible book will make the reading list more feasible.

Intriguing, informative, and relevant courses such as Dr. Feldstein Ewing’s encourage students who are not familiar with the social and behavioral sciences to learn about topics as relevant and meaningful as addiction—a subject all-too-frequently overlooked for its significance in the university setting and modern-day society.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Several pedagogical lessons have emerged for me from teaching this honors course—lessons that influence how I teach all of my classes. In terms of best practices for teaching, a course design that requires active student participation
yields significantly more interested and engaged students. Not only is the class more interesting to the students but also to the instructor. Paralleling the work of Kuh regarding the importance of having students engaged in terms of academic and broader college success (Kuh, Hu, & Vesper), I have found that having students move around throughout a class period (e.g., get up to move into group discussions, write their perspectives on the board, and engage in interactive class activities) keeps students involved. Bevin Ehn’s observations confirm the research by Kuh (1993) that shows classroom experiences to be the primary source of how students change during college; thus, I use the opportunity in this honors course (as well as other courses) to ensure that students have a sense of the real-world application of the topics studied in class. Finally, I have learned the importance of keeping students active and engaged by attending to their feedback, both provided (through course evaluations) and behavioral (are they slumped in their seats? watching the clock? texting under the table? smiling? participating? interacting with their peers?). Using this information, I will continue to draw on lessons from this honors course to adapt and modify my approach to classroom teaching both in and outside of the University of New Mexico University Honors Program.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES


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What is addiction? Together, we will critically evaluate definitions of addiction (and relevant behaviors, and life choices), and determine what addiction means to us. My hope is that through this class, we will rid ourselves of conventional definitions, and come up with thoughtful, unanticipated, and original ideas about addiction.

In addition, in this class we will figure out how addiction affects people on an individual level (in terms of biology, physiology, day to day interactions), all the way to how it affects our society on a greater level (in terms of the environment, national spending, international relations).

Together, we’ll also evaluate the prevention and intervention approaches that exist for different addictions, and how effective they are in preventing or intervening with addictive behaviors.

This is a collaborative, interactive class that requires critical analysis and thoughtful contributions. I anticipate fantastic thoughts and debate.

Here is what is required for the class:

Required Reading:

Required Films (not necessary to purchase):
1. Crazy Heart (2009)
Class Requirements and Related Grading:
1. Contributions to class seminars (25%)
2. One interview of a specialist on the addictive behavior of the student’s choice (25%)
3. One research-based presentation (25%)
4. One interdisciplinary group project (25%)

Expectations:
What I will expect from you
• Appropriate and professional conduct
• Thoughtful, active, class participation
  – If you’re shy, come see me and we’ll figure out strategies to help you feel more comfortable participating in class.

What you should expect from this class
• You will gain practice and experience in:
  – Communicating your ideas verbally and in writing
  – Sharpening your critical thinking skills
  – Analyzing and communicating research findings
  – Collaborative working skills

What you can expect from me
• Fairness
• Academic rigor
• Accessibility—you can always see me with questions or concerns.

Cell phone policy
Absolutely no cell phones (texting or answering) permitted except in predetermined emergencies (to be discussed with me beforehand). Penalty for cell phone use is loss of participation credit.

Absence policy
No more than 2 unexcused absences without penalty in participation credit.

Our Semester:
Act 1: What is addiction?
Act 2: What are the consequences of addiction?
Act 3: How does addiction influence personal through global events?
Act 4: What are the individual through public policy prevention and intervention strategies that exist? How effective are they?
Act 5: Where can we go from here? Steps for the future.
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Week by week (example):

1/20: Orientation
  • What is addiction?
  • Thinking about addiction from micro through macro levels

1/27–2/3: The way we feel
  Reading: Beautiful Boy
  1/27: xi–43
  * Film: Crazy Heart
  2/3: 44–103, 561–566

2/10–2/17: The way we eat
  Reading: Fast Food Nation
  2/10: 1–10, 18–57, 59–88, 111–131
  * Film: Super Size Me
  2/17: 132–190, 192–252

2/24: Talk with specialists due; presentation of findings in class

2/24–3/3: The way we look
  Reading: Wasted
  2/24: 1–144
  * Film: Thin
  3/3: 145–289 *Guest speaker

3/10–3/24: The way we believe
  Reading: Banner of Heaven
  3/10: prologue–226
  * Film: Jesus Camp
  3/17: No Class—Spring Break
  3/24: 227–341

3/31: Research presentations due; presentations of findings in class

4/7–4/14 The way we behave
  Reading: The Last True Story
  4/7: 1–146 *Guest speaker

*Film: Jarhead
  4/14: 147–220
  * Be sure to watch Into the Wild in preparation for 4/21 discussion
4/21: The way that we live:
   Discussion of Into the Wild
4/28–5/5: Interaction and outcomes
   Reading: Persepolis
   4/28: 38–164; *Guest speaker
*Film: American History X
   5/5: 165—407
5/5: Presentation of interdisciplinary projects
Team Teaching on a Shoestring Budget

JIM FORD AND LAURA GRAY
ROGERS STATE UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Team teaching is an established pedagogical practice, particularly in honors education. Many institutions have long traditions of combining the gifts of multiple faculty in one honors course. For schools that lack such a tradition, however, securing the institutional resources to support team teaching can be a daunting obstacle. If team teaching is really a part of “The New Model Education,” as Gary Bell argues (57), can it be done on a shoestring budget? The Rogers State University Honors Program began in the fall of 2005 with an extremely tight budget and no money for compensating faculty. Despite this challenge, we have experimented with a number of ways to implement team and collaborative teaching in honors courses. This essay will highlight the advantages and disadvantages of five different models for team teaching, none of which involves significant financial expense.

BACKGROUND

We decided to team teach because of our shared academic values and intellectual passions. Our discussions of literature, art, and philosophy enhanced our individual experiences, and we came to recognize the benefit of a shared classroom. Laura is Associate Professor of English at Rogers State University while Jim is Founding Director of the Honors Program as well as Associate Professor for Philosophy and Religious Studies. Each of us has also team taught with other professors and found those experiences rewarding as well.

Such collaboration is not without its obstacles. Questions of authority and credibility can be intertwined with preconceived ideas of gender and discipline in the classroom. Some students, especially incoming freshmen, perceive Jim’s additional role as director (the person ultimately in control of their scholarships) differently than Laura’s role as classroom professor. Consequently, some students consider Jim more powerful, at times more important, and at other times more threatening. Further, few students have experience in the academic areas of philosophy and religion prior to college while all have studied English for years (for better and worse). We have found that emphasizing our equal positions in the classroom and sharing in all class discussions and presentations, regardless of perceived academic area, alleviates some of these inherent
complications. Recognizing and dealing with student perceptions are essential for the successful team-teaching experience.

The value of team teaching is immense. Discussions of successful team-teaching experiences are common in the honors literature. John Zubizarreta recounts that, at the 2007 Teaching and Learning Fishbowl, students cited team-taught courses as one of their best learning experiences (114), a perception borne out by subsequent fishbowls as well. Kateryna Schray describes an intriguing bird-watching course that shows how multiple professors can facilitate the interdisciplinary nature of honors education. In such accounts, however, the funding for multiple faculty almost seems taken for granted. For instance, a group of faculty at Drake University teach “Paths to Knowledge,” an interdisciplinary course in which not only do all faculty members “receive a full course credit” but they also enjoy a “paid faculty summer workshop to prepare” (Vitha et al. 141). Such a situation is ideal, but the reality for many programs is that, in times of scarce resources, paying two or more faculty for teaching one course can be difficult to justify.

**FIVE MODELS OF TEAM TEACHING**

We have adopted five alternatives to full compensation, each of which is briefly described below, then discussed more fully, and finally summarized in the Appendix. The first model is the unpaid overload: one professor receives full credit for the course while a second donates his/her time to the course even though both are teaching equally. The second model is an extended series of guest lectures; while this model differs from full team teaching since one professor is always present and the other professors make one-time appearances, it can still be a worthwhile approach to collaboration. These first and second models are well-known approaches in use by many honors programs today. The third model is the “Shared Assignments” approach, which enables two or more faculty to share significant assignments between two courses and to team teach on selected readings, assignments, and topics, fully participating in each other’s classes on a limited basis. The fourth model (what we call “The Block Course”) is full team teaching, with two professors collaborating on teaching two courses in one combined format; each professor receives credit for teaching one class, but the two courses are integrated into one new block course. Finally, in the “Joint Meetings” model two or three courses meet together at regular intervals to discuss shared readings; by scheduling monthly or biweekly joint meetings, faculty create regular spaces for team teaching and student interaction across classes, enabling focused, specific team teaching without asking faculty to donate a full semester’s time. All five of these models are ways to implement team teaching when the financial resources for fully compensating faculty are unavailable, and they can serve as intermediate steps toward an ideal system.
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THE UNPAID OVERLOAD

The traditional way to deal with financial constrictions is for one or more faculty to teach an unpaid overload. By donating their time for the full semester, faculty members who believe in team teaching can pioneer the practice at their institution. In *Beginning in Honors: A Handbook*, Samuel Schuman objects that “obviously, this situation should be avoided like the plague” (42). His reservations are understandable. Faculty who generously volunteer their time once may be expected or even required to do so again in the future. Unfortunately, this may be the only way to sustain some team-taught courses. Such is the case for Women in the Literary and Visual Arts, an interdisciplinary non-honors course at Rogers State. Together with Gary Moeller, the head of the Department of Fine Arts, Laura has taught this course since 2004. The first few times they alternated who was compensated and who donated their time; the past several years Laura has been paid to teach the course while Gary (as a department head with an already full teaching load) has volunteered.

From the beginning, Gary and Laura decided that both professors would participate fully in all classes, discussions, and projects. The course is a comparative study of women artists, both visual and literary. Gary grades the weekly visual analyses and Laura the weekly literary summaries while all major projects and final grading are done collaboratively. Having now taught the class five times, both professors are comfortable with the materials from both disciplines. Either one could easily teach the course alone and handle the content fully. Crucial to the course’s success, however, is the collaborative environment and presentation that team teaching facilitates.

Such a system has drawbacks, however. Unaccustomed to such a model, students often are concerned about who is “in charge” in the class because only one professor’s name is on the schedule and on their transcript. Gary and Laura address these concerns directly and early, then emphasizing their joint roles throughout the term. While specializations and fields are clear, both professors take part in all discussions, not just discussions within their own disciplines. The greatest obstacle, of course, is the burden to the unpaid faculty member, who must still carry a full teaching/administrative load. The course was first created with the idea that it would be a special topics course taught every two to three years, but now it is a required course for one major and one minor and has to be taught yearly. Figuring out how to sustain such a long-term commitment to team teaching with an unpaid overload remains a challenge since the teaching and service workload at an institution such as RSU is already quite demanding.

This institutionalization of the course highlights the danger of the unpaid overload, which can become an expected part of the professor’s schedule. With the advent of the honors program in 2005, Jim (as director) looked for ways to integrate team teaching without requiring one faculty member to donate a semester’s worth of teaching.

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GUEST LECTURES

The second model for team teaching at Rogers State is incorporation of guest lectures. While guest lectures are a common enough practice, having a different professor lecture every week is more unusual. In the spring 2007 Honors Humanities II course, a total of fifteen other faculty members lectured in their area of expertise. The course met twice weekly for seventy-five minutes. The first session of each week saw a different professor teach on a chosen area of their favorite subject. A music history professor lectured on the history of rock and roll, a Spanish professor on the novels of Garcia Marquez, and a theatre scholar on the performance conventions of Shakespeare’s time as background to understanding Hamlet. The second session of each week, the professor of record (Jim) led a discussion of the week’s materials. The challenge with this model was integrating the various topics. While some of the lectures were excellent, faculty frequently tried to cover way too much material for the time available. The temptation to say everything that could be said (and possibly to make a favorable impression on some of the university’s best students) often proved overwhelming.

The students in the course were quite positive about the experience, but as professor I often felt that the experiment was unsuccessful. One goal of the course was to expose honors freshmen and sophomores to a variety of disciplines and professors, to give them a sense of the myriad possibilities at the university. In that respect, the course was successful, but it was less successful in cultivating the kind of discussion, engagement, and critical thinking that honors courses normally inspire. While the guest lecture model can be a fascinating experience, synthesizing the views and expertise of fifteen other faculty members is difficult, and, although the course drew on the talents of many different teachers, it was not really a team-teaching experience as much as a succession of individual teachers contributing to the whole. For the method to work, the honors director or course professor needs to make clear to every professor the goals and rationale of the course and to plan carefully with all of them how their particular contribution will fit into the overall course.

SHARED ASSIGNMENTS

As we discussed our previous experiences with team teaching, we both knew that we wanted to do more with honors. In the spring of 2008, we decided to link our honors general education courses by sharing major assignments (a third model). Laura taught Honors Composition II while Jim taught Honors Humanities I. Students in both courses read Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, and they wrote their major paper in Composition II about those texts. Each professor made several appearances in the other’s classroom, participating in joint discussions. Two shorter papers for Humanities I went through a draft, peer review, and revision process in Composition II. The idea was to enable team teaching in the two courses without either professor having to donate a full semester to it.
This model had several advantages. The students’ papers were much stronger than usual, showing a depth of critical thinking and a quality of writing uncommon for freshmen (even honors freshmen). Many of the students commented on how much they enjoyed the experience. The shared assignments made clear to them how essential writing is for all students and showed them that “writing across the disciplines” is more than a slogan. The linked courses also enabled us as professors to assign longer and more challenging readings than is typical for these courses. Students in Humanities I might normally read one of Homer’s texts and selections from the other while students in Composition II typically would not read Homer at all.

The one big mistake we made was allowing a student to enroll in only one of the two linked courses. All students had been advised that they had to enroll in both courses, but, because no special designation was made in the official class schedule, it was difficult to refuse this student’s demands to enroll in the composition course. While she said all the right things before the semester started, she was increasingly resistant to the heavy workload as the semester wore on. Her complaints became a real drain on the composition course in the second half of the semester. Especially in a course that is explicitly experimental, one negative student can have severe consequences for the entire class.

THE BLOCK COURSE

Having learned our lesson, we made the requirements as explicit as possible for the next iteration of linked courses. For spring 2009, we taught an extended block course (the fourth model). Laura was the professor of record for Honors Composition II, Jim was the professor for Honors Humanities II, but both professors (and all students) met for two hours three times a week. Both professors were fully involved in the course from planning stage to daily activities. We worked to integrate the course activities in order to avoid having separate “humanities time” and “composition time.” The key to the block course is making it truly a hybrid of the two separate classes rather than just two courses that share a meeting time.

The block course was an incredibly rewarding experience for faculty and students alike. At its best, it was the kind of teaching experience one dreams about—students fully engaged, discussions exciting and unpredictable, a truly challenging course. The extended course session meant that topics could be fully covered. For instance, Frankenstein is a required text in all Comp II courses. Teaching this novel within the context of a humanities course rather than a stand-alone composition course, however, allowed us to connect the novel to other Romantic art, music, and poetry. While some attempt is made to contextualize Shelley’s work in traditional composition classrooms, the students lack the time, ability, and perspective to engage fully in the ways we were afforded by the block course. The longer sessions also allowed for more creative activities, like competitive sonnet writing and academic bowls in which teams competed in painting recognition, and we were also able to tour a local museum.
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At the same time, the course was a bit of an endurance test. On an off-day, the two hours could really drag, particularly on days that students had tests or major assignments in their other classes. Sometimes the composition side of the course could seem neglected. Students did a tremendous amount of reading and writing, but they should have spent more time reflecting on their work and on the writing process in general. The normal practice in composition of producing multiple drafts, peer reviews, and revisions were all but lost to in-depth discussion and creative pursuits. Faculty members teaching a block course have to struggle to make the writing and revising process as explicit as possible and to emphasize the importance of these tasks.

This model presents the greatest benefits, but also the biggest challenges. Once again, one difficult student presented special problems for the team-taught course. While all students knew what was expected of them before they began the semester, as a captive population they did not have much choice. One student made it plain that this kind of challenge was not what he wanted out of honors. He withdrew from the two courses, from the honors program, and ultimately from the university. In some ways the more intensive environment of the block course accelerated the normal winnowing process of honors.

Another challenge is that, in effect, each professor was again teaching an overload. The workload was more than teaching an additional class because each of us had to master subjects outside our specialty. However, the rewards of the block course made it easier to do that extra work so that it did not feel like an overload. The block-course model would not be sustainable for the same faculty over a long period of time, but as an occasional experiment it is quite worthwhile.

JOINT MEETINGS

The fifth and final model for collaborative teaching is to hold joint meetings with our required interdisciplinary honors seminars. Each fall, one seminar is offered for each year’s class (freshman, sophomore, and junior). The professor teaching the seminar determines the course’s theme, assignments, and reading schedule. Once a month in the fall semesters of 2009 and 2010, all three seminars met together (approximately fifty students in all and three professors) while at least once more each month the freshmen and juniors met together. All three professors agreed on the monthly meetings (the final Thursday of each month). Laura taught the Junior Honors Seminar, Jim taught the Freshman Honors Seminar, and we both agreed to an additional joint meeting each month. In every case the students read common texts that were assigned with the joint sessions in mind. In one session the students were divided into teams, each of which was given a different set of essays on honors education (many of them drawn from HIP and JNCHC). The ensuing seminar saw the students critically reflecting on honors in their program, their goals for college, and the nature of education in general.
In many ways the joint meetings have turned out to be the most beneficial model, the one that we would most recommend to other honors programs. This model generated some of the engagement of the block course without faculty having to teach a semester’s unpaid overload. It provided a great opportunity for the freshmen to get to know the older students. More importantly, it let the juniors model good discussion practices for the freshmen. While seniors can often be focused on capstone projects and post-graduation plans, in our experience juniors are usually more willing to devote their time to this sort of experimental course. The juniors were eager to show the freshmen (in the words of one junior) “what honors is all about.” By the time they are juniors, students have seen successes and failures and have gained wisdom and perspective; they are also practiced in group discussions and creative thinking, hallmarks of such sessions. Most striking, however, is the appreciation they have gained for their experiences within their honors courses. As they move into their major classes, which seldom are honors, they comment on the disappointing lack of critical engagement by other students. Most show a wistful maturity and appreciation for the opportunities that have come to them through the honors program and share this with the freshmen. Late in the semester, the students worked together in teams drawn from all three classes (freshman, sophomore, and junior) so that their collaborative learning paralleled our collaborative teaching.

While we will continue to experiment with each of the five models in honors general education courses, the joint sessions of the annual honors seminars have become a permanent feature of our honors program. This model is easiest to use when the honors director is able to schedule multiple courses at the same time and has access to adequate facilities for a large group. We used the auditorium our first two years because all of the larger classroom spaces were unavailable. While non-traditional classroom spaces present challenges, they help students make a greater effort to participate. This kind of joint session can also be conducted outside of normal class hours if programs are not able to schedule the courses concurrently, but that option presents its own problems for scheduling. A monthly film series or book club presents similar opportunities if holding joint sessions in the classroom proves unworkable. For the true team-teaching experience, however, bringing separate classes together at regular intervals works best.

CONCLUSION

Having two or more professors from different disciplines on a teaching team reinforces the interdisciplinary nature of honors education. Multiple professors almost always produce multiple perspectives, enhancing the discussion and ensuring an ongoing conversation. Faculty members working together teach by example, modeling the sort of discussion, listening, and critical response practices that are at the heart of a great seminar. The ideal situation is full compensation for every faculty member, but that ideal is not always
possible. The five models we have described provide possibilities for implementing team teaching when funding is simply not available. Successful experiments with such models might provide a basis for establishing more funding; at least, that is our hope at Rogers State.

REFERENCES


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### APPENDIX

#### FIVE MODELS FOR TEAM TEACHING ON A SHOESTRING BUDGET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid Overload</td>
<td>One professor is paid for teaching the course while additional faculty members do not receive credit toward their teaching load. One of the more common mechanisms for team teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Lectures</td>
<td>One professor teaches the course, and numerous others give one-time lectures. Not full team teaching, but worthwhile as an intermediate step.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Assignments</td>
<td>Two courses that coordinate major (and some minor) assignments. Substantial readings are discussed in both classes with both professors participating. One term paper is begun, revised, and peer-reviewed in a composition class, for instance, for final submission in humanities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Block Course</td>
<td>Two courses that meet together every time as a two-hour block course three times a week. Both faculty members participate fully in all sessions and activities, and both grade every assignment. Ideally, all course materials and activities are fully integrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Meetings</td>
<td>Two (or more) courses meet together at regularly scheduled intervals. For instance, a junior honors seminar and a freshman honors seminar meet together twice each month to discuss common readings, with the two faculty facilitating, and once a month the two courses are joined by a sophomore honors seminar, with all three faculty participating.</td>
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On Mentor Programs
Beyond Formulas: A Collaboration between Liberal Arts Honors Underclassmen and Senior Math Majors

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

“Congratulations! Sony Pictures producers have hired you as a scientific consultant to assist them in producing a remake of the classic film Gone With The Seabreeze, which chronicles the founding of the Westchester campus of Loyola University in 1929. The original film features shots of various old buildings that can still be found across campus today. The producers wish to recreate these shots, but need to know where to position the camera, which they have tasked you with finding.”

Thus began the month-long, collaborative project at Loyola Marymount University between the honors underclassmen in HNRS 140, On Motion and Mechanics, taught by Alissa S. Crans, and the senior applied mathematics majors in MATH 495, Mathematical Modeling, taught by Robert Rovetti. During a period of four weeks, six teams of freshman and sophomore liberal arts honors students, each led by a senior math major, set out to reconstruct an old photograph using a mathematical technique based on straightforward geometry. Along the way they would run into inaccessible landscapes, blocked views, and busy schedules, but ultimately they emerged with both a finished product and a clearer understanding of what it means to apply a theoretical method to a real-world problem. We begin by describing the courses and the assigned project itself, and then we reflect on the pedagogical goals of the project and various observations made by both students and instructors.

DESCRIPTION OF COURSES

On Motion and Mechanics (HNRS 140) offers freshman and sophomore honors students outside of LMU’s Seaver College of Science and Engineering the opportunity to experience the methods, practices, and techniques common to science, mathematics, and engineering disciplines. While the name of the course does not change, the content each year depends entirely on the instructor. In the past few years, this course has been taught by faculty members in the
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fields of engineering and natural science who focused on comparing and contrasting scientific and engineering methods and then climate change and environmental issues.

This past fall, however, the course was structured around the dual questions “What is mathematics?” and “What do mathematicians do?” Throughout the semester we discussed questions such as “What does it mean to perform research in mathematics? Is mathematics created or discovered? Where, and by whom, is mathematics used and practiced?” and “How is mathematics similar to and different from the humanities, sciences, and engineering?” Our reading list was extensive and included Steven Strogatz’s “Elements of Math” column from the New York Times website, How Mathematicians Think by William Byers, biographies of mathematicians from the undergraduate mathematics journal Math Horizons (published by the Mathematical Association of America), essays from Campbell and Higgins' Mathematics: People, Problems, Results, entries on the website weusemath.org, and A Mathematician's Apology, by G. H. Hardy. We also watched video presentations by mathematical speakers on the website TED.com and attended the Einstein Public Lecture in Mathematics given by Fields Medalist Terrance Tao at UCLA.

In addition to the project described in this paper, the students completed group projects on graph complexity, voting paradoxes, and statistics. The major assignment for the course consisted of a paper about a mathematical topic together with an in-class presentation. Topics included the Monty Hall Problem, knot theory, game theory, Lewis Carroll logic problems, the golden ratio, check digits, and infinity, among others.

In contrast, Mathematical Modeling (MATH 495) is a course designed specifically for students in the College of Science and Engineering. It provides senior applied mathematics majors with a capstone experience through activities that bring together the material and skills they have acquired during their undergraduate training. Students are exposed to classic problems in modeling and are encouraged to use a variety of techniques, both analytical and computational, to solve them. During fall 2010, particular focus was placed on modeling as an interpretive process, in which one begins with a verbal statement of a real-world problem, narrows the scope of the problem to a realistic size by creating a list of assumptions and needed facts, and then proceeds to cast the problem within a mathematical framework that leads to a formal solution (either exact or approximate). Consistent with our department-wide learning outcomes, the course heavily emphasizes writing as a central means of communicating the students’ learning and discovery. In the previous year, students in this course were also asked to read and comment on essays by writers such as Douglas Hofstadter, Isaac Asimov, and Stanislaw Lem on topics related to the creative process in science and mathematics. The course ends with a significant research paper in which students compare and contrast multiple approaches to modeling a topic of their choosing.
DESCRIPTION OF CORE PROJECT CONCEPT

For the core task of the project, we gave each team an old picture of one of several buildings that still stand on the campus of LMU and asked them to (1) identify the building, (2) physically measure (or estimate) various lengths on the building and on the photograph, (3) use the provided formulas to calculate the location of the photographer, and (4) with a camera reproduce the original photo from that location. This project was based on the method described by Byers and Henle in their article “Where the Camera Was.” The main result of their method is given as a single mathematical proposition:

**Proposition:** If a picture of a rectangular solid taken by a vertically-held pinhole camera has measurements (on the photograph) of \( a, b, c, d, \) and \( e \) (Figure 1A), then the camera was positioned a distance \( L \) to the left of point \( B \) (in the direction from \( C \) to \( B \)) and a distance \( F \) in front of point \( B \) (in the direction from \( A \) to \( B \)), where \( BC \) and \( AB \) are measured lengths from the actual building, and

\[
L = \left( \frac{de}{d(b-c)+e(b-a)} \right) BC
\]

\[
F = \left( \frac{ae}{d(b-c)+e(b-a)} \right) AB
\]

The lowercase italicized letters represent lengths as measured on the photograph itself (using a hand-held ruler) while the uppercase bold letters represent locations on the building and the quantities \( BC \) and \( AB \) represent actual lengths of the building itself (measured using, for instance, a long tape measure).

**Figure 1A**

[Diagram of an idealized rectangular prism with three points A, B, and C, and five lengths a through e.]

**Figure 1B**

[Diagram of a student-generated prism superimposed onto a photograph of St. Robert's Hall. Note that the prism does not necessarily cover the entire building or have the same shape as the idealized prism in Figure 1A. Lengths \( AB \) and \( BC \) must be measured (or estimated) on the building itself while lengths a through e are measured on the photograph.]
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In order to successfully solve the problem, each team needed to:

1. Draw an appropriate rectangular prism on their photo, as shown in Figure 1B;
2. Measure the lengths \( a, b, c, d, \) and \( e \) on their photograph;
3. Locate the points \( A, B, \) and \( C \) on the actual building and determine (using a method of their choosing) the on-site lengths of \( AB \) and \( BC; \)
4. Compute the quantities \( L \) and \( F; \) and
5. Find the location of the photographer by moving distance \( L \) to the left of \( B \) in the direction from \( C \) to \( B, \) and distance \( L \) in front of point \( B \) in the direction from \( A \) to \( B. \)

The proof of the proposition relies on a multi-step geometric argument involving comparisons of similar triangles and principles of projective geometry (e.g., vanishing points and horizon lines), the details of which can be found in the original article (Byers and Henle 255). Both the method and its proof were discussed prior to the beginning of the project with the senior math majors, who were later asked to explain the method to their teams.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT PROCESS**

We formed six teams, each consisting of two or three honors students and one senior math major as the team leader. Enough honors students from the School of Film and Television were enrolled so that we could allocate one to each team. Each team was given a unique photo of an LMU building, chosen from the LMU Hannon Library Digital Collection, including Sacred Heart Chapel, St. Robert’s Hall, Xavier Hall, and a building from the old Loyola College, now Loyola High School (about 15 miles from LMU). After an initial orientation meeting in which the classes were introduced to each other and the teams were formed, the students were given approximately four weeks to analyze their original photo, reproduce the photo, create their multimedia presentation, and write their report.

**MEASUREMENTS AND CALCULATIONS**

Comprising the “meat” of the assignment, the process of measurement and calculation required students to take measurements from both the photograph and the building and then use the formulas to calculate a resulting location of the original photographer (and where they would stand to reconstruct the photo). Although the method is simple in theory, many groups encountered various challenges along the way, including inaccessible building areas, blocked views, and variability caused by the imprecision of their method of measurement. We reminded the teams that real-world problems rarely work out as nicely as the familiar “textbook problems” and that problem solving requires creativity and independent thought. As an example, one group found they were unable to physically measure their building as newer buildings had
been subsequently erected around it during the intervening years; their solution was to use Google Earth to access an overhead satellite photo of the building and estimate the dimensions of their building using other known objects in the satellite photo.

**MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATION**

In order for the students to demonstrate their success, the assignment asked them to use a digital photo-editing platform to create a visual comparison of the original and reconstructed photos. Under the guidance of Glenn Gebhard from the School of Film and Television, the class met in LMU’s Film Editing Lab to use the software **Final Cut Pro** and produce a twenty-second “cinematic dissolve” from the original photograph to the reproduction. The resulting movies enabled all of us to clearly gauge the accuracy of their measurements, calculations, and approximations made in adjusting for physical obstacles. Some groups found they had to move, zoom, or otherwise adjust their reproduced photo, indicating the presence of some error or overly generous approximation perhaps stemming from the estimation of on-site lengths and distances. Nonetheless, the final products from most teams were quite impressive.

The students also produced a presentation of their work, using whatever medium they preferred, that outlined their process from beginning to end and that could be showcased in the mathematics department and at LMU Honors Program events. Affirming their innate familiarity with computers and digital devices, most teams chose to extend their initial twenty-second “dissolve” movies into full-fledged mini-documentaries ranging from three to five minutes and including snapshots of individual students “in action” as well as voice-over narration.

**WRITTEN REPORT**

In the written report, teams described their methods, including steps taken to overcome any obstacles. Additionally, teams were asked for brief commentary on the history of the photo, some of which was obtained via personal interviews with a long-serving LMU professor, Father Rich Robin. In order to emphasize the goal of understanding the origin of a mathematical formula, we also asked students to fill in several small-sized “gaps” in the mathematical proof as presented in the original article (Byers and Henle 255). (It is not uncommon for a mathematical proof to omit one or two steps that are assumed obvious to the intended readership or amount to straightforward computation; asking students to provide these missing steps enables them to work through the details and demonstrate an understanding of the proof.) Finally, we asked students to comment on the differences between the original and reconstructed photo and to propose how those differences might have been reduced by modifying their approach.
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REFLECTIONS

Finally, we asked the students to reflect on their experiences working on this project by providing them with prompts, including “What were the most enjoyable parts of the experience? What were the most difficult aspects? What were the hardest parts about managing your group? Were there any unexpected discoveries or surprises?” and “What was it like working with someone in a field completely different from your own?”

In addition, the honors students considered and responded to the following questions: “Did this project change your perception of what it means to solve a ‘real world’ problem using mathematics? Is this the type of activity you imagined mathematicians doing? Did you feel like you were ‘doing mathematics?’” and “Did you feel that this project still required analytical thought, even though the ‘math’ wasn’t difficult?”

PROJECT GOALS

In assigning this joint project, our primary goal was to engage both the honors students and the senior math majors in experiencing several aspects of applied work that are familiar to any practicing scientist:

1. Communication is vital to intellectual work. A large portion of this project required the students to produce a clear record of their work that could be understood by a general audience without sacrificing fidelity to the technical details. In addition, by design the math majors were challenged to lead a team of younger, non-science students who did not speak the “language of mathematics.” This challenge presented a learning opportunity not only for the honors students (who likely benefited from the peer-level tutoring) but also for the math majors. As noted by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), “when students are challenged to think and reason about mathematics and to communicate the results of their thinking to others orally or in writing, they learn to be clear and convincing . . . students who have opportunities, encouragement, and support for speaking, writing, reading, and listening in mathematics classes reap dual benefits: they communicate to learn mathematics, and they learn to communicate mathematically” (“Guiding Principles” 3).

2. Applied problems rarely follow a straight line from problem to solution. In any field, problem-solving skills go hand in hand with theoretical understanding. Although the problem is initially stated in an idealized form, real-world problems quickly emerge that must be dealt with by dynamically and creatively adjusting the method and observing the modified results. The framework of assumptions and definitions that defines the end result is often not completely understood until the end. “Effective problem solvers constantly monitor and adjust what they are doing. Effective problem solvers plan frequently. They periodically take stock of their progress to see whether
they seem to be on the right track. If they decide they are not making progress, they stop to consider alternatives and do not hesitate to take a completely different approach” (NCTM, “Principles and Standards” 54).

3. Creative and/or investigative projects increasingly involve interdisciplinary teamwork. Generating lasting solutions to today’s complicated problems requires insight and techniques from a wide variety of disciplines. Once our students leave LMU, regardless of their major they will undoubtedly be working with others having different backgrounds. This project provided a glimpse into their future as the teams consisted of three or four students, no two having the same major. The importance of teamwork is acknowledged in multiple disciplines; for example, Julius Jackson, in Math and Bio 2010: Linking Undergraduate Disciplines, writes that the “undergraduate curriculum must change to raise expectations and meet the challenge to educate new biological scientists capable of joining in research collaboration with mathematicians, computer scientists, physical scientists, and engineers to solve biological questions” (56).

4. An additional goal, meant primarily for the mostly liberal-arts honors students, was to draw a connection between the use and the understanding of a mathematical method. Most of us can relate to the experience of being given a formula, recipe, or other list of steps and then being asked to follow it blindly in order to produce a desired output. The two formulas needed to complete the computations in this project involve only simple high-school algebra, yet their simplicity obscures their origins, and a surface reading of the method offers little in the way of understanding why it works. Here the honors students had to rely primarily on their math major consultants rather than their professors (again providing an opportunity for the math majors to communicate their knowledge at an appropriate level) for an explanation of the why. Again from the NCTM: “Listening to others’ explanations gives students opportunities to develop their own understandings. Conversations in which mathematical ideas are explored from multiple perspectives help the participants sharpen their thinking and make connections” (“Principles and Standards” 60).

SAMPLE OUTCOMES

We now present the work of two student teams. The first example features St. Robert’s Hall (Figure 2), which was originally built in 1929 as one of only two buildings on the Westchester campus of Loyola Marymount University. Caroline Barlett, Oneika Barrett, and Luke Vetter were assisted by senior Jessica Young and charged with reconstructing a photograph of this building taken in the 1940s. The final multimedia presentation by this team, including a description of the process and a cinematic dissolve of the original photograph into the new one can, be found at: <http://myweb.lmu.edu/acrans/StRoberts.m4v>.
Our second example is a photograph of Sacred Heart Chapel, which was finally completed in 1953 after being delayed for a year by the Hughes Aircraft Company, who claimed that the bell tower might interfere with their radar system. Angelica Cadiente, Monica Rosales, and Jack Shain, in consultation with mathematics major (and honors student) Kayla Pietruszka, reproduced a photograph of the 1953 Loyola Marymount University commencement ceremony (Figure 3). The final presentation of this team, including a wonderful history of the chapel, a description of the process, and a cinematic dissolve of the original photograph into the new one can be found at: <http://myweb.lmu.edu/acrans/SacredHeart.mov>.

**Observations and Reflections**

The most frequently stated challenge in the students’ reflections was the difficulty in finding time to meet as a group, given their differing majors and numerous commitments. Although we anticipated this problem and gave the
students a month to complete their work along with a fairly detailed outline of the necessary steps, we did not micromanage their progress and usually intervened only when asked. As we hoped, this assignment provided the senior math majors with invaluable (although sometimes frustrating) experience in leadership of a diverse group, time management, and delegation of tasks.

The “imperfection” of the real world appeared as the second most common challenge. One honors student stated, “the source of my greatest joy during the project was also the source of my greatest frustration. In finding where the original photo was taken and realizing that due to the change in landscape we would not be able to directly recreate the photo was in a way perfectly imperfect. In a field where the answer is either right or wrong . . . our pure math was right, but a means to make it applicable to the task at hand did not exist.” This comment is revealing in that it highlights a common preconception (due, undoubtedly, to how the subject is taught) that mathematics is purely computational, driven by preexisting formulas, and that these computations must have binary outcomes (right or wrong) with no room for “fuzzy thinking.” Another student commented, “the most unexpected discovery during this project was to how much of an extent mathematics cannot account for all the imperfections of the real world. For instance, there is no formula for getting rid of physical obstacles in your way.” This student’s comment sums up the opinion of many non-science students in thinking that, if they only just use the formula appropriately, their answer will undoubtedly be correct. The realization of this student that such clear answers do not occur in “real world” problems is one we hope many students shared. Indeed, a burgeoning recognition in the students that mathematics involves a coupling of creativity, initiative, and analytical thought seemed to be present: “the math in some sense felt the same as I had always known it, plugging in numbers and doing basic arithmetic, but in [another sense] it was all brand new and not math at all.” Another wrote that “applied math is not sitting in a room . . . in this case, it was actually going out into the field and solving a problem . . .”

The senior math majors had a wide range of experiences, but most agreed that having to play a leadership role, some for their first time, was the most challenging part. Reflecting on this component of the project, one senior wrote that “this was a good way to familiarize me with, hopefully, what I will be doing in my future career.” Many of the honors students expressed a strong dislike (or even phobia) of mathematics, and, despite the fact that the formulas themselves did not require the technical expertise of someone trained in advanced mathematics, some seniors found it easier simply to perform the calculations themselves rather than guide the honors students through them. One senior wrote, “[a]s someone who loves math and finds the proofs fascinating, it was somewhat difficult to explain it to people who did not care for it to be explained in the first place.” However, another senior rose to the challenge of mentoring the honors students, writing that she “explained [to her team] that sometimes people get a mental block toward doing math because they believe they cannot do it, and this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.”
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Carrying out the measurements and calculations without having any understanding of why the method works is obviously possible. One of the goals of the project was to encourage the students to move beyond plugging numbers into a formula. To this end, we instructed the seniors to explain the proof of the procedure to their group members, a definite challenge. Some honors students appreciated this explanation, including the students who stated that “it led to our understanding of why a formula works because we were required to understand how the formula came to be through the proof. I found this very helpful”; another wrote, “I realized that this was doable, and not only was it doable, it was something that I’d learned before. I remember learning about similar triangles in my geometry class in high school, and I was extremely surprised to find that I still remembered why certain angles had to be equal.” Coming from students who openly and actively expressed their fear and frustration with mathematics, these comments were encouraging.

Yet there remained a disconnect between understanding and implementation in some students who found it difficult to see the importance of the proof when they could simply use the formulas without a deep comprehension of it. Finding a means through which to make this connection more explicitly will be important in future versions of this project. Nevertheless, we feel strongly that simply having the honors students exposed to the proof of the process held enormous value (especially considering that this course may be one of the only undergraduate math classes they ever take). The majority of these students’ mathematical experiences up to this point had consisted of being handed formulas by their teachers or textbooks with little or no explanation or justification for why they hold true. They, like the majority of K–12 students, were likely taught how to “plug and chug” using the formulas provided in the chapter to solve the problems of that chapter. As observed in the NCTM Curriculum and Evaluation Standards: “[F]or many non-mathematicians, arithmetic operations, algebraic manipulations, and geometric terms and theorems constitute the elements of the discipline to be taught in grades K–12. This may reflect the mathematics they studied in school or college rather than a clear insight into the discipline itself” (6). Thus, merely seeing that the formulas they were using had justification (and a lengthy one at that), together with the verbal reinforcement of the proof provided by the seniors, was a small step toward having the students achieve the NCTM standard of recognizing “reasoning and proof as fundamental aspects of mathematics” (“Principles and Standards” 187).

FINAL THOUGHTS

This joint project was a self-contained module that fit neatly into the existing structure of two separate courses and allowed for a meaningful interaction between two disparate groups of students in a reasonable amount of time. Our hope was to expand the honors students’ perception, understanding, and appreciation of what constitutes the art and practice of mathematics; give our senior math majors a taste of what it is like to lead a diverse team on a technical
project (a task with which they may very well be faced upon graduation); and provide all the students the opportunity to exercise their creative and critical-thinking skills. We were encouraged to see evidence of changed perceptions, with one student remarking, “after all the discussion about applied math vs. pure math, it was nice to finally see what applied/‘real world’ math was. This was not the type of activity I would imagine mathematicians doing . . . I really did feel as though I was ‘doing mathematics.’ Although the mathematical formulas in this project were relatively simple, finding the location did require some amount of analytical thought.”

One of the most rewarding outcomes was seeing that the seniors, perhaps unknowingly, changed some of the honors students’ impressions of the type of student who chooses to major in mathematics; as two honors students remarked, “[our senior] broke the stereotype of the ‘typical’ math major,” and “it was even nicer that my math major was a woman—it once again helped to dispel the notion that mathematics is a male field.”

In future implementations of this project, we will likely draw more attention to the imprecise nature of the method and emphasize that errors and approximations are expected to occur. One possible modification of the assignment is asking the teams to carefully analyze the process they used in producing their first photo and to identify any major obstacles, come up with a revised method (perhaps using another mathematical or technical solution), and take a second photo, thus highlighting the iterative nature of problem solving. Another possible mathematical angle to pursue is an “error analysis,” in which students examine the connection between errors in their measurements and errors in the final product. For example, if a student measures one of the photographs with a ruler that has only eighth-inch increments, by how many feet might the final photographer location be miscalculated?

Overall we felt this project was a success. It certainly paved the way for future collaborations between two separate entities at our university (the College of Science and Engineering and the Honors Program). Despite the various challenges noted above, the student teams followed the assignment with enthusiasm and produced remarkably impressive final presentations. We look forward to creating additional cross-course thematic experiences with the LMU Honors Program.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cut Pro to produce the digital movies. Finally, Brad Stone, Director of the LMU Honors Program, wholeheartedly supported this project from the brainstorming stage to the final outcome.

REFERENCES


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Peer Review Across Disciplines:
Improving Student Performance in the Honors Humanities Classroom

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The term “peer review” often elicits a negative response from teachers and students alike. The process involves numerous challenges; anyone who has used the technique knows that students often feel awkward giving feedback to their peers and even more uncomfortable accepting the advice of peers in a classroom setting. They hesitate to voice negatives about performance, possibly because they doubt their own reaction to the material presented or fear that, in retaliation, they will be rated poorly as well. In addition, when teachers fail to establish and communicate clearly defined expectations, student authors do not produce high-quality drafts, and student reviewers often believe that even a lackluster analysis should result in a high grade on the assignment. However, once students understand that peer review is a necessary component of the professional environments they will soon join, are trained in the use of peer evaluation, and accept the potential benefits of well-constructed reviews by others at their ability level, their individual performances improve on compositions, speeches, projects, and original research papers. They also become better listeners and editors, are more supportive of others’ endeavors, and become more confident about their own work. These benefits are perhaps most visible in the honors classroom, where smaller class sizes allow for closer, more detailed interactions between student groups and where students can demonstrate and improve on their high-level skills of critical thinking and analysis by learning to evaluate the work of others. With some preparation for the process and some experimentation in its implementation, teachers in every discipline can provide a supportive and positive learning experience using this helpful feedback technique. In this article, teachers of honors courses in the humanities disciplines of English, speech, art history, and history at South Dakota State University hope to show that—in addition to reducing faculty workload (Stowell)—using innovative and carefully crafted peer review procedures creates a win-win situation for every student involved in the process as both author and reviewer.
Peer review is an integral part of the curriculum in my honors composition classes since it not only produces visible results on projects but helps students improve their skills in teamwork and oral communication. The process is useful for many types of assignments, including short papers such as summaries or reviews, oral presentations, and longer research-based papers. At the beginning of the semester, I ask students to describe their past experiences with any type of peer evaluation, and we discuss their reactions to these activities. This discussion, I have found, helps to establish an honest and supportive environment, which is vital to the success of peer review throughout the semester.

The type of peer review that seems to work most effectively in the traditional composition classroom is what I call “rapid-fire” review, which can be incorporated at any point during a project, including various stages of brainstorming, outlining, and drafting. Students bring two copies of their work to class, one of which is turned in to the instructor as part of the project grade. Multiple peers comment on the other copy throughout the class period: rapid-fire review requires students to switch papers after short blocks of time, analyzing one facet of the project during each session. It is important that instructors clearly articulate the question(s) that should be answered in each session. For instance, instead of simply asking students to “comment on the thesis statement,” which can often lead to vague or unhelpful results, instructors could tell students to “double underline what you believe to be the thesis statement, and then next to it, write down the author’s argument in your own words. Offer suggestions for improved clarity or strength of argument.”

In a fifty-minute class, I generally find that six or seven minutes per session works best, but flexibility is important. If a session has ended but students need more time, I allow them to continue; therefore, the most important prompts should be addressed first. Students bring and use several different colors of ink so that authors can better track the comments they receive. Reviewers also include their name on each draft they analyze so that at the end of class students can discuss their findings with one another. Rapid-fire review could instead be completed anonymously, possibly increasing the likelihood of more honest feedback but also eliminating the opportunity for discussion afterwards.

Many types of peer review sessions can also be held in a computer classroom, the setting I prefer for reviewing drafts of the final course project, a research-based essay of eight to twelve pages. Students bring electronic drafts to class on a flash drive or as an email attachment and exchange them with their peer review partner. They spend the entire class period completing a full review of the draft: reading the draft carefully and answering questions that the instructor provides in a Microsoft Word document. This prompt can include questions about the vitality of the introduction, strength and clarity of the thesis statement, quality and extent of supporting evidence for the argument,
effectiveness of organization and transitions, and persuasiveness of the conclusion; it can easily be tailored to the expectations of each assignment. The prompt should avoid asking “yes or no” questions and instead require students to think carefully and provide detailed answers, a process that provides the highest-quality feedback. The students are also asked to use the “Comment” function in Microsoft Word to highlight and comment on any problems they see in their partner’s draft, including spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors as well as other areas that need improvement. Praise is always encouraged since authors should know when they are crafting clear arguments, supporting their points, or achieving other successes noticed by the reviewer. When both parts of this evaluative process are completed, the reviewer saves the two documents (draft and prompt sheet) and emails them to both the author and the instructor. Instructors can incorporate participation in (and quality of) peer review as either part of the project grade or part of class participation. After each peer review session, I evaluate the students on the overall quality of the feedback they provide and reward improvement as the semester progresses.

Whether peer review is incorporated into the computer-based or traditional composition classroom, several important student learning outcomes result from the process. By analyzing their peers’ drafts, students gain ideas for how to improve their own work, and the instructor’s prompts give them greater insight into the most important expectations of each assignment. In addition, students come to understand and value the revision process as integral to successful writing in any discipline, which is an important goal in the composition classroom. Peer review also builds a sense of community in an honors class as students interact and accept mutual responsibility for one another’s successes. Visible results from the process include early drafts that lack confidence or direction blooming into well-organized, clearly articulated arguments worthy of our honors students.

Many students are uncomfortable with peer review at first because they have no experience with it, but they develop throughout the semester into confident and knowledgeable reviewers, building skills that will serve them well in their careers no matter what field they enter. Because the smaller class sizes in the honors program allow for multiple and detailed peer review sessions for each project, honors students especially benefit from this process. In a course evaluation for spring 2010 Honors Advanced Composition, one student wrote: “Peer review has helped me learn a lot about the writing process and the importance of collaboration.” This statement is simply worded but represents the significant benefits that peer review can offer honors students in the writing classroom and beyond.
PEER REVIEW ACROSS DISCIPLINES

BARB KLEINJAN,
COMMUNICATION STUDIES AND THEATRE

In a public speaking classroom, every performance communicates a message that is immediately assessed by audience members, who provide feedback through their verbal and nonverbal reactions. Unlike a written paper or exam, a visible and shared performance is evaluated in some manner by every listener present. The speakers’ accomplishments or failures in invention, arrangement, style, and delivery are clearly evident to the viewers. Not surprisingly, the pressure of giving a flawless performance as opposed to an effectively communicated message unnerves many novice speakers, particularly perfection-driven honors students. Fearing audience judgment and the resulting negative reaction, the speakers’ confidence levels diminish rapidly. Appraisal comments and improvement suggestions that could normally be exchanged privately with the professor are now clouded with post-presentation doubts and insecurities. Consequently, making peer review a valuable tool in an introductory-level honors speech course first requires establishing a supportive, skill-focused culture in a non-threatening environment for practice and growth. One honors student concisely phrased this philosophy as “watching for potential, not error.” I believe that an attitude of coaching rather than correcting best produces this atmosphere. Peer review creates a climate of team building and encourages honors speakers to view each presentation as a process rather than a product.

Despite the natural aptitude, intelligence, logic, and organizational proficiencies that most honors students display, many of them fear public speaking as much as the typical collegiate student population does. To alleviate these reservations, I integrate individual and group demonstrations of particular delivery methods within the course curriculum. After modeling the desired movements, gestures, facial expressions, and vocal tones, I select groups of students to repeat the techniques throughout the classroom, eventually incorporating the entire class into these practice sessions. By first observing my expectations, then imitating, adapting, modifying, assessing, and encouraging others, the students become less self-conscious and more comfortable performing before their peers. As they relax and enjoy the experience, the honors students coach and applaud one another while conquering each step of style, delivery, and creativity.

Training the students to use the peer review instruments is the next task. Each speech, and thus each evaluation form, varies as the speaking criteria build in sophistication throughout the semester. We start with four simple queries: analysis of thesis statements, vocabulary development, positive delivery aspects, and one achievable suggestion for improvement. Every student in the class reviews at least twelve speakers, so each presenter receives at least twelve positive comments about his or her delivery. As the speeches increase in length, intensity, and difficulty, I insert more group practice situations within the classroom, add descriptors to the peer review forms, raise the expectations,
provide a rating scale, and always include a place to write a paragraph of praise and observed potential. I maintain the consistency of twelve reviews per speech; this supportive base of affirming observations bolsters self-confidence and encourages creativity. Interestingly, the honors students quickly peruse my post-speech evaluation comments and grade markings but then intently and carefully read each peer review.

With the advantage of the smaller number of students in an honors section, both the modeling demonstrations and the specific criteria of the peer review process can be incorporated most efficiently into the curriculum. Enabling each class member to practice closely with the instructor, function as a peer coach, and receive best-practices advice from classmates, honors sections offer the public-speaking student an opportunity to reap powerful benefits.

By addressing the four canons of rhetoric—invention, arrangement, style, and delivery—the honors students progress from extemporaneous speeches to debates to oral reading performances, culminating in readers’ theater events. As their poise and confidence increase, the orators quickly embrace the differing performance vehicles. With each successive assignment, I demonstrate new presentation techniques, provide a peer review rubric specific to the goals of the project, and allow the students to gain feedback from twelve of their colleagues. Built into the overall grade for the course, I evaluate the peer reviews on the basis of observed accuracy, completed criteria, communicated expectations, crafted creativity, and identified potential. As the class moves from the “me to we” mentality, they build a support system that recognizes the many talents and unique expressions of gifts possible within public communication formats. One student summarized the final experience in these words: “I actually cried before my first speech, but now I can hardly wait to perform again!”

A nurturing culture, skill-based coaching, immediate feedback, criteria-designed peer review, and positive reinforcement, all within the framework of a team-based honors classroom, result in a dramatic acquisition of public-speaking performance expertise, poise, and confidence.

LEDA CEMPPELLIN, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY

The peer review process also leads to impressive results in my lower-division honors course on art appreciation. The term research project in this course is assessed in several stages throughout the semester, with the first two stages involving student peer review and the last stage requiring the instructor’s assessment of the final project. In the first two phases, each student is required to review two other papers, anonymously, according to the same assessment rubric used later by the instructor: (1) general information; (2) analysis of the artworks; (3) compare/contrast (artworks, concepts, ideas); (4) introduction and conclusion; (5) cohesion and coherence; (6) fluency (spelling errors, style); (7) personal critical opinion (not instinctual but matured through a progressive deepening the subject); and (8) title, notes, bibliography, use of MLA style. I also
PEER REVIEW ACROSS DISCIPLINES

add a few important questions to the assessment rubric to be answered by the peer reviewer in narrative form. For instance, one question is aimed at checking the student’s understanding of the paper’s core argumentation, thus increasing the reviewer’s reading and comprehension skills and providing the author with an opportunity to receive important feedback about the strengths and flaws of his or her overall focus and vision. Other important questions require the reviewer to comment on the variety of sources, quality of information, and degree of scholarly depth, providing suggestions for improvement in each of these areas.

During the two stages of student peer review, the instructor becomes acquainted with the student’s paper and also grades how successfully the reviewer has assessed the paper according to the rubric. For instance, if the student reviewer did not notice some contradictions in the paper’s overall argument, the review was probably done superficially and/or too quickly, and the review would earn a poor grade. This process provides an incentive for students to take peer review seriously, helping to ensure that they both give and receive high-quality feedback. In the third and final stage, the instructor assesses the maturation of the student’s project and the final results achieved. These three phases are spread throughout the semester to allow the instructor to monitor the projects’ progress as well as give students enough time to critically examine the feedback received and refine their projects.

A recent example demonstrates the benefits of this peer review process. The original research paper assignment in Honors Art Appreciation for fall 2009 was to analyze the theme of interconnectedness in art by focusing on one or more artists and their relationship with the land, the community, or both. During a discussion-board session between the second and the third weeks, students had an opportunity to discuss their chosen topic and receive feedback from peers, helping them engage with their own and their peers’ research projects from the beginning of the semester. During the fifth and tenth weeks, students were required to review two peer drafts each week. Finally, in the thirteenth week, the final essay of ten to thirteen pages, including ten to fifteen sources, was due for instructor grading. Students arrived at the final length gradually and naturally in large part thanks to the peer review process, which offered them significant feedback and suggestions for improvement.

One student chose to compare the sand art produced by the Navajo with the sand art of contemporary artist Jim Denevan. The title originally chosen by the student for the first draft was “Sand Art: Two Different Perspectives.” Because the sources of sand art under consideration were so different, the risk of fragmentation into two topics represented a constant challenge but was effectively addressed by three suggestions from peer reviewers. The first suggestion, in the section on comparison/contrast, was to emphasize a crucial aspect of sand art: destruction, following creation, as part of the same artistic process. The second suggestion, in the last section of the assessment rubric, was to change the title for the paper so that it emphasized the “ephemeral nature of the artworks.” The
original title, “Sand Art: Two Different Perspectives,” evolved in the second draft into “Sand Art: Temporary Art from Two Perspectives.” However, feedback from the peer reviewer during the second stage pointed out the paper’s comparisons of two culturally different artists and suggested making the title more captivating. As a result, the title dilemma was finally and brilliantly solved by the student in the third and final version as “Sand Drawings: Only a Moment in Time.” This final title, thanks in large part to the suggestions of peer reviewers, avoids direct reference to the artists and instead emphasizes their common characteristics, improving the harmony and strength of the paper’s argument. The paper is one of four research projects from this honors class that have been published in Volume 9 (2010) of the Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences and can be found online at <http://www.kou.org/v9/interconnected-through-art/>. Within this group, another student’s published paper, which discusses a collaboration between artist Andy Goldsworthy and choreographer Régine Chopinot, has been listed as required reading for Professor Jürg Koch’s fall 2010 Graduate Dance Composition (DANCE 530) at Washington University <http://faculty.washington.edu/kochj/uwcourses/Dance%20530/Reading writing.html>.

These impressive results within the discipline of art history highlight the potential benefits of implementing a peer review process in the honors classroom and should encourage the adoption and implementation of peer review techniques across the curriculum. The peer review system can be shaped in different ways and easily targeted to the specific needs of any discipline.

APRIL BROOKS,
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

The peer review process has also proven successful when tailored to the needs of students in the history department’s research-based capstone course for graduating majors. Honors students who major in history come into the class with as much trepidation as non-honors students because all students know that they must pass the course with a grade of C or better to complete the major. In this capstone course, History 480: Historical Methods and Historiography, students are required to write a research paper of fifteen to thirty pages and incorporate both primary and secondary source material. Our students often assume that this research paper is the same as a term paper but soon discover that research is much more complicated and intense than they realize. Consequently, the capstone course has had fairly high drop and fail rates; in an average semester, fully one third of the students have not passed the class.

About four years ago, dismayed by these abysmal results, I attended a conference designed to teach instructors how to conduct a course that produces first-rate research papers (Brown and Baughman). I returned from that conference convinced that I could improve our student success rate by using two of the many techniques they suggested: a carefully constructed schedule and peer review.
Each tenured and tenure-track faculty member is expected to take a turn at teaching the capstone class, and this responsibility is rotated. The students’ workload includes frequent conferences with the instructor and with peer groups, and the process begins almost immediately. In a brief talk to the class soon after the semester begins, each student must present his or her topic to the entire class and answer questions about it. Listeners respond with questions and comments designed to help the student narrow the topic so that it can be completed within the time frame of a single semester. The students are then divided into small groups, and each early segment of the paper, turned in on a carefully constructed schedule, is peer reviewed before the author turns in a final and complete research paper.

Throughout the term the schedule ensures that students begin work on their topic early and continue at a measured pace no matter what goes on during class time. Thus, discussions about historiography can be interspersed with peer review sessions, problem-solving sessions, or individual conferences with the instructor. The manner in which these elements are arranged is left up to the individual instructors, among whom there is considerable variation. Regardless of who teaches the course, students tend to stay in the class more frequently and turn in better papers at the end because the course includes peer review. Their confidence level is high because they get a lot of support from their peers, and their work profits significantly from the input they receive. Here is a sample schedule for the project’s completion:

- Week Three: Thesis statement.
- Week Six: First three pages including introduction and beginning of evidence.
- Week Ten: First seven pages.
- Week Twelve: Class no longer meets with instructor.
- Week Fourteen: Paper due.

In each of these steps, peer review is an integral part of the process. All papers except the final draft are peer reviewed before being turned in. Each writer gets a chance to revise before submitting the draft to the instructor for grading. The paper is reviewed by at least two members of the peer review group, and any issues are forwarded to the instructor for adjudication. When the class no longer meets with the instructor, the groups are urged to meet two or three times a week, and they sometimes meet more frequently. As the class progresses through these steps, the improvement in student writing skills is plainly visible. The students’ critiquing skills improve as the groups gain confidence in their opinions and begin to see positive change in their work. Students frequently find that they need to change their thesis statement based on the results of their research, and my response to that is: “Congratulations, you have just become a historian.”
This methodology has significantly lowered our drop/fail rate, which now hovers around five percent, and we have further proof that peer review works. Our university has an on-campus writing contest for seniors every spring. The top monetary award in this contest is $2,500. In 2008, six students from the history capstone class submitted papers to the contest. Five of the students won awards; the total amount of money they garnered was $7,500. In 2010, nine students submitted their papers, and three were awarded cash prizes totaling $5,000. In both years, the top monetary award went to a student in our capstone class.

The class is hard work for the instructor, but the results are gratifying. The students report that they recognize the improvement in their writing skills and feel confident in their research ability. On our annual student opinion surveys, those who teach the capstone are scoring “off the charts” in availability and helpfulness.

These four examples show how beneficial the peer review process has been for honors students in the humanities, and it can be successfully adapted to other disciplines as well. With careful design and implementation, peer review provides a win-win situation for both instructor and student, serving as an important tool in the arsenal of strategies instructors can use to help honors students develop valuable skills and achieve success across the curriculum.

REFERENCES

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Julie.Barst@sdstate.edu.
APPENDIX

INFORMATION, INCLUDING ONE VIDEO (TURNER), ABOUT DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING PEER REVIEW IN A VARIETY OF DISCIPLINES


An Honors Alumni Mentor Program at Butler University

JACLYN DOWD, LISA MARKUS, JULIE SCHRADER, AND ANNE M. WILSON
BUTLER UNIVERSITY

BACKGROUND: BUTLER UNIVERSITY AND THE BUTLER UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

Butler University is a comprehensive master’s university of approximately 4,000 undergraduate students with five colleges: the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; the College of Education; the College of Business; the Jordan College of Fine Arts; and the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. The Butler University Honors Program is an interdisciplinary program open to undergraduates from all five colleges. Incoming students admitted to Butler who meet certain benchmark requirements (1320/30 or higher SAT/ACT or top five percent of graduating class) are invited to apply to our honors program. If students perform well in their first year at the university, the Butler Honors Program may invite them to join at the middle or end of the academic year. In addition, students may petition to join the program at any time provided they are able to complete its requirements prior to graduation.

The requirements of our honors program are: completion of four interdisciplinary honors courses; completion of a departmental honors course, an upper-level research course offered within the student’s academic major; completion of a thesis proposal as part of a thesis-preparation course; participation in a designated number of cultural events—plays, readings or lectures by visiting writers, concerts, ethnic festivals, and the like; and completion of an honors thesis, which includes an oral presentation of the thesis project. While we have approximately ten percent of the overall student body participating in the honors program, the past several years have shown that only between five and seven percent of the graduating class is fully completing the program. An analysis of the attrition information from our program indicated that we lost most of our honors students after the four required honors courses, some time during the thesis preparation process. In addition, particular academic programs demonstrated a higher attrition level than others, majors we determined were “at risk” for non-completion of the honors thesis. This information provided us sufficient motivation to find methods to address the attrition rate.
BACKGROUND: THE OFFICE OF INTERNSHIP AND CAREER SERVICES

The Office of Internship and Career Services at Butler University is a developmental support unit designed to help students explore, select, prepare for, and actively pursue satisfying careers. This unit is under the supervision of the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs (as opposed to being housed in Student Affairs) and retains seven full-time employees. Among the office’s primary responsibilities are providing access to internship and career oriented information and offering opportunities to connect students with local employers.

Butler University has been awarded grants from the Lilly Endowment, Inc., to address Indiana’s “brain drain” by increasing exposure to internship and employment opportunities with emphasis on employer development and student programming. Through these grants, development of partnerships with local employers, community organizations, and area alumni is essential to success and has been strengthened through the Office of Internship and Career Services. A portion of the original grant money was devoted to recruiting mentors for our students, encouraging their commitment to and involvement with Butler undergraduates. Local alumni were tapped as a key resource for this portion of the project.

THE GENESIS OF THE IDEA

The alumni mentor portion of the Lilly grant, a small percentage of the initial funding, was not as successful as the Office of Internship and Career Services had envisioned. Coincidentally, a local alumna approached the grant director at an event and commented that she would like to find a way to give more time back to Butler. In addition, the alumna lamented that she wished she had completed her honors thesis. Why not pair this alumna with a current student to share that insight?

The grant director noted that a number of the area alumni mentor volunteers were honors graduates. Conversations with the honors director and coordinator produced a plan to tap the resources of the Office of Internship and Career Services, the Alumni Office, and the Office of Post-Graduate Studies in order to implement the Honors Alumni Mentor Program. This program was intended to fill the program gap, which emerged midway through the first Lilly grant, and would support honors students through the thesis process in order to complete the honors program. The mentor program has continued through the second Lilly grant with collaboration from the Office of Internship and Career Services.

THE PROGRAM

Alumni mentor programs exist in many arenas, mostly to address a particular program goal. Reviews of the goals of mentor programs reveal a range from character development and leadership training to career preparation and skills
development (Schlee; Stewart & Knowles). In addition, general or specific goals of an alumni mentoring program include: a larger alumni engagement strategy (Jones); building relationships with local alumni (“Alumni Mentor Programs to Start”; King); using local alumni as examples in case studies (Finney & Pyke); providing networking benefits (Alsop); pairing alumni with current students in a course setting (Breslow); using alumni to mentor students in a particular major for professional growth (Vance & Bamford; Sword et al.); and using alumni as a support system for at-risk students (Phillips & Wile; Price & Balogh). The goals of our mentor program were twofold: first, increase the completion rate of student theses by providing a mentor who has “been there” to guide the student through the process as well as an independent sounding board for thesis research and project ideas; and second, connect students to a mentor who will help with professional exploration through networking, internships, or job-shadowing opportunities. Through these two goals, both the Butler Honors Program and the Office of Internship and Career Services could garner benefits from the Honors Alumni Mentor Program.

We envisioned that the mentors and mentees would each have distinct opportunities and would benefit mutually from their mentoring relationship. The mentors would gain:

• concrete relationships connecting them to the current culture of our campus;
• an opportunity to reflect on the role that honors and thesis research played in preparing them for a career and lifelong learning; and
• a chance to assist a current student or avoid mistakes that the mentor may have made.

The mentees would gain:

• another guide to help explore resources and opportunities at Butler;
• another advocate for post-graduate plans and goals;
• a supporter who has been through the Butler thesis process;
• a local resource for networking in the Indianapolis community; and
• an advisor to help them see “the larger picture.”

We modeled our mentor program on an existing physician mentor program for pre-med students already in existence at our university (Pryor & Samide). Similar to the pre-med mentor program, we felt that the two most critical academic years for honors students are the sophomore and junior year. During this time, students are evaluating their potential majors, weighing possible career paths, selecting probable thesis topics, and addressing many of the “big questions” that arise during the college years, so we felt that this was an optimal time to provide students the additional support of an alumni mentor.

In the early summer of 2007, we worked with our alumni office to access our honors alumni. We had just completed a project to code these alumni in
AN HONORS ALUMNI MENTOR PROGRAM AT BUTLER UNIVERSITY

our database, and we were eager to find an initiative to use this new resource. We selected alumni who were at least ten years beyond graduation as we felt that a decade was enough time past post-graduate education to establish oneself in a career environment and to have developed a professional network in Indianapolis. We also selected alumni who lived in or around the Indianapolis area. We generated a list of two hundred alumni to whom we sent letters of invitation. In addition, we contacted the alumna who had made the comments at the Office of Internship and Career Services event. We also sent letters of invitation to all of the rising sophomores in the Butler Honors Program. From these solicitations, we garnered seven willing alumni (including the key alumna) who would take between two and three mentees each. We also identified seventeen students who wanted to participate in the program. We were very fortunate that the number of student participants and the number of spots the mentors offered exactly matched.

Late in the summer of 2007, the mentors and mentees completed surveys. The mentor surveys asked about education, career/life path, major, thesis subject, thesis advisor, mentor’s preference for a male or female mentee (or no preference), hobbies, interests, and expectations for the mentorship. The student surveys asked about current major(s), mentee’s preference for a male or female mentor (or no preference), hobbies, interests, and expectations for the mentorship. None of the student participants indicated a gender preference. Pairings of mentors with mentees were based on some common areas of interest (see Table 1). In addition, we deliberately paired students from our identified “at risk” majors with our alumna who wished she had finished her thesis.

In order to facilitate the introductions of mentors to their student mentees, we held two kickoff meetings early in the fall of 2007 to accommodate the schedules of our oversubscribed honors students and our oversubscribed alumni. At these kickoff meetings, we introduced the mentors to the mentees, explained the goals of the program to the participants, provided food and beverages, and provided all participants with a “goodie bag” containing an honors t-shirt and a copy of Rules of the Red Rubber Ball by Kevin Carroll. The kickoff meeting had a soft ending time to encourage the start of informal conversations that we hoped would provide a strong foundation for the continued mentor-mentee relationship.

During the academic year, mentors and mentees met in pairs or in groups. The participants also continued communication by email and phone. In order to facilitate face-to-face interactions, we sent reminders of campus events by email and provided tickets to on-campus events for program participants. Mentors and mentees met at least twice in the first two semesters of the program. All participants report that conversations have been substantial and rewarding.
The majority of the seventeen inaugural-round student participants graduated this past May. Of these, nine completed the honors program and graduated. Three of the seventeen have not yet graduated; one is a pharmacy student (a six-year program at Butler) and well on her way to completing the program; and the other two have delayed graduation for health and family reasons. A fourth student transferred for financial reasons two years ago. That leaves four mentees who have graduated from Butler without completing the program.

These four students each had a unique reason for not completing our honors program. One mentee dropped the program at the start of her junior year in order to add a second major and focus on improving her course performance. A second student decided not to complete the honors program after taking a semester off to intern on Broadway. Upon her return, she decided her best professional move would be to continue auditioning and performing in various professional venues beyond Butler while completing her degree in arts administration, which she did very successfully.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alumnus</th>
<th>Butler Honors Student</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male, BS 1980, Zoology</td>
<td>Female, Pharmacy/Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Profession: Physician</td>
<td>Male, Biology (transfer student)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, BM 1974, MS 1978</td>
<td>Female, English Lit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Profession: Music and Art Elementary Teacher (newly retired)</td>
<td>Female, (transferred out)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, BA 1975, Speech &amp; English</td>
<td>Female, Journalism/English Lit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Profession: Public Relations Director</td>
<td>Male, Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male, BA 1995, Journalism</td>
<td>Female, English Writ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, BA 1992, Computer Sci.</td>
<td>Female, Arts Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Profession: Lawyer</td>
<td>Female, Internat. Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female, BA 1990, Zoology</td>
<td>Female, Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Profession: Healthcare Administrator</td>
<td>Female, Biology &amp; Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Male, English Writ. &amp; Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
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</table>
The other two students successfully navigated our thesis-proposal process but decided not to complete the thesis in their final academic year. The first of these students chose to be the president of his fraternity, which he felt was more in line with his long-term goals to be a politician. He has since commented that he has regrets about not completing the undergraduate thesis. His was one of the more successful mentoring relationships from this initial effort. The second student decided to declare a language major after studying abroad the second semester of her junior year and chose to devote her time to coursework in her major rather than a thesis.

Among the nine student mentees who completed an honors thesis, two are College of Business students, two creative thesis writers, and one a transfer student; these are categories in which we typically see a lower completion rate. We can probably attribute some of this success to the alumni mentor program.

Participant interactions were as varied as the participants themselves. Many of the student participants investigated potential thesis project ideas with their mentors. Mentors were key advocates for these students, helping their mentees to seek out on-campus experts and resources with which the students were unfamiliar. Students explored potential career pathways and asked tough questions about options available to them with their alumni mentors. In some cases, mentors shared how the honors program had given them the foundation they needed to meet future challenges.

There were some unanticipated positive outcomes from student participation in the alumni mentor program. First, the student participants were far more active in other honors activities. They attended more social events, took full advantage of honors resources, and were more aware of honors issues on campus. Second, student participants became very visible on campus, in their majors, in campus activities and groups, and in local community organizations. The student participants have become some of the most engaged honors students we have had in some time, embracing the full range of opportunities afforded to them in the honors program, the university as a whole, and the local Indianapolis community.

CHALLENGES OF THE FIRST ROUND

The first round of our alumni mentor program did not go entirely as planned. Glitches in program design as well as mentor and student participant issues contributed to the program’s not reaching its full potential. We believe that careful consideration of these setbacks could lead to greater success in the future.

When we designed the program, we assumed that we would be able to match a new set of alumni with a new set of student participants in the second year. However, we were unable to find a new batch of alumni mentors for 2008–09. We had not pursued the second group of mentors as aggressively as we should have, nor had we thought to hold back some of our alumni for the second year of the program. We have taken steps to address this flaw, as discussed later.
The numerous commitments of our alumni as well as our current honors students meant that scheduling times to meet was a challenge. In addition to the inevitable difficulties of juggling work, family, and extracurricular activities with the commitment mentors made to our honors students, one alumna delivered a child during the first year of the program. Also, some of our mentors did not take the lead in initiating conversations with our mentees.

Scheduling face-to-face meeting times with student participants was challenging as well, and sometimes it was impossible when students had taken the opportunity to study abroad or spend a semester off-campus during the two-year period of the mentor-mentee relationship—the kind of opportunity that many of the alumni had heartily encouraged for their mentees. In another case, a student left the university; we were unable to determine if the alumni mentor program had any impact on the student’s departure.

Some of the interpersonal dynamics of the mentor-mentee relationships required very little help from us in order to move to meaningful conversations. However, the enthusiasm of the participants was not equal across all pairings, and we had a few less exuberant program members. In one case, the relationship simply did not work.

Comments we received after the first year of the program included:

“X’s been thought-provoking and accessible beyond the scope of what I expected from the program. He’s a great listener, sounding board, and provocateur of ideas. He’s been accommodating, and I look forward to other meetings with him.”

“We talked about taking classes that may or may not fit into our major and how that may benefit us in the future. We also talked about what information we learn in classes as opposed to what skills we actually used. For example, he talked with us about an English literature class that he took as a senior as a time-filler that really helped him research and write in his job. Also we talked about the biology dept. spring break research in Panama. I think I might try to go on it next year.”

“Thank you for this opportunity! I’ve really had a great time hearing how the Honors program has been such a positive experience . . . made me excited for what is to come!”

“My mentor has really just been a great person to talk to—he’s an adult, he survived college, he’s survived the working world, and there’s just something about hearing somebody say, ‘I felt exactly the same way’ or ‘All your hard work really is worth it’ that makes your day just ten million times brighter.”

“I would say my conversations with my mentor have made me a little more confident when it comes to the whole idea of writing

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for pay. In fact, last time I think he suggested that I do my best to right now start finding professional writing jobs of whatever level of meagerness just so that I’d be out there doing it already, getting that experience. The fact that his ability to write is basically the crux of what he does for a living was encouraging, because even though other advisor-type figures here at Butler have been telling me for awhile now that the ability to write well and persistently is an at least somewhat significant asset in terms of making money, it simply feels truer, more real when someone you are conversing with as if chums says so.”

“I went through a stage sophomore year where I suddenly found it very important to take an active interest in the things I’m fascinated by, which for someone who grew up swaddled in the less engaging and basically stupefying aspects of television, videogames, and the internet, was of course pure revelation. X himself was very kind and engaging in response to my kind of ridiculous ramblings. His encouragement was important.”

“We talk more about life than the honors program, but it’s good discussion for both of us. I’m still planning on writing a thesis, even as a Y major. That’s not his area of expertise, but as it turns out his wife was a Butler Y honors student, so I’ll be getting together with her, too.”

“I was really worried about continuing on with the honors program, and actually considered dropping it after my sophomore year. However, after I talked to my mentor and she told me about how much she regretted not writing her thesis and completing the honors program, I felt motivated to give it a try. My mentor inspired me and gave me the extra push I needed in order to find the necessary inner-confidence to stay in the program. I currently am enrolled in my departmental honors course and am very excited about the research topics I have been exploring.”

Before this first group of participants graduated, we again gathered their feedback. Overall, most students had not had contact with their mentor in a year. However, five of the students believed their participation in the Alumni Mentoring Program was a significant factor in their completion of the honors program. Several explained that they simply did not have time to be in contact with their mentors given the intensity of finishing their undergraduate coursework, completing their thesis, and developing life plans for after graduation. Two noted that they did not feel the need to continue the relationship beyond successful submission of an honors thesis proposal since that was the purpose of the program as they understood it. Several students indicated that interest in pursuing the relationship waned once the student had made educational and
career decisions that were no longer in line with that of their mentor; this was especially the case for two of the students writing creative thesis, one of whom commented, “X was very friendly and offered to help if we needed anything, but I’m not sure he really knew how to help me. And, to be fair, I didn’t really know what kind of help I needed.” Finally, some students shared that they did not think they needed an alumni mentor in the final phase of thesis preparation given the availability of their faculty mentors. One such student wrote, “I feel like we have enough faculty members to use as mentors, and having an honors alumni mentor really wasn’t that helpful.” The students making these comments were all from academic programs in which students routinely complete undergraduate theses.

Two students responded that their mentoring relationship continued until graduation and that they planned to maintain contact in the future. One of these was a student who completed her thesis in a major where the completion rate for the undergraduate thesis has typically been low. She shared that she chose her thesis topic (the effect of caregiver status on career advancement among area lawyers) largely due to her relationship with her mentor (the female lawyer who regretted not completing her thesis and who also had her second child in 2008). One student participant who chose not to complete his thesis in order to become president of his fraternity had continued contact with his mentor beyond the duration of the program. He commented that he “appreciated having X’s feedback when figuring out whether to take on the fraternity” leadership role. He added that he was fortunate to have stayed in touch with his mentor until graduation in order to talk about his choice, what he had learned, and how he might pursue research in the future.

Different students offered similar suggestions to make the program more efficient and a better match for their busy schedules. The students whose interests diverged from the paths that had served as the basis for their mentoring match preferred group event-based mentoring opportunities to one-on-one interactions left to the pair’s initiative. Students suggested inviting all sophomores to one of several dinners with alumni mentors who share somewhat similar educational and career paths. The students could then pursue a one-on-one relationship if they felt it was a good match while the rest wouldn’t feel guilty about not having time to meet with their mentor. One student wrote, “I think the key is to make it a one-time deal...I felt bad kind of neglecting some of X’s emails, and though I appreciated the offer, it was hard to make time to meet multiple times, especially during the very-busy junior/senior years.”

SECOND ROUND OF THE ALUMNI MENTOR PROGRAM

In the fall of 2009, we paired a new group of alumni with students. In this round, we only have seven student participants paired with seven alumni mentors (see Table 2). We are a little concerned that the student interest in the alumni mentor program seems to have dropped off. However, with this group we
were able to pair individuals, which should make for the ideal mentor-to-
mentee ratio.

We were unable to arrange a suitable kickoff meeting, so we were forced
to make the pairings and hold the reception later in the semester. We offered
each set of tickets to on-campus events to the participants, and we spon-
sored a coffee reception prior to Madeline Albright’s lecture on campus. We
have continued to use email as the primary source of communication from the
honors office to participants. Feedback that we have received from this round
of students has also been positive overall. While some students have had
monthly contact with their mentors and others have met once a semester, most
note that their mentoring relationship provides insight into the bigger picture of
making a life and a living beyond the daily grind of their undergraduate work;
this is true even if the mentee does not plan to follow in his or her mentor’s
career footsteps. The students have appreciated learning more about what it
was like to be a Butler undergraduate when their mentors were students, how

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alumnus</th>
<th>Butler Honors Student</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female, BS Speech, 1973, MBA/CBA; 2 years Law School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Profession: Director Learning and Performance Support Services, Corporate Director/Business Owner</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female, BA English 1977, JD 1980</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Profession: Assistant General Council at Eli Lilly and Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male, BS Chemistry 1997, Dual MS degrees Discovery and Process Chemistry, Clinical Trial Management</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Profession: Clinical Project Manager Eli Lilly and Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female, BA Music Education 1999</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Profession: Band Director and General Music Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male, BS Philosophy 1968, JD 1972</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Profession: Lawyer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female, BS Chemistry 1995, MS Organic Chemistry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Profession: Research Scientist Eli Lilly and Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female, International Studies/Spanish</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female, Political Science, International Studies, pre-law</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female, Political Science, English, pre-law</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male, Biology, pre-med</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male, Actuarial Science, but passionate about music</td>
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<td>Male, Marketing, pre-law</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male, Science, Technology and Society and LAS Economics</td>
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graduate studies intertwined with their careers, and how they overcame particular hurdles in their personal and professional paths.

CONCLUSIONS

Having completed our third year of the program, we feel that the honors alumni mentor experiment is working. Even though the student participants completed the honors program at about the same rate as honors students who did not have mentors, students from our at-risk professional programs (business and pharmacy) had a higher completion rate. In addition, the students who did not complete their thesis were well aware that they were making a difficult decision and wrestled with it. Our alumni participants have valued their experience in the program and have all noted that they enjoyed connecting with current Butler students. Many of them serve on our alumni advisory board, and they have generated several ideas for continued alumni involvement with the Butler University Honors Program.

The current Lilly grant runs through 2012. The results are compelling enough for us to supplement the existing budget to support this program fully once the grant is complete. The cost of the program is modest (tickets to events, small gifts for the alumni, beverages for receptions) and well worth the small portion of our budget required to support it. In the event that interest grows, we will seek new funds to sustain this valuable program in permanently.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Michael J. Samide and Johnny D. Pryor for providing the template from the Butler physicians mentor program; the Butler Alumni Office for coding all the honors graduates in our alumni database; the sixteen alumni mentors who graciously donated their time to our students; the twenty-four Butler students who participated in this project; and the Lilly Endowment, Inc. for support of the program.

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On Outreach
The Neptune Academy:
Honors Students Give Back

DOUGLAS CORBITT, ALLISON WALLACE, COREY WOMACK,
AND PATRICK RUSSELL
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS

In August of 2008, two faculty members of the University of Central Arkansas Honors College were charged by their dean, Rick Scott, with designing a summer academy for local teens deemed to be at academic risk. The central goal of the program would be to offer selected honors college upperclassmen—beneficiaries of full-ride scholarships, compelling interdisciplinary seminars, and close faculty mentoring—an opportunity to share with struggling youngsters their pre-professional training as well as their own gifts of character and personality. Our hope was that the experience might serve as a meaningful intervention in the lives of adolescent students.

What resulted from the planning conducted by honors faculty members Doug Corbitt and Allison Wallace was a pilot for the Neptune Academy, launched in August 2009, and described herein by Corbitt and Wallace. Also included are reflections on the experience by two of the eight honors college students who served as the teaching staff: Corey Womack (a senior at the time in digital filmmaking) and Patrick Russell (a junior English major). We offer as well the following appendices: a sample schedule for a day of the Academy; registration forms; and a “what-to-expect” letter, sent out just before the start of the Neptune Academy. A six-minute video of highlights from the academy is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWmxAllIZU_Y>.

DOUG SPEAKS

Suppose you were to take eight honors students and give them the task of designing a week-long day-camp for rising eighth-graders who have been identified by their teachers as struggling learners. Tell the honors students that they are to make learning exciting and fun for youngsters who just know that learning is anything but exciting and fun. What do you get?

You get a lesson on observing well in preparation for writing poetry. The youngsters are seated in a circle in the woods, and Patrick asks them to look closely at their surroundings, to describe what they see. To look more closely. Over here. In the direction of a downed tree, not more than fifteen feet away. And suddenly, the rotting log stands up and walks toward us. We all jump, shriek, exclaim, and burst into embarrassed laughter. It was Patrick’s friend

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Michael, mud- and leaf-daubed into a convincing semblance of woodland debris. Had we actually seen what we thought we had seen? What might we have seen if we had looked closer?

You get a lesson on clear, descriptive writing in which the youngsters have to find, gather, and describe a range of objects without revealing the particular items under consideration. The honors students must then attempt to identify, on the basis of each description, the right object from a rather extensive collection.

You get lessons on paper-making, film theory, storytelling, habitat construction, cooking, plant identification, animal tracking, musical improvisation, and star-gazing.

And you get to see the dazzling gifts of extraordinary young adults as they introduce others to a world of wonder and magic, of light and color, of laughter and friendship. In short, you get the Neptune Academy.

THE BACKGROUND

A confluence of factors led to the Neptune Academy. First came the sense of shared values that has emerged among the members of the honors faculty. Through our conversations and joint labors, we have come to think of ourselves as in the business of promoting human flourishing not just for the high-ability students in our program but for everyone. We challenge our students to take seriously the idea that “each of us is better off when all of us are better off,” and we urge them to look for concrete, practical ways to strengthen their communities and reach out to others. Such appeals leave us little room for inaction ourselves.

Second came the dream of the UCA Honors College’s founding director, Norb Schedler, to create a summer academy that would involve university honors students. Schedler’s vision centered on training secondary school teachers in gifted and talented (GT) programs. In such an academy, honors students would serve as teaching assistants to faculty, modeling elements of the UCA Honors College pedagogy such as student presentations and collaborative projects to GT teachers, who in turn would receive graduate credits. The academy was planned as a collaborative project with the College of Education. The vision was ambitious and needed substantial funding, but the money did not come, and other priorities arose to supplant this one.

Our current dean, Rick Scott, sought the development of a summer program geared to adolescents who were bright but at risk of not attending college. He imagined an academy that would embody the joy of discovery and inspire its attendees to future college enrollment. As in Schedler’s vision, honors students would contribute as teaching assistants, working with the young, summer academicians to introduce ideas and ways of knowing and learning that would open them to a larger world. Scott imagined that the parents would be schooled, as well, in topics such as how to create a productive study environment in the home, how to help their child prepare for standardized tests,
and how to learn what scholarships and other sources of financial aid were available.

In 2005, two honors students, Danielle Sterrenberg and Kerry Wilkins Snook, produced a thesis under Scott’s direction entitled “Preparing for the Lively Experiment: University of Central Arkansas Honors College Summer Academy.” The thesis outlined a week-long curriculum modeled on components of honors core courses taught during the freshman and sophomore years at UCA, and it proposed a hands-on approach that had students performing, doing experiments, writing, and taking field trips, all under mentorship of honors student teaching assistants and an academy director. A 2006–07 grant application to fund the summer academy did not succeed, and in 2008 Scott asked the authors of this article to develop a new grant proposal for the academy. The assignment led to the Neptune Academy, and it occurred a year earlier than expected.

The final factor was a serendipitous presentation at the honors college by visiting speaker Ronald Simons, a professor of sociology at the University of Georgia. Simons and his research team had conducted a longitudinal study of 179 boys and their parents to test hypotheses derived from two contrasting theories. One is the latent trait theory, which holds that “continuity of deviant behavior [from childhood into adolescence and adulthood] is an expression of an underlying social trait” (218), e.g., failure to learn self-control, impulsivity, insensitivity, shortsightedness (219). The second is the life-course theory, which holds that “childhood antisocial behavior has a corrosive effect on social relationships that serve as informal social controls. [These effects] in turn accentuate involvement in deviant behavior” (218). The team’s findings: (1) a strong correlation between childhood oppositional/defiant behavior and adolescent delinquency but also (2) “no significant association between these two variables once the effects of quality of parenting, school commitment, and affiliation with deviant peers were taken into account” (237). In other words, if the boys’ parents received guidance and education about dealing with oppositional/defiant behavior, or if at least one teacher or counselor demonstrated manifest interest in the child, or if the boys became affiliated with more conventional peer groups, the correlation between childhood oppositional/defiant behavior and adolescent delinquency disappeared.

This was good news! The right sorts of interventions can make a significant difference in a youngster’s life.

Armed with the over-arching vision of the honors college and the encouraging results of Simons’ research, we set out to identify the particular needs of struggling learners in our geographic area, central Arkansas.

Jay Barth, Ima Graves Peace Professor of Politics at nearby Hendrix College, was involved in research that yielded two helpful reports in 2008: (1) the final report of the Governor’s Task-Force on Best Practices for After-School and Summer Programs and (2) a study sponsored by the Clinton School of Public Policy, Hendrix College, and several other organizations on what Arkansas is doing to close the achievement gap.
Barth and Nitta found that “summer learning loss and unproductive time between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. [during the school year] are key causes of the achievement gap in Arkansas” (3). They cited many examples of after-school and intensive summer programs across the nation that have helped low-achieving students not only to increase proficiency in, say, reading, but also to catch up to their peers. However, the studies also revealed that there is no statewide initiative for after-school and summer programs in Arkansas and that nearly one in five Arkansas schoolchildren are left to take care of themselves after returning home from school (29–30).

Moreover, Mark Cooper, a colleague in the College of Education at UCA, informed us that the university’s Mashburn Institute sponsored a number of programs targeting struggling learners in the elementary grades and a few programs targeting high-school age students but nothing in the middle-school years.

Cooper put us in touch with the Office of Alternate Learning Environments at the Arkansas Department of Education, and the director, Lori Lamb, was excited to hear of our plan to address low achievement in middle-schoolers by giving them young-adult “professors”—university Honors students. She told us that she has over three hundred middle-school students in the Conway area alone whom she would like to place in a program such as the Neptune Academy. But we wanted to test the idea on a smaller number of children and only (for the time being) youngsters with no record of serious behavioral problems; Simons et al. notwithstanding, we thought it unwise to expect our young-adult honors students to cope with significant levels of adolescent oppositional/defiant behavior. Lamb suggested that we try to identify youngsters who scored at or above the eightieth percentile on benchmark exams at some point between fourth and seventh grade; whose scores in the last one or two testing cycles had dropped markedly; and who had no record of serious behavioral problems.

Thus we approached the counselors at the two middle schools in our town with a proposal to match eight of our honors students with approximately twenty-four of their academically at-risk middle-schoolers in a pilot program that we had come to call the Neptune Academy. We found the staff at one school enthusiastically receptive but the staff at the other completely uninterested.

ALLISON SPEAKS

As with any major endeavor, there’s the vision on the one hand and the reality of its implementation on the other. Let’s take these one at a time:

THE VISION

We envisioned hiring and training eight honors upperclassmen to work with twenty-four rising eighth-graders thought to be academically at risk. The plan was to create an intensive, week-long summer experience “in the woods” with an environmental education curriculum designed and delivered by the team of “Young Professors” (YPs). This intensive week would then be followed by
regular, frequent contact throughout the subsequent school year between each of the YPs and three academy participants apiece, matched to their respective honors mentors by gender. We considered this relatively small cohort a good size for the pilot program since we preferred to take baby steps and succeed rather than giant strides and risk failing. We fully expected to discover flaws in the academy’s first year that would need rethinking in future years.

We decided to put college students to the task rather than teaching the summer academy ourselves for several reasons: with a team of Young Professors, the gap in age would be considerably smaller; the middle-schoolers would see teens not much older than themselves getting excited about learning; and they would see teens who have “made it,” who have gotten through high school and into college and who have begun to take control of their own destinies.

We wanted to schedule the academy for the last week of summer vacation so that youngsters would begin the school year with a rousing “send off” of sorts and so that the follow-up contact between them and their YP mentors could begin while the youngsters were in school and (possibly) getting re-acquainted with their academic demons.

We decided to create a two-credit college course, led by Doug Corbitt and me, that was required for the selected YPs and that met once weekly throughout the spring 2009 semester. In this course, Doug and the YPs would work their way through at least one contemporary text on the subject of adolescent development in an effort to understand what sorts of youngsters they might find themselves working with: adolescents given to impulsive behavior, for example, or struggling with esteem issues or perhaps grappling already with addiction. We also expected to tap education and psychology professionals for short class visits to share their insights and expertise.

Parallel in time with the unfolding of this course, we envisioned requiring each of the YPs to identify a faculty member on our campus who would be willing to meet periodically to discuss lessons that the honors student would work up, lessons stemming from each student’s own primary interests and expertise. We were envisioning selecting honors students with particular interests and background in environmental sciences and/or humanities-oriented approaches to the environment.

In choosing our Young Professors, we decided to advertise the eight positions in the fall of 2008, providing a description of the academy vision and the two-credit training course. We would ask prospective applicants to tell us why they wanted to be part of such a program, what skills and background (both academic and personal) they could bring to it, and what kinds of lessons they could imagine teaching within it. Doug and I would then review applications received by the posted deadline (early November) and select the best eight from among them.

To assemble the first academy cohort of youngsters, we believed we could tap the guidance counselors at our city’s two middle schools to help us identify a likely pool of rising at-risk eighth-graders. We intended to compare seventh-
grade students’ standardized test scores with their elementary school performance, hoping to identify those kids who had begun their academic lives well but who, for whatever reason, had begun seriously to falter.

We pictured securing the use of a developed camp facility located within an hour’s drive of Conway and with such amenities as indoor sleeping areas, indoor plumbing, dining hall, trails, and a lake (i.e., plenty of nature to study). We wanted easy vehicle access in the event of accident or illness requiring quick transport to a hospital, but we also wanted to stage this week “in the woods.” We assumed that academically at-risk youngsters would associate schoolrooms and buildings with unpleasant experiences. A week spent mostly outdoors and away from institutional settings seemed more likely to rekindle in these kids the idea they probably had in kindergarten, that learning can be fun.

We knew we would need to secure funding—and permission as well as insurance coverage from the university—for all of the above, so we drew up a preliminary budget of about $30,000, to give us a goal to aim for.

Finally, we decided on the name “Neptune Academy” because, several years back, physicists in California made the experimental discovery that atmospheric conditions on the planet Neptune are such that it literally rains diamonds. We wanted to create conditions for a handful of struggling adolescents in which something sparkly—something precious—would happen.

**THE REALITY**

We picked a bad year to launch a program that, ideally, required some $30k. Thanks to the Great Recession, the grants we wrote came to no avail, and the funding we sought through existing sources at the State Department of Education failed to materialize.

We might have had better luck had we put off launching the Academy until summer 2010, but we were eager to try at least a pilot project. Also, we did have access to about $12k in internal grants with which to hire the YPs, and we had an eager pool of prospective applicants—honors students who had gotten wind of the idea that was taking shape—wanting to take part in this exciting vision. As it happens, had we waited to do this in 2010, the $12k would not have been available to us due to the university’s massive budget cuts early in 2009–10.

We did manage, then, to hire eight wonderful YPs, two of whom had once themselves been struggling learners. All eight were not, however, prepared to offer environmental education; one was a political science major, another was a philosophy major, and a third was majoring in digital filmmaking. Thus some re-thinking of the original curriculum vision was in order. We also managed to create the two-credit course, which met one night a week for the duration of the spring semester; throughout that time we worked our way through Sheryl Feinstein’s 2007 book, *Teaching the At-Risk Teenage Brain*. The YPs also brainstormed lessons and recreational-activity ideas, and they periodically debriefed everyone on what they were learning from working with their faculty mentors.
As it became clear that major grants would not, after all, be forthcoming, we were forced to drop the idea of a camp facility in the woods for overnight use and to recast the majority of the intensive week we envisioned as a day camp on our own campus, with lunches at the university cafeteria covered by a participation fee of $75 that each youngster’s family would pay. (We offered to scholarship any student who wanted to participate but who needed financial aid; no one turned out to need it.) Sundry other expenses remained to be covered, such as the cost of having T-shirts printed with the Neptune Academy logo. We were able to cover these expenses by means of an internal UCA Foundation account that had been established in previous years by university development efforts and earmarked for use by the honors college.

Funding constraints, as well as a general petering out of leads we had sought, also prevented us from asking education and psychology professionals from around the state to visit our spring course. We later realized that at least two or three faculty on our own campus might have been useful; tapping them is on the “things to do differently next time” list. The only staff the Neptune Academy ever had were Doug (Director) and me (Assistant Director), and we did not pay ourselves for the work of the academy itself, the time spent planning it, or the teaching overload occasioned by the two-credit training course.

With a day camp, we would need no residential space; we could use one or two campus buildings for some of the indoor lessons and any outdoor part of campus that we wished. The outdoor space happens to include a twenty-acre parcel of woods and prairie—the Jewel E. Moore Nature Reserve—so some lessons and recreational activities could easily be held “in the woods” after all.

Thanks to the little bit of internal funding to which we had access, we managed to get away from campus as a group for one overnight camping trip at a nearby state park. Camping gear aplenty was begged or borrowed, but food had to be purchased and the camp site rented. Ultimately, the pilot program of the Neptune Academy cost about $15k—half what had originally been envisioned.

Recruiting for eighth-graders did not go quite as well as hoped; rather than the desired twenty-four, we eventually had ten register to participate. One of the city’s two middle schools never responded to our invitation to work with us, and, although administrators at the other school were happy to partner with us, we did not find many youngsters eager to include “school” in their summer plans, at least not if that school were offering no credits toward graduation. Each student who did register to participate was required to submit a handful of forms, described in Appendix B.

The gender breakdown was such that we ended up matching the six male YPs to the six boys and dividing the four girls between the two female honors students. Although the youngsters knew ahead of time that they would be assigned a YP mentor, we did not make these assignments public until the end of the intensive week of the academy experience in order to ensure positive group dynamics all around; that is, every eighth-grader had plenty of opportunity to engage and interact equally with every Young Professor.

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Opening day was on a Sunday. As parents arrived with their teens, they were asked to complete a few short, additional forms that gave us, for example permission to videotape their children. Then Doug addressed parents as a group in one room while the YPs set about breaking the ice with the youngsters in the adjoining room. To judge by the raucous laughter that soon ensued from that quarter, not a whole lot of ice needed breaking. It quickly became clear that the entire group—teens and young adults together—were going to get along very well, on the whole, even as the occasional youngster might, over the course of the week, try the patience of the occasional Young Professor.

Doug has alluded to some of the academic lessons that transpired as the week progressed. What he did not mention was his own decision to begin each day by gathering the seated group in a circle around him for a brief discussion of a “word for the day”—such as “dedication” or “imagination.” As each new day began, Doug would ask the group to recall the concepts that had been introduced on previous days so that by the end of the week the youngsters could easily recite the entire list. By this strategy Doug was essentially inviting everyone to reflect repeatedly on the various concepts and to be mindful of them throughout the week’s many lessons and recreational interludes.

The week wrapped up back on campus on Saturday with a short, informal “awards” ceremony, in which every teen was presented with a certificate, and after which families, Neptune Academy staff, and key university administrators gathered for a celebratory cookout and group photograph.

That was in August 2009, just days before the new school year began. Subsequently, YPs began Facebooking, emailing, texting, or calling their assigned youngsters, occasionally joining them at their middle-school football games or taking them out for ice cream.

COREY SPEAKS

I now consider my time with the eighth-grade students at the Neptune Academy to be my best days at UCA.

However, as much as I enjoyed the spring semester of preparation for the camp, I remember that—as the summer began winding down, the scheduled week approached, and I saw the toils of my senior year quickly following on its heels—I wasn’t as excited about the prospect of giving up the last week of my summer. With two senior film assignments, graduate school applications, and an honors thesis to complete, I couldn’t muster much positive attitude about the academy when August rolled around.

But when the day came and we started our ice-breaking games with the ten kids, my apprehension melted away. I was already comfortable with my friends, the other Young Professors, but what surprised me was how quickly the eight-graders opened up to us. They were laughing and taking part in the games within a few minutes. I had expected a general mood of reluctance and anger. Had I been thrown at that age into an “academic summer camp” on the last week of summer vacation, I would have been furious. However, these students seemed excited and eager to learn.
My second big surprise came later that night. I had planned a lesson for the group around the film *To Kill a Mockingbird*. As the movie rolled, I had trouble focusing. Tom Robinson’s trial seemed to wear on for hours. By the time Boo Radley saved the Finch children, I was certain that my first lesson would fail; this movie was much too slow for these middle-schoolers. When the film was over, I stood in front of the group and asked them what they liked about it. I got the usual answers of “Atticus,” “the trial,” “Boo Radley.” I asked the group what they thought the title of the story meant. The classroom was silent for a moment, convincing me I would never be able to teach anyone anything. But then—

“It means we shouldn’t hurt or wrong something if they only do good things for others.”

“No. . . . Didn’t it have two stories? I mean, we shouldn’t do that, but doesn’t the part about Tom mean we shouldn’t judge people? He didn’t hurt that girl, but they sent him to jail just because he was black.”

I was stunned. They nailed it: in two quick statements these kids cut to the heart of one of the most morally challenging stories of the twentieth century. I had underestimated them, and their ability and eagerness to learn continued to floor me for the next week. These children weren’t fazed by any idea or task we put before them; they might not always understand or excel, but they always tried, and they were always willing to do something new.

My week at the academy sparked another line of thought about the other Young Professors. All of us are members of the University of Central Arkansas Honors College. During my four years at UCA, I have witnessed a certain perverse stigma that comes with being in honors. The rest of the student body and some of the faculty insist on putting you on an academic pedestal, which doesn’t always work to your advantage. I had never believed in this stigma. I consider honors students to be the same as all other university students—or, at least, I did.

I began to witness the difference during our spring semester of planning. Here were eight upper-level students meeting once a week, discussing lesson plans and a camping trip to share with youngsters they had yet to meet at a camp that might never—because of a lack of funding—be realized. Now, most college students have trouble remembering much before last weekend and thinking about much after next weekend. But our ability to exercise forethought is one reason honors students are better prepared to take on a project like the Neptune Academy. We spent an entire semester planning extensively, but, when the week of reckoning finally arrived, we realized many details were still uncertain. Had our group not been composed of borderline-obsessive perfectionists, the week would have surely crashed.

As I attended academy lessons led by other Young Professors throughout the week, I was continually impressed with the excitement and new perspectives they brought to subjects that even I would normally consider, well, boring.
Eric, for example, taught the students about The Prisoner’s Dilemma—an intricate, intense philosophical concept proving that, in the long run, society will fare better with cooperation than competition. However, Eric didn’t introduce this concept with a hefty lecture or by thumbing through a great philosophical tome. Eric taught the students a card game, wherein they could either guarantee their own individual survival by condemning a partner or they could cooperate. Within a few minutes the children understood that points added up much faster if they consistently cooperated.

Another Young Professor, Jeremy, taught a lesson about the formation of the planet and life as we know it. He had the students create a chalk timeline covering just over a kilometer of campus sidewalks. Jeremy stepped off the epochs and eras, calling out the major events in biological and geological history. The kids marked the line and drew a small cartoon illustrating the formation of water or the first single-celled organism. The entire project was very impressive, but most impressive was the last major event Jeremy illustrated, the appearance of humanity. After walking more than a kilometer, we found that recorded history took up no more than a centimeter of chalk. When the kids stepped back and grappled with this realization, the group as a whole seemed to gasp; you could look in their eyes and witness the event of learning. You could see fireworks going off in their heads. In this moment I realized what makes honors students different from other college kids and why they might be better prepared to lead a program like the Neptune Academy.

Like the young people they too once were, honors students still enjoy learning; we love knowledge and making connections. Many college students, their high school experience having killed something within them, look at class as that annoying time between naps, but honors students understand the beauty that comes from a classroom or a library or a science lab. Something has happened to us in our lives, making us want to know all we can about our environment and ourselves. Whereas the average college student looks to school as a chore, the honors student understands the inherent beauty that comes with knowledge. We know that life is better when you understand the hows and whys of the world. Witnessing the small epiphanies that come with learning—in both my fellow Young Professors and a bunch of jumping middle-schoolers—was well worth the last week of my summer.

**PATRICK SPEAKS**

People care, and people care that you care. Young teens really do care about their futures, about their hobbies, interests, and studies, and they desperately want others—their parents, friends, teachers—to care about that care. As fundamentally social beings, we crave this affirmation. A sense of community is vital to our development. Yet despite our individual cries for it, we ourselves often forget to dispense it to others. The teacher ignores the quiet whimpers of her student. The dad turns off his ears to turn on that night’s football game. The friend talks more of himself.
But in honors, we remember the Other. We bow in humility before the Other and the possibilities we can have together. We give her the time of day because we recognize the sheer beauty of the Other—the fact that she sees the world in a completely different way, that she helps contribute to the whole process of the world, that she holds the special capacity to create, and that, if an honest person, she helps us realize who we are and what we believe.

And so, in the Neptune Academy, we Young Professors actively engaged the students, letting them know that we cared, that we were genuinely interested in their concerns, that we wanted them to actualize their self-created possibilities or first to dare even dream of those possibilities. And boy, I saw the Other. Once I got past their OTD (Obsessive Texting Disorder), I saw wonderful kids who could be terribly excited about life and what they found dear within it. Eighth-graders bragging about what instruments they play, what disciplines they study, what professions they wish to pursue, how fast they can text: put them in the classroom, and, once their excessive energy wears off a bit, they feed you diamonds. I was amazed at the profound insights these kids had at such a young age. I handed them concepts and lessons that I wrestle with today, and these young students grabbed them, took off, and soared.

We must pass on to our younger generations a capacity for seeing the wide world in all its magnificence and all its ugliness, too. This capacity is not an innate trait, biologically bestowed by indifferent genes; rather, it needs to be harnessed and cultivated through education that mirrors the real world. Not only did I want my Neptune Academy students to open their eyes and see, to stand in awe before it all, but also to feel compelled to act. I guess I wanted to pass on the honors bug of being a “Global Citizen.”

The academy wasn’t all roses. Hyper eighth-graders will drive sluggish college students crazy at times. Their attention can instantly make you focus on some random, irrelevant thing. Cody, for instance, during Doug’s morning pep-talk about integrity, yelled “Microwave!” when he saw a college student carrying one down the hall. These youngsters will blatantly tell you, during your lesson, that they are bored, and they will ask you serious questions from which you cannot run and which you cannot cover over with ready-made comments. They will ask you about God, about dating, and they might tell you disturbing secrets about themselves or their homes.

But we Young Professors held fast to our patience. What we saw in every one of our students was a light, a flicker of amazing possibility, and we gave them the tools to cultivate that light, to tend to it, to enlarge it. We showed that we cared. We introduced them to the excitement and wonder of education—not classroom education, but real-world education. We tried to open their eyes, and I say that, if we only woke up one of them, we succeeded. I with always remember the joy and thankfulness I felt when I saw some of these kids “light up,” when they fed me diamonds, made daring comments, or offered astute insights, when they discovered passions they had not known until they met me and my fellow Young Professors.
DOUG SPEAKS

A pilot program is just that: an experiment to see if an idea has legs. The week in August 2009 revealed much that could and should be done differently as well as much that will be worth repeating when the Neptune Academy becomes a more fully realized endeavor. Here are a few of our lessons learned:

1. **Ask the right follow-up questions in the right way.**

   Honors students are accustomed to having their answers challenged with follow-up questions and comments designed to elicit any shortcomings in their remarks. Struggling middle-schoolers are not. We found that aggressive use of the Socratic method—however cheerfully and supportively practiced—prompted high levels of anxiety and frustration and tended to shut down the happy give-and-take of inquiry. A more effective approach, we think, is a welcoming response to every answer coupled with enthusiastic appeals for ways to check or test the answer. This strategy has two great benefits: it fosters participation by reducing the risk of embarrassment for self-conscious teens, and it cultivates the intellectual virtue of analyzing and assessing one’s own thinking.

2. **Be prepared for the inevitable snafus and take advantage of them.**

   The most careful planning will not eliminate equipment failures, experiments that go awry, and crafts that take some students much longer to learn or complete than others. The attendant irritations, annoyances, and distractions, however, can be reduced by assigning one or two Young Professors a “back-up” role at each activity and by equipping them with a generous supply of games, logic puzzles, stories-with-holes, and the like. In the event that nothing goes wrong, the “back-ups” can, through unmistakable signs of interest, help keep attention focused on the task at hand.

3. **Be mindful of energy levels.**

   Energy levels are extraordinarily high in the morning and at the beginning of a week-long program. They tend to wane as the day or the week progresses. Scheduling the more intense activities accordingly promotes more willing participation in all activities.

4. **Not all complaints are signs of problems.**

   The youngsters, for example, expressed some dismay that we only provided healthy snacks, but each day they consumed the abundant supply of fresh fruits, nuts, and baked goods we made available.

5. **Healthy friendships encourage a love of learning.**

   During the semester-long planning process, the YPs in our program gained a deep appreciation for each other’s strengths and abilities. The weekly planning sessions evolved into animated, energetic brainstorming sessions frequently punctuated by laughter and amusement. This good will was then
shared with the youngsters who enrolled in the academy. The YPs, in turn, were openly appreciative and asked that we repeat the program—expressly for them—the following summer.

6. The full support of the local school board and middle-school principals and counselors is indispensable for the smooth implementation and operation of the program.

Not every parent will welcome a letter inviting his or her child’s participation in a program for struggling learners, but, if the program is actively endorsed by school officials, a significant number of concerned parents will be not only receptive but grateful.

Most importantly, we found that our initial instincts were right on target: university honors students are often well aware that they have been blessed with many gifts—intellect, character, and supportive relationships—and that, without these, their own lives would be much the poorer. They are eager to give back, and in doing so, those initial gifts are compounded to an immeasurable degree.

REFERENCES


The authors may be contacted at DougC@uca.edu.
THE NEPTUNE ACADEMY: HONORS STUDENTS GIVE BACK

APPENDIX A

SCHEDULE FOR A TYPICAL DAY OF THE NEPTUNE ACADEMY

N.B. To allow for lessons in small groups to be conducted concurrently, the youngsters were divided into two teams, naming themselves the Blue Polar Bears and the Purple Moose.

8:00–9:00 Drop-Off/Breakfast/One-to-One Encounters
9:00–9:15 Theme for the Day: Integrity
   Doug Corbitt
9:15–9:30 Icebreakers
   Patrick Russell and Eric Wilson
9:30–10:30 Blue Polar Bears: “Photography”
   Corey Womack
   Purple Moose: “Finding Your Way” (Orienteering)
   Brandon Aist
10:30–10:45 Break
10:45–11:30 Purple Moose: “Ropes and Knots”
   Dietrich Ringle
   Blue Polar Bears: “Exploring the Map”
   Brandon Aist
11:45–12:30 Lunch
   Beth Estes
1:15–2:00 “Nature Songs”
   Katy Simers
2:00–2:15 Break
2:15–3:15 Purple Moose: “Photography”
   Corey Womack
   Blue Polar Bears: “Finding Your Way” (Orienteering)
   Brandon Aist
3:15–3:30 Break
3:30–4:15 Blue Polar Bears: “Ropes and Knots”
   Dietrich Ringle
   Purple Moose: “Exploring the Map”
   Brandon Aist
4:00–5:00 Recreation—Patrick Russell and Katy Simers
APPENDIX B
REGISTRATION FORMS FOR PARENTS AND YOUNGSTERS
(Student Form, Autobiography, Parent Form, Statement of Commitment)

Neptune Academy
University of Central Arkansas
Student Application Form

Personal Information
Name:______________________________________________________________
   Last       First       Middle       Nickname
Address: ____________________________________________________________
   Mailing Address       City       Zip Code
Phone #: _________________________Cell # : _________________________
Email address:_______________________________________________________
Date of Birth:_________________ Male ____ Female ____
Ethnic Group (circle one):
3. Asian                     4. Hispanic
5. White or Caucasian        6. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
7. More than one race
How did you hear about this program?
   ___ Counselor   ___ Teacher   ___ Word of Mouth   ___ Other _______________________________
In what areas can the Neptune Academy help you? (check all that apply and rank them in order of importance)
   ___ Improve my grades   ___ Develop new interests
   ___ Improve my study skills   ___ Meet new people
   ___ Discover my strengths   ___ Learn about college
   ___ Identify my passions   ___ Make friends
   ___ Engage in shared adventures and explorations
   ___ Investigate ways to turn my passions into a career or vocation
   ___ Other ________________________________
THE NEPTUNE ACADEMY: HONORS STUDENTS GIVE BACK

Please check the subject areas that you find most enjoyable:

___ English  ___ Science
___ Social Studies  ___ Health and P.E.
___ Math  ___ Art
___ Foreign Language  ___ Band, Choir, or Orchestra
___ Computer Technology  ___ Career Orientation

Please check the subject areas that you find least enjoyable:

___ English  ___ Science
___ Social Studies  ___ Health and P.E.
___ Math  ___ Art
___ Foreign Language  ___ Band, Choir, or Orchestra
___ Computer Technology  ___ Career Orientation

STUDENT PLEDGE

If accepted by the University of Central Arkansas Neptune Academy, I will strive to be present for all program activities. I understand that failure to participate and to follow the rules of conduct and regulations of the program may result in loss of participation privileges.

_______________________________ _________________________________
Student’s Signature  Date
Autobiographical Information

(To be shared only with Neptune Academy directors and program leaders)

On this page, tell us a little about yourself. Be sure to include information about people who have had a significant impact on your life (e.g., parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, teachers, etc.). You may also wish to share your hobbies, abilities, talents, likes, dislikes, etc., and any other information that will help us know you. Please feel free to use both front and back of this page.
The Neptune Academy: Honors Students Give Back

Neptune Academy
University of Central Arkansas
Parent Form

Father’s Name ____________________ Occupation ____________________
Mailing Address ___________________________________________________
Place of Employment ________________________________________________
Home Phone ___________ Cell Phone ___________ Work Phone ___________
Highest Grade Completed: (Please circle)

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<tr>
<th>Less than 9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
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<th>College</th>
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Mother’s Name ____________________ Occupation ____________________
Mailing Address ___________________________________________________
Place of Employment ________________________________________________
Home Phone ___________ Cell Phone ___________ Work Phone ___________
Highest Grade Completed: (Please circle)

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<th>College</th>
<th>1</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Guardian/Step-Parent’s Name ________________ Occupation ________________
Mailing Address ___________________________________________________
Place of Employment ________________________________________________
Home Phone ___________ Cell Phone ___________ Work Phone ___________
Highest Grade Completed: (Please circle)

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<th>College</th>
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Daytime Emergency Contact Information
Name ____________________________ Relationship to Student _____________
Place of Employment _________________________________________________
Home Phone ___________ Cell Phone ___________ Work Phone ___________

1. Why do you want your son/daughter to participate in The Neptune Academy?
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

2. What do you want your son/daughter to gain by participating in The Neptune Academy?
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
3. What are three words that describe your son/daughter? __________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. How self-confident is your child? __________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. In what areas would you most like to see your child improve while in the program? __________________________

________________________________________________________________________

6. What concerns do you have related to The Neptune Academy? __________

________________________________________________________________________

7. What disabilities, allergies, medical conditions, or serious challenges (if any) does your child face that we should know about? __________________________

________________________________________________________________________

If my son or daughter is accepted as a participant, I give my permission for him/her to attend all of the program activities. I understand that the Academy is fully insured against any accidents, illnesses or injuries that may result from participation.

Name of Parent or Guardian __________________________

Signature of Parent or Guardian __________________________ Date __________

Email Address of Parent or Guardian __________________________
THE NEPTUNE ACADEMY: HONORS STUDENTS GIVE BACK

Neptune Academy
University of Central Arkansas
Statement of Commitment

If you want to participate in the Neptune Academy, you are expected to commit yourself to the following requirements. Read the statements below and if you understand what is expected of you and can commit yourself to each requirement, please sign the form.

1. I will treat program leaders and participants with respect, courtesy, and consideration.

2. I will listen carefully and attentively while others are speaking.

3. I will obey all safety instructions and activity guidelines (e.g., rules for games).

4. I will make my best effort to be on time.

5. I will help clean up.

6. I will be friendly to all participants and refrain from any actions and words intended to hurt, embarrass, or isolate others.

7. I will respect the property of others (including University property).

8. I will participate fully in all of the scheduled activities (unless prevented by disabilities, allergies, etc.).

9. I will refrain from disruptive behavior.

10. I will refrain from any acts of violence and will not bring any weapons or controlled substances to campus or to the off-campus camping trip. (Exceptions will, of course, be made for physician-prescribed and/or over-the-counter medications. However, please inform us in advance of any medications your child may be taking.)

11. I will cooperate fully with program leaders’ requests and directions.

I recognize and understand that failure to meet these requirements could result in my being dismissed from the Neptune Academy at any given time.

Signature of Student_________________________________ Date_____________

I have read and understand the commitments that my child has agreed to fulfill in order to participate in the Neptune Academy. I support my child’s involvement and will help and encourage him/her to achieve the guidelines outlined above.

Signature of Parent/Guardian _________________________ Date _____________

HONORS IN PRACTICE
Please return the enclosed forms, along with a check for $75 (made payable to “The UCA Honors College”) to the address below by July 24th. (You may wish to duplicate the forms and retain a copy for your records.)

Doug Corbitt, Director
Neptune Academy
UCA Honors College
P.O.Box 5024
Conway, Arkansas 72035

Be sure to mark “Neptune Academy” on the Memo line. (If you have already requested that your child be considered for a scholarship, please disregard payment instructions. If you have not already made such arrangements but payment would be a serious burden, please contact Doug Corbitt at 501-450-5131 or at dougc@uca.edu.)
Dear <<Parent's Name>>,

The start of the Neptune Academy is just under two weeks away, and we’re all excited about meeting you and <<Student’s Name>>. Here is some information about what to expect:

**When:** The Academy begins Sunday afternoon, August 9th and continues through Saturday afternoon, August 15th. **Registration and check-in will be between 1:30 and 2:00 p.m. Sunday afternoon in Farris Hall Lobby on the UCA campus.** (Please see the forthcoming map and the directions below.) Pick-up time on Sunday will be 8:30 p.m. at the front entrance to Farris Hall.

**Where:** The main entrance to Farris Hall will be place where you drop off and pick up <<Student’s Name>> each morning and evening. The easiest way to reach Farris Hall is to take Farris Road to Students’ Lane (just north of the Jewel E. Moore Nature Reserve and almost directly across from the Child Study Center on Farris Road). After you’ve turned east (toward campus) on Students’ Lane, Farris Hall will be the first large building on your left. (If you take the second entrance into the Farris Hall parking lot, you’ll be perfectly positioned to drop your child off curbside at the main entrance to the hall.)

**What to Bring:** Since many of our activities will take place outside, <<Student’s Name>> will almost certainly want to bring **sunscreen, sunglasses, and a cap.** (In addition to lunch, we’ll also be providing bottled water and snacks throughout the day, but if <<Student’s Name>> has a favorite Nalgene water bottle or the like, <<he/she>> is welcome to bring it.) We recommend a **medium-sized spiral notebook** for taking notes and recording instructions and observations, a **couple of pencils and maybe a pen**, and a **“smallish” backpack.** If the weather is especially hot and humid, it might also be a good idea to bring **an extra T-shirt** each day in order to have the option of changing into cleaner, drier clothes after an out-of-doors activity. **Cell phones are permitted, but we kindly ask that their ring-styles be set to “Vibrate” and that, except in emergencies, students refrain from using them to text or to call others during instructional activities and games.**

**What to Wear:** **Shorts, T-shirts, and athletic shoes (or sturdy, comfortable hiking sandals).** A word of caution, however: The air conditioning in some of the buildings at UCA can be quite chilly during the summer. <<Student’s Name>> may also want to bring **a light jacket.**

**Week-day Schedule:** Activities will begin at 9:00 a.m. and end at 5:00 p.m. on Monday through Friday. However, if necessary, you can drop <<Student’s
Name>>> off as early as 8:00 a.m. and pick <<him/her>> up as late as 6:00 p.m. Between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. each morning there will be light breakfast foods available (e.g., doughnuts and orange juice).

**Saturday (August 15th) Schedule:** Activities will begin at 11:00 a.m. and wrap-up by 7:00 p.m. There will be a cook-out (to which parents are invited) at 5:00 p.m. More information to come.

**Overnight Camping Trip (August 13th-14th):** We had originally planned to transport the participants using two 15-passenger vans to a campground on the Buffalo National River, but due to a recent change in safety regulations, we are limited to 9 persons per van. As a result, we will not be able to offer the Night-on-the-Buffalo camping experience. (The university does not have enough vans available, and we do not have enough qualified drivers.) We are, instead, arranging an overnight trip to Woolly Hollow State Park. Woolly Hollow is close enough to Conway for us to use two vans to ferry all participants to the site while maintaining adult supervision of the entire group. **All camping supplies and food will be provided.** <<Student's Name>> need only bring toiletries (there are facilities at the park), flashlight, pillow, a change of clothes, and desired snacks.

I will be contacting you with more information as the time approaches, but please let me know if you have any specific questions I have not yet addressed. In the meantime, thank you for allowing <<Student's Name>> to participate in the Neptune Academy. We are so grateful to have this chance to get to know <<him/her>>.

Sincerely,

Doug Corbitt, Director
Neptune Academy
UCA Honors College
City as Text, the experiential learning program developed by the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee, has been adopted and adapted by hundreds if not thousands of educational institutions throughout the United States and beyond. Having served on the Honors Semesters Committee, I exported this learning strategy to Switzerland when I took a teaching position in the International Baccalaureate Program of the Collège du Léman in Geneva. I adapted City as Text™ for multi-disciplinary college preparatory students in Europe, and that adaptation might now serve in turn as a model for experiential learning in honors programs and colleges back in the United States. The focus and link between the City as Text™ experiences on two different continents and at two different levels of education will be what I call “Self as Text.”

The experiential learning experience that is the extension of and variation on NCHC’s City as Text™ involved an educational trip from Geneva to Zürich taken by eighty-five International Baccalaureate Theory of Knowledge students accompanied by eight multi-disciplinary teachers. The Theory of Knowledge course serves to encourage eleventh- and twelfth-grade students, through an interdisciplinary inquiry into “what it means to know,” to gain both a summative and forward-looking perspective on their education and on themselves as knowers. The course is most effectively taught by means of active learning, exploring essential questions that challenge students to discover and analyze the major ways in which we know and to make interconnections between these modes of knowing and the subject areas they have been studying.

The trip served the purpose of initiating the eleventh-graders into the course. The students had been told that they would be going to two exhibits. The first was Gunther von Hagens’ Body Worlds, an exhibit of artfully displayed plasticized human cadavers, skinned to reveal (as the exhibit brochure announced) their “interior faces” of skeleton, muscles, nerves, and organs. The second was Buddha’s Paradise at the Rietberg Museum in Zürich, displaying two-thousand-year-old Buddhist art. The students also knew that most of us would be eating dinner at a restaurant in Zürich where you eat in the dark. Finally, the students knew that they would be required to produce a criteria-based, graded, reflective essay on the trip activities.

The students, generally between sixteen and seventeen years old, were a multi-lingual and multi-cultural group, and for the most part they were used to
SELF AS TEXT: ADAPTATIONS OF HONORS PRACTICE

that context. All spoke English but in many cases not as their mother tongue and generally in addition to several other languages. As IB students, they were an academically select group. The challenge for us teachers in planning the trip curriculum was to determine what kinds of tasks would engage students already well-versed in diversity and difference. What kinds of activities would challenge them to step even further outside of themselves and gain a yet wider perspective on self/other/world? Martha Nussbaum has expressed this challenge eloquently in her concept of “narrative imagination” or “the invitation to become, to a certain extent, philosophical exiles from our own ways of life, seeing them from the vantage point of the outsiders and asking the questions an outsider is likely to ask about their meaning and function” (Gillison 34). I see this questioning of self, what I call “Self as Text,” as also the end goal of the mapping done in NCHC’s City as Text™.

In planning the trip curriculum, we were fortunate to have a large choice of exhibits in Zürich to select from, including both Body Worlds and Buddha’s Paradise, but as a creative and motivated team of teachers we would also like to take some credit for having chosen to juxtapose these two exhibits. As is the case in many team initiatives to develop a curriculum, a blending of ideas and possibilities took place among us, a creative and seemingly magical process that was not random but intensely purposeful work. As soon as we learned of these two exhibits, we saw the potential the combination held. How many of our students, we asked ourselves, had already been to any of the controversial Body Worlds exhibits? None, as it turned out. How many were familiar with Buddhism in the context of Gandhara, Pakistan, and Bamiyan, Afghanistan, two thousand years ago? Several knew that giant Buddha statues had been destroyed by the Taliban, a fact that was also a central component of the exhibition; however, learning about the earlier historical context of these sculptures and engaging with issues of who decides whether to destroy or preserve the past, and according to what criteria, was something new. Newer still was comparing and contrasting this exhibit with that of Body Worlds and issues it raised about the preservation and/or destruction of the human body and, some would say, the soul.

Once we had realized the potential of the exhibits, the rest of the planning soon followed. Since the two exhibits conveyed information first of all through the sense of sight, we imagined a third activity that could not be experienced visually. We decided to take them to a restaurant in Zürich called “Blindekuh,” or “Blind Man’s Bluff.” The restaurant is completely dark. You enter, are led to your table, and are served a three-course meal in total darkness. We chose not to reveal to the students in advance that the waiters and waitresses were all blind. We were sure that the “Blindekuh” would require some intense and unfamiliar mapping on the part of the students.

In subsequent reflections on our experience of both the trip and its planning, I have repeatedly come back to the process of mapping. In the NCHC monograph Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning, Bernice Braid...
addresses the crucial role of mapping, by now a core concept of honors teaching and learning. Students and teachers engaged in a City as Text™ assignment, she says, are asked to observe a place and its people in their given context—what Braid calls “focused observation” (16). She says that the questions are: “Whom do I watch? Why? What do I expect? Why? Am I ever surprised? By what?” (15). Braid stresses the importance of knowing how I, the observer, respond. In the end, mapping becomes a metaphor for a personal voyage of discovery, of learning how to stand on foreign ground and find a new touchstone, a place on which to stand, a new perspective from which to see. True learning brings forth a paradigm shift in our own journeys of discovery—a new way of seeing that is a new way of thinking and of being within ourselves, with others, and in the world. This magic worked itself out through our mapping and planning of the trip to Zürich as well as the transformations the trip brought forth in our students, who, like their college counterparts, learned how to ask new questions, re-learned how to be surprised by the unexpected, and responded with their own magic mirror of “Self as Text.”

But let’s go back to those students on the train. As background information for their voyage of discovery, we had provided students with a handout to orient them to the two exhibits and the restaurant. The handout began with the introduction to the *Buddha’s Paradise* exhibit from the webpage, followed by a list of orienting yet largely open-ended questions and a page of key ideas or “unifying themes” about Buddhism. We also provided a set of questions to use for reflection on the Buddha exhibit, focusing on the ethics of destruction or preservation of the past.

After having seen *Buddha’s Paradise* and looked into her magic mirror of “Self as Text,” my student Ethar Abd Al-Shakour wrote: “The past should be left for the future generations to look back to and reflect. . . . As for me, I wouldn’t want to destroy any part of me for the future me because everything I have and am is what makes me me and what makes me unique and different from everyone else.” Ethar’s words demonstrate the active, engaged learning that went on for this sixteen-year-old student. She reflected on the impact of the contemporary destruction of an over two-thousand-year-old tradition and made a personal connection between the ethics of the preserving or destroying the past and the value of sustaining her own identity; this is important learning at any age.

Another student, Rebecca, always a strong defender of her faith, reflected: “I learned a lot about the religion itself, as well, and what I learned from it is not to agree or disagree, but to understand and accept different beliefs.” This was no trivial statement for Rebecca, who was empowered through her active learning experience to lead others not only from the perspective of her traditional faith but also from a perspective of tolerance that is vital to twenty-first-century global citizenship.

Second on our background handout was a copy of the *Body Worlds* exhibit’s mission statement, followed by a page I had put together called “An Assembly of Random Thoughts,” which could or could not apply to this exhibit.
These thoughts included: “Is it art? Is it science? Is it awesome? Is it disturbing? ‘The Devil made me do it,’ said Faust. Cultural perspectives on THE DEAD—are you grateful?” The juxtaposition of these ideas was meant to be jarring and to trigger creative reflection on the part of the students.

Diana Baranga responded: “The extent to which science has driven human knowledge is admirable. . . . However, the exhibition was also disturbing. . . . It is true that we use technology for the progression of humankind, but how far should we be allowed to go?” Her question echoes many like it that have been asked about this controversial exhibit and asked throughout history, often after a horrendous event like the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The key to knowledge is learning how to ask the right questions, and Diana ranks as an outstanding student in the questions she raises. I often feel humbled by her philosophical, ethical, and deeply felt contributions to class discussions. She did not ask her essential question about human knowledge lightly.

The third component of the background handout related to the restaurant, and it was a page of questions leading to reflections on sight and light followed by a nineteenth-century poem by John Godfrey Saxe entitled “The Blind Men and the Elephant.” While the ancient story that this poem is based on is well-known, not all of the students had heard this tale that underscores a basic honors education call to consider claims as well as counter-claims, to understand that our knowledge and indeed our ‘truths’ are interpretive in nature, and to realize that any interpretation is one among many and capable of being changed.

In his reflection on the restaurant experience, Jeremy Dejardin noted: “In fact, the only people capable of serving the food in pitch black are blind people. . . . I started having images projected into my mind’s eye of who and what was there. I think my hearing was the sense that deceived me the most because I was focusing too much on it so that I heard things which weren’t real.” Through his experiential learning at the “Blindekuh,” Jeremy looked at the reflection in the mirror of self/other/world and no longer found in it the same conventional images. Instead, like many artistic and literary counterparts, he had somehow gone through the magic mirror and come out the other side, where “who and what was there” were “images projected into . . . [his] mind’s eye” and he heard things that “weren’t real.” In this dark yet quite vivid and marvelous world, only the blind could “see.” For Jeremy, Self as Text took on mythical proportions in the “Blindekuh.”

I think all who went to the “Blindekuh” during our discovery tour to Zürich would agree that, along with the exhibits, it offered stunning new perspectives. Most of us who went on the trip came back with the sense of having learned an incredible amount about ourselves, others, and the world. Long past the debriefings in our large group and in our various small classes, the Zürich experiences lived on as a reference point in many different contexts. The bonds that had been formed remained strong as well and continued to work their magic for students and teachers.
MICHAELA RUPPERT SMITH

As teachers we felt that we had succeeded in what we had set out to do. The students had come through their experiential learning orientation to the course and its emphasis on critical, reflective, and transformative thinking with flying colors. In the spirit of a City as Text™ “voyage of discovery” (Braid 14) and of Nussbaum’s “narrative imagination” (Gillison 34), the students had brought about their own paradigm shifts and found new touchstones of reality, new eyes with which to see themselves and the world. We could indeed call this process “Self as Text,” which is a life-long process that both college honors education and pre-college adaptations of it aim to promote. At all stages of our lives, responsible knowers can never stop seeking new perspectives, new eyes from which to see. Through our adaptation of an NCHC practice, our college preparatory students had successfully gone on a communal and individual voyage of discovery. In their reflective essays they later articulated, recollected, and preserved this particular voyage in their narrative imagination. Through their adventure in experiential learning they had ventured outside of themselves, scrutinized evidence and considered multiple points of view. In dialogue with community and through personal reflection, they had questioned their basic values and integrated new ways of thinking and being into their lives.

As their teachers, we felt rewarded for our efforts. We had stimulated and supported our students’ intellectual, social, moral, and emotional growth, helping prepare them well for the future journey of higher education, college honors, and continued life-long learning. All it had taken was work and dedication on the part of a group of teachers who, like our students, were willing to embark on a journey of “Self as Text” and make the most of it. In the spirit of honors teaching and learning at any level, everyone had come home the richer for having left. Together we had forged strong communal bonds, charted exciting new intellectual territory, and set new personal goals. We had deepened our understanding of ourselves, of each other, and of the global culture that calls on us to be capable and effective leaders.

City as Text™ is innately a tripartite process that encompasses Self as Text, City as Text™, and World as Text. In honors practices and their many adaptations, we are empowering future leaders of a new, demanding, socially just, and globally sustainable tomorrow. Part of the magic of “Self as Text” is that the mirror is large and multi-faceted; it invites us to embark on a life-long journey where all of us can find and re-find, invent and re-invent, ways of learning and seeing and knowing in ever-expanding contexts.

REFERENCES


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On Master Plans
Preparing a Master Plan for an Honors College

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My experience as an honors dean, like my previous experience as a departmental chair, is that it is easier to spend time putting out fires than engaging in long-term planning. The myriad daily tasks tempt administrators to succumb to the "tyranny of the now." We almost always have classes to schedule and teach, books and articles to write and edit, students to advise, scholarship applications to proof, theses to read, special events to publicize, committee meetings to attend, building tours and speeches to give, students to recruit, conferences to attend, and numerous other worthy tasks that call for immediate attention.

I became dean of an honors college in 2008. However we prize it, the college is undoubtedly similar to many others. We developed from a program that the university established in 1973, became a separate college in 1998, and moved into our own building in 2004. We serve about 750 total students in a large state university that now enrolls more than 25,000 students. We have identified our goal as "providing an ivy league type education" within this larger state university context. To complete our program, students take 31 of 120 hours in honors classes, where we handpick faculty and limit enrollments. The capstone of the honors degree is a thesis, which students generally write at the end of their junior or beginning of their senior year. We also print a literary magazine and newsletter, and we offer a lecture series and other special events, scholarships, awards, study abroad opportunities, and other perks for our students.

Shortly after I became dean, our university president asked me to develop a two-year, five-year, and ten-year plan for our honors college. Although I did not initially relish this task, I ultimately found that the process helped direct my attention and that of the honors college to longer-term goals and helped focus the attention of our president and university leaders on our key programs. I also learned the value of gathering data from multiple sources and involving key constituencies in the process. We ultimately concluded that we should continue to engage in long-term planning, with or without future presidential directives.

The content of individual master plans varies from institution to institution and program to program and depends heavily on such factors as the selectiveness of the institution, the number of students enrolled in honors programs, the
availability of physical facilities, the adequacy of funding, and the presence or absence of administrative support. By contrast, some aspects of the process of such planning are likely to apply across institutions. No process can guarantee a perfect outcome, but inattention to relevant sources of information and constituencies is likely to lead to the articulation of unsupportable or unsustainable goals, which have little long-term value.

GETTING STARTED

Having served as the author of the university’s most recent master plan, I knew that whatever changes were proposed would work best if they were aligned with the three major goals of Middle Tennessee State University. These goals, which are similar to those at comparable universities, are pursuing academic quality, promoting student-centered learning, and promoting partnerships. While all the goals are applicable throughout the university, the first two goals seemed particularly suited to the honors college.

I had worked closely with an individual in the provost’s office on the master plan and knew that she had also worked on the two previous ones. I began by consulting her. Although she had a number of useful suggestions, she was most helpful in alerting me to various constituencies that I should consider. These included students and faculty in the honors college; staff members within the college, including an associate dean and a former dean who was spending two post-retirement years helping with development; members of our honors council and our board of visitors; alumni; and the larger university community. My contact in the provost’s office also urged us to tie our report both to internally collected data within the honors college and data about larger national trends. Both sets of data ultimately proved helpful in situating our master plan within an overall context.

We found two national reports to be especially useful. The first was a study that the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) conducted. The 2008 report observed that “student experiences and outcomes are more varied among students within institutions than among institutions” (6). Indeed, it found that “less than 10% of the total variation in effective educational practices is attributable to institutions. The lion’s share is among students within institutions” (7). This survey makes a powerful argument for the value of developing and/or maintaining a high-quality signature program at a public institution that exists primarily to serve the general needs of students within the state and region. This argument was hardly news to those of us in the honors college but was important to reiterate in a report that other constituencies would read.

Members of our board of visitors had expressed great interest in the reasons that honors students choose either to come to our institution or to go elsewhere. As we worked on our plan, we found that a 2008 report by Lipman Hearne on High-Achieving Seniors and the College Decision provided special insights into the factors that generally influence such students and thus the areas we should emphasize to attract them.
IDENTIFYING TRENDS

I was privileged to become dean of a program that had been in existence for thirty-five years at a university that is preparing to celebrate its centennial. I thought it was important to begin the master plan with some background information that included this history, laid out current admission and graduation requirements, and delineated special events that the college sponsored as well as enrollment and graduation trends.

Gathering this information helped me spot some trends that I had not previously identified or had only vaguely sensed. I knew, for example, that one of our most difficult tasks lay in increasing the number of honors theses and honors graduates, and I was pleased to find that we raised our average number of graduates from seven in 2003–2004 to thirty in 2008–2009. Partly because of a scholarship program that we had initiated two years previously for incoming students who pledged to complete the program, we were fairly confident that this number would continue to increase. Indeed, one of our challenges may well be how to continue effective supervision of an increased number of such manuscripts.

I was less aware of enrollment trends. The honors college had fairly steadily increased both the total number of students enrolled and the total number of seats filled for several years leading up to the 2005 opening of the new building; during this time, the dean had undoubtedly considered numbers to be especially important in justifying the new construction. Enrollment had begun to drop in the fall of 2005, however, and had continued to decline through the fall of 2008, when the president asked that we do the study. This decline in enrollment corresponded to an increase in admission standards, which undoubtedly strengthened the reputation of the program but also alerted us to a problem that we might not have identified without reviewing the data. Partly because of our study for the master plan, we have implemented changes that include adding new class sections. These changes have turned the numbers in a positive direction without sacrificing quality.

Working on the project helped us realize that our data on graduates was not as strong as it should be. Although we surveyed students after they defended their theses, this sometimes occurred almost a full year before they graduated, making it difficult to say exactly what percentage of students were going to graduate or professional schools. This absence of important information prodded us to make some changes in the way we collect such data for the future.

WHERE WE STOOD NATIONALLY

Honors directors and deans often concentrate on the perceived strengths or weaknesses of their own programs without necessarily knowing how their programs compare to others. In other circumstances, we could have sought NCHC site visitors to help with our assessment, but the university president had given us a relatively tight deadline to prepare a report, and, with the budget situation we faced, the time was not propitious to spend money on outside consultants.
PREPARING A MASTER PLAN FOR AN HONORS COLLEGE

If correctly handled, a master plan is helpful not only for identifying goals within the honors college but also for educating external communities about the college and how it compares to honors colleges in other institutions. Our college had long been working to achieve the standards outlined in the National Collegiate Honors Council’s “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program” and “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College,” and we realized that publicizing this information could be useful to outside constituents. By showing that the college met each of the eleven criteria that the NCHC had established for a fully developed honors college, we were able to inspire pride and confidence in our program by demonstrating that our college already met established benchmarks. These standards would undoubtedly be even more helpful for individuals in less-established programs who are seeking to raise their existing program to the next level.

GETTING INPUT

One of the sources we used in planning for the future consisted of surveys of students who had written theses over the past four years. This survey included information on the following: the number of hours that students worked outside of school and their reasons for doing so; students’ plans for post-graduation; and their satisfaction with aspects of the university in general and the honors college in particular. A fairly high number of our students reported that, while in school, they had to work in order to meet basic needs; this fact indicated a need for additional scholarship support. Most of our students were pleased with their honors classes and their honors advisor. Almost all of our students reported that small class sizes—we cap lower-division classes other than our lecture series at twenty and upper-division classes at fifteen—were important to them, and an even higher number thought that the quality of their education was either outstanding or very good.

While such a retrospective analysis of our program was important, we also surveyed existing students and other relevant constituencies. To this end, we developed a master survey (see Appendix), which we distributed to current honors students, honors alumni, members of the honors faculty, members of our board of visitors, past honors administrators, and select high school counselors.

Despite a number of contacts, response rates from alumni and board members (some of whom had pushed for such a plan) were relatively meager. Although this response was disappointing, it was not out of line with similar surveys, and we eventually concluded that the response rate did not stem from disinterest in the college but from an inability to judge day-to-day aspects of a program in which many of the targeted groups were not directly involved. We were able to increase the number of student responses by handing out surveys in a number of classes rather than relying only on mailings or e-mail correspondence.

We asked open-ended questions about the greatest strengths and weakness of our program, our most immediate priorities and long-term goals, and
perceived measures of progress. We also made a list of about a dozen priorities that individuals had suggested for the college and asked respondents to rank them as low, medium, or high priorities. Respondents were understandably concerned about the financial viability of the honors college at a time of national economic decline and looming state budget cuts. Perhaps largely because students constituted a majority of our respondents, the highest priority that they identified was increasing the number of honors scholarships and honors graduates. Large numbers also favored increasing study-abroad partnerships (something we had already begun to do) and partnerships with other honors programs.

By contrast, some responded almost incredulously to the idea that we might consider starting a university press. We ultimately concluded that such concerns were directed more to the expense of the program and its placement within the honors college than to the merit of the idea itself. Perhaps again guided by financial concerns, some respondents thought that we should convert our literary magazine to an on-line format. Although we ultimately rejected the idea, we have applied it to a science journal that we subsequently adopted. Despite major efforts that we had made to publicize the college, student respondents continued to indicate that our program was not as well-publicized or as well-recognized as it should be, a problem with which we continue to struggle.

Responses to open-ended questions were not always as positive as I might have hoped. I learned that members of my own staff preferred to have more regular meetings and from some current scholarship recipients that they thought I was meddling a bit too much in their curriculum. I could easily remedy the first concern, and, although I thought the latter concern was unfounded, it proved helpful in allowing me to assess my work in my first year as dean, ultimately helping me be more sensitive to student concerns.

**WRITING AND ORGANIZING THE MASTER PLAN**

As the dean facing a relatively short deadline, I took primary responsibility for writing the document but invited input from others. The former honors dean, who shares my own love of writing and is a particularly good wordsmith, gave the document a close and able reading. An administrative assistant proved especially valuable. Her contributions included gathering background information for appendices; formulating an attractive cover, which featured our gold honors medallion; binding and helping to organize the report; and compiling charts of enrollment trends, graduation rates, and responses to our surveys for use in our appendices.

We ultimately divided the report into five major parts and eight appendices, which we prefaced with an outline. Part I provided background concerning the college’s history, the curriculum, enrollment and graduation trends, and university and alumni support. Part II focused on the overall goals of the university and the specific goals of the honors college. Part III listed NCHC standards and examined the degree to which the college was meeting them.
PREPARING A MASTER PLAN FOR AN HONORS COLLEGE

Part IV emphasized the relationship between the university and the honors college. Part V listed goals for the first two years, years three through five, and years six through ten. Finally, the appendices provided information on a proposed new scholarship, members of our board of visitors, enrollments, and thesis production. It also included a copy of the survey instrument that we used to generate information, responses to survey questions, and information we had gleaned from exit surveys of thesis writers.

WHAT WE PUT WHERE

The most important part of our report focused on delineating goals for the next two years, five years, and ten years.

1. The First Two Years

During preparation of the report, it became obvious that, with the current economy, our university, like other state institutions, would be facing financial exigencies in the coming years. Indeed, as we were preparing the report, we learned that projected revenue had declined to the point where the university foundation would not be paying dividends on foundation accounts for scholarships for the next year. Raising funds for this shortfall became a top priority that we highlighted in a telethon in which we participated shortly after writing our master plan.

Given survey responses, we formulated two new scholarship programs—in addition to our current Buchanan Scholars Program—that we would like to implement in the first two years. In the second of these years, we will have a full cohort of Buchanan Scholars, twenty students in each class who receive full scholarship support for four years in return for enrolling in the program and maintaining progress toward an honors degree. Because we believe that this program is so integral to increasing the number of students who write theses and graduate with honors, we proposed a program that would provide additional support for twenty more scholars who are willing to make a similar commitment.

The college had already been taking steps to emphasize leadership by and among honors students, and we stressed the importance of elevating this goal as a priority. Identifying this emphasis helped us recognize the importance of the institute for leadership excellence that we had previously offered, that we have continued for an additional summer, and for which we are now seeking additional funding. The report also highlighted efforts we were making to establish a campus chapter of Rotoract and a Leadership Circle, which has subsequently applied for membership in Omicron Delta Kappa, a national honor society that emphasizes both scholarship and leadership.

As we prepared the master plan, we recognized that the honors college should be intimately involved in the university’s centennial celebration in...
2011. We proposed offering a lecture series on the university’s history, which we implemented this fall, and using college resources to help individuals who were working on books on the subject. Other short-term goals included increasing publicity about the honors college, developing a program to recruit more transfer students, creating language halls in the honors dorm, and hiring a fundraiser. At the time we wrote the report, our previous dean was coordinating these efforts, and we proposed that the university follow his tenure with another individual who could devote efforts to this task. Although the university may no longer have funds for this appointment, we were able to highlight the college’s commitment to fundraising.

2. Goals for Years Three to Five.

Goals that we identified for years three through five include continuations of programs that we hope to implement within the first two years: new scholarships and increased numbers of honors graduates; continued improvement of our award-winning literary magazine; and endowed professorships, joint faculty appointments, or exchanges with other honors colleges to meet the needs of our growing program.

3. Goals for Years Six to Ten

A major contribution for our new building marked the transition of our honors program to an honors college. Our university recently refurbished a dormitory for honors students, which our students enjoy, but it is located at the other end of campus. Our university master plan calls for constructing a more expansive living/learning center closer to the college with offices and residential faculty who can tie the structure more intimately to the honors college. As much as we wanted to put this initiative at the head of our agenda, it would likely require another major donor or set of donors, and existing economic realities make locating such a donor in the short run a relatively unlikely prospect. We recognized that putting such a project even in a period six to ten years away would not make it a reality, but we thought it important to include it in the plan that board members and alumni read. We made a point of emphasizing that this project could be moved forward in time should a donor step forward. Coincidentally, we mentioned that although the honors building had been named, the honors college had not, and we indicated that the university would work with donors interested in naming rights for themselves or their relatives.

We also suggested that, if overall university standards improve and enrollments are healthy, we might need to raise honors admission standards concomitantly. We further emphasized the need to reconsider staffing and other needs during this time.
CIRCULATING THE REPORT

Once we had completed a draft report, we sent copies to all members of the board, distributed copies to members of the honors council, and to other interested groups. We got relatively few responses, but we considered them all. We learned the wisdom of sending draft copies of the document when a prominent donor called to say that we seemed to be soliciting contributions to name a building that had already been named for his father rather than for the college that had not been named for anyone. Fortunately, we had already included language indicating our appreciation for the building donors, and I was able to explain our simple mistake and correct it in the final copy. Still, the experience highlighted the need to choose words with care and the importance of circulating drafts prior to issuing the final document.

I was especially pleased to receive a very positive response from the university president to the report since I knew from my experience heading up the university master plan that he read such reports closely and would not approve projects that he did not think were workable or to which he was not personally committed.

After getting approval from the provost and the president, we mailed final copies of the report to members of our board as part of a larger informational strategy that we have employed to send each year a variety of materials, including two newsletters and two issues of our literary magazine, to friends and board members. We have subsequently used the master plan as a point of discussion at our annual board meeting.

LESSONS LEARNED

Our master plan helped us think about the future and inform key constituents, both inside and outside the university, where we are headed. We have also learned that even a report soliciting input from a variety of sources cannot anticipate all the important issues and will require ongoing modification.

Although we attributed declining enrollments to changes in admission standards, we found that we could reverse the trend by being more proactive in recruiting incoming students and by asking departments to schedule more classes. In the summer before our first two years under the new plan, we hosted incoming honors-eligible students and their parents in our building and increased both the percentage of students who chose to enroll in our classes and the average number of courses they took. We have also begun hosting high school students who are participating in our governors’ school and other on-campus summer projects, and we will soon be having an open house for high school students on President’s Day.

In some cases, we are recognizing that we need to add goals and, if necessary, substitute one goal or set of goals for another. We still hope, for instance, to implement a program for transfer students within our next two years, but recently we learned that support and resources are available for scholarships to
attract students with international baccalaureate diplomas, and we have already implemented these scholarships even though this was not on our original master plan. After writing the report, I also learned that the foundation office was seeking support for a plan for Centennial Scholars, which was very much along the order of the plan I myself had proposed.

Israel’s King Solomon opined that “without vision the people perish” (Proverbs 29, 18). Few honors colleges are likely to perish simply because they lack a master plan, but our experience suggests both that it is important to share a vision and that a master plan can be valuable means of so doing. Such a plan provides a way to transcend day-to-day concerns and concentrate on longer-term goals. A master plan can be particularly useful in dealing with the university foundation office since it provides both a vision and concrete proposals that the office can use when soliciting potential donors.

In writing our report, we learned the importance of gathering data on enrollment and graduation trends, polling a variety of constituencies about their perceptions of college strengths and weaknesses, keeping them informed of our progress, and sharing our vision with them. We situated our college and its development within the larger context of other honors colleges and programs and within the university of which it is a part.

Both because we were acting on the instruction of administrative leaders who have been very committed to our college and because we kept them involved in the process, we believe that we will be able to use the document to remind them of our priorities in the years ahead. At the same time, we will work to see that our plan does not limit future projects but serves as a baseline against which to measure our progress.

REFERENCES


PREPARING A MASTER PLAN FOR AN HONORS COLLEGE

The author may be contacted at jvile@mtsu.edu.
Dear Friend of the Honors College:

After meeting with members of the Board of Visitors, President McPhee has asked the College to develop a Master Plan that will establish goals over the next ten years. The following survey is designed to allow you to participate in this process. We welcome your suggestions and thank you in advance for your help.

1. I am:
   (a) A current honors student
   (b) An honors alum
   (c) A member of the honors faculty
   (d) A member of the Honors Board of Visitors
   (e) A past honors administrator
   (f) A high school counselor
   (g) Other _________________________________________________________

2. In my judgment, the greatest strengths of the MTSU Honors College are:

   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

3. In my judgment, the greatest weaknesses of the MTSU Honors College are:

   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

4. I think the most immediate priority of the Honors College should be:

   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

5. I think the most important long-term goal of the Honors College should be:

   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
6. I think the most obvious measures of progress in the Honors College are:

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

7. Below is a list of projects that have been suggested for the honors college. Please indicate by circling one of the responses whether you think each is a low-priority goal, a medium-priority goal, or a high-priority goal.

- Constructing a new honors residence hall near the honors college.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Creating a study-abroad partnership with a foreign university.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Creating a university press.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Expanding the current literary magazine, Collage.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Increasing the number of honors scholarships.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Increasing the number of honors graduates.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Creating endowed professorships within the Honors College.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Hiring additional staff to help with advising and scholarships.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Providing for future summer leadership institutes for MTSU honors students.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Providing leadership institutes for high school students.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Increasing the visibility of the Honors College.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Successfully nominating a student for a Rhodes Scholarship.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High

- Establishing more partnerships with other universities and the community to expand opportunities for honors students.
  - Low
  - Medium
  - High
JOHN R. VILE

8. The goals that I would most like to be added to the above list are:

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

9. Some of the goals listed above are relatively expensive. Please list any individual, agency, or organization that you think might be particularly interested in one or more of these projects and might be willing and able to contribute to it.

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

10. Do you have anything else that you would like to convey about the current status or the future direction of the Honors College? If you need more space, please continue on the back of this form.

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

Thanks so much for your help. We will keep you apprised of progress in developing a Master Plan for the Honors College.
Some Multidisciplinary Practices

Kathleen Black
Northwestern College (St. Paul, Minnesota)

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of the Northwestern College Honors Program in 2002, we have operated with several underlying principles, three of which relate to our goal of being multidisciplinary. Based upon our recognition of multiple intelligences and our acknowledgment of scholarship in all academic disciplines, we have made it our goal that a single definition of either intelligence or giftedness should not suffice as a strategic design concept for the program or as a selection criterion for the students who participate in it.

In creating our program, the Faculty Honors Program Committee decided that our honors program would not include only traditional or discipline-specific pursuits but would incorporate elements that reflect and encourage excellence in a number of different ways and disciplines. We wanted one of the criteria for honors students to be the expression of their giftedness in many categories, including music, art, mathematics, and science.

The adoption of a multidisciplinary structure birthed a second objective in our honors program: to develop well-rounded scholars. The idea of developing “Renaissance students” appealed to us. We frequently tell prospective students that, if they are accepted into the honors program, they are by definition “interested in everything.”

Finally, we wanted the honors program to be a vehicle for associating, connecting, and integrating concepts and knowledge from a variety of disciplines. As an overriding focus, we strive through the multidisciplinary structure to help our students see associations that connect one discipline to another. Once the students are able to see the commonalities as well as the distinctions among disciplines, they are less likely to isolate themselves within their own particular majors.

PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE MULTIDISCIPLINARY PRIORITIES

While foundational program objectives are laudable, translating them into organizational commitments and operational practices is challenging. In response to this challenge, we developed the following practical approaches.
MULTIDISCIPLINARY ADMISSIONS PROCEDURE

Since Northwestern College grants a substantial scholarship to students accepted into the honors program, we restrict the number of accepted students, so admission is highly competitive. We generally evaluate between seventy-five and ninety-five applicants for admission of just fifteen new students. Therefore, developing and executing a selection process that is fair to all applicants has been a top priority from the beginning of the honors program, and we have always affirmed that we need to include different types of scholars.

Applicants submit short essays that should demonstrate character and depth of thought, but the writing prompts do not pertain to any particular discipline. We also require that applicants submit a longer paper about any subject of their choosing. In evaluating these writing samples, we are looking for a thesis supported by main ideas and relevant details, but we put no restrictions on the subject matter. This paper is generally one that the applicant has done for a class in high school.

In addition to these written materials, applicants submit a sample of their achievement or ability that may come from almost any field of interest to them and that includes an explanation of the context of their submission. The work they choose to submit varies widely, but a common characteristic is their high degree of originality in content and form. Some include pictures of their artwork, photography, musical compositions, film productions, poetry, short stories, or creative prose pieces. Other applicants have submitted research in biology, chemistry, or physics; projects in political science; or computations in mathematics. They have submitted speech performances, oral interpretation, drama performances, and vocal and instrumental musical performances as well as papers in literature and history. We thus take a multidisciplinary approach right from the beginning of the process by allowing candidates for the program to submit evidence of their scholarship in any discipline.

Each original submission is scored by a faculty member qualified to serve as an expert in the relevant discipline. If an applicant sends in a CD with a flute performance, the primary flute instructor scores it; if someone sends in a report on research in chemistry, a chemistry professor scores it. In this way, many professors from diverse disciplines across campus become involved in the honors program and play a role in determining which applicants are accepted. We make this discipline-specific scoring as uniform as possible, using a simple 1 to 5 scoring scale: 1 indicates typical high-school-level work; 2 is good high-school-level work; 3 is typical college-level work; 4 is good college-level work; and 5 is excellent college-level work. As one might expect, 5 is extremely rare.

This application process has served the program well in meeting our multidisciplinary objectives and helping us defend our selection process as fair to all applicants. A parent once complained that the admission process was unfair to his son, who was good at science and math, not English. The complaint withered away when we explained that his son had chosen to send in only essays...
Kathleen Black

for consideration when he could have sent work in science or math, a choice that the application material makes clear.

Another way our application process has worked well is that we have a group of students in the program who are diverse in their chosen fields of study. We do not consider the choice of a major in our selection; nonetheless, the majors of the selected students represent almost every department on campus. We generally have between sixty-five and seventy scholars in the program pursuing over thirty different majors.

We also admit students after their first year at the college. These second-chance applications similarly reflect our multidisciplinary intent in that, during their first year, the applicants must have taken honors classes in at least two different disciplines and submit a paper, on any topic, that was written for one of our classes.

Honors Courses within Various Disciplines

The honors courses that we create and offer also show our commitment to our multidisciplinary approach. We currently have honors courses in a number of disciplines: ancient studies, art, biology, history, literature, music, mathematics, philosophy, textual interpretation, topics in science, and writing. The courses must all be approved by the Honors Committee, a multidisciplinary group of professors. Beyond approving the concept and content of each course, the committee members may offer suggestions for methodology.

In addition, the honors director has been instrumental in encouraging the creation of innovative honors courses, regardless of the academic field. The first offering of Honors Environmental Biology, for instance, included ten days of study, during spring break, at a research center in Belize. Students studied both sea life and the rainforest under the direction of two professors from our college, a marine biologist and a botanist. Students did their lab work in Belize rather than during regular lab sessions on campus. This year, students in this general-education honors biology course will go to Japan, working under the direction of a faculty member who did marine research through a Fulbright grant at the hosting Japanese research facility.

Faculty members involved in honors from various disciplines contribute ideas that shape the courses. Those of us on the Honors Committee do not restrict ourselves to thinking only about the academic disciplines in which we have degrees. Thus, we demonstrate to students one of our objectives for the program: that scholars need not be isolated within their majors.

Requirements for Courses

Another manifestation of our multidisciplinary commitment is the nature of our course requirements. Most honors programs require that students take a specified number of honors credits and/or take specified honors courses. Instead, we have distribution requirements. Our students must complete honors courses within a minimum of three different disciplines.
SOME MULTIDISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

When the Honors Committee was forming the program parameters, we chose to look at the multiplicity of disciplines rather than the number of credits. Students necessarily learn about disciplines in which they might have had no earlier interest, thus becoming multidisciplinary scholars.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY PRESENTATIONS AND RESPONSES

In addition to completing honors courses, students must complete one or more “honors components,” arranged by the honors director, during each semester in which they are unable to take an honors course. They are required to do at least one honors component before they graduate. The individualized components, taken by the juniors and seniors, are supervised by faculty members who agree to direct honors students in specified projects.

The subject matter of the honors components varies widely and has included number theory, international business, radio production, engineering, psychology, music theory and practices, and the theory of second language acquisition. Some recent components include “Symphonies Out of Songs: The Compositional Technique of Mahler’s First Symphony”; “The Somali/Autism Puzzle for Educating Diverse Learners”; “Erasmus and Luther in the Struggle over Free Will: De Libra Arbitrio vs. De Servo Arbitrio”; “Introduction to Egyptian Mathematics”; “Talkin’ Trini: A Survey of English in Trinidad”; and “Racial Justice and the Supreme Court.”

The methodology also varies. Sometimes the components consist of traditional research papers in areas of interest, but students have also assisted professors in their research and have conducted original research on their own. Two honors students have done research within the Minnesota Historical Society to study the history of gangsters in St. Paul and the history of authors of the Twin Cities. For each of these, students created for their fellow students a tour of relevant sites to visit. One student did primary sociological research to present “Same Country, Different World: The Unique Culture of Bethel, Alaska.” Another student assisted a professor with research by collecting samples and doing laboratory analysis for a component entitled “Genetic Analysis of E. coli from Lake Johanna.”

After completion of a component, the student is required to present the work in an Honors Seminar session, using PowerPoint. Attendance at fifteen sessions of Honors Seminar each semester is a requirement for our honors students, and students not in the program attend sessions as well. Students must answer questions from the audience at the conclusion of each presentation. Honors students learn to communicate ideas to others who are not majoring in that field, and the listeners learn to ask thoughtful questions and participate in discussion of a new concept not related to their major. In a seminar session presented by an engineering student on “An Introduction to Einstein and Special Relativity,” students from diverse disciplines got excited as they began to understand the concepts. One music major wrote about this experience: “I remember one specific seminar on Einstein’s Theory of Relativity in which I suddenly
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realized that I understood what was being said! This technical, scientific jargon that would have blown my mind previous to college was fitting and making sense." In their yearly reflective essays for the honors program, many students make similar comments about the knowledge and enthusiasm they have gained in numerous subjects outside their majors through listening to their peers.

Other lectures in a variety of disciplines are delivered by professors and guest scholars for both Honors Seminar and the college-wide Lecture Series. All faculty, staff, and students, as well as people from the community, are invited to these lectures, which count as seminar sessions. Sometimes we require them to respond to the lectures online in a discussion-board forum or devote an additional seminar session to discuss the ideas, but we always encourage them to take notes, and our honors students often step forward with thought-provoking questions for the speaker, regardless of whether the current topic matches their major.

MINNESOTA COLLEGIATE HONORS SYMPOSIUM

The Minnesota Collegiate Honors Symposium is perhaps our most important setting for multidisciplinary learning. The Northwestern College Honors Program created this yearly symposium, to which other colleges in Minnesota with honors programs are invited. All the students in the Northwestern program are required to attend this daylong event. Some of our students present, of course, but each of the others is assigned a task for the symposium. Many are session monitors, who must ask two questions of each speaker. Students are not briefed before these presentations, and roles are assigned without any regard for the topics of the presenters or the interests of the session monitors. We expect our honors students to be able to listen to a scholarly presentation about which they had no previous information and create stimulating questions.

At each symposium, we have had presentations about philosophy and literature such as “Arian Soteriology”; “Conflict and Compromise in the Development of Islamic Ideals”; “The Conflict between East and West in Paradise of the Blind”; and “The Ghost of Idi Amin in Ugandan Literature.” Other topics demonstrate a variety of disciplines: “Pressing On: Martin Luther King’s Living Legacy as Displayed in the Life and Ministry of Dr. John Perkins”; “The Healthcare Industry and the LEP Individual: ESL Education’s Role in Healthcare Communication”; and “Incentives for a Federal Shield Law.”

Two aspects of student participation in this Symposium reveal the objectives of our program. First, Northwestern students who are chosen to do a presentation do not necessarily explore a topic that is within their major, and so a mathematics education major presented a paper on “Class vs. Character in Dickens’ Bleak House.” Secondly, students respond well to the symposium. They can be heard in the hallway between sessions telling each other how interesting a session was or extending the discussion into the breaks and over lunch. The students also post responses on our electronic discussion board for further exploration of ideas. In their reflective essays, they have written
SOME MULTIDISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

comments like “I would rarely solicit information concerning the development of vocal cords, but I found myself fascinated by the presentation at the Honors Symposium” or “At this year’s symposium, I had the opportunity to learn about psychology, business, sociology, math, and linguistics. What a great time!”

MULTIDISCIPLINARY FIELD TRIPS

Because we are located in an urban area, we have the opportunity to take at least one field trip each semester, which counts as an Honors Seminar session. The Honors Council, a group of students in the program, decides the destinations of these field trips, and the assumption is that all students are interested in learning anything. We have taken field trips to art museums, historical sites, history museums, a science museum, and the Minnesota Zoo (conducted by a guide from the University of Minnesota School of Veterinary Medicine). We have had intercultural experiences (a Vietnamese cooking lesson and the Festival of Nations) and have experienced theater (Jane Eyre at the Guthrie Theater). Sometimes a field trip has been multidisciplinary in itself. Our field trip to the American Swedish Institute included information about architecture, history, and art. Another example is our attendance at an event called Victorian Ghost Stories at the James J. Hill house, which includes elements of oral interpretation, literature, and, in the tour of the mansion that belonged to the famous railroad magnate, history and architecture.

Students often mention field trips in their reflective essays. One student wrote about how interesting it was to tour a museum in the company of fellow honors students who shared their knowledge and insights as they looked at exhibits: “Our recent field trip to the Mill City Museum was another chance to learn from my fellow students as well as the tour guide and museum exhibits. I am continually amazed as I find that I am interested in every subject that we learn about.” Another wrote recently: “At the beginning of the year, we took a field trip to the zoo. I have to admit that I did not expect to learn very much; I just went because I enjoy going to the zoo. I was very surprised to find that I actually learned a lot while we were there. The other students in my group shared their knowledge, and I had a chance to share some of mine. This field trip generated discussions and learning.” These comments provide some subjective validation that the program has been successful in providing valuable learning experiences and in encouraging our students to visit these venues on their own.

CROSS-DISCIPLINARY HONORS SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS

In addition to the requirement to attend at least fifteen hours of Honors Seminar events each semester, students must complete seminar assignments related to all majors. For example, we require them to improve their non-specialized vocabulary by adding new words from their reading each semester and using words collected in that year’s “dictionary” in an essay or narrative account that they post in the discussion forum online. In addition, we require
them to annotate their summer reading and, using the annotated lists of their fellow honors students, make lists of books they would like to read. One of our continuing emphases in Honors Seminar is the development of argumentation and logic, skills that apply to every discipline. After learning about deductive and inductive arguments, premises, ambiguous language, logical fallacies, argument by authority, use of statistics, and semantic argument, students practice those skills using primarily the writing prompts provided by the Graduate Record Exams (GRE).

Another frequent activity during Honors Seminar is discussion, either led by the juniors or seniors or “Open Discussion” during which everyone is expected to bring in a topic. Occasionally these discussions are centered on a topic within the student’s major, but often they focus on current events. Students enjoy this chance to get beyond what they call the campus “bubble.” As one student said, “I think one of the greatest things about Honors Seminar is this exposure to a wide range of ideas and current issues.”

We also make students aware of what we call “outside opportunities,” which might be lectures or special exhibits at museums. Students may use up to two of these outside opportunities to fulfill requirements for seminar hours. They share these learning opportunities, if possible, by inviting others to join them. (We tell them to “try to use all the seat belts in the car.”) They also share by posting a summary and response online. No attempt is made to match these outside opportunities to any particular major.

**INTEGRATING THE DISCIPLINES**

Our objective of making honors students see connections among the various academic disciplines has frequently proven to be more elusive and difficult than our objectives of being inclusive in admissions and multidisciplinary in academics. However, the integration of academic disciplines can occur as a direct result of a student’s honors courses. Immediately prior to graduation, honors students are required to write a final paper reflecting on their journey as a scholar. The specific honors courses they choose to mention are not necessarily courses within their major field of study. For example, one social science major recently wrote that she was glad that she had taken the honors course in forensic science, a course involving physics, chemistry, and biology. While she never wanted to major in science, when she was graduating and heading for law school, she saw the application of this course to the study of law.

Integration also occurs in honors components. A few of the upperclassmen have requested to do components that either cross disciplines or have been inspired by the work of an honors student in another discipline. For example, one student did a component on the correlations between art and classical literature, and two others have explored the broad question “What is the nature of higher education?” Another senior, with a major in cross-cultural studies, was influenced by studies in psychology that other honors students had done and adopted their methodology. Other examples of integration of disciplines
SOME MULTIDISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

within the honors components include “Notating Culture: An Examination of Music Notation and its Relationship to Culture”; “The Effect of American Postmodernism on Mass Religious Events”; and “Affected by Beauty: Calvin’s Aesthetic Theory.”

We have also seen integration among disciplines as a result of the student-led seminar discussions. The most outstanding example of integration of multiple disciplines came from a student majoring in musical composition. He wrote:

Had I not been an [honors student], I highly doubt that my composing would be as broad-minded as I seek for it to be. I would likely not be drawing in influences from other art forms, as witnessed by my Improvisation after Edvard Munch No. 1, “Hvit Nat,” inspired by a trip to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. I doubt that I would have pursued poetry to the extent that I have, which has led to the composition of many art songs over the last year; several professors believe these to represent my best work. Having the experience of upper-level, multi-disciplinary student presentations continually broadening my interests, I have found many new and formative inspirations for composition. From hearing mathematics students speak, I pursued one to find out about matrix functions, and then applied these to composition, eventually having a major breakthrough in my compositional technique, producing a work that will be on the recital. From the religious and philosophical discussions we have had in seminars over the years, I have explored more mystical and theological concepts in music. (J.D., Reflective Essay, April 2010)

Honors Colloquium

A new honors course that epitomizes our efforts to be multidisciplinary is an interdisciplinary colloquium in which students do research on a variety of topics within a common theme at a location outside the United States. They then present to each other what they have learned. So far, we have been able to do two Honors Colloquiums, one with a study trip to Wales and Ireland and one with a study trip to Scotland. Within the country or countries associated with the trip each time, students have studied history, linguistics, sociolinguistics, literature, art, music, electronic media, journalism, philosophy, and religion. Many of the students have been able to conduct relevant research while they were on the study tour. In a presentation last spring to students and faculty members, Colloquium students recounted the connections they had found among their areas of study and the integration of ideas from the study of others.

CONCLUSION

We believe that we have made a good start on the realization of our program’s multidisciplinary objectives. A recent graduate wrote, “My interests have
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not narrowed. . . . Instead, they have expanded so much that I do not even know how to satisfy all my appetites for different areas of learning. I was recently asked in an interview what I would want to study if I could expand my knowledge base in one area. I laughed because I did not know what area to choose.” He has become a “Renaissance student.” In this graduate and in our honors students as a whole, we see evidence of interest in and appreciation for a wide variety of subjects, the connections between them, and their application to numerous fields of study, leading us to believe that we are meeting these objectives for the program.

The author may be contacted at kmblack@nwc.edu.
About the Authors

Julie M. Barst is Assistant Professor of English at South Dakota State University, where she specializes in nineteenth-century British literature, composition, women’s studies, and Australian literature. She has published articles on British imperialism in *European Romantic Review* and the *Australasian Victorian Studies Journal*, and she is currently co-teaching an interdisciplinary honors colloquium entitled “Women Shaping Their World.”

Kathleen Black is Director of the Honors Program and a professor of English at Northwestern College of St. Paul, Minnesota. She teaches classes in linguistics and writing and has authored books including *Guide for the Advancing Grammarian: An Exploration of English for Writers and Teachers* and *Teaching Practical Grammar*.

Elizabeth Bleicher is Assistant Professor of English and Coordinator of English Education at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York, where she is a member of the honors program faculty. She teaches and conducts research on liberal and higher education, pedagogy methods, and Victorian literature and culture.

April Brooks, Professor and Head of the Department of History and Political Science at South Dakota State University, has taught both high school and college students. She believes that content knowledge in a subject is important but helping students develop the skill sets needed for their future is paramount.

Leda Cempellin received her PhD at the University of Parma, Italy, and is currently Assistant Professor in History of Art at South Dakota State University. She authored the books *Conversazioni con Don Eddy—Conversations with Don Eddy* (2000); *L’iperrealismo “Fotografico” Americano in Pittura. Risonanze Storiche nella East e nella West Coast* (2004); *Leigh Behnke: Real Spaces, Imagined Lives* (2005), and numerous articles on contemporary art. Her most recent research and scholarly interests include topics in museum studies and in gender and art.

Douglas Corbitt is a lecturer in the University of Central Arkansas Honors College, where he teaches courses in the history of philosophy and bioethics. He holds an MA in philosophy from the University of Chicago and a BA in mathematics from Asbury College.
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Alissa S. Crans is Assistant Professor of Mathematics at Loyola Marymount University. Her scholarly interests include higher-dimensional algebra and the relationships between mathematics and music. She is extremely active in mentoring young female mathematicians and in helping all students increase their enthusiasm for mathematics and participate in the mathematical community.

Jaclyn Dowd oversees education and re-employment services as a senior director with the State of Indiana Department of Education and Department of Workforce Development. Prior to her current role, she was a project director with the Butler University Internship and Career Services office, where she coordinated internships, mentorships, and employment opportunities with Indiana employers. Dowd holds an MBA from Butler University and a BS from Indiana University.

Bevin Ehn received her degree in journalism and mass communication from the University of New Mexico in 2009. The multifaceted education she received as a member of the UNM Honors Program is what inspired her to explore a variety of nontraditional research topics as an undergraduate. Her thesis, “Music for the Modest Message,” examines how various music formats influence advertising likability and message recall.

Sarah W. Feldstein Ewing is Assistant Professor of Translational Neuroscience at the Mind Research Network and Adjunct Assistant Professor of University Honors at the University of New Mexico. Her research focuses on employing translational studies to develop more effective interventions for adolescent and adult health-risk behaviors.

Jim Ford is in his seventh year as founding Director of the Rogers State University Honors Program. He is Associate Professor of Humanities, Philosophy, and Religious Studies. He earned his BA from the University of Tulsa and his MA and PhD from Princeton University.

Adam D. Frank is Assistant Professor in the Honors College (Asian studies and anthropology) of the University of Central Arkansas. He is the author of Taijiquan and the Search for the Little Old Chinese Man: Understanding Identity through Martial Arts. His current research projects focus on the 2010 Shanghai World Expo.

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Annmarie Guzy is Associate Professor of English at the University of South Alabama, and she holds a PhD in Rhetoric and Professional Communication from New Mexico State University. She currently serves on the NCHC Teaching and Learning Committee, and she was recently invited to join the advisory board of the online journal First-Year Honors Composition.

Lauren Hundley is a sophomore and member of the University of Florida Honors Program. She hopes to attend the College of Pharmacy at the University of Florida in 2011 and pursue a doctorate in pharmacy. She was a writer for the Swamp Survival blog during the fall 2010 semester.

Melissa L. Johnson is Assistant Director of the Honors Program as well as a doctoral student in educational technology at the University of Florida. She is particularly interested in pedagogical uses of technology. Her dissertation focuses on the essence of the online teaching experience in honors.

Barb Kleinjan teaches Honors Speech 101, Honors Public Speaking 215, and 7-12 Speech Methods for the Department of Communication Studies and Theater at South Dakota State University. After earning an ME in Educational Administration and Curriculum, she also designed and co-taught a multidisciplinary, cross-curriculum course incorporating speech and geography. Additionally, for thirty years she coached the Oral Interpretation forensics team at Sioux Valley High School in Volga, South Dakota.

Lisa Markus is Honors Program Coordinator and an alumna of Butler University's honors program in Indianapolis. After spending several years serving kids with special needs, she returned to her alma mater to reenergize. She delights in the opportunity to learn across disciplines while supporting honors students and faculty in their endeavors.

Alexander S. Plattner is a sophomore and member of the University of Florida Honors Program. He is currently pursuing a BS in mathematics and biochemistry. He was a writer for the Swamp Survival blog during the 2010–2011 academic year.

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Patrick Russell is a senior at the University of Central Arkansas majoring in philosophy and English and minoring in honors interdisciplinary studies. He is currently completing his undergraduate thesis on the relationships between Heideggerian philosophy and food production systems. He plans to pursue a PhD in literature and the environment.

Julie Schrader joined the Butler University Office of Internship & Career Services (ICS) in March 2005. As Manager of Employer Development and Director of the Lilly Endowment Partnerships for Educational and Career Opportunities (PECO) grant, she works with Indiana-based employers to develop internship and career opportunities for students and graduates.

Kateryna A. R. Schray is a professor of English at Marshall University in Huntington, WV. In addition to teaching honors courses, she has served as a Writing Mentor for Marshall’s Yeager Scholars program. She is the recipient of several teaching awards and the author of numerous articles on medieval and modern authors.

Michaela Ruppert Smith is a former teacher at the International Baccalaureate Program at Collège du Léman in Geneva, Switzerland, and is now Head of General Education at Glion Institute of Higher Education in Switzerland. Before moving to Switzerland, she directed the Midwestern State University Honors Program. She earned her PhD in intellectual history from Claremont Graduate University and her BA from Bryn Mawr College.

John R. Vile is Dean of the University Honors College and Professor of Political Science at Middle Tennessee State University. He served for more than twenty-five years as a department chair, helps coach MTSU’s mock trial teams, and specializes in American constitutional law and the amending process. In addition to writing numerous articles and reviews, he is the author and editor of more than thirty books, several of which are in multiple editions.

Allison Wallace is Associate Professor in the University of Central Arkansas Honors College, where she teaches interdisciplinary courses in American literature and the environment, literature and medicine, and organic horticulture. She is the author of a memoir on beekeeping and numerous essays on nature writing, food, and farming.
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Anne M. Wilson is Professor of Chemistry at Butler University with her primary teaching role in the area of organic chemistry. She has mentored thirteen students in the completion of their undergraduate theses and over forty students’ undergraduate research projects in her fifteen years at Butler. She recently completed a six-year stint as Director of the Honors Program. She is enjoying her full-time return to her discipline and hopes to be able to offer her honors course on food in the near future.

Corey Womack is a graduate of the University of Central Arkansas Honors College. He holds a BA in digital filmmaking, a BA in broadcast journalism, and a minor in interdisciplinary studies. He is currently pursuing an MFA at Florida State University in writing for the stage and screen.

John Zubizarreta is Professor of English and Director of Honors and Faculty Development at Columbia College. A Carnegie Foundation/C.A.S.E. U.S. Professor of the Year, his book publications include The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning; Inspiring Exemplary Teaching and Learning; and The Robert Frost Encyclopedia. He is an avid telemark skier, a former six-time national whitewater canoe champion, a moonstruck husband, and a busy father of two girls.
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Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook by Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurrier (2005, 98pp). This monograph includes an overview of assessment and evaluation practices and strategies. It explores the process for conducting self-studies and discusses the differences between using consultants and external reviewers. It provides a guide to conducting external reviews along with information about how to become an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor. A dozen appendices provide examples of “best practices.”


A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges by Theresa James (2006, 136pp). A useful handbook for two-year schools contemplating beginning or redesigning their honors program and for four-year schools doing likewise or wanting to increase awareness about two-year programs and articulation agreements. Contains extensive appendices about honors contracts and a comprehensive bibliography on honors education.

The Honors College Phenomenon edited by Peter C. Sederberg (2008, 172pp). This monograph examines the growth of honors colleges since 1990: historical and descriptive characterizations of the trend, alternative models that include determining whether becoming a college is appropriate, and stories of creation and recreation. Leaders whose institutions are contemplating or taking this step as well as those directing established colleges should find these essays valuable.

Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices by Annmarie Guy (2003, 182pp). Parallel historical developments in honors and composition studies; contemporary honors writing projects ranging from admission essays to theses as reported by over 300 NCHC members.


Inspiring Exemplary Teaching and Learning: Perspectives on Teaching Academically Talented College Students edited by Larry Clark and John Ziniaretta (2008, 210pp). This rich collection of essays offers valuable insights into innovative teaching and significant learning in the context of academically challenging classrooms and programs. The volume provides theoretical, descriptive, and practical resources, including models of effective instructional practices, examples of successful courses designed for enhanced learning, and a list of online links to teaching and learning centers and educational databases worldwide.

Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks by Jean Diggs with reflective essays on theory and practice by student and faculty participants and National Park Service personnel (2010, 272pp). This monograph explores an experiential learning program that fosters immersion in and stewardship of the national parks. The topics include program design, group dynamics, philosophical and political issues, photography, wilderness exploration, and assessment.

Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning edited by Bernice Brand and Ada Long (Second Edition, 2010, 128pp). Updated theory, information, and advice on experiential pedagogies developed within NCHC during the past 35 years, including Honors Semesters and City as Text®, along with suggested adaptations to multiple educational contexts.

Setting the Table for Diversity edited by Lisa L. Coleman and Jonathan D. Kotinek (2010, 288pp). This collection of essays provides definitions of diversity in honors, explores the challenges and opportunities diversity brings to honors education, and depicts the transformative nature of diversity when coupled with equity and inclusion. These essays discuss African American, Latina/o, international, and first-generation students as well as students with disabilities. Other issues include experiential and service learning, the politics of diversity, and the psychological resistance to it. Appendices relating to NCHC member institutions contain diversity statements and a structural diversity survey.

Shatter the Glass Ceiling: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education edited by Peter A. Machon (2008, 10pp). A companion piece to Place as Text, focusing on recent, innovative applications of City as Text™ teaching strategies. Chapters on campus as text, local neighborhoods, study abroad, science courses, writing exercises, and philosophical considerations, with practical materials for instituting this pedagogy.

Teaching and Learning in Honors edited by Cheryl L. Fuiks and Larry Clark (2001, 129pp). Presents a variety of perspectives on teaching and learning useful to anyone developing new or reinvigorating established honors curricula.

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCH) is a semi-annual periodical featuring scholarly articles on honors education. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology, articles on interdisciplinary efforts, discussions of problems common to honors programs, items on the national higher education agenda, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education.

Honors in Practice (HIP) is an annual journal that accommodates the need and desire for articles about nuts-and-bolts practices by featuring practical and descriptive essays on topics such as successful honors courses, suggestions for out-of-class experiences, administrative issues, and other topics of interest to honors administrators, faculty, and students.