

2014

## Editor's Introduction

Ada Long

*University of Alabama at Birmingham*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchchip>

---

Long, Ada, "Editor's Introduction" (2014). *Honors in Practice -- Online Archive*. 210.  
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchchip/210>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the National Collegiate Honors Council at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors in Practice -- Online Archive by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

# Editor's Introduction

ADA LONG

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

All of us need heroes. Throughout my thirty years in honors, two of my heroes have been Sam Schuman and Ted Estess, both of whom not just incorporate but embody the highest values of honors culture in the way that Gary Cooper embodied the Old West. Both are beautiful writers, accomplished scholars, dedicated teachers, generous colleagues, and—without making a fuss about it—indispensable exemplars and mentors for at least two generations of honors directors and faculty. Opening with contributions from both of them makes this a special volume of *Honors in Practice*.

Sam Schuman's "Valediction" is a speech he gave, somewhat revised for this publication, when the University of North Carolina Asheville dedicated its new fitness center to him. Schuman is Chancellor Emeritus at UNCA and also of the University of Minnesota, Morris. He returned from Minnesota to UNCA as both a professor and dean before retiring from academia. Fortunately, he has never retired from the NCHC, where he still runs, with Ted Estess, the Beginning in Honors sessions at the national conferences. His most recent NCHC monograph is *If Honors Students Were People: Holistic Honors Higher Education*, in which he argues for spiritual and physical as well as intellectual development within honors, and these are the themes of his speech. Tying the physical to the spiritual, and calling on his distinguished background as a literary scholar, Schuman celebrates the blessing of the brief lives we are allotted, concluding, "I am the luckiest man on the face of the earth." I speak for all of us who have the blessing of his friendship in saying that we are the luckiest ones on the face of the earth.

We are also fortunate to include in this volume an essay titled "Making Pictures" by Ted Estess, Schuman's co-director of Beginning in Honors. This essay, like Schuman's, was originally a speech for a special occasion—last fall's Honors Convocation at the University of Houston Honors College, where Ted was dean for many years—and has been adapted for publication here. He counsels students that a good education teaches you *what* you don't know and—more importantly—*that* you don't know. By telling stories about his own life as a student as well as his students' lives, Estess demonstrates the wisdom of "learned ignorance." Students arrive in college with set pictures of the world that, given time and an open mind, change in unsettling ways, producing new pictures and minds that are "supple," "capacious," and "generous." Estess's and Schuman's gentle, joyful teaching—in Beginning in Honors, in their numerous publications and conference sessions, and in their personal interactions—has shown thousands of new honors directors and faculty how to make new pictures.

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The next group of essays in this volume of HIP introduces innovative teaching strategies. In "Ask Me about ISON: The Risks and Rewards of Teaching an Interdisciplinary Honors Course on a Scientific Event Unfolding in Real Time," William L. Vanderburgh and Martin Ratcliffe describe an honors course they taught at Wichita State University on the comet ISON. Ratcliffe, a planetarium astronomer, and Vanderburgh, a philosopher of science, gambled that ISON would be a major astronomical event of the twenty-first century and designed a course for the fall of 2013 that they could make up as they went along while following the progress of the comet. When the comet fizzled toward the end of the semester, they and their students learned that failure can be as interesting as success in studying an ongoing event in astronomy or in any other field; the unfolding narrative and the kinds of resources that lead to a thorough study of an event-in-progress lend excitement and drama to a course no matter what the outcome. The authors offer many good ideas, projects, models, and resources for generating such an interdisciplinary course.

In "A Traditional Educational Practice Adapted for the Digital Age," Elizabeth Nix, Brian Etheridge, and Paul Walsh demonstrate that a carefully planned MOOC can be valuable to honors students as well as to a much wider audience. The authors designed a traditional weekly honors seminar on the Civil Rights Movement, taught by Taylor Branch, at the University of Baltimore. In addition to the twenty-one honors students enrolled in the class for credit, hundreds of auditors participated online so that a "face-to-face seminar for enrolled honors students" became simultaneously "a massive yet interactive seminar experience for the general public." The authors describe the technological and intellectual components of the course in a way that gives MOOCs a good name. Their course maintained the high academic standards in a small-class setting that we traditionally associate with honors while at the same time opening up and sharing the experience with a much larger audience. They have provided a model for traditional and online, closed and open, honors courses that could be valuable to many honors programs with the resources to accomplish this double mission.

Melissa Ladenheim addresses the challenge of coaxing honors students into seeing the relevance of poetry to their lives. In "Engaging Honors Students through Newspaper Blackout Poetry," she describes a strategy she has adopted in the Honors Civilization course at the University of Maine—a strategy suggested by one of her students. Students black out portions of current newspaper articles in order to reveal a poetry hidden within. The poetry they find is in the world around them and, in chiseling it out from everyday prose, they find and create the poetry within themselves, making them better able to understand Sappho and other lyric poets. Blackout poetry generates an active learning experience within the honors classroom that shows students how poetry "can shape the way they think about the world and their place in it."

On a larger scale, Kevin Gustafson and Zachary Cureton have incorporated active learning into the honors curriculum at a programmatic level in the University of Texas at Arlington Honors College. Their essay—"Re-Envisioning the Honors Senior Project: Experience as Research"—describes the integration of

experiential learning into three honors capstone options: “a community service learning placement, a paid or unpaid professional internship, or a semester- or year-long study abroad program.” After a literature review on the principles of active learning and critical reflection, Gustafson acknowledges that experiential capstones are “messier and less predictable” than traditional theses and thus possibly intimidating to faculty members who are accustomed to the role of authority figure rather than facilitator. The rewards of the experiential option, however, become apparent in Cureton’s description of his capstone project on Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, which combined “inter-cultural theory, literary study, and personal reflection [about his year-long study abroad in Russia] in order to understand ways in which people do and do not adapt to new surroundings.” As Gustafson concludes, “experiential capstones tend to foreground the larger social, ethical, and even personal dimensions of doing research. As such, they offer not just interesting alternatives to the traditional honors thesis but an opportunity to enrich it.”

The principle of applied knowledge is central also to the next essay, “Sea Lions and Honors Students: More in Common than You May Think.” Kristy L. Lindemann-Biolsi of St. Francis College makes the broad argument that honors courses should teach the “transfer of information between contexts,” which is essential to animal training, by instilling “the skills of metacognition and self-regulation,” ensuring that students not only learn but learn how to learn. Honors teachers too often take these skills for granted without realizing that honors students, too, need to be taught how to plan, monitor, and apply the knowledge they gain in the classroom so that they are not simply learning a “specific behavior in a specific location with a specific person.” Lindemann-Biolsi offers honors faculty several specific techniques for teaching skills that students will be able to take beyond the classroom.

The next two essays address the Great Books curriculum that forms the core of some honors programs. In “There and Back Again: Learning From the History of a Freshman Seminar Sequence,” Stephanie R. deLusé describes the history of the Great Books course sequence called The Human Event at Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University. Inspired in the late 1970s by Jacob Bronowski’s BBC/PBS series *The Ascent of Man*, the course sequence was modeled on the “Columbia model” of the Great Books approach, which is more historical and context-based than the topics-centered approach of the “Chicago model.” The author summarizes the evolution of the course sequence into interdisciplinary core courses with a focus on Great Ideas as much as Great Books and taught by twenty-nine full-time Honors Faculty Fellows. She describes experiments with the program that succeeded and others that failed, arguing that such a historical examination of a program’s roots can be useful to current faculty and administrators.

Sarah Harlan-Haughey suggests that an inherent flaw in the Great Books approach is the often unexamined and faulty presumption that the progression of time marks some kind of intellectual, artistic, or moral progress. In “Against Teleology in an Honors Great Books Curriculum,” Harlan-Haughey acknowledges

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

the variety of problems as well as assets of a Great Books curriculum such as the one she teaches in the University of Maine Honors College, and she suggests that at least one of these problems can become an asset: a Great Books curriculum can give teachers an opportunity to “actively and consciously resist implicit buy-in to teleological narratives inherent in the curricular structure.” She provides a useful “toolkit for honors educators”—a lengthy and detailed list of “conscious interventions in the teleological assumptions inherent in any Great Books course”—to help teachers and their students question and resist the powerful cultural, religious, and political forces that reinforce a belief in progress.

This volume of HIP concludes with two essays that address the kinds of expectations that students and educators have about honors. In “High-Impact Recruiting: A Focus Group of Prospective Honors Students,” David M. Rhea and Kristy Goodwin describe the steps they took to determine and meet the expectations of incoming freshmen when the Governors State University Honors Program transitioned from an upper-level, two-year university to a four-year university. Since both the honors program and the university were recruiting freshman-level students for the first time, the honors program needed to design a program that met the expectations of high-achieving high school students from the diverse Chicago Southland area when such students had no familiarity with GSU. Their solution to this challenge was to create a focus group of prospective local high school students to find out what they expected and wanted from an honors program, then incorporating their ideas into the program design. They used High-Impact Educational Practices—learning communities, collaborative assignments/projects, and research—as strategies within the focus group as a means of getting students involved in the design of the program. Rhea and Goodwin explain the details of this process and suggest its potential use at any stage of a program's development.

The final essay—“Navigating the Kokosing: A Comparison between Honors and Private Liberal Arts Colleges” by Scott Carnicom of Middle Tennessee State University—refutes the claim and expectation that honors will provide the same kind of experience that students would get at a liberal arts college. Until 2014, Carnicom was Associate Dean of the Honors College at Middle Tennessee State University, and he spent a year at Kenyon College as an American Council on Education Fellow, allowing him to compare the undergraduate experiences at these two contrasting institutions. The similarities—small class size, personal interaction, and emphasis on discussion and writing—are significant, but what liberal arts colleges offer that honors programs at large universities do not, according to Carnicom, are a focus on “academic breadth and synthesis” rather than specialization, on the value of teaching and interdisciplinarity across the four-year curriculum, on institution-wide commitment to undergraduates, and on the love of learning rather than preparation for graduate schools or careers. Carnicom argues, “If we say that we emulate liberal arts colleges, then we must think about where we stand on the breadth–depth continuum so that our curricula are not like a Brooklyn diner menu, going on for pages and pages offering

ADA LONG

all things to all people, when instead we should be striving to build a cohesive academic experience that uniquely defines our program.”

