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2012

## The Genesis of an Honors Faculty: Collective Reflections on a Process of Change

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Glover, Robert W.; Slavin, Charlie; Harlan-Haughey, Sarah; LaBouff, Jordan P.; Martin, Justin D.; Killinger, Mimi; and Haggerty, Mark, "The Genesis of an Honors Faculty: Collective Reflections on a Process of Change" (2012). *Honors in Practice -- Online Archive*. 157.

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# The Genesis of an Honors Faculty: Collective Reflections on a Process of Change

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## INTRODUCTION

In the early twentieth century, Woodrow Wilson introduced the concept of “preceptors” at Princeton University (Office of the Dean of the College). At the University of Maine a century later, we have adapted Wilson’s concept by hiring faculty members who lead small-group discussions in our interdisciplinary, two-year, four-course core Civilizations sequence, which is a requirement for all first- and second-year honors students. Like Wilson, we hope to “import into the great university the methods and personal contact between teacher and pupil which are characteristic of the small college, and so gain the advantages of both” (Leitch). During the 2010–2011 academic year, the University of Maine Honors College tripled its number of salaried preceptors, expanding from two to six. With that expansion came new challenges: an innovative, albeit periodically strained, collaboration with the UMaine College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and four of its departments; an experimental and precarious foray into non-tenure-track interdisciplinary academia with fresh consideration for undergraduate research; and an evolving sense of what it means to be honors faculty members—or, more broadly, academics—at a twenty-first-century university rife with change. Various perspectives illustrate the difficulties and possibilities endemic to this faculty formation and collectively belie the assumption that faculty members necessarily best cohere around a single discipline and familiar professional constructs. We suggest that a university today, as it has done in the past, can and should coalesce around and be invigorated by untried models and pioneering colleges whose faculty members are willing and eager to take risks.

Administrators and search committees at other institutions, as well as prospective honors faculty members, may be able to learn from our experience

at the University of Maine. To this end, we share multiple perspectives on our new preceptor positions by the dean of the UMaine Honors College (Charlie Slavin); two honors faculty members (Mark Haggerty & Mimi Killinger) who served on the search committees; and the four new hires (Rob Glover, Sarah Harlan-Haughey, Jordan LaBouff, and Justin Martin). Our seven personal narratives each engage thematically with several central issues: newness and institutional resistance, identity formation, interdisciplinarity, and faculty retention. We try to be as honest as possible as we present our individual assessments of the initiative so far. We believe that a discussion of such thorny issues as non-tenure-track appointments and the creation *ex nihilo* of a new kind of position will enable other institutions to make informed decisions as they consider implementing such a model.

### COLLEGIAL SYNERGY (CHARLIE SLAVIN, DEAN OF THE HONORS COLLEGE)

In the spring of 2010, our outgoing university president approached me with the possibility of providing funding for additional faculty lines in the honors college. He talked about wanting to support the growth and centrality of the honors college while also addressing the challenges faced by our college of liberal arts and sciences (CLAS) in the wake of years of across-the-board cuts that were particularly grave given the disproportionate role CLAS plays in providing service courses to the entire university. The president's proposal resonated positively with me, but, given the fiscal situation of the university, I wanted to be sure such an initiative would have some traction.

After consulting with the provost and being assured that the president's proposal was being seriously considered by the executive leadership, the dean of CLAS and I began to develop a proposal for a cohort of teacher-scholars. The concept that we envisioned immediately diverged from the purely teaching model that the president had publicly proposed to hire "lecturers to teach in college departments where there is student demand, and in the Honors College. . . . Without the usual research expectations, we will expect these scholars to apply their demonstrated teaching skills . . ." (Kennedy). The CLAS dean, provost, and I all saw an opportunity to attract individuals who would not only excel as teachers but also engage undergraduates in research activities. At the same time, we realized that, in order to provide fresh and current research experiences for undergraduates, these new preceptors would need to establish research programs, albeit with an eye to connecting undergraduates to their research. The notion of "undergraduate engaged research" became the hallmark of the new positions.

Developing the proposal involved negotiations both between the CLAS dean and me about whether to split the positions fifty/fifty or in some other proportion; exactly what would we call them; and how we would determine which departments in CLAS received them. Further negotiations took place between the two of us and the provost about how many positions there would

be and what they would be paid. When the proverbial dust settled, we had four CLAS-Honors preceptors to be hired in 2010–11 for the following year. They would teach a 3-3 load, distributed equally between the honors college and their department in CLAS, and they would “develop and maintain a program of scholarship that engages undergraduate students.” Both the CLAS dean and I felt strongly that the CLAS-Honors preceptors should be hired at salaries equivalent to assistant professors in their departments and that there should be national searches for these new colleagues. Our goal was to create a new model, not a lesser model.

The question of tenure has been the most challenging issue we have confronted in this initiative. Those of us responsible for developing the model engaged in numerous discussions among ourselves and with others as we tried to come to a workable position. The first and perhaps overriding element concerned the tenure status of the new positions. The expectations and thus the evaluation criteria for these preceptors would not be the same as for tenure-stream members in their departments. Additionally, we had no promotion/tenure criteria for faculty in the honors college, where half of their efforts would be directed. Having given the issue serious consideration, and admitting that the question was worthy of future reflection, we decided, in the present climate and given the time-frame in which we were working, to support the establishment of the CLAS-Honors preceptors as non-tenure-stream faculty members.

Throughout the hiring process, including discussions about evaluation, rank, workload, startups, and space, the CLAS dean and I had a mutual understanding about the fundamental nature of these new positions, and we had the support of the provost. This constellation of administrative collaborations was crucial for the success of our endeavor. In order to determine the CLAS “homes” for the four preceptors, the CLAS dean constructed a request for proposals (RFP) to go out to all the departments and programs in his college. The criteria for selection were (1) potential for undergraduate-involved research or creative activity and how the unit would support the new faculty member’s scholarly program; (2) history of and potential for collaboration with the honors college; (3) demand for undergraduate instruction in the unit and current ability to meet the demand; and (4) integration of a preceptor into the mission of the unit. Before the proposals were due, the CLAS dean and I held two open forums for faculty members in CLAS to discuss the positions and the RFP. People were obviously interested, and we received at least one proposal from nearly every CLAS unit. The CLAS dean, the associate provost/dean of undergraduate education, and I read and ranked the proposals. We met, chose our top four (English, journalism, political science, and psychology), and then sent them to the provost, who confirmed our recommendations. By the summer of 2012, we were ready to begin the hiring process for four new CLAS-Honors preceptors.

At the start of the fall 2010 semester, individual search committees were formed for the positions; each included two members of the CLAS department,

two honors faculty members (including one of the two current honors preceptors, Mimi Killinger and Mark Haggerty), and one faculty member from the UMaine College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture (NSFA). The NSFA faculty members were invited because of their commitment to undergraduate research and their familiarity with the honors college. The next step was finding candidates.

### **COLLIDING COLLEGIAL WORLDS (MIMI KILLINGER, REZENDES PRECEPTOR FOR THE ARTS)**

As the UMaine Honors College underwent a collegial sea change in the spring of 2011, my position as one of the two veteran honors preceptors simultaneously transformed—or more accurately “formed”—as did my professional identity as an honors faculty mentor.

The other veteran honors faculty member, Mark Haggerty, and I were each assigned to two search committees in areas bearing some resemblance to our research disciplines. I hold a PhD in twentieth-century U.S. history, but at one time I was an English major, and I enthusiastically accepted my appointment to the Honors-English search, looking forward to a sentimental journey through English department halls.

Though a committee member from the department was to chair each search committee, with administrative support likewise coming from the department, my contrite dean surprised me with an email plea that I chair the Honors-English committee as their faculty had—for a variety of valid reasons—demurred. Thus began a six-month process of awakening for all of us, during which I would fume intermittently about misperceptions regarding honors and honors teaching on the part of my English colleagues while harboring my own lingering insecurities about the academic validity of my interdisciplinary work.

Unlike the new CLAS-Honors preceptorships, my position was created specifically for me, and in many ways by me, as a partner accommodation after several years of adjunct teaching. Charlie sat down with me and my other full-time colleague, Mark, who was likewise a partner accommodation, and designed our positions with our particular strengths in mind. We did not have to formally interview, nor apply through an external search, nor articulate our qualifications, all of which might actually have been a healthy exercise for me as I would have been compelled to verbalize and then internalize why I chose honors rather than a disciplinary career path.

As chair of the Honors-English search committee, I found myself awkwardly the only untenured faculty member at the table; the other faculty member representing honors on the committee was a full professor in sociology who teaches part-time in the honors college. One of the English faculty members was a long-time union man irked by the lecturer rank of these prospective CLAS-Honors positions; the other was a disciplinary purist who was wholly skeptical about the potential success of our search, suggesting that the quirky

nature of the position (half-time and honors-ish) meant we would have few competitive applicants and no takers.

Drafting the job description was a painstaking group process of condensing the verbose CLAS-Honors advertisement into three lines to make it MLA-compatible. Each iteration became more awkward than the next as we tried in three lines to describe a position like no other. Despite my ability to turn a phrase, I assumed an obsequious posture, scribing various suggestions and compiling numerous obscure and awkward versions. Finally, I chimed in, as did our outside member, a marine scientist, proving that we were all, in fact, language people able to write and agree on three coherent sentences. With lingering doubts, we placed our ad in sync with the real-seeming MLA job listings and waited . . . about forty-eight hours, at which time applications began pouring in at an unmanageable rate. The English department administrative support—again, for a variety of valid reasons—then bowed out, which meant that our honors college, embroiled in three other simultaneous searches, would have to stretch its resources even further. However, at this point I began to believe in the authenticity of a CLAS-Honors joint position in English and in my rightful place at the table.

In honors fashion, administrative support duties within our college were quickly spread around based on skill sets. Our dean proved the most adept at speedily creating electronic application folders, 150 in all; two honors associates, recent honors graduates, demonstrated a *savoir-faire* for managing Excel files; and our multi-talented administrative assistant calmly fielded all other requests. English faculty colleagues came to appreciate our unorthodox yet efficient honors ways as the process moved rapidly along. Moreover, important inter-collegial and interdisciplinary bridges began to form as the position increasingly proved intellectually viable and the applicants exceptional and exciting. Our seemingly odd application criteria—that applicants demonstrate disciplinary excellence, be inclined towards honors teaching, and be committed to undergraduate research—attracted innovative, creative scholars and proved highly useful measures for paring down our robust applicant pool to nine telephone interviewees and then three campus visitors.

A non-committee English colleague who periodically teaches in honors accepted my invitation to meet the visiting candidates. He wrote a poem in response to one candidate's presentation on the seventh-century, Old English "Caedmon's Hymn." Caedmon was said to have been an illiterate cowherd, suddenly compelled to compose a song of praise. My colleague described Caedmon's listeners' surprise:

And the monks, hearing his song next morning,  
dumbstruck at the wonder of such words, made  
flesh, on the tongue of this herdsman in their midst.

—Jim Bishop, 2011

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We honors folks—perhaps me, in particular—in some ways had our Caedmon’s moment through this process, gaining a sense of professional authenticity, assuming our well-deserved place at the interdisciplinary table. When our Honors-English search committee unanimously decided on our top candidate for the position, who accepted it as did each of the first-choice candidates in the other three searches, the union fellow asked if he could walk with me to take our recommendation to Charlie. So we made the now-familiar trek across campus together, colleagues in the truest sense, pleased with our collective work well done and deeply reflective upon the mutual benefits embedded in these CLAS-Honors positions.

### OBSTACLES AND CONSENSUS

(MARK HAGGERTY, REZENDES PRECEPTOR FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT)

Defining and generating internal and external legitimacy for the positions shared between departments in CLAS and the honors college required patience and work. Internally, many of the faculty members in the departments that received these positions had limited knowledge of what occurs in the honors college and what impact our honors duties would have on the search for a colleague. Those of us in honors mistakenly assumed that our colleagues at the university understood our interdisciplinary curriculum and realized that we valued and celebrated students and faculty members willing to take intellectual risks by frequently working outside their disciplines.

Externally, many of the candidates for these positions did not understand the interdisciplinary nature of the position and its unique research component. Since honors faculty members are immersed in this model, we believed that phrases in the position announcement like “undergraduate teaching . . . in interdisciplinary Honors core courses” and “responsibilities [that] include preceptorials in the first- and second-year core Honors sequence” made it clear that our style of honors education was not a disciplinary one and that CLAS-Honors preceptors were not going to be teaching honors versions of disciplinary courses.

The search committee members appointed by the departments frequently viewed the joint nature of these positions as a negative, something to be overcome by a candidate who viewed academia from a discipline-specific perspective. As these positions were conceived, successful candidates would have strong credentials within their field of expertise and the ability and/or experience to engage with ideas and content areas that are unfamiliar. The extensive nature of the honors college curriculum requires its faculty members to engage with material external to their expertise.

As might be expected, the candidates’ standing in their own discipline was discernable through the documentation they provided. More difficult to assess was their eagerness and ability to conduct interdisciplinary teaching in honors as well as undergraduate-engaged research and scholarship. Thus, some of the search committees used an additional instrument to identify those candidates

who understood and would embrace the joint nature of these appointments. A writing prompt was designed to elicit the candidate's interest in our specific version of an honors curriculum: multi-faculty member, interdisciplinary, temporally expansive, lecture/discussion courses populated with students from across the university. A second prompt asked the candidates to discuss their specific prior experience in undergraduate-engaged research or their interest in pursuing it.

The applicants sorted themselves by their ability and the attention they paid to the unique nature of these positions. Some candidates who would have been excellent candidates for positions solely within the discipline did not exhibit the requisite range and interest in an interdisciplinary liberal curriculum. The initial misperceptions on the part of the departments regarding the honors mission and the departments' fear of an inferior candidate pool vanished as we negotiated the short list of candidates. Our discussions allowed the members of the search committees to prioritize their own interests while developing an appreciation of the priorities of their partners in these joint positions. This process generated genuine buy-in by both groups. Most importantly, the honors college and department representatives were able to generate a cohesive understanding of and belief in the position.

The candidates' campus visits were conducted in a somewhat bifurcated manner. Although search committee members attended all candidate presentations, the candidates typically spent one day with the CLAS department and the other with the honors college. The candidates endured a somewhat stressful and exhausting schedule of giving scholarly presentations and teaching classes. The honors college included students, adjunct faculty, regular faculty teaching part-time in honors, and full-time honors faculty in the process; all were able to attend meals and an open forum with the candidate. Perhaps most in keeping with the special nature of these positions, each candidate was asked to choose a text from the forty or so in the honors *Civilizations* curriculum and lead a "mock preceptorial," populated by current honors students and open to observation by anyone interested in the search. While the mock preceptorial setting was a bit awkward (the typical relationship between students and preceptor had not been formed, and the students had not read the texts within the past week), the candidates' ability to focus on the students and to generate dialogue provided relevant insights into their teaching philosophy and style. Both students and faculty members provided feedback about these interactions to the committee.

Somewhat surprisingly, the members of each search committee came to a consensus about top candidates, who had demonstrated the ability to perform successfully in both their CLAS department and in the honors college. The committees formed an understanding of the positions and together searched for those candidates who would be successful in the joint and complex nature of these positions as teachers and scholars. The committees were ultimately able to create a unified view of the positions.

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After the four hires were made, joint “conference committees” were formed, composed of two members representing the honors college and two from the CLAS department. The task of these committees, which in all cases differed in membership from the corresponding search committees, was to construct evaluation criteria for the CLAS-Honors preceptors, resulting in a new round of negotiations and sense-making. These conversations frequently focused on the research component as stated in the job description. CLAS department committee members were cautious about the focus on undergraduate-engaged research and the negative impact they thought that it could have on the disciplinary success of newly appointed faculty members. Compromise was reached by acknowledging that “evidence of scholarship produced independent of students will also be considered” in the annual review and reappointment evaluation criteria approved for each of the positions.

A remaining challenge is how the honors college will integrate such a large new faculty cohort. The existing institutional arrangements in honors are not representative of a typical department with long-standing committee structures that support evaluation, renewal, and leave. Until recently, faculty members with departmental appointments, mostly in CLAS, and adjunct faculty did all the teaching in the honors college. The community of faculty within honors is relatively loosely tied, having no shared office spaces or department meetings, so it is difficult to determine common visions. Any shared decision-making between faculty members with honors appointments and those who teach in honors does not have a defined structure. While incorporating a bright and energetic new group of faculty members is an exciting prospect, the size of this group and its recent introduction to the interdisciplinary nature of the honors college clearly indicates a need to mature thoughtfully as a college.

### **THE APPLICANT: NAVIGATING AN UNTRODDEN PATH (ROBERT W. GLOVER, CLAS-HONORS PRECEPTOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE)**

In the 2010–2011 academic year, I was working as a visiting assistant professor at James Madison University in an interdisciplinary justice studies program. I had completed my PhD in political science just prior to arriving there. While it was gratifying to have gotten a job in such a difficult market, the one-year appointment also meant that I was immediately on the job market again. Two consecutive years of job-hunting left me perpetually busy and anxiety-ridden, but they gave me a rich pool of job market experiences upon which to draw and a baseline with which to compare the application, interview, and hiring processes for my unique joint position in the honors college and the political science department.

I initially encountered the position posting through the American Political Science Association (APSA) job posting website, *E-Jobs*. A number of assets

stood out about this position and impelled me to apply: the combination of honors and teaching within one's home department; the focus on collaborative research with undergraduates; research and teaching opportunities that emphasized personal growth and intellectual risks; and the highly interdisciplinary nature of the honors college. I remember thinking that this demanding set of expectations would require someone with a fairly eclectic set of skills in research, teaching, and negotiating the multiple layers of a large university—expectations that struck me as fascinating and potentially rewarding challenges (see Appendix for full job ads).

I also had some concerns on my end regarding this position. First was the “second-class citizen” status implied by the joint nature of the appointment. In discussing the position with colleagues and my former graduate advisors, I wondered how a faculty member with split responsibilities and a split salary line would be received in the two units, political science and honors. Others within my discipline shared such concerns and looked askance at this unconventional posting. The job market in the information age provides numerous outlets for candidates to share information, gossip, and abuse, i.e., superfluous attacks on fellow applicants. My graduate school friends and I lovingly dubbed the most prominent of these forums “The Cesspool.” On one such blog, conversation turned to the joint position at UMaine. I produce, for posterity, a post made on the blog *Political Theory Rumor Mill* in reference to the very position that I now hold:

Has anyone else actually read the maine ad? i'm surprised they don't ask you to scrape the ice off the department chair's windshield twice daily, too. all this, PLUS living in an ice cave? sweet

Clearly, this person saw in the ad an unrealistic set of expectations, exploitation in its purest form, an unsurprising response given that we have a tendency to react with skepticism and fear to the unfamiliar. Furthermore, in an era of shrinking state higher education budgets and the mantra of “do more with less,” a skeptical disposition might be healthy. Thus far, however, my experience has not been one of marginalization or exploitation, perhaps because the political science department had already developed objectives that went beyond teaching assignments; they articulated ways I could become a valuable member of the department by undertaking innovations in the existing curriculum.

My second concern was the “two masters problem.” In researching the position, I worried that I might not be received as a full colleague in political science with an equal voice in departmental governance. Another worry was how the dual nature of my appointment would affect reappointment and evaluation decisions. Promotion, tenure, and reappointment decisions can be tricky in joint appointments, which often entail a joint committee to evaluate the performance of the candidate. Members of two different institutional units can differ wildly about what constitutes high-quality research, teaching evaluations, and appropriate service contributions. In an extensive recent study of joint

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appointments, Wallace notes a number of concerns: evaluation criteria, voting rights, dilution of autonomy within one's host department, and an increased workload (2). Many universities have established best practices as well as cautionary guidelines relating to the problematic dimensions of such appointments (University of Missouri System).

Clear, jointly-devised performance criteria for joint appointments need to be articulated prior to the hire; vague guidelines about an "active research agenda" or "quality teaching" might suffice for other positions but not for these. It is too early to know whether I will encounter any communication-related "bumps" further down the road of reappointment, but the hiring committee's thoughtful articulation of such expectations prior to my on-campus interview makes it less likely that internal disputes will arise.

Concerns nevertheless remain with regard to physical space and a presence in both honors and political science. At present, I have an office within my home department but a limited physical presence in the honors college, an arrangement that at times makes me feel more integrated into the former than the latter. However, initial plans have been made to construct an interactive, open-format space to be shared by the existing and incoming honors faculty members. We are unanimously excited at the prospect of such a space and see it as an integral dimension of our acclimation to the culture of honors and movement, in the words of my colleague, from an incoming "cohort" toward a cohesive and unified "faculty."

My third concern related to rank. In political science, we have a more or less standardized system of rank: adjunct, lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor. As a CLAS-Honors preceptor, I am classified as a lecturer, but I lacked any previous frame of reference for such a position and worried about having a yearly reappointment not on a tenure track. I was not sure what level of job security the position would provide, how it would be understood by members of my discipline, whether it would include union protections, and whether it would be comparable in pay and benefits to an incoming tenure-stream assistant professor. Academic appointments absent traditional tenure protections are increasingly the norm in higher education. A recent Department of Education report suggested that, while 57% of instructors were tenured or tenure-track in 1975, today that number has fallen below 30% (Wilson A1). In such an environment, applicants understandably remain uncertain whether non-tenured options can provide the benefits of economic well-being and autonomy as an educator and researcher.

One final concern that remains is whether the position of preceptor/lecturer will affect my success in seeking extramural funding and grants. My other concerns, however, have diminished since I arrived on campus. As new hires, we are part of the same collective bargaining agreement that protects all other faculty members. Our positions, after a certain period, will be secured by a component of the collective bargaining agreement called "just cause protection," which grants us nearly all of the same protections as tenure. In addition,

our positions are a source of pride for the honors college, our host departments, and the University of Maine as a whole. In the end, even though tenure-track offers remained a possibility for me, I committed to Maine because I was satisfied that this position was a better option for me professionally and personally.

Though the application and interview process was a bit daunting at first, it turned out to be relatively pain-free. In general, my strategy was to focus on the broad themes of my expertise, research, and teaching interests, whether interacting within my discipline or not. Having been in the honors college for a number of months now, I recognize that scholars frequently step outside of their disciplinary comfort zones to engage texts and subject matter unfamiliar to them. Engaging with job candidates outside of their areas of expertise is not a chore for departmental faculty members, and interdisciplinary socialization and engagement have been major benefits of my joint appointment.

**THE TEACHER/SCHOLAR:  
UNDERGRADUATE-DIRECTED RESEARCH  
(JORDAN LABOUFF, CLAS-HONORS PRECEPTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY)**

Examining the job market as I approached the end of my graduate career was disheartening. Advertisements for positions almost all encouraged scholars to select one of two paths—either research or teaching—a situation at odds with the best of my graduate school experiences. In the 2007–2010 academic years I completed my graduate training in experimental social psychology while simultaneously serving as a faculty member in the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core, an honors program devoted to undergraduate liberal arts education and undergraduate-focused interdisciplinary research. Although balancing the demands of disciplinary research and interdisciplinary undergraduate instruction was frequently problematic, I witnessed the synergy between honors teaching and undergraduate-focused research.

Conversation about balancing the demands of research and teaching has increasingly supported the premise that tradeoffs between the two are zero-sum (Fox). Deep involvement in the classroom is often seen as a direct threat to research success, particularly when defined by publications (Trice). Scholars are sometimes encouraged, explicitly or implicitly, to limit classroom involvement in order to free up the considerable time that successful research requires. In the context of this conversation, the advertisement for the University of Maine preceptorship in psychology was unexpected, challenging the notion that excellence in research and teaching are incompatible. Given the core criterion of engaging undergraduates in collaborative research, this teacher/scholar position clearly focused on undergraduate scholarship in both the classroom and the laboratory.

This model was attractive for several reasons. Disciplinary research can be insular in its methods and scope while these joint appointments encouraged scholars to encounter fresh problems and adapt methods and lines of inquiry to

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student initiatives. Further, this moved in the promising direction of research opportunities that arise along disciplinary boundaries (Sung et al.). Relationships that cross the classroom and laboratory can help prepare both established scholars and students to capitalize on serendipitous findings in research. Student-driven projects can also be less dictated by rigid programmatic methods and thus more likely to uncover new and productive avenues of advanced research. Finally, this type of research, which promotes collaborative relationships within and across colleges, helps to establish a sense of community among faculty members.

The primary challenge of such relationships and projects, however, is that undergraduate projects are a flash in the pan compared to the relatively slow burn of a faculty member's or graduate student's line of research. Even if undergraduates are connected with a faculty research mentor early in their academic careers, by the time they are acclimated to research methods in their discipline and advanced enough to develop an independent project, they frequently have only three semesters in which to take that project from start to finish. In order for the training of undergraduates to be maximally effective and productive on that timescale, honors and disciplinary faculty members must communicate and cooperate with one another. The interdisciplinary and cross-college conversations and collaborations that are required to create joint appointments may generate adaptability and relationships between faculty members that encourage sharing resources in a way that ultimately benefits the students. Since the application and interview process for the CLAS-Honors preceptorships brought together faculty members from several departments, these types of collaborative conversations took place before the interview process even began.

As my discussions with the University of Maine proceeded, it was clear that this position offered more than nominal support of integrating teaching and scholarship through undergraduate-focused research programs. In contrast to several teaching-focused, non-tenure-track positions advertised elsewhere, the preceptor position provided start-up funds for undergraduate-focused research programs, institutional support for faculty and student travel to present their research, and access to competitive faculty fellowships and sabbatical programs.

A teacher/scholar position like mine seems uniquely poised to support the type of flexibility necessary for successful undergraduate-focused research programs. Although my time with Plato's *Republic* and honors freshmen may reduce the amount of time I can spend on research projects in social psychology, it generates relationships with undergraduates and faculty members who will go on to work with me as research collaborators. It also generates new ideas and conversations that can improve both the quality of my research and the quality of my discourse about that research. This type of joint position might be a way for universities to bridge the perceived gap between successful research and teaching.

## INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND THE WRITER'S LIFE (JUSTIN D. MARTIN, CLAS-HONORS PRECEPTOR OF JOURNALISM)

The best journalists and writers I know have encyclopedic understandings of history, and they constantly devour quality writing from diverse fields. Wordsmiths as well as news writers need expansive intellectual engagement. Before coming to the University of Maine, I taught at the American University in Cairo, a diverse campus in a global city, but location alone does not create interdisciplinary thinking or quality writing.

Diverse readings in, for instance, *The New Yorker*, *Reader's Digest*, the classics, and contemporary best-sellers are advisable not only for *Jeopardy!* aspirants, as honors program administrators should keep in mind when they promote their positions to writers from all fields. The prospect of improving the octane of my own writing by being reintroduced to Rousseau, Locke, Shakespeare, and entirely new texts is one of the primary reasons I accepted my current position, where I am reading texts that are at once wholly unrelated, yet entirely related, to journalism. A colleague of award-winning news reporter Todd C. Frankel described him as an outstanding writer because he "had an appreciation of good writers and he studied good writing. He often parked himself at one of the computers in the library and printed out stories from Nexis. He may have printed out every Rick Bragg story he could find" (3). In a matter of days after my first honors semester commenced, I was referencing in my own writing some of the classical political treatises I was covering with my students.

One of the reasons I took this joint CLAS-Honors position was the flexibility it allowed me in choosing my research and writing topics. Many tenure-line positions in journalism require professors to focus mainly on peer-reviewed scholarship in juried journals to the exclusion of actual journalism. In journalism in particular—a field that is changing faster than we can chronicle it—professors should not distance themselves from the actual practice of writing and reporting news, whether in mainstream news organizations or trade publications. When I interviewed for the preceptorship, one of the first questions I asked was whether the media criticism I write for *Columbia Journalism Review* would be appreciated and encouraged. Not only would it be appreciated, I was told, but it would also score marks in a retention and promotion calculus. Part of the writer's life is having substantial license to choose one's own research topics, and I wanted to retain this autonomy. Too many journalism professors in research-intensive programs are discouraged from doing the kind of writing with which our students identify the most.

Honors administrators who adopt and promote joint positions should openly emphasize how their curricula enrich the writer's life, and not just journalists and English professors are interested in cultivating more marketable writing; even mathematics professors must write well in order to publish in juried journals. Consuming knowledge from diverse fields leads academics not only to better writing but to more diverse and better grant applications, better

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recommendation letters, and increased potential to produce pioneering work in their fields.

Innovation is almost always combinatorial in nature. Gutenberg invented a printing device that changed the world because he had worked as a wine vintner and knew the mechanics of grape presses. Benjamin Franklin was a renaissance man with deep knowledge in diverse disciplines. Historical precedents for interdisciplinarity in generating new knowledge should be well understood, but the modern intelligentsia is only starting to grasp its value, as argued in Steven Johnson's book *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation*.

Clear writing stems from two activities: frequently practicing (and revising) compositions and reading the best compositions of others. Academics are brilliant at being insular; plenty of chemistry, French, and physics professors spend little time reading high-quality English composition even if they would like to. The benefits of expansive and varied reading lists should and do make be positions in interdisciplinary honors programs attractive to academics.

A new honors colleague of mine recently told me that the "honors life is great for those of us academics with ADD." Her point was that honors professors, at least in the University of Maine's program, read *Silent Spring* one day and *What is the What?* the next. This intellectual variety leads to deeper and better writing, combinatorial knowledge that produces greater innovation, and potentially more marketable grant proposals. Foundations, government agencies, and university administrations are all throwing money at grant applications that promote and demonstrate interdisciplinarity for these very reasons, but interdisciplinary work is difficult in academics' frenetic lives, and the phenomenon is not nurtured as a matter of course in primordial academic departments. Interdisciplinarity is a deliberate act that academic programs like the UMaine Honors College need to instigate.

### **FROM COHORT TO FACULTY (SARAH HARLAN-HAUGHEY, CLAS-HONORS PRECEPTOR OF ENGLISH)**

Coming out of a decidedly interdisciplinary graduate program in medieval studies at Cornell, I have seen a diverse faculty come together under a common pedagogical and programmatic banner, so I know it can be done gracefully and collegially. I know that if professors of linguistics, anthropology, musicology, art history, English, classics, foreign languages and literatures, and political science can put aside their departmental affiliations and come together to create a well-respected interdisciplinary medieval studies degree for undergraduate and graduate students, we can figure out how to work together in our shared commitment to the honors college.

At some point in this process, we all stopped being merely successful applicants and started to envision our futures here at the university, both

collectively and as individuals. Thus, as I begin my new job here at the University of Maine, I find myself wondering what it means for us to be a cohort. As we went through a unique hiring process, we were all reassured that starting together as a group of four, a cohort, would be invaluable for us as we navigated a sea of newness. Implicit in this comforting thought was the uncomfortable reality that we will fall if we do not stand united. The problem then is how we move from the nebulous and at times juvenilizing status of “cohort” to “honors faculty”; how we make a faculty out of people who by definition are wearing many different hats; and, in the process of strengthening our own positions, how we create an innovative and dynamic learning environment for undergraduates.

All of us are trained in specific disciplines and lodged in different departments. We may appreciate and admire one another, but we may also have little in common intellectually. One could argue that we will come together as colleagues under the common banner of the honors college curriculum, but the historical structure of the honors college echoes that of many other institutions; the combination of full-time faculty members, who teach honors on-load because they want to, with part-time, overload, and adjunct instructors as well as administrators does not necessarily lend itself to the creation of a cohesive set of colleagues with a shared sense of mission and purpose.

The answer may be hidden in our job descriptions. We are charged with fostering interdisciplinary undergraduate research, and, if we think through what this means, perhaps we can come up with a unique solution that not only meets our evaluation criteria but also makes us into a faculty who interact with one another in useful, productive ways while strengthening the honors college. As I think through this question, several prerequisites for success come to mind. First is space; we need to have a shared place where we see each other daily, thus coming to see each other as colleagues. We might also establish a weekly or bi-monthly gathering, perhaps in the form of a lecture series or a forum for discussion of issues and questions related to teaching honors. Above all, we need to develop a system that generates, sustains, and rewards interdisciplinary undergraduate research in order to bring the honors faculty together in a meaningful way. In short, our search for common ground must move beyond the procedural and pragmatic logistics of organizing space, constructing committees, and establishing best practices for internal governance; it must move beyond mere functionality to the systematic level at which common intellectual ground is both created and sustained.

One such system could be a thematically oriented interdisciplinary research group, conducting collaborative projects under the preceptors' joint supervision. Given a biannual or annual theme—an intentionally general topic such as “water” or “sound”—students would be encouraged to submit project proposals. The broadness of the topic might elicit participation from students in all fields of study. Once interdisciplinary research groups had been formed and students with relatively similar interests grouped together, we would design

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evaluative structures that encourage students to share ideas and, in an interdisciplinary context, take ownership of their own research. In a regularly scheduled time, these groups would come together to present ongoing research and thus gain insight from seemingly separate projects.

Playing a coherent role in our college's mission involves more than our own research or even our individual agendas as teachers. A crucial part of what will make us a team is sharing thematic research in an open yet structured forum. By creating a rigorous interdisciplinary system that yields well-trained, ethically centered and intellectually nimble graduates, we can grow together as a cohesive faculty. Like the other members of my cohort, I have heard encouraging comments from friends and colleagues about our unique positions, and I have heard an equal number of negative predictions, one of which is meant to sound comforting: "Once the honeymoon is over and people have forgotten about this 'new model,' you will settle into your own departments and become absorbed into a normal tenure track." Although I am interested in pushing this new teacher/scholar model toward tenure, I take this kind of comment as a challenge to do with our own academic lives exactly what we expect our students to do. We must take ownership of our own academic careers as well as that of our college and, in an imperfect world, strive for something better, more holistic, a different model of successful academic life. I refuse to look at a great opportunity to make a real difference in an institution and instead see a crushing handicap. We may not seem to have much in common at first glance, but all seven of us preceptors—as well as other honors faculty members and university administrators—share a passionate commitment to making this new model work. If we can create an interdisciplinary forum for undergraduate research, we can go from a being a cohort to being a faculty.

### CONCLUSION

The creation of our honors college faculty remains a work in progress. We cannot yet report success, nor would we necessarily advocate implementing the same model at every institution; different programs have different needs. However, we have found this process of change illuminating and learned some important lessons. We have seen first-hand that newness meets with institutional resistance, especially given the ways that honors differs from other departments. We have also found that the success or failure of this undertaking rests in whether we can put this tension to use, making it a crucible for identity formation, for deliberations about retention and interdisciplinarity, and for a deeper understanding of all that is surprisingly possible in the formation of an honors faculty. Our honors faculty and dean are deeply committed to developing and sustaining these appointments. In a few years, we hope to report that we have managed to develop CLAS-Honors preceptorships that are academically secure, professionally rewarding, and wholly viable in their interdisciplinarity, their freedom from censure and doubt, and their collective strength.

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## APPENDIX

### JOB DESCRIPTIONS/ADVERTISEMENTS

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Honors College at the University of Maine are partnering to create a cohort of CLAS-Honors Preceptors who will hold joint faculty appointments in the Honors College and a CLAS department. The focus of these positions is undergraduate teaching, both in the specific discipline and in interdisciplinary Honors core courses. These Preceptors will also foster research opportunities and creative activities of upper-level undergraduates. The positions are non-tenure-track ongoing appointments at the rank of lecturer.

#### **CLAS-Honors Preceptor of English**

*Responsibilities:* Teaching responsibilities will be a 3-3 course load, evenly divided between the Honors College and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Courses will include undergraduate core courses in English and upper-level literature courses related to the applicant's area of expertise, along with an annual writing course. In Honors, teaching responsibilities will include preceptorials in the first- and second-year core Honors sequence and upper-level tutorials in the applicant's area of expertise and interest. The faculty member will develop and maintain a program of scholarship that engages undergraduate students. Other duties include advising English and Honors students, supervising undergraduate student research and Honors theses, and providing appropriate service to the department, college and university. Salary competitive.

*Requirements:* Ph.D. in English by appointment date; expertise in either Medieval or Renaissance literature; commitment to undergraduate and interdisciplinary teaching; evidence of, or demonstrated potential for research and for involving undergraduates in scholarship. Successful candidates will provide evidence of wide-ranging intellectual interests. Preference will be given to applicants with experience in Honors education, in both literary areas and in writing instruction.

#### **CLAS-Honors Preceptor of Journalism**

*Responsibilities:* Teaching responsibilities will be evenly divided between the Honors College and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Courses will include undergraduate journalism core courses and upper-level journalism courses related to the applicant's area of expertise. In Honors, teaching responsibilities will include preceptorials in the first- and second-year core Honors sequence and upper-level tutorials in the applicant's area of expertise and interest. The faculty member will develop and maintain a program of scholarship that engages undergraduate students. Other duties include advising of journalism and Honors students, supervision of undergraduate student research and Honors theses, and appropriate university service.

*Requirements:* Ph.D. in Mass Communication or related field by appointment date; demonstrated commitment to undergraduate and interdisciplinary teaching; evidence of, or demonstrated potential for, involving undergraduates in scholarship. Interdisciplinary teaching and research experience, experience with Honors education, and professional journalism experience are preferred. Successful candidates will provide evidence of wide-ranging intellectual interests.

### **CLAS-Honors Preceptor of Political Science**

*Responsibilities:* Teaching responsibilities will be evenly divided between the Honors College and the Department of Political Science. In Political Science, teaching responsibilities will include courses on public policy and political theory. The public policy courses will include an element of engaged policy studies where the faculty member will take students into the community to conduct research about particular policy issues. The courses in political theory will focus in some way on the ideas of justice and democracy. The successful applicant will also be able to offer additional courses related to the applicant's specific areas of expertise. The ideal candidate for this position will be able to integrate the theory and policy elements into a coherent whole. In Honors, teaching responsibilities will include preceptorials in the first- and second-year core interdisciplinary Honors sequence and upper-level tutorials in the applicant's area of expertise and interest. The faculty member will develop and maintain a program of scholarship that engages undergraduate students. Other duties include advising of Political Science and Honors students, supervision of undergraduate student research and Honors theses, and appropriate university service.

*Requirements:* Ph.D. in Political Science by appointment date; demonstrated commitment to and success in undergraduate teaching; appropriate empirical analysis skills; record of or demonstrated potential for an active research program and evidence of or demonstrated potential for involving undergraduates in this scholarship. Interdisciplinary teaching and research experience, experience with Honors education, and real world involvement in the public policy process are preferred. Successful candidates will provide evidence of wide-ranging intellectual interests.

### **CLAS-Honors Preceptor of Psychology**

*Responsibilities:* Teaching responsibilities will be evenly divided between the Honors College and the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Courses will include undergraduate psychology core courses and upper-level psychology courses related to the applicant's area of expertise. In Honors, teaching responsibilities will include preceptorials in the first- and second-year core interdisciplinary Honors sequence and upper-level tutorials in the applicant's area of expertise and interest. The faculty member will develop and maintain a program of

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research that engages undergraduate students. Other duties include advising of psychology and Honors students, supervision of undergraduate student research and Honors theses, and appropriate university service.

*Requirements:* Ph.D. in Social Psychology or related field by appointment date; commitment to undergraduate and interdisciplinary teaching; evidence of involving undergraduates in research. Experience with Honors education is desirable. We are especially interested in individuals who will complement the growing focus on psychophysiology and health in the Department of Psychology, and/or who are interested in the application of basic social psychological research to social problems (e.g. prejudice and discrimination; environmental sustainability; obesity).