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## Editorial Matter for Volume 6, Number 2

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# JNCHC

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**JOURNAL OF THE  
NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL**

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**A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL**

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## **WHAT IS HONORS?**

### **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. Virginia McCombs, President, Oklahoma City University; Jon Schlenker, President-Elect, University of Maine, Augusta; Kate Bruce, Vice-President, University of North Carolina, Wilmington; Norm Weiner, Immediate Past President, SUNY, Oswego; Patricia Ann Speelman, Executive Director, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; John Madden, Secretary, Cerritos College; Philip Way, Treasurer, University of Cincinnati. Executive Committee: Larry Andrews, Kent State University; Richard Badenhausen, Westminster College; Kambra Bolch, Texas Tech University; Akofa Bonsi, University of Alabama at Birmingham; Bruce Carter, Syracuse University; Danielle Coulter, Ball State University; David Duncan, University of Florida; Holli Hitt, Mississippi State University; Jocelyn Jackson, Morehouse College; Kathleen King, University of Maine, Augusta; James Knauer, Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania; Lydia Lyons, Hillsborough Community College; Nancy Poulson, Florida Atlantic University; Jacci Rodgers, Oklahoma City University; Stephen Rosenbaum, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Charlie Slavin, University of Maine; Stephen Wainscott, Clemson University; Emily Zhivotovskiy, Long Island University, C. W. Post Campus.

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## **EDITORIAL POLICY**

*Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* is a refereed periodical publishing scholarly articles on honors education. The journal uses a double-blind peer review process. 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. Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at (phone) 850.927.3776 or (e-mail) [adalong@uab.edu](mailto:adalong@uab.edu).

## **DEADLINES**

March 1 (for spring/summer issue); September 1 (for fall/winter issue)

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# CALL FOR PAPERS

The *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* is now accepting papers for Volume 7, No. 1 (spring/summer 2006), which will be a general-interest issue

**The deadline for submissions is March 1, 2006.**

The following issue (**deadline: September, 2006**) will focus on the theme of honors administration. We invite research essays for this issue that consider matters related to directing an honors program, serving as dean of an honors college, changing from a program to a college, term limits (or lack thereof), serving in any administrative or staff position of an honors program or college, institutional relations, positioning within an institutional hierarchy, budgetary management, fundraising, national involvement, tenure and promotion, career advantages or liabilities, balancing administrative/academic or honors/disciplinary responsibilities, or any other topic relevant to honors administration.

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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

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 preferred; endnotes are acceptable.

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

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

Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at [adalong@uab.edu](mailto:adalong@uab.edu) or, if necessary, 850.927.3776.



# DEDICATION



**JOCELYN E. WHITEHEAD JACKSON**

**D**r. Jocelyn Jackson has been active in honors education and in the National Collegiate Honors Council for close to three decades. She was Vice President, President, and Past President of NCHC from 1985 to 1988, and she currently is an elected member of the NCHC Executive Committee. Her voice has been strong and influential in the national evolution of honors, helping to direct its course and keep it on track. She has been active in many other contexts as well. She has been President of the Southern Regional Honors Council and held other offices in that organization over the years, and she was instrumental in the formation of the National Association of African American Honors Programs in the early 1990s, serving as its first Executive Director. Educated at Boston University (B.A.), Georgetown University (M.A.), and Emory University (Ph.D.), Dr. Jackson has held academic and administrative positions at Chafin College, the U.S. Naval Intelligence School, Clark College, Atlanta University, Spelman College, and (since 1987) Morehouse College. It has always been a special treat at honors conferences to see the Morehouse buses pull up at the conference hotel and get a first look at the young men who will always give the most polished and intellectually engaging conference presentations. One can see Jocelyn's influence in the professionalism of her students and feel it in the tenor of every organization in which she is involved. With special pride and gratitude, we dedicate an issue of *JNCHC* that addresses the question "What is Honors?" to a woman who has for many years helped provide and shape the answers to that question.





ADA LONG

# Editor's Introduction

ADA LONG

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Probably most people reading this issue of *JNCHC* have to answer the question “What is Honors?” several times a week. Sometimes the answers come trippingly off the tongue with enthusiasm and clarity; sometimes they inspire new understanding of what a particular honors program or college is really about; sometimes they balk at being articulated; and sometimes they evoke annoyance, boredom, or weariness at endless repetitions of the same old buzzwords.

We all think we know what “honors” is, yet I suspect that we are often surprised at how differently others define it. Surprises come during interviews of candidates for our programs, conversations at NCHC conferences, meetings with campus administrators, and—most disconcertingly—chats with our own students.

Paradoxically, we mostly do know what we mean by “honors,” at least in a general way, and at the same time we are often stymied when we get down to the particulars. By definition, honors programs and colleges are exclusive—otherwise, what could the word “honors” possibly mean?—but at the same time they increasingly (and, in my view, rightly) struggle for inclusivity. Except in a few cases of free-standing honors colleges, we are part of our educational institutions yet also a thing apart. The paradoxes multiply the more we investigate them, yet the NCHC has managed to come up with a document defining the “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program” that most of us acknowledge to be appropriate and accurate, and, very recently (as described in an essay by Peter C. Sederberg in this issue), it has come up with a parallel document defining the characteristics of an honors college.

The focus of this issue of *JNCHC* on the question “What is Honors?” will likely reinforce both the paradoxes and commonalities of the way we think about honors education. While it is hard to find any single characteristic that distinguishes honors from non-honors students, teachers, or courses, and while honors programs/colleges across the country are far more different from each other than are, for instance, English departments or service learning programs, we do share one trait with passion and, I daresay, universal agreement: our belief in the vitality and necessity of outstanding undergraduate education.

I suspect we also know what we mean by “outstanding undergraduate education.” In my introduction to the spring/summer 2005 issue of *JNCHC*, I cited an essay called “The Organization Kid” by David Brooks, a columnist with whom I do not always agree on matters political but who is, in my view, one of the canniest commentators on education in America. So I will cite him again. In a column called “Psst! Human Capital!” published in the *New York Times* (November 13, 2005), Brooks defines human capital not in the economic terms of the marketplace but as a combination of

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

cultural, social, moral, cognitive, and aspirational capabilities that he sees as the virtue and goal of education. About excellent education he writes:

The only things that work are local, human-to-human immersions that transform the students down to their very beings. Extraordinary schools, which create intense cultures of achievement, work. Extraordinary teachers, who inspire students to transform their lives, work. The programs that work touch all the components of human capital.

This statement is as good a definition of honors as any I have seen, and it is echoed over and over again in the essays that appear in this volume.

My own view is that increasingly what distinguishes honors and makes it the standard-bearer, fortress, and refuge of excellent undergraduate education is flexibility. As the national trend toward standardization and accountability grinds forward, more and more colleges and universities limit faculty autonomy, curricular experimentation, and student choices. There are two notable categories of exceptions: the most prestigious universities, such as Harvard and Stanford, and honors programs and colleges. If I am right, then our very inability—or refusal—to answer the question “What is Honors?” with unanimity of voice is what enables us to provide the finest education to our students. We are still able to experiment, to change course (and courses), to define ourselves in the contexts of our unique regions and student bodies, to go beyond the minimal, to stretch the maximal, to adapt to the changing individual and collective needs of our students, to welcome eccentricity, and to use our minds rather than simply obey the rules.

And so I treasure the difficulties we often have in defining honors. They keep us honest and interesting.

At the same time, I am struck by what I see as a commonality in all the essays submitted to the Forum on “What is Honors?” Each of them affirms some component of Brooks's definition of excellent education, and—as a whole—they provide a picture of honors that should make us all proud. Above all, what I see in them as a group is a reaffirmation of the holy trinity of great education: the student, the teacher, and the focus of inquiry. The accessories (all due credit to Vince Brewton's wonderful phrase “accessorized education”) that preoccupy honors administrators—extracurricular programming, recruitment gimmicks, admissions standards, mission statements, public relations, fundraising, assessment, and so on—mean nothing if we lose sight of this trinity.

The seed essays for the Forum were “What is Honors?” by Dail W. Mullins, Jr., and “What is an Honors Student?” by Jay Freyman. We sent these two essays to the NCHC list serve and invited short essays in response, with no requirement that the essays directly address the issues raised by Mullins and Freyman.

After first laying out the pitfalls of mission statements as euphemisms that hide rather than reveal the precise character of individual programs and colleges, Mullins addresses head-on the tension between meritocracy and egalitarianism that has characterized the discourse about honors for the two and a half decades that I have been involved in it. Mullins notes a shift in honors toward greater flexibility in admissions and what may be a tipping of the balance toward egalitarianism. He suggests that the question “What is Honors?” becomes a more complex and fraught one given the

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attempt to define, accommodate, and reward a diversity of talents that have not traditionally been associated with honors. Mullins points out that, beneath the shiny surface of all the abstractions that comprise mission statements, some serious philosophical and political issues emerge that belie the placid generalities with which honors programs and colleges advertise themselves to the world.

Freyman suggests a way to resolve the tension between meritocracy and egalitarianism described by Mullins. He argues for an understanding of “merit” that is roughly comparable to Mullins’s understanding of egalitarian principles: namely, a diverse range of criteria that transcend quantitative measures like SAT/ACT, GPA, or AP background. Based on his many years as Director of the Honors College at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, Freyman argues that the qualities of excellent recruits and members of honors programs are ascertained in an interview, not in numerical scores. Best among these qualities is curiosity, but Freyman describes many others along with suggestions about how to evoke and detect them. Freyman’s proposed admission strategy is admittedly inefficient when measured in amounts of time committed to the selection process, but it is highly successful, he suggests, if measured in the curiosity, diversity, educational commitment, intellectual depth, and cultural awareness of students admitted to an honors program or college. Freyman’s criteria for selecting and defining honors students are subjective, but they are precise; they are not numbers, but neither are they the vague generalities of a mission statement. His essay provides specific and identifiable characteristics that one can seek in candidates for an honors program—a program that would look altogether different from one that selected by the numbers.

Inspired by Freyman’s definition of an ideal honors student, Sam Schuman—with his usual clarity and eloquence—has provided his definition of an ideal honors teacher in “Teaching Honors.” The central word in his definition—a word that appears all too rarely in discourse about higher education but that shows up directly and indirectly in several of the Forum essays on “What is Honors?”—is *love*. Schuman describes in a precise, personal, and compelling way the three kinds of love that inform great teaching: love of one’s subject matter, love of one’s students, and love of bringing the subject matter and the students together. This essay will be helpful to honors administrators in identifying the best teachers for their programs or colleges; it will be helpful to honors teachers as a touchstone for reflection on their own teaching; and it will help honors students if their administrators and teachers work to provide the kind of love Schuman encourages.

Len Zane, from the pleasant distance of his post-honors rocking chair, contends that the focus on “honors student” or “honors teacher” displaces the central component of honors, which is the curriculum. In “Honors as an Adjective: Response to Jay Freyman,” Zane argues that the honors curriculum is what takes freshmen, whoever they are, to the status of “honors students” upon completion of their coursework and that “honors teachers” are the people who implement that curriculum. Part of Zane’s point is that we shouldn’t worry so much about who gets into a program as long as they are able to do the work; we should instead focus on what kinds of students we want to graduate from a program and how to get them there. Zane here addresses a very serious issue in higher education generally: should a university, college, or

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

program be judged by the quality of freshmen it admits, or should it be judged and—more importantly—judge itself by the quality of its graduates? Zane argues that the standard thinking is backward, and he makes an interesting and persuasive case.

Vince Brewton, in “What Honors Can Do,” suggests a related but different misdirection that seduces honors administrators away from what it can and should be. He argues that, given the pressure to attract top students who already have a sense of entitlement, honors is too often a form of “accessorized” education, trying to “out-do, out-tech, out-gadget, and out-hype the competition.” What it should be is “serious study, serious teaching, and serious inquiry” aimed toward “teaching one student at a time.” Brewton acknowledges all the impediments to his ideal honors education, such as limited funding and staffing resources as well as student expectations (although James Hill’s research essay may suggest expectations more in line with Brewton’s ideal), but his sense that honors education may be drifting into recruitment gimmicks and marketing strategies rather than serious education may be an alarm bell we should all heed.

Daniel Pinti sounds a similar alarm in his essay “Is, Ought, and Honors,” providing an ideal of honors education akin to Brewton’s and also identifying the misdirection of honors toward marketing and consumerism. Above all, however, Pinti blames the twin pressures of “competition and perfectionism.” He suggests that we ought to be encouraging students to do less and to do it more fully, to do it in such a way that they discover themselves in their studies. The central capacity of honors, he writes, is “to be transformative” and to lead students toward “inwardness.” This ideal does not require funds and accessories as much as a commitment by faculty and staff, as well as students, to take a path toward fulfillment and self-understanding rather than perfection and a place at the top.

In “A Way of Life,” Sriram Khé provides another, but compatible, ideal of honors education as a continuous pleasure in inquiry that extends beyond any course, program, or college to include a way of experiencing the world. Echoing both Freyman and Mullins, Khé argues for an understanding of honors that transcends and transforms our promotional images of ourselves, a bigger and more all-inclusive concept than can be included in any brochure or website.

Bebe Nickolai, in her essay “In Praise of Silence,” describes her experience this semester in an honors rhetoric class as she became the student, learning from her students that *being* a student is often the best way to teach. Obviously, Nickolai’s insight applies to more than her one honors class during this one semester at her one university. Her essay reveals that shifting the power and the voice from the teacher to the student often leads to the best education for both.

In “A Student like Me,” Bonnie D. Irwin describes the diversity of students in her honors program at a state comprehensive university, focusing especially on their diversity of backgrounds and motivations. As she points out, and as any honors teacher has probably learned, high test scores and grades (as well as low test scores and grades) tell only part of the story. She challenges us to direct attention to students who have, as she had in college, the highest test scores but not the highest ambitions. To teach these students well—and to teach well all of the students who don’t fit a single prototype—requires listening to them and getting to know them. She reaffirms the

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values that Jay Freyman espoused and that many contributors to the Forum have echoed, especially that honors education is above all personal.

The Forum concludes with an essay by a former honors student who we can all wish were speaking about our own programs. In “Honors: When Value-Added is Really Added Value,” Jacqueline P. Kelleher writes about her experience as an honors student in a way that would make any honors administrator proud and that serves to illustrate the highest ideals of honors expressed in all the essays in the Forum on “What is Honors?” If one seeks consensus on what we all hope that honors is, Kelleher’s essay provides it, and any honors director, dean, or teacher who does not read this essay is missing an opportunity to feel *great*. Here is one sentence as an enticement to read the whole essay: “I also remember vividly the time I sat in the kitchen, staring down gravely at two applications: one for the University of Southern Maine and one for welfare.” Two bonuses to Kelleher’s personal narrative illustrating honors at its best are: (1) that she is now a national and international consultant on assessment and accountability with a perspective that is way too rare in this field and that was shaped by her honors experience, and (2) that she is a passionate and unflagging advocate for honors. I know we will be hearing more from her in the future.

The centerpiece of this issue of *JNCHC* is an outstanding essay by Laura Bender Herron, an honors student at Kent State University and a 2005 winner of the NCHC’s Portz Prize. “Redemptive Memory: The Christianization of the Holocaust in America” is a thoroughly researched, beautifully written, and intellectually sophisticated analysis of the way the Holocaust has been transformed within the collective American memory into a narrative that Christians can find comfortable and comforting. Choosing three examples to illustrate her thesis—the movie “Schindler’s List,” Corrie ten Boom’s memoir *The Hiding Place*, and The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum—Herron demonstrates that the American version of the Holocaust, more myth than history, represses the fact that Hitler’s Germany was a Christian country, foregrounds the tiny number of Christian “rescuers” to make them the heroes of the story, and distorts the events of the Holocaust into a story of Christian redemption. Herron’s argument is far more complex and subtle than I (perhaps anyone) can summarize. The essay needs to be read in its entirety, and fortunately such a reading is pure pleasure and excitement from beginning to end. It is one of the finest pieces of undergraduate scholarship I have ever read, and honors administrators would do well to assign it to their students for its educational value and also as a model of scholarly research.

The next section of this issue of *JNCHC* includes three research essays related to the topic “What is Honors?” The first two of these studies contain the kind of research that the NCHC has especially encouraged: comparisons of honors students to control groups of non-honors but honors-eligible students.

James P. Hill’s “What Honors Students Want (and Expect): The Views of Top Michigan High School and College Students” is a two-part study investigating what honors students see as the value of an honors education. The first part examines the expectations of a large group of top high school students, mostly from Michigan. These students, as part of their application process, responded to essay questions about the criteria they believed were most appropriate to admission to an honors

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

program or college. The second part of the study focused on large samples of current Central Michigan University students, both those in the CMU Honors Program and those who, though equally eligible, were not in the program. The study concluded that all these sets of students valued the same qualities that honors administrators and faculty tend to value: high-quality instruction, small classes, social opportunities, and long-range academic goals. These broad educational goals are students' primary expectations, Hill concludes, putting criteria such as standardized test scores or prerequisites such as honors residence halls in perspective as component parts of a larger, more academically motivated set of expectations. As Hill contends, the data in this study point to the importance of student voices in promoting honors education.

Gayle E. Hartleroad, in "Comparison of the Academic Achievement of First-Year Female Honors Program and Non-Honors Program Engineering Students," presents the results of a research study of female students in the Purdue University Freshman Engineering Honors Program. The study compared these students' grade point averages to those of female engineering students who were eligible to join the program but did not. Hartleroad's data indicate that the Honors Program students earned significantly higher grades in both semesters of their freshman year and in the year as a whole. She discusses the particular importance of providing the support and community characteristic of honors programs to women who are in small minorities within male-dominated fields such as engineering. Her data are reassuring to incoming women students, not just at Purdue but probably at most universities, who unnecessarily fear that honors program participation will negatively affect their grades.

The final research essay is one of great interest to the membership of NCHC, addressing the question "What is an Honors College?" Peter C. Sederberg's "Characteristics of the Contemporary Honors College: A Descriptive Analysis of a Survey of NCHC Member Colleges" is fascinating reading even for people who have no stake in creating or maintaining an honors college. Lucid and compelling in style, the essay lays out issues relevant to all of us in honors. Reporting on the recent proposal to and acceptance by the NCHC Executive Committee of a document outlining "The Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College," Sederberg presents the results of a recent survey of honors colleges that revealed common practices. He also presents guidelines and their rationales as deliberated by the NCHC *Ad Hoc* Task Force on Honors Colleges, which he chaired. He notes the accelerating trend of transforming honors programs into colleges, arguing persuasively that these changes should not be simply nominal, that becoming an honors college should entail more than a new marketing strategy. Honors educators who have been wary of an established set of guidelines—or skeptical about the "Basic Characteristics" document—will have much to learn from Sederberg's essay, and many will be reassured by his acknowledgement that programs can be as vital and effective as colleges. Program directors as well as current or aspiring college deans will benefit from Sederberg's explanation of the legitimate and desirable—if not always actual—characteristics of an honors college.

The final section of this issue—a section that we hope will expand in future issues—is the "Book Review" section. We enthusiastically invite reviews of books

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that might be of special interest to honors administrators, teachers, and students, and we are grateful to Hallie E. Savage for leading the way with her review of Charles Lipson's *How to Write a BA Thesis: A Practical Guide from Your First Ideas to Your Finished Paper*.

In addition to research essays, Forum submissions, and book reviews, we are happy to receive responses to texts published in *JNCHC* and will consider publication of such responses based on their value to the readership. Meanwhile, we hope that the current issue of *JNCHC* will be of use to its readers the next time they are asked the perpetual question "What is Honors?"





# About the Authors

**Vince Brewton** serves as Founding Director of the Honors Program at the University of North Alabama and teaches American literature in the Department of English. His research interests have resulted in a number of publications on violence and identity in literature. Prior to coming to UNA, he worked in honors administration at the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College at Ole Miss.

**Jay Freyman** is Associate Professor of Ancient Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where he was also Director of the Honors College from 1991 to 2002 and is currently Historian of the Eta of Maryland chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. His scholarship interests lie in the areas of ancient Greek drama and of the nature and uses of liberal education. He teaches courses in Latin and Classical Greek from the elementary through the advanced level.

**Gayle E. Hartleroad** currently serves as Associate Director of Graduate Programs in the Miller College of Business at Ball State University. Previously, she served as the Honors Program Assistant Director and Academic Advisor in the Department of Freshman Engineering at Purdue University. She earned a Doctor of Education degree in higher education leadership from Nova Southeastern University.

**Laura Bender Herron** is currently completing her MA in History at Kent State University. Her master's thesis extends her exploration of Christian collective memory and the Holocaust, which she began with her undergraduate honors work. She plans to continue her studies in Modern European history, focusing on the history of the Holocaust, at the doctoral level.

**James P. Hill** is Director of the Honors Program at Central Michigan University. He is also a Professor in the Political Science Department and holds both J.D. and Ph.D. degrees. He specializes in administrative law and environmental issues as well as consulting on Native American casino development.

**Bonnie D. Irwin** is Dean of The Honors College at Eastern Illinois University. She is a Professor of English and has taught leadership, world mythology, and world literature. She earned her PhD in Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley. Her research interests include the reception of the *1001 Nights* in American culture and the writings of Arab American women.

**Jacqueline P. Kelleher** recently left her position as the Assistant Dean in the Neag School of Education at The University of Connecticut to pursue a new adventure at the Western Oregon University. She is building their institutional office of research, assessment, and strategic planning. Additionally, she serves as an Assistant Professor in the College of Education, teaching courses in engaged teaching,

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

learning, and assessment. She will continue to be involved working with honors students and making sure programs have the resources necessary to continue their magic. Dr. Kelleher speaks and consults nationally and internationally on assessment and accountability issues.

**Sriram Khé** is Director of the Honors Program and Associate Professor of Geography at Western Oregon University. Sriram earned his PhD in urban and regional planning from the University of Southern California. Given the eclectic nature of his academic pursuits, he is always at a loss in identifying his interests and specialty.

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