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Faculty Compensation and Course Assessment in Honors Composition

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When my National Collegiate Honors Council monograph *Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices* was in its dissertation stage, an early draft contained information about potential administrative problems in offering honors composition courses. The initial questionnaire did not include specific questions regarding administrative concerns, but I was prompted to include such questions in the follow-up interviews after receiving a somewhat troubling email message from a questionnaire respondent, an excerpt of which is included here:

> Our program is so different from those typically offered that I am not sure if any of our answers would be relevant to your concerns. Because our mandate was to create a program which would not result in special courses provided only to honors students, the powers (power, really) insist that anything smacking of "elitism" is *verboten*. In addition there is no separate budget or staff; the program simply offers an honors "option" to regularly scheduled classes. This means that each semester a number and variety of General Education courses will be offered with an honors option. Since these classes are part of the regular curriculum, the option for honors is technically open to anyone (thus the claim is made that this program is inclusive).

Contemplating possible paths of resistance, I decided to ask in the follow-up interviews not only if respondents had encountered resistance in general but also if faculty were compensated for honors coursework and in what fashion. I also wanted to determine whether positive outcomes of assessment of honors composition courses might have been used to overcome resistance.

At that early draft stage, however, the dissertation director advised that this section be excised for two reasons: (1) the content touched upon sensitive internal political issues that, as a doctoral candidate, I would do well to avoid, and (2) the nature of the discussion detracted from the overall focus on pedagogical guidelines. As I revised the manuscript toward its final monograph version, the administrative concerns section remained an awkward fit, better suited for separate presentation. This essay, therefore, will address the aforementioned three problem areas in the

administration of honors composition courses: faculty compensation, course assessment and evaluation, and resistance to honors courses. Granted, these issues are relevant to honors courses in all disciplines, not simply composition. The questions were asked, however, during interviews regarding writing courses and components within honors programs, and as noted in the sections below, teaching and assessment actively comprise a more significant portion of scholarly research in composition than they do in most other disciplines, so this essay will, by nature, focus more specifically on the context of honors composition.

HOW ARE FACULTY WHO TEACH HONORS COURSES COMPENSATED?

While the planning and implementation of strong, challenging honors composition courses can be personally and professionally invigorating, the bottom line is that these courses must be supported, funded, and staffed. Frank Aydelotte, a founder of the contemporary honors movement who also taught composition at schools such as Harvard and MIT, identified funding as a key concern:

> Where individual tutorial work or honors seminars are counted as a regular part of a professor's duties, the expense of instruction for the college or university is, of course, somewhat increased. The increase could in many cases be wholly or partially met by curtailing the number of small advanced specialized courses offered by departments. The number and variety of such courses represent a great extravagance in American higher education. A few small colleges are courageously limiting the number of courses offered as a means of finding faculty time for honors work, and it may well be that the soundness of instruction in such an institution may in the future be partly judged by the thinness of its catalogue. For the most part, however, this method of economy has not been adopted, and in too many places whatever additional expense honors work may involve is borne by the faculty in the form of extra hours of teaching. (*Breaking the Academic Lockstep*, 59)

Although Aydelotte was commenting on the state of honors education in 1944, some of these statements unfortunately still hold true sixty years later. For many contemporary honors programs, whether at two-year, four-year, or graduate degree-granting institutions, a major challenge is providing adequate incentive and compensation to lure the best faculty into teaching honors courses and away from departmental courses in which they are deeply invested or needed. Many faculty are happy to have the opportunity to work with honors students, but is personal satisfaction enough compensation in the face of budget cuts, demanding courseloads, and research requirements? In addition, faculty assignment to and compensation for honors composition becomes increasingly important given the variety of instructors who teach composition. For example, at a graduate-degree granting institution, it is not uncommon to have composition taught by full-time tenured and tenure-track professors, full- and

part-time instructors, adjuncts, and graduate students at the doctoral and master's levels (who, in most English departments, do not serve as assistants to a professor of record but who are the course instructors themselves). Arguably, select part-time instructors or graduate teaching assistants would certainly be qualified to teach honors composition sections; in fact, several colleagues and I enjoyed this opportunity early in our teaching careers. If a selling point of an honors program, however, is that classes will be taught by full-time professors, then administrators and faculty must ensure that honors sections are staffed appropriately.

In addressing faculty assignment and compensation, respondents reported several options in allocating instructors to honors composition courses. The recommended option, reported by thirty-two of the forty-six respondents to this question, is to incorporate honors courses into an instructor's regular teaching load. If this is not possible for the instructor's home department and/or the honors program, several other options are listed below.

1. Regular Load. The best scenario for honors composition courses is including an honors course as part of an instructor's regular teaching load. Sample responses and variations include the following:

> Faculty are paid for all honors teaching by their own departments. Honors courses are part of the regular workload (though a faculty member might opt to teach honors as overload). Honors courses carry departmental numbers (300 level numbers indicate honors). (Joan Digby, LIU/CW Post)

> Hours to teach honors courses are part of the normal teaching load. To prepare a new honors course, release time is given. (Lory Hawkes, DeVry Institute)

> Part of normal teaching load. Two instructors for the two-semester foundation course (HRS 101-102) and for the third semester course HRS 201 (Leadership Development through the Classics). Faculty brought in to lecture for one class are given a modest honorarium ($300 currently). (Karl Oelke, Union County College)

> It is part of their normal teaching load. There is a stipend ($500.00) awarded each year to two course proposals (we have an annual competition) for course development for the following year. The teacher(s) of each winning course is awarded $500.00 by the Honors Program to prepare for and/or run the proposed course. Honors Program money is also available to fund special projects such as field trips, guest speakers, etc. (Thomas W. Albritton, High Point University)

2. Release Time. If the instructor's home department cannot afford to incorporate an honors course into the instructor's regular teaching load, then the writing program administrator, the department, and the honors program can work together to provide optional types of compensation, one of which is release time.

> Most Honors faculty will receive overload or release time. We have a special "deal" with some departments that they teach 3 credits of Honors courses and we pay their department for 4 credits so that they might hire an adjunct to teach their normal load courses. All of the monies come from the Honors budget which is rather small. Academic Affairs is currently in charge of our program and some compensation comes from their budget. (Carrie Williams, Mankato State University)

> Faculty asked to teach an HC course are released from one course in their department teaching load. (Brian Murphy, Oakland University)

3. Reduced Load. The department and honors program may also arrange for an instructor to have a reduced load to teach an honors course.

> Faculty who teach Honors courses (writing-intensive by definition) normally receive a one-course reduction in their departments, with the Honors budget compensating departments a little over $2,000 for the cost of replacing the instructor with a part-time instructor for that one course. (Daniel Rigney, St. Mary's University)

4. Other Monetary Compensation. In some cases, the honors program itself must take the responsibility of providing its own type of funding to instructors.

> The faculty mentor receives $400 for the first student in a contract and $175 for each additional student up to the maximum of $1200. There is a line item in our budget to cover this cost. Students do pay for one hour tuition ($46) for the Honors Contract. (Matt Campbell, Johnson County Community College)

5. Other. If no financial compensation is available, instructors, departments and/or program directors can make other types of arrangements.

> The only compensation for honors instructors is a reduced class size. (Jean Shankweiler, El Camino College)

> Our faculty that teach during the year, Fall and Spring, are not compensated on an individual basis but their colleges/divisions are compensated. (JoAnn Evans, West Virginia University)

> No funds exist for this. Departments must donate faculty if the honors program is to offer courses. (Lillian Mayberry, University of Texas at El Paso)

Overall, participation of committed faculty is crucial to the success of honors education, including honors composition. Consider the amount of work that honors program directors and faculty choose to dedicate not only to coursework but also to independent study projects, theses, and extracurricular activities, such as taking students to conferences. Granted, some work is considered part of a normal teaching

load, as noted above, or can be counted in the annual professional activity report, but in some instances faculty are compensated only with gratitude and personal satisfaction.

HOW SHOULD HONORS COMPOSITION COURSES BE ASSESSED AND EVALUATED?

Another bottom-line aspect of honors education is assessing which elements of the program are successful in meeting the instructional goals of both the honors program and the institution. During the period of Aydelotte's surveys (*Breaking the Academic Lockstep*), proponents were still fighting to begin and maintain honors programs, so they worked more to establish the appropriate curriculum and instruction than to construct assessment methods. During the next stage of honors education's development, as documented by Joseph Cohen in *The Superior Student in American Higher Education*, honors educators began to discuss assessment measures used in their programs. One chapter in Cohen's text describes the evaluation of honors programs through student reporting and evaluation of their educational experiences; other types of program evaluation, such as self-evaluation, review by accreditation agencies, or institutional outcomes assessment are not substantially discussed.

Today, honors program directors and composition faculty have a variety of resources from scholarship in both honors education and composition that can be used to assess honors composition courses. Of the forty-four respondents to this question in the follow-up interview, however, only five indicated that the English department had specifically assessed honors composition courses during the previous five years; thirteen respondents listed a variety of other assessment procedures, including internal and external program and institutional reviews; and twenty-six stated that the courses had not been assessed in any fashion. The English department or other home department of the writing program can become more involved in the assessment of honors composition courses by using one or more of the following methods:

1. Writing program assessment. First, honors composition courses can be reviewed using criteria established in journals such as *Assessing Writing* and *The Journal of Writing Assessment* and in general writing program assessment literature, such as the following:

> *Assessing Writers' Knowledge and Process of Composing.* Lester Faigley et al.
>
> *Assessment of Writing: Politics, Policies, Practices*. Eds. Edward M. White, William D. Lutz, and Sandra Kamuskiri.
>
> *Developing Successful College Writing Programs.* Edward M. White.
>
> *Evaluating College Writing Programs.* Stephen P. Witte and Lester Faigley.
>
> *Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging.* Eds. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell.

(Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning. Brian Huot.

Teaching and Assessing Writing: Recent Advances in Understanding, Evaluating, and Improving Student Performance. 2nd ed. Edward M. White.

Validating Holistic Scoring for Writing Assessment: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations. Eds. Michael M. Williamson and Brian Huot.

Writing program administrators in particular can contribute valuable professional understanding of and experience with such methods.

2. Honors program assessment. Evaluation of honors composition can also be conducted through standards established by the National Collegiate Honors Council, which are available in various NCHC publications:

Beginning in Honors: A Handbook. Samuel Schuman.

Honors Programs: Development, Review, and Revitalization. C. Grey Austin.

Evaluating Honors Programs: An Outcomes Approach. Jacqueline Reihman, Sara Varhus, and William R. Whipple.

Honors Programs in Smaller Colleges. Samuel Schuman.

Honors in the Two-Year College. Two-Year College Committee.

3. Institutional review. Assessment of honors composition courses and projects can also be included in scheduled departmental and institutional reviews. For example, the annual or otherwise regularly scheduled program report to the institution's administration should include reflections on performance in these areas, with more in-depth evaluation of these components on a cyclical basis. Honors programs can also be evaluated during general reviews by external accreditation agencies (North Central, SACS, etc.). Program directors should consult guidelines for evaluation criteria from each institution or agency.

4. Faculty responses. Just as faculty input is essential in designing and providing honors instruction, it is also necessary for thorough evaluation. Regular end-of-semester or annual reports can identify effective and ineffective components of honors composition courses. These reports can range from informal meetings and anecdotal discussions to formal written reports.

5. Student evaluations. Because these courses are designed to help honors students become better writers through interesting, challenging discussions and assignments, the students themselves can provide valuable feedback regarding whether various types of writing instruction and projects are useful, demanding, manageable, and so forth. End-of-semester, qualitative course evaluations allow students to discuss the positive and negative aspects of a course in their own words. As students complete the honors program, they can also compose self-reflective essays that include discussion of how their honors composition course(s) prepared them to write for other classes.

Overall, any assessment measures should be discussed by the honors program director, the writing program administrator, and the honors faculty, who should work together to decide on the most appropriate measures for their program and institutional needs.

HOW DO PROGRAM DIRECTORS ADDRESS RESISTANCE TO HONORS?

Resistance to honors work can be found at all educational levels—elementary, secondary, and postsecondary—in a variety of forms: resistors argue that honors programs siphon off money and instructional resources, pull all of the good students out of classes in which other students can learn from them, promote elitist segregation in an age of open admissions and liberatory approaches to higher public education, and so forth. Honors composition courses are no exception to this resistance; for example, department chairs or writing program administrators may be reluctant to schedule multiple sections of honors composition that cap at 15 and must be taught by full-time professors when they must first staff forty or fifty or sixty sections of regular composition that cap at 25. Of the forty-seven respondents to this question regarding resistance, twenty-seven indicated that they had experienced little or no resistance to honors work while twenty acknowledged that they had dealt with, or indeed were still dealing with, varying amounts of resistance.

1. Little or no resistance. In this section, honors program directors indicated that they have faced little or no resistance to their honors programs. Sample responses include:

> There is no significant resistance here, apart from an occasional grumble that honors programs in general are "elitist" or that this or that honors student is bratty (and why don't I do something about it?). I go out of my way to avoid creating the impression that our program is "elitist" in the pejorative sense of being arrogant, disdainful of other students, etc. The fact is that some of our students do have tendencies in this direction. On the positive side, I emphasize to faculty and administration that our program has what I call a "leavening effect" on the quality of students and academic performance at St. Mary's, attracting students who might otherwise have gone elsewhere and upholding high academic standards as an ideal. I also like to point to our extraordinary track record in placing honors graduates in top graduate and professional schools. We do all this on a shoestring budget, so we're not perceived as a major threat to anyone so far as I know. We rely on the cooperation of other departments to "loan" us faculty, etc., and generally we get it. However, this often requires subtle diplomacy and effusive expressions of gratitude, especially with colleagues who are congenitally difficult to work with. So far, it works. (Daniel Rigney, St. Mary's University)

> No resistance from the administration during this, our "re-building" program (I took over as Director in summer 1995 to reinvigorate a program in serious decline)—since then, I've received great support from the administration in offering faculty development opportunities to develop courses, in funding lecturers from within and without, and in released time to recruit and administer. Faculty generally support the efforts, although some remain skeptical of results, and some resent what I call the "siphon" effect (the great sucking sound of "all the good students" leaving their classes for honor classes—more their perception than reality). My argument is that if the program succeeds, it will bring students to the College who would not otherwise have come and who will take courses other than Honors Program courses too. (Karl Oelke, Union County College)

> We have numerous faculty who are active researchers but who take on an extra honors course simply because they love it so; we have numerous U Distinguished professors who teach basic honors courses or seminars and mentor students. We need a bigger budget to help some departments with heavy service components to do more teaching and certainly some faculty will not go to the trouble. Generally those who do undertake honors teaching are hooked on the type of exciting "R & R" presented by this type of teaching. Our campus has quite a record of getting known scholarships such as the Rhodes, Marshall, Goldwater and Truman, and folks know that many of the students who get these grants have had experience with honors, so that gives the program a good reputation as well as having all of these very special profs regularly endorsing it with their teaching. (Judith Zivanovic, Kansas State University)

2. More significant resistance. These program directors had faced more significant resistance from faculty and administrators. They discussed particular examples of resistance and the ways these problems were solved, either partially or in full.

> Faculty are faced with the need to research and publish extensively in addition to their class loads. We have trouble finding faculty, the best faculty, who have time to keep up their scholarship and teach their other classes. Some depts. support us by making the Honors sections part of the regular course load, but some depts. don't have enough faculty to do that. In that case, faculty teach Honors classes on an overload. (Alison Trinkle, Texas Christian University)

> Our faculty, individually, are eager to be involved in honors. As members of a dept. unit, however, they resist peer faculty having smaller classes and release time for research/advising activities with honors students. We have a new director to take a new approach.

> In the past we have simply avoided those depts. (Sally Cone, Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis)

> SIGH! SIGH! SIGH! The problem comes with the territory, doesn't it? I believe that I have very solid upper-echelon administrative backing for the Honors and Scholars Programs. (It helps that the Associate Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs, to whom I report, was the founder of the Honors and Scholars Programs here in their present manifestation!) I am less sanguine about the support from the various Deans and their staffs, although there is usually a very healthy level of cooperation between their offices and the Honors and Scholars Programs. Enrollment pressures sometimes make departmental chairpersons acutely chary of offering courses or sections that are designed for small enrollments. And the University has an anti-elitist heritage that makes some resistance to any privileged status for Honors Program students and/or University Scholars inevitable.

> The strategy for countering such objections is probably two-fold. We have worked diligently to integrate the University Scholars and especially the Honors Program students into the University community. Thus their academic achievements and their considerable extracurricular involvement can be seen as leave enriching the quality of life for the whole community. The second part of that strategy is to keep reminding people of the ripple effects of the Honors Program students' successes—they heighten the University's reputation, they offer case studies that have high value in recruiting new students and new faculty, they help succeeding classes of students have better chances at good jobs and places in good graduate and professional programs, etc. (R. Alan Kimbrough, University of Dayton)

From these anecdotes, we can see that faculty and administrative resistance to honors work, as well as adjoining financial and courseload matters, can be addressed and resolved in a variety of professional and collegial efforts; such resolution is critical for proponents of honors composition who wish to argue for honors sections that have lower caps and are taught by full-time faculty as part of their regular course loads.

Overall, responses to questions regarding administrative concerns in offering honors composition courses reveal the amount of hard work that honors program directors and faculty members invest in the design and implementation of honors courses and programs. These directors have acknowledged not only their successes but also the areas of their programs that need improvement, such as political relations among other administrators and faculty or economic shortfalls incurred by honors courses. Faculty who go beyond what is required by their courseload and service agreements are compensated in some cases only by their personal satisfaction in working with academically talented students. This commitment to quality instruction should be fostered by honors program directors and departmental administrators

through both the effective allocation of resources and the assessment experience necessary to improve and maintain honors composition courses that challenge students and faculty alike.

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