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# JNCHC

## JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL

Fall/Winter 2007

Vol. 8, No. 2

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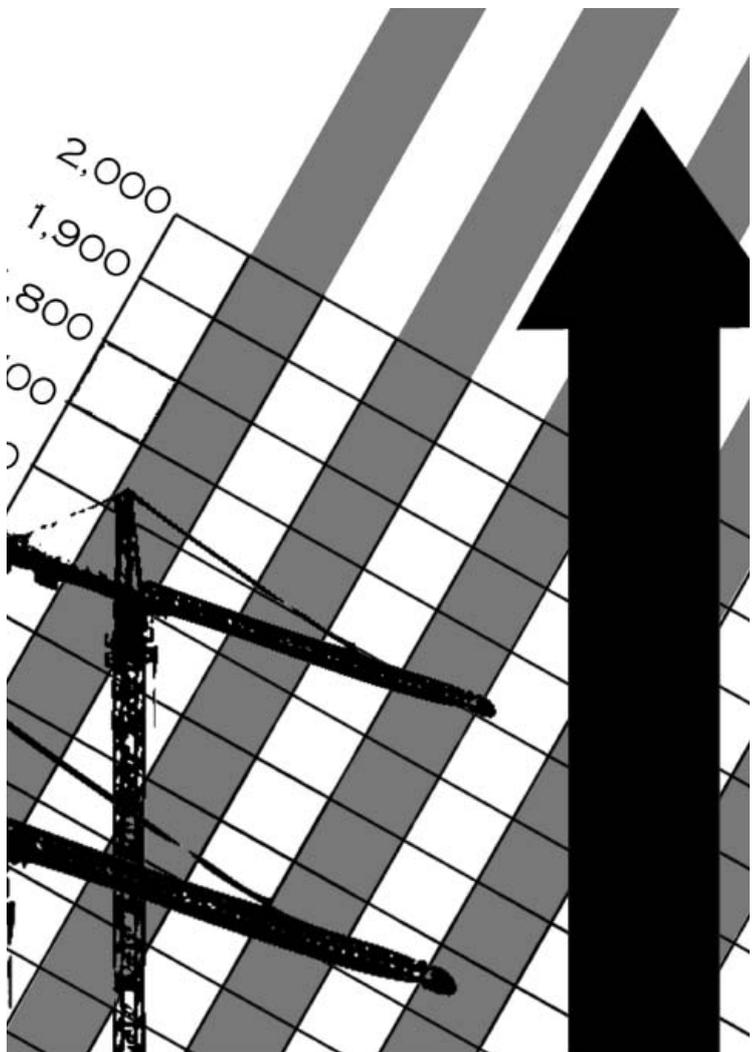
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## MANAGING GROWTH IN HONORS

JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL

VOLUME 8, No. 2

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

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## **MANAGING GROWTH IN HONORS**

**JOURNAL EDITORS**

**ADA LONG**

**DAIL MULLINS**

**UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM**

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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 [adalong@uab.edu](mailto:adalong@uab.edu).

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

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Cover image by Alex Mayfield, honors student at Oral Roberts University

# CALL FOR PAPERS

The next issue of *JNCHC* (**deadline: March 1, 2008**) is a general-interest issue that invites research essays on any topic of interest to the honors community.

The issue will also include a Forum focused on the theme “Honors Culture.” During the past decade, numerous essays have appeared in the national media\* trying to define the current undergraduate culture in contrast to that of previous generations. Is there a particular honors culture? What are its characteristics? Does it differ from non-honors culture and/or from the honors culture of former periods? To what extent, if any, do honors administrators control this culture? Does the culture generally coincide with the stated goals of a particular honors program or contradict them? What are the particular roles of students, teachers, and staff within the honors culture, and which is culturally dominant? We invite essays of roughly a thousand words that consider the specific traits, if any, of honors culture in the context of your campus and/or a national context.

\*Some relevant articles:

David Brooks, “The Organization Kid,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 2001):  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200104/brooks>

Rick Perlstein, “What’s the Matter With College,” *NY Times* (Sept. 30, 2007):  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/magazine/30wwln-essay-perlstein-t.html>

Nicholas Handler, “The Posteverything Generation,” *NY Times* (Sept. 30, 2007):  
<http://essay.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/09/27/the-college-pastiche/>

Thomas Friedman, “Generation Q,” *NY Times* (Oct. 10, 2007): <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/10/opinion/10friedman.html?em&ex=1192248000&en=b68385a36eade5ac&ei=5087%0A>

## 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



Photograph © Elisif Andrews Brandon

## LARRY R. ANDREWS

Larry Andrews has recently achieved the enviable titles of Professor Emeritus of English and Dean Emeritus of the Honors College at Kent State University, having “retired” on July 1, 2007. Larry arrived at Kent State in 1969 after achieving a B.A. in English at Ohio State, a Ph.D in Comparative Literature from Rutgers, and three years of teaching experience at the University of South Carolina. During his almost forty years at Kent State, he also did teaching stints at the University of Warsaw, Poland, and Volgograd State University in the USSR. His research has ranged from Fyodor Dostoevsky and Victor Hugo to Ann Petry and Gloria Naylor. His languages are equally wide ranging; French, German, and Russian are his primary languages (after English), and his secondary languages include Polish, Italian, Spanish, Greek, and Latin. The diversity of his interests and abilities has been a significant asset not only to Kent State and its Honors College but to the NCHC and to honors throughout the country. Larry has served as President of the Mid-East Honors Association and as a member of the NCHC Executive Committee, Publications Board, and *Honors in Practice* Editorial Board. He has several publications in honors journals, including the lead essay in the spring/summer 2007 issue’s Forum on “Grades, Scores, and Honors.” Another of his essays is titled “At Play in the Fields of Honor(s),” an appropriate title given his antic as well as serious disposition. He will not be retiring from the NCHC any time soon, and we look forward to future essays, conversations, and presentations from our highly esteemed colleague.



ADA LONG

# Editor's Introduction

ADA LONG

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

A recurrent motif throughout the history of *JNCHC* has been the growth of honors across the country: more colleges and programs, more students, more administrative demands, more work, and—sometimes—more resources. The implications of all these increases have resonated throughout the honors community, raising questions about how to manage the accelerating growth without diminishing the quality of an honors education.

And so we asked members of the NCHC to contribute to a Forum on the topic “Managing Growth in Honors”; we issued the following Call for Papers both in the last issue of *JNCHC* and on the NCHC listserv:

We invite essays that discuss growth in size and/or complexity of individual honors programs and colleges or the growth in numbers and kinds of programs/colleges nationally. We invite essays that analyze the consequences of growth for students, faculty, honors administrators, or institutions. Essays might focus on numbers of students, size of budgets, allotment of space, class size, ambition of extracurricular activities, or any other kind of growth within a program or college. Other essays might focus on the increased size of national honors conferences, intra- or inter-institutional competition, national visibility, or any other developments and consequences of the rapid growth of honors during the past three decades. An underlying question might be, “Is less more, or is more better?”

Len Zane addressed the final question in reviewing one of the essays for this issue of *JNCHC*: “The article got me thinking about how you measure the impact of honors on campus. Is a program that gives  $x$  students a really good experience better than a program that gives  $2x$  students a lesser experience?” This question goes to the heart of the matter and underlies most of the essays published in the Forum.

We asked Peter C. Sederberg, Dean Emeritus of the South Carolina Honors College, to write the lead essay for the Forum; others could respond to his essay and/or address the topic from other perspectives. In “Nothing Fails Like Success: Managing Growth in a Highly Developed Honors Program,” Sederberg provides an in-depth analysis of the pressures to keep

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

increasing the number of students in a highly successful honors college at a large flagship university. These pressures range from enhancing the university's image to accommodating a broader range of students; they may take place as a mandate from upper administration or as an initiative shared by all of an honors program's constituencies; and the pressures may or may not be accompanied by the promise of adequate resources. Yielding to these pressures may result in the improvement or collapse of a viable program. Sederberg has laid out the spectrum of problems—and some potential solutions—that ensue from a mandate to grow an honors program; his essay is an invaluable aid to every honors director or dean who is under such a mandate and needs to foresee the potential hazards.

The first response to Sederberg comes from Ira Cohen, also a long-time and now emeritus honors director at a large research university. Based on his experience at Illinois State, Cohen—in “Robert Burns, Peter Sederberg, and Higher Education Administration”—finds resonance in Sederberg's perception of the contradictory expectations of honors directors and central administrators. While higher administrators know what they want from an honors program, they cannot see the contexts and complexities of mandated growth, often with troubling consequences for honors programs and their administrators. In such cases, honors directors would do well to “see ourselves as others see us”—or at least to know they are seeing us from a perspective quite unlike our own.

In “Important Issues for Growing an Honors Program,” Nick Flynn from Angelo State University provides advice about specific considerations essential to managing growth in honors. In an essay that will be especially helpful to new honors directors, Flynn focuses on strategies for making budget requests, ensuring scholarship support, providing adequate advising, and maintaining a sense of community when a program is planning substantial growth.

In what turns into an argument that NCHC should become an accrediting agency, Greg Lanier's essay “Growth = Bucks(?)” outlines the funding dilemmas of honors programs and colleges. Using the particular context of legislative policies in Florida, he describes the Catch-22 status of funding strategies at institutions such as the University of West Florida, where he directs the honors program: funding is based on enrollment growth of the past, but enrollment growth depends on funding in the future. He also describes the phenomenon of quantum jump (QJ) funding, its benefits and its dangers. The best solution, he concludes, is getting regular jumps in funding, and accreditation visits are, he argues, the best catalysts for QJs.

Sederberg's essay, along with others in this Forum, has laid out the multiple and complex reverberations of rapid growth throughout all components

of an honors program. Jean E. McLaughlin addresses one such component that may escape an honors director's attention but that is crucial to student success. In "The (Un)familiar Library: Managing the Transition for a Growing Number of Honors College Students," McLaughlin describes the false sense of security and then the overwhelming confusion that virtually all new honors students experience in their first attempts to do undergraduate research. Such attempts can lead to panic, and panic leads, alas, to Google. The University at Albany, SUNY, has wisely managed this consequence of growth in honors by creating McLaughlin's position: Honors College Librarian.

The final three essays in the Forum demonstrate that less can be more. In "Balancing Low Growth with High Success," Robert H. Hogner of Florida International University describes the development of a business honors program that, although originally conceptualized as a free-standing unit, evolved into a collaborative project with the Honors College. Hogner analyzes the factors that have led simultaneously to low enrollment and high success, factors that all result from a small community's initiation of ambitious projects such as a national journal, an honors society, and a spring-break program in Thailand. Hogner also explains some strategies that enable the program to compensate for its small size, e.g., offering honors-type experiences to students outside the program.

Mike Davis of Cameron University—in "Nothing Succeeds Like Failure: Managing Loss in a Renascent Honors Program"—demonstrates that Sederberg's advice is valuable not only to deans of large honors colleges but also to directors of small programs. He finds in Sederberg's ideas a set of inverse protocols for how to manage controlled loss. Davis's attempt to institute a more robust admissions procedure is likely to produce a temporary reduction in the number of applicants, with potentially negative consequences for his budget and himself. We hope to hear back from Mike Davis about how his venture turns out.

In the final Forum essay—"Getting More for Less: When Downsizing in Honors Yields Growth"—Janet Myers and Mary Jo Festle provide an example of improving an honors program by shrinking it. Four years ago, Elon University reduced the size of its program by half—from eighty to forty students admitted per year—and experienced just the opposite of the hazards that Sederberg listed in growing a program. The Elon Honors Program experienced a sudden abundance in every kind of resource—faculty, funding, physical facilities, administrative time—and, as a result, could create a more rigorous curriculum, an intensive thesis component, multiple extracurricular opportunities, heightened selectivity, and—most importantly—a greatly enhanced sense of community among the honors students as well as improved performance.

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Elon experience notwithstanding, the insight expressed by Ira Cohen threads it way through most of the Forum: the perspective of central administrators that more is better differs from the perspective of honors directors that less is more. Since growth is almost inevitable under these circumstances, the Forum essays provide useful information and advice about how to manage it.

The first of this issue's research essays also directly addresses a crucial strategy in managing growth: enhancing a program's advising system. In "Honors Growth and Honors Advising," Robert Spurrier describes the development of a cadre of trained professional advisors as part of the Oklahoma State University Honors College staff. He provides a survey of previous research on this topic, and he explains in detail the process he undertook to develop, implement, and evaluate an appropriate advising system. Since advisors are likely to be the key face-to-face liaisons between a large program and its students, Spurrier's strategy for strengthening advising may be especially valuable to honors administrators who are presiding over rapid growth.

In the next research essay, Sriram Khé presents the results of his pilot study on the correlation—or lack thereof—between SAT, GPA, and success in the Honors Program at Western Oregon University. Although the sample size is small and the data include only five cohorts from admission through graduation, Khé's study seems to affirm a growing national skepticism about test scores and high school grades as predictors of success. If a substantial number of honors administrators collected similar data that could be pooled in a much larger study, Khé's article could lead to invaluable insights into honors admission criteria.

Another study that could be replicated by large numbers of honors administrators is described by Donald P. Kaczvinsky in "What is an Honors Student? A Noel-Levitz Survey." Kaczvinsky provides the results of a national survey administered to all freshmen at Louisiana Tech University in 2004-2005, and he has uses these results to compare honors to non-honors students in a variety of categories. Some of these results are predictable (honors students had greater academic confidence); some are interesting (honors students felt more secure financially); and others might be surprising (honors students were less sociable and did not have significantly better study habits). Kaczvinsky also presents some provocative survey-based comparisons of students who did and did not qualify to stay in the honors program.

The final research essay—by John Mihelich, Debbie Storrs, and Patrick Pellett of the University of Idaho—is titled "Transformational Experience through Liberation Pedagogy: A Critical Look at Honors Education." The authors have applied concepts in the tradition of Paulo Freire and Allan G. Johnson not just to honors students but to the study of honors students by

## ADA LONG

honors students. Hoping to raise their students' awareness of their privileged status within honors, the authors have used ethnographic research projects and journals to elicit their students' understanding of the role of social class in the admissions process and in the general culture of honors. Numerous quotations from the students' journals reveal the extent to which they accepted or rejected the elitism in their honors program and in themselves.

The essay by Mihelich *et al.*, along with many of the other essays in this issue, leads nicely into the Forum topic for the next issue of JNCHC: "Honors Culture." Please see the Call for Papers for more information about this future Forum.



**Forum on  
“Managing Growth in Honors”**



PETER C. SEDERBERG

# Nothing Fails Like Success: Managing Growth in a Highly Developed Honors Program

PETER C. SEDERBERG

SOUTH CAROLINA HONORS COLLEGE

## INTRODUCTION

“Nothing fails like success,” economist Kenneth Boulding observed decades ago. He went on to explain that we only learn from failure; if a particular pattern of behavior or policy seems to be working we continue it until, of course, it fails. Then we might learn something. The law of diminishing marginal utility echoes Boulding’s aphorism. What starts out as a source of pleasure yields diminishing utility until it reaches zero or even sinks to a negative return. I recall that my introductory economics instructor used the example of how the pleasure yielded by the first in a series of cold beers on a hot day ultimately becomes a nausea-inducing, coma-provoking calamity. I expect the beer example is still widely used in introductory economics classes.

This line of somewhat counter-intuitive thinking corrects the conventional wisdom that you cannot have too much of a good thing (or you can’t be too rich or too thin). Unfortunately, for successful honors programs and colleges, the conventional wisdom often seems to guide the policy making of university leadership when it comes to determining the appropriate size of a college or program. After all, administrators seem to think, if a program is perking along with 500 students, it will be twice as good with a 1000.

Seldom will mandated growth be that starkly justified, though as the decision moves up the institutional hierarchy from dean to provost to president to trustees, it often seems to approach such simple idiocy. Honors directors and deans, laboring closer to the front lines, better recognize the complexity and challenges of managing enrollment growth. Indeed, each added student increases marginal costs in both quantitative and qualitative senses. Anticipating the full costs of growth is difficult; persuading the central administration to address them often approaches impossibility. Moreover, my personal experience leading the South Carolina Honors College for eleven years and overseeing an increase in size from fewer than 800 to 1200 students

## NOTHING FAILS LIKE SUCCESS: MANAGING GROWTH

taught me that, no matter how carefully the growth process is managed and supported, honors remains more vulnerable to events beyond its control than most of the major colleges in a university. To paraphrase another aphorism from economics, when a college of arts and sciences catches a cold, honors goes on life support.

Managing growth also presumes university leaders possess some notion of an appropriate size and are not simply “biggering” for the sake of “biggering.” Determining appropriate size, though, reminds me of the small boy who asked his father why he was so tall. His father replied, “So my feet can reach the ground.” An honors program/college should be no larger than what can be securely grounded in the university’s resources and culture.

### THE PRESSURES TO GROW

The pressure to increase the size of a successful program or college comes from a number of often reinforcing directions, and we cannot dismiss any of these motives as frivolous. All deserve careful consideration, not peremptory dismissal. The interrelated growth imperatives include:

1. *Increasing demand.* Those of us in honors leadership have a dirty little secret—we like to turn away qualified students. Having more, even many more, qualified applicants than we can accommodate validates the prestige and visibility of our program. High-achieving honors programs and colleges, like the wider institutions of which they are a part, report with pride indexes of selectivity and yield. After all, we commonly compare ourselves to fine liberal arts colleges, and they accept only a portion of their qualified applicants. Moreover, once we reach the point where we turn down applicants with credentials that were competitive in the recent past, we benefit from what I term “the reverse Groucho Marx effect:” People *want* to be in a club that won’t have them. When the South Carolina Honors College started declining applicants who had been admitted to Furman, Emory, or Davidson, we moved from being a “fall-back” school to being among the top choices of our applicants. However, the folks in enrollment management and in the upper levels of the administration are not as easily convinced of the beneficial effects of increased selectivity for honors admission even though they may pursue it for the wider institution. In my experience, they are not persuaded by the observation that Harvard could double the size of its enrolling class with no diminishment in overall quality but chooses not to do so. The leaders of public institutions, however, cannot afford the luxury of labels like Harvard and Ferrari that deliberately limit supply to maintain brand mystique.

Even if the wider institution is increasing its overall selectivity, the applicants who do not pass muster in the honors admissions process are likely to be in the upper quartile of the institution's admitted class. University leadership may fear, with some reason, that honors rejects will be less likely to matriculate in the regular university. Public universities are not immune from the desire for institutional label enhancement, and this desire contributes to the pressure on honors not to become increasingly selective even as the overall admissions process grows more selective.<sup>1</sup>

2. *The desire for enhanced institutional transformation.* Wider institutional interests in expanding the size of a successful honors program or college do not simply reflect crude numerical calculations but also include important qualitative dimensions. Highly developed honors programs and colleges often garner increased institutional support by arguing that successful honors recruitment not only leads to a better statistical profile in *US News and World Report* but also qualitatively transforms the undergraduate educational environment. In promoting our programs, we tout the benefits of salting the undergraduate population with increased numbers of highly motivated, talented students who will enrich the classroom environment across the university, contribute their talents to the larger community, and increase the probability of national awards and recognition, thereby adding further luster to the university's reputation. Our initial success in promoting this justification and demonstrating its validity rebounds back against us as an argument for expanding the program continuously in the hopes of further institutional enhancement.
3. *Overall institutional growth.* The undergraduate population at many state universities is expanding. As the size of the overall entering class rises, university administrators can make the apparently straight-forward argument that the incoming honors class should expand simply to maintain the same approximate percentage of the overall freshman class. During the middle years of my tenure as dean (1997 through 2001), the entering class of the honors college stabilized at about 9% of the overall freshman class (approximately 250 out of 2800 incoming freshmen). This period of stability ended, though, in 2002. Since then, the overall incoming class grew, first in an unplanned spurt and

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<sup>1</sup> If the South Carolina Honors College kept the admissions criteria used in 1994, we probably would admit over 1000 students and enroll an incoming class approaching 500 rather than 300.

## NOTHING FAILS LIKE SUCCESS: MANAGING GROWTH

then as a result of deliberate policy, until in 2006 it reached nearly 3700 students.<sup>2</sup> Maintaining the same ratio implied an entering honors class of approximately 330 students. Consequently, we faced pressure to increase the absolute size of our entering class simply to maintain this ratio. As a result, the freshman honors class grew over the next four years to approximately 300 students. This growth, while significant, still resulted in an entering honors class that comprised a smaller percentage of the overall freshman class than in 2001.

4. *Anti-elitism and the pressure to expand opportunity.* Those of us who have participated in the debates surrounding either the founding of an honors college or the significant enhancement of an existing program undoubtedly recall the opposition arising from those who believe that honors education smacks of an illegitimate elitism inappropriate for a state-supported university. I am not about to rehash this debate; however, even at schools where honors is a deeply established and widely supported component of the institution, a strong residual sentiment often supports making these enriched opportunities available to more students. Most, if not all, of the members of NCHC respond to this credible concern in various ways: for example, creating a path through which students can transfer into honors after their first semester or year; opening honors courses to non-honors students on a space available basis; or creating programs that are designed from conception to include both honors and non-honors students. At South Carolina, the university even created a second-tier program that currently enrolls a considerably larger number of incoming students than the Honors College. The desire to open honors opportunities to more students, though, can also be indirectly reflected in a resistance to enhancing existing admission standards even in the context of a rapidly expanding applicant pool. Particularly at the point where a new college is launched out of a pre-existing honors program, an expanded publicity campaign, unaccompanied by new admissions standards, has often led to massive increases in the freshman class. The resulting enrollment overload usually leads to an immediate deterioration in quality due to overcrowding.

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<sup>2</sup> The surge in 2002 was unplanned, but it brought a windfall in tuition revenue at a time when the state appropriation was falling. Subsequent increases were deliberately pursued to maintain and enhance this windfall into a sustained zephyr of revenue. Formal university policy aims to increase the size of the incoming class to over 4100 students in the next five years and the honors class to 350, but it remains to be seen if the university is able or even willing to achieve these goals.

## MANAGING GROWTH: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

The negative consequences of poorly managed growth can be easily predicted and are, unfortunately, more widely distributed among our larger programs than we may care to admit.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, the size and pace of enrollment growth affects the intensity of the management challenge; a jump of 100 students in an incoming class that previously averaged 150 takes on an entirely different character if it occurs in one year rather than over five. Even a well run, strongly supported program can be overwhelmed by a sudden surge in numbers. A rapid and unanticipated increase leads to a classic “overshoot and collapse” outcome. Every aspect of the program/college will be stressed. Honors residential opportunities will be woefully inadequate to handle the demand; the freshman advising system will be overwhelmed; honors course availability will not accommodate the demand; operating budgets will run deficits; faculty will complain as their sections increase in size (if that’s even possible); students will feel cheated; and parents will be angered.

And this is just in the first semester. A sustained increase will compound the problems over the years. Even with the support of a sympathetic central administration flush with resources (what a fantasy!), years of sustained investment will be required to address the curricular, organizational, and residential deficits.

At the most basic level of quantifiable and easily anticipated consequences of growth, the response is simple to define, though perhaps less easy to implement: plan for the increase. The first step in the plan must be to control the admissions process. When John Palms became President of the University of South Carolina in 1992, he immediately identified the Honors College as a focus for investment. First on his agenda, though, was to increase the size of the incoming class from about 160 to 200 students, a rather modest growth goal on its face. Unfortunately, this target was implemented immediately, before initiating enhanced recruitment to expand the size and quality of the applicant pool, with predictable results. The Admissions Office, responding to the central mandate, admitted students that were less qualified than those who had enrolled over the previous decade. In fact, even with the relaxed standards, in the absence of a sustained effort to increase the number of applications to the College, enrollment numbers rose only a modest 20 students for the fall of 1993. These last 20, though, significantly lowered the overall class profile. On the bright side, they were easily

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<sup>3</sup> I am not going to name names. Insofar as I provide any concrete illustrations, I will draw upon my own experience with the South Carolina Honors College. Overall, we have done a reasonably good job in managing the growth of the College from approximately 750 students in 1993-1994 to 1250 students in 2006-2007.

## NOTHING FAILS LIKE SUCCESS: MANAGING GROWTH

absorbed within the existing Honors College structure. My predecessor, William Mould, immediately tightened control over the admissions process, recruitment was enhanced, and the decline in quality was quickly reversed. The target class of 200 was met for the fall of 1995, and their statistical profile returned to the previous norm.

The second component of managing growth is equally obvious: leverage more resources. The obvious, of course, easily eludes us. Bill Mould, however, succeeded. Building on the president's high profile aim to bring in an honors class of 200, he was able to garner a three-year boost in the College's base budget amounting to a 50% increase overall. The first year of this increase was slated for 1994–95, the year I began serving as dean.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, over this period, I was able to hire an additional advisor and an associate dean, enhance honors course subsidies to departments, and thereby increase the number of honors courses to accommodate the growing numbers of students.

The president's ultimate goal, though, was to increase the incoming class to 250 students. By the fall of 1996, I was convinced we could fulfill his aspiration and maintain, even improve, their quality, *if* we received an increase in our budget comparable to the one I inherited from Bill.<sup>5</sup> Again, the president was supportive, and the additional budget allocation allowed us to add another advisor and increase our course offerings over a three-year period. Overall, the budget for the Honors College more than doubled between 1993 and 1999.

These happy consequences, then, arose from two factors:

- A university leadership committed to the goal of an enhanced Honors College in terms of both size *and* quality.
- Relatively prosperous times in the state that contributed to modestly increasing appropriations for higher education.

However, two further background factors were also important:

- A relatively steady state in terms of overall undergraduate enrollment.
- A president committed not simply to the Honors College as an island of excellence but to enhanced overall undergraduate opportunities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks, Bill.

<sup>5</sup> I titled my proposal "1000 x 2000," in that four entering classes of 250 students starting with that entering in fall 1997 would result in a college of over 1000 students by the year 2000.

<sup>6</sup> President Palms did much more than significantly increase the direct support of the Honors College. He also secured a \$20 million dollar gift to fund a full scholarship for out-of-state students to complement the existing one for South Carolina residents; he increased the number and value of other scholarship programs; he greatly improved the resources of the Office of Admissions; he raised general admissions standards; he built new high-end residence halls; and he improved support services for the general undergraduate student population.

The last two points suggest more qualitative dimensions of successful growth management that go beyond the obvious need to control the rate of growth and increase honors budgets.

In a “steady state” university—one where both the undergraduate student population and the faculty numbers remain constant—increasing the size of the honors college while maintaining program quality increases marginal costs, both in ways easily measurable and in more qualitative terms. Note that between 1993 and 2000 our enrollment increased about 50% while budgets doubled. Not only did we add advisors and an additional associate dean, but the increasing complexity of college operations required our own IT administrator. Moreover, the marginal cost of extracting additional honors courses from departments increased. This marginal cost involves both the direct cost of an additional course and the indirect cost of the impact on general undergraduate educational opportunities.

South Carolina Honors College provides a curriculum-rich environment. We roughly calculate that we must add an honors class to each semester’s offerings for every 8 to 10 additional students enrolled in the College. An additional 350 students require at least 35 more classes each semester. Ultimately, a 50% increase in the honors student body was matched by an approximately equal increase in the number of honors courses. Per course compensation paid to the departments for these additional courses necessarily rose to enable them to cover their normal instructional obligations.<sup>7</sup>

This leads to a more qualitative dilemma: at what point does the “burden” of honors instruction begin to significantly impair the quality of the overall undergraduate experience? One pragmatic justification offered for an institutional investment in honors is that it is skimmed lightly from across the top of the university’s instructional resources so that the impact on regular students is small. Though no literal “tipping point” exists, as the college curriculum expands in a steady-state university, the negative impact on overall undergraduate instruction inevitably rises beyond “negligible.” As this negative impact intensifies, adding additional courses to match growing student demand becomes increasingly difficult and expensive, and the required budgetary increases needed to maintain the honors curriculum approaches improbable, if not impossible, levels. The resulting inability to offer additional honors courses leads to a decline in the quality of the honors experience. Pressure to maintain enrollment will inevitably contribute to a degradation of the honors curricular offerings. The general arc of decline is clear:

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<sup>7</sup> I will not belabor the details of this process except to point out that these marginal costs varied with the discipline. Honors foreign language sections, for example, were commonly capped at 16 students as opposed to 18 to 22 in the regular sections; honors introductory biology, in contrast, was capped at 50 versus 300 in the regular sections.

## NOTHING FAILS LIKE SUCCESS: MANAGING GROWTH

“honors only” courses close earlier or grow in size; honors sections “embedded” in larger regular sections increase as a proportion of total offerings; and the use of the so-called “h-option,” where students contract with their professors in regular courses to do some extra enriching exercise for honors credit, grows more common.

This degenerative pressure extends beyond the core mission of honors instruction to every other operational aspect of the college. Increasing the incoming class by 50% places stress on everything else related to honors operations as these students make their way through the pipeline: educational support and academic advising; mentors for research assistantships and senior theses; existing honors facilities; and honors residential opportunities.<sup>8</sup>

These problems arise in a steady-state university. The situation grows much worse much more rapidly in a university where relative resources are contracting. After 2001, the University of South Carolina, like most other public institutions, experienced an extended period of declining budgetary support from the state. Consequently, a hiring freeze was imposed, and the number of tenure-track faculty declined. However, in large part to replace the loss of state support, the undergraduate population increased by 20% between 2001 and 2005. In this unpromising environment, the Honors College incoming class grew from the 250s to slightly over 300 students.

In recognition of the looming challenge and in the absence of any hope for additional university support, we initiated a “participation fee” for honors students that currently amounts to \$200 per semester. This fee generates nearly \$500,000 a year. In addition, my successor negotiated an increase in the base budget when he began his tenure in 2005. This resource infusion, however, may not be sufficient even though it greatly exceeds the resource increases that successfully supported the significantly larger enrollment expansion of 1994 to 2000. The reason is simple: managing growth in honors enrollment beyond some point requires broad institutional investment in undergraduate education, not simply increased resources for honors. In the absence of such an institutional commitment, one or more of three results will ensue: the quality of honors education will decline; the quality of the general undergraduate educational experience will decline; and/or honors enrollment will fall in either an unplanned or deliberate fashion.

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<sup>8</sup> These problems emerge even in a strongly supportive environment. The small administration building of the South Carolina Honors College is inadequate for a College that is coming close to doubling its size between 1993 and 2007. The honors freshmen residence that opened in 1997 could not even accommodate the demand that year when 253 students entered. Help, is on the way in the shape of a massive new two-year honors residence hall that will also include office space for advisors. Unfortunately, its availability has been delayed until 2009.

The South Carolina Honors College currently faces such a triple threat. Between 2001 and 2006 the incoming class rose from 258 to 312 students. If this current increase of approximately 50 students is sustained, it will ultimately produce a college approaching 1300 students.<sup>9</sup> Concurrently, the overall undergraduate population increased by 3100 students. Unfortunately, tenure-track faculty barely increased. As a consequence, many key departments must meet increased instructional demands with the same or slightly more faculty. Based on our past experience, 200 to 250 more students would require offering an additional 25 honors classes each semester. Academic departments, however, are groaning under the instructional load created by the overall undergraduate population and resist offering more honors classes.

The university, to its credit, is pursuing a multiyear hiring initiative, but faced with a bulge of replacement hiring due to retirements combined with the overall enrollment surge, student/faculty ratios stay at levels significantly higher than in 2001.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the overall fabric of undergraduate education is fraying, and the Honors College cannot insulate itself from the ragged consequences. To make matters worse, the university still operates under a modified version of a “Value-Centered-Management” budget system, inaugurated concurrently with the enrollment surge, where colleges keep a major portion of the tuition they generate. Under this system, the “value” driving undergraduate instructional decisions is to deliver instruction in the cheapest way possible. If a class must use a tenure-track faculty member, make the enrollment as large as possible. If a course must have a low enrollment (for example, foreign language), use adjuncts and graduate students as much as possible. This value directly counters the honors goal of placing the best professors in small-enrollment honors classes and minimizing the use of adjuncts and graduate students. In this context, the Dean of Arts and Sciences avows she does not want any of her “planes” to fly half-filled, signaling her preference for wide-bodied jets, not 15-passenger honors seminars.

The convergence of all these factors—a growing honors population, increasing overall undergraduate enrollment, an undergraduate instructional faculty that lags significantly behind the enrollment growth, and a budget system that encourages delivering instruction at the lowest possible cost—creates an environment that threatens the quality of both the Honor College and

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<sup>9</sup> Not all students graduate in four years.

<sup>10</sup> Replacement hires often go to fill general instructional needs; however, the new faculty hiring initiative tends to support creative, multi-disciplinary hiring plans that strengthen the university in rising areas of academic teaching and research interest. For example, a Middle East hiring initiative might combine hires in history, geography, religion, and Middle-Eastern languages. In a purely academic sense, such an initiative enriches the university; from the perspective of general education courses to meet the burgeoning student demand, the new hires may fall short in alleviating the pressure.

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the overall undergraduate educational experience. What's more, these trends possess high inertia. They cannot be easily or rapidly reversed.

In these circumstances, the appropriate growth strategy may, paradoxically, require contraction. The most important imperative of a high-profile honors college or program is to sustain its reputation for excellence. Glossy brochures and a flashy web presence cannot achieve this imperative; ultimately, it must be embodied in the lived experience of its students. If they matriculate to swelling or closed classes, overloaded advisors, declining enrichment opportunities, all occurring within a university-wide instructional environment under even greater stress from overcrowding, then their degraded experience will rapidly translate into a depreciation of the college's reputation. A premium-quality honors college can easily ramp up its enrollment once the overall institutional context justifies it. A sullied reputation might never be repaired.

At the last, growth management must be guided not by artificial ratios but by the resource requirements for sustaining excellence. Just as we must be tall enough to reach the ground, for if we do not reach it we will fall, a highly developed honors program/college must also stay grounded in its core mission to provide an enriched learning environment for high-achieving students. If it grows beyond its capacity to provide for this core mission, then it, too, will fall.

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IRA COHEN

# Robert Burns, Peter Sederberg, and Higher Education Administration

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While Peter Sederberg starts his description of managing growth with a quotation from Kenneth Boulding, I prefer to start with lines from Robert Burns' "To a Louse": "O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us / To see ourselves as others see us!"

I think it is fair to say that, at the time Peter took over the program at the University of South Carolina, the national honors movement had, for the first time, reached some consensus about what honors and the National Collegiate Honors Council were vis-à-vis higher education. This was accomplished with the crafting of the "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program," which owes much of its creation to the masterful work of John Grady and Richard Cummings. This effort continued, of course, with the subsequent document on honors colleges, upon which Peter himself did yeoman's service: "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College." By articulating these honors characteristics, NCHC was defining itself and its values.

Like all consensual documents, the "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program" was not universally loved, but in the thirteen years since its adoption, it has been a major factor in how we see ourselves and hope others see us. The observation by Burns clearly applies to honors: the viewpoint of those within honors education is frequently at variance with those administrators working outside the framework of honors. In the last decades, as Peter points out, honors has returned to the main stage at many flagship public universities, and his school is clearly one. This vitality and centrality are reflected in the transformation to honors colleges from already existing programs and the creation of totally new honors colleges. He points out some of the difficulties that were created for him when he should have been ecstatic about the metamorphosis. The issue is not simply one of growth; it goes beyond that. The place of honors at institutions is being distorted by people who are too often intoxicated by their own perceptual filters. He addresses some of these filters; for example, growth in honors makes us

look good as an institution. The problem becomes what happens once growth is the policy *du jour*. Therein lies the rub: growth requires new resources.

People who are planning a new program or dramatic changes in growth go awry when they confuse acorns and oaks. That which is an acorn is not an oak yet, nor are programs functioning just because they exist on paper. Frequently administrators may desire, as in Peter's case, to expand the program for institutional ends. Although they have expectations that seem reasonable to them, they have little familiarity with how the program functions. I would argue that, when new initiatives begin, two kinds of errors creep into even the best-planned expansions: unrealistic errors in both planning and budgeting as well as interactive problems, once the program has been launched, that could not be anticipated when the plan was brilliantly conceived. Therefore, I always recommend starting small, with a test group in year one rather than starting with a full-blown expansion that would, for example, double enrollment immediately. Someone typically pays a high price when this simple advice is ignored. As Peter reminds us, growth in honors does not take place in a vacuum; rather, it occurs in a highly structured setting. Adding honors students requires adding honors sections, faculty members, support staff, co-curricular programming; resources. Without doubt, most academic administrators are bright and savvy enough to understand the ramifications of growing a program, but somehow they forget that insight when it comes to honors. They need Burns to remind them about the importance of perspective.

Unfortunately, too many college and university administrators have long perceived honors as an ornament—an intellectual one but an ornament nonetheless—and thus susceptible to outside tinkering. Problems with growth are, of course, exacerbated when administrators at many levels do not communicate well with each other and especially with the administrators responsible for managing growth areas at the institution. The consequences of this breakdown and the disparities in perception are noted by Burns in the next two lines of his stanza: “It wad frae monie a blunder free us, / An’ foolish notion . . .”

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NICK FLYNN

# Important Issues for Growing an Honors Program

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A common challenge in honors is gauging how much our respective programs should grow over a certain time period. Before that challenge can be fully addressed, however, several issues of a more rudimentary sort must be considered—issues concerning budget, scholarships, advising load, and development of community within the honors program. Essentially, directors must be able to financially support expansion (budget and scholarships) while not altering the environment of their programs (advising load and community development).

## BUDGET

A program that outgrows appropriate funding levels for enrichment activities will quickly lose one of its most important and attractive characteristics. I will primarily focus on the programming budget, or “local” money, that is needed to support enrichment activities for honors students. As Spike Milligan once stated, “Money can’t buy friends, but it can get you a better class of enemy.” It is important to keep this adage in mind when making budget requests for programming. While a director should ensure that his or her honors program has all the monetary resources it needs for programming, any impression by other university entities that the program is receiving special treatment in regard to programming funds needs to be avoided.

One way to avoid the appearance of special treatment is to propose an expenditure per student that both you and your administration can agree on. This expenditure can thereafter be used as a metric when budgetary requests are made and will thus be less likely to cause resentment; the argument for increasing funds will not have to be revisited each time a request is made. In developing the metric, honors directors would do well to obtain information from honors programs at “sister” campuses in their systems and at comparable institutions. An NCHC- recommended site visitor may also provide a compelling argument to your administration for increased funding.

When making requests for university funding, honors program directors would be wise to first understand the fiscal culture of the university. Are

## IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR GROWING AN HONORS PROGRAM

conservative budget requests typically made, or does everybody “shoot for the moon?” Some directors may get away with budget deficits and may, indeed, use those deficits to argue for more resources. Other directors, however, may lose their position as director if they exceed their budget allocation. A friendly dean or department head may be able to provide some very important insight into the nature of funding request practices at your college or university.

One final component of budgeting over which honors program directors may be able to exercise some direct control has to do with the employment of staff. Some administrations will not hesitate when it comes to supporting development of graduate student or student assistant positions since these positions help with student retention. If a budget request for a staff member is continually denied, you may want to consider asking for a graduate or student assistant during the next budget cycle.

If an honors program is unable to secure sufficient funding from his or her institution, fundraising from within the larger surrounding community may be another option although directors need to be wary here: a director who is spending too much time on fundraising is essentially robbing Peter to pay Paul since other aspects of the program such as organization, institutional reporting, or visibility will likely suffer. Most university administrations will offer some fundraising help to its honors programs, but an honors program director should not be expected to raise the majority of its needed funding.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships are, of course, an ideal way to support growth in an honors program since they help to attract and retain students. Prospective and current students as well as their families are very aware of the bottom line concerning college costs. An honors program director needs to be aware that the need for more scholarship money will grow as the program grows, particularly if scholarships are used heavily as recruiting tools. Directors should keep this awareness in mind especially when considering future growth of their programs. Annual funding requests to your university administration should include projected scholarship needs for future years so that the administration will not be surprised by large increases in scholarship budget requests when your program does grow.

Awareness of the relationship between growth of a program overall and growth of its scholarship needs will be important whether every student or a limited number receives a scholarship. Some programs may not have the financial support to provide scholarships to every student. If you cannot provide scholarships to each student, then consider developing a policy whereby

the top 10% of applicants receive a scholarship; this will make future budget requests easier. Also make sure that your application deadline coincides with the budget request deadlines at your institution.

## **ADVISING LOAD**

Another issue that needs to be in the mind of any honors program director considering program growth concerns advising load. Honors programs often pride themselves on the quality of advising they are able to provide to their students. Advising, however, can quickly consume the staff of a program that has, for example, decided to expand by seventy students from one year to the next. As with programming money and scholarships, a maximum ratio of student to advisor should be developed and effectively communicated to the administration.

Several options are available to provide advising outside of your existing staff. An honors program that employs outside personnel for advising needs to implement a communications plan and a well-conceived training plan since, chances are, these advisors will not report directly to the honors program. Some universities have an academic advising center, and so some of the honors advising responsibility can be handled by this center. The best scenario in this case is to have the smallest acceptable number of advisors be responsible for honors advising. Another option is to ask your honors council members to help with advising or to ask departments with a large number of honors students to assign one faculty or professional advisor to honors students. A significant advantage to outsourcing your advising load is that it can allow your program to grow without the need for additional staff. One drawback to the above approaches, however, is that you are no longer in direct control of advising for students in your program. In such cases, honors program directors may want to implement advising evaluation forms, as our program and many others do, so that they can more accurately gauge the efficacy of the advice that is being provided to their students.

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Many competing interests on a campus challenge the development of community within an honors program, and growing a program too fast can damage community development. Furthermore, a program's entering students, who are not familiar with the program they have joined, may feel reluctant to adopt or follow an existing program's traditions or established norms. One mistake that newer programs sometimes make is allowing the entering student population to outnumber the returning student population. The larger of these two populations will likely dictate the culture within the program, leaving the director with the task of maintaining community—a task otherwise carried out by returning students.

## IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR GROWING AN HONORS PROGRAM

Program growth may require directors to rethink events designed to develop community. Potluck dinners with an invited speaker are a convenient, often inexpensive way to feed and entertain a large number of students. Our program typically provides entrées and eating utensils/accoutrements (plates, cups, ice, etc.) but depends on guests for side dishes, beverages, and desserts. Where funding is a particularly difficult issue, a few large, well-organized events can be cheaper than many small events and just as effective at fostering community. Space issues also need to be considered since some events may need to be housed in areas of the campus that charge for their use or require advance reservations.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The wise director looks at least two or three years down the road when pondering the growth of his or her program. Growth can be an asset to a program, but it must be done at a pace that both the administration and the program are willing to support on a monetary, staffing, and organizational basis. The road of honors is strewn with former directors who grew their programs faster than support funding could keep up with—or at any rate faster than the resources needed to support growth were provided.

Acknowledgment: These issues were discussed in an April 2007 Great Plains Honors Council meeting workshop entitled “If the students come will they build it?” I would like to thank the individuals who participated in the workshop that led to the development of this essay.

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GREGORY W. LANIER

# Growth = Bucks(?)

GREGORY W. LANIER

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Many of us in honors education will readily agree that, if the equation above is ever true at all, it is a very sharp double-edged sword. I suspect that most of us who direct honors programs or colleges at public institutions have been sliced or diced more than once by an institution's growth imperatives. Although upper-level administrators often point to their honors programs with pride and tout the accomplishments of their honors students to alumni and benefactors, only a few honors programs and colleges actually report a funding baseline that adequately addresses all the needs of the program and its students; a consistent lament that has echoed for years throughout NCHC conferences is "if we only had enough funding, we'd do that too." To be fair to upper administrators, those of us in honors education need to admit that honors programs are the African violets of the academic floral landscape. In general, honors programs simply *require more*: they are more labor-, energy-, time-, and funding-intensive than programs for the bulk of the student population. In times of financial stress for higher education institutions (financial stress in higher education has become the status quo in Florida for at least a decade now), it can be difficult to shift funds to a high-cost program that sometimes serves less than 5% of the total student population when the institution as a whole is struggling to supply enough test tubes for the freshman chemistry labs or can't hire enough composition teachers to limit freshman composition classes to 22 to 25 students. Unfortunately, when viewed from the lens of a university president or chief accounting officer, the allocations that public institutions receive from their legislatures most often amount to flat budgets that barely cover increases in operational costs, particularly during times when a spike in energy prices can quickly consume whatever meager increase a rogue legislature might have deigned to grant during the last session.

Hence established programs at public institutions, be they honors or otherwise, find that increases in funding are often slow to come, and when they come, they are often tied to *enrollment growth*. In Florida, home of the Hanging Chad and Other Great Ideas That Have Not Been Imitated Elsewhere, we have a legislature that only, only, only provides new money for the state university system when new students appear, i.e., when we can demonstrate *enrollment growth*. If we can't, we should get ready for a cut; we are ecstatic if we received the same amount of funding we got last year—

## GROWTH = BUCKS(?)

thank you very much, kind sirs—despite the steady increase in operational costs year after year. As Stanley Fish pointed out in a disdainful article titled “Access vs. Quality,” recently published in the *New York Times* (Aug. 1, 2007), this type of legislative thinking leads quickly to a culture of institutional mediocrity as all things gravitate toward an under-funded malaise:

The challenge is to combine first-class schooling with affordability and access. The temptation is to do things on the cheap.

Although much loved by legislative aides and the government bureaucracy, the practice whereby funding increases are directly and exclusively tied to enrollment growth is, almost by definition, doing it on the cheap since that approach allows no margin for enhancement or for advances in new directions. When additional funding is a direct function of rising numbers, it is not surprising that many honors programs, mine included, are under the imperative to grow, grow, grow. But enrollment growth by itself cannot fix the problem, as Fish also points out:

The conditions that leave a university system depressed have been a long time in the making and will take time to reverse. Five straight years of steadily increased funding, tuition raises and high-profile faculty hires would send a message that something really serious is happening. Ten more years of the same, and it might actually happen.

Moreover, there are at least two hidden and invidious threats within the “increased growth equals increased funding” formula. First, increased growth figures are rarely based on a single year’s numbers; the most common practice appears to be the vaunted “three-year rolling average,” in which enrollment figures are determined by calculating the average of “student credit hours” or “full-time equivalents” over the previous three years. In practice, that method basically holds institutions prisoner to whatever conditions existed two years ago. On the sound fiscal management side, this method avoids extreme changes—either up or down—caused by irregular spikes or dips in the overall numbers. But on the day-to-day management side, the method ensures that programs that are doing what is expected and growing will always be significantly under-funded since the newly generated funds will always lag at the very least by one or two years. Peter Sederberg’s title gets it right: “Nothing Fails Like Success.” The second and far darker danger is that, since the method is at best a gentleman’s handshake made by politicians, the promises for future rewards aren’t always kept.

This year in Florida, all of us in higher education—community colleges and universities alike—are facing overall budget cuts of 7–10%. At the University of West Florida, where we have been working hard to recover

from the overall dip in enrollment we suffered in the wake of Hurricane Ivan (which closed us for three weeks during the fall term of 2004), we are hopeful for an overall enrollment increase of 3–5% for the upcoming academic year. The situation is better/worse in Honors. Last year, the dean charged all the units with increasing enrollments (Honors was asked to grow by at least 5%), and so my Assistant Director and I instituted some of the recruiting strategies that we had long planned but never done. As a result, overall admissions to the UWF Honors Program are up 30%, and the incoming freshman class has increased from 109 in fall 2006 to 135 in Fall 2007—an increase of 24%. So I'm doing the math, and it looks really lousy; realistically, even if we tighten everywhere we can, we're probably faced with a 20–25% shortfall in meaningful funding given that we'll have fewer dollars to serve more students. In practice, that will mean that fewer honors theses will be financially supported, fewer honors students will present at the national, regional, and state conferences, fewer honors students will be able to have international experiences, and fewer honors courses will be offered. And there is no hope of a miraculous infusion of funding next year—remember the rolling average? We'll still be behind in funding next year even if the legislature flip-flops; it's only a question of whether we'll be way behind or as Sederberg aphoristically puts it, headed for life support.

Although Sederberg is right that “An Honors program/college should be no larger than what can be securely grounded in the university's resources and culture,” getting to that point of balance often requires the work ethic of a dray oxen, the balance of a high-wire dancer (not walker; dancer), the steely nerves of a high-stakes poker player, and sheer dumb luck, with sheer dumb luck often taking precedence. Although its defenders would have it otherwise, funding models based on enrollment growth don't supply a steady curve of increased funding that faithfully tracks a steady upward trend of growth, even if one factors in a two- to three-year lag time. Rather, I have long suspected that meaningful increases in honors funding come in a series of sporadic quantum jumps (henceforward known as QJs). At UWF, the first Honors Program QJ was modest but significant: in 1988 it was decided that the institution should have an honors program, and to that end a two-course-release position appeared for the first director and a half-time administrative support position materialized as well, along with the princely sum of \$5000 in expense funds to do all that honors is supposed to do. And that's how things stood for nearly a decade, save that the two-course-release position and the staff position disappeared, all the administrative functions having been absorbed into the portfolio of responsibilities handled by the Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

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At the end of the millennium the UWF Honors Program received its most significant QJ when the institution, along with the rest of the state university system, was allocated the first of what was supposed to be a much ballyhooed three years of enhancement funding that would propel higher education in Florida into the twenty-first century. At UWF, some \$300,000 of that enhancement funding was earmarked for the Honors Program, and that largesse resulted in the appointment of a full-time Honors Director, a full-time Honors Coordinator, restoration of the half-time office support position, and a substantial increase in funding to support honors classes and activities (conference travel, leadership development, international experiences, etc.). The QJ in funding supported a QJ in the quality, reach, and culture of the program. The program expanded from a first-two-years paradigm into a 4-year academic experience more appropriate to an honors program at a regional comprehensive institution; special honors seminars were developed and an honors thesis became required, a summer international experience was added, support for student travel to the national, regional, and state honors conferences became possible, and development of a core community of honors students occurred. And, as one might expect, the program grew. Remarkably. From an active cohort of 250 with an incoming class of 60 in fall 2000, the program grew to an active cohort of nearly 500 with an incoming class of over 130. Thus we can easily demonstrate *enrollment growth* since the program expanded surely and steadily until it doubled in size.

So, since funding is tied directly to enrollment growth, the funding for the program has doubled as well, right? If you answered yes, you didn't pay attention to Hidden Danger #2. The much ballyhooed three-year enhancement plan for higher education in Florida, which was to have netted the Honors Program an overall total of \$600,000 in operating funds (\$300,000 in year 1; \$150,000 in both years 2 and 3), was scuttled by the Florida legislature the very next year. And the UWF Honors Program has basically been stuck at the funding level established by the last QJ ever since.

When just waiting around for the next QJ proved tiresome, I sought the opportunity to have the Honors Program included on the regular program review cycle in the hope that an external voice would be more successful in articulating the plight of Honors than I had been. In January of this year, Bob Spurrier of Oklahoma State and Kate Bruce of UNC-Wilmington were kind enough to evaluate my program, and they concluded:

While the strengths of the [UWF] Honors Program are compelling, there are insufficient resources to support the program. These concerns are in several areas: budget to support program needs and staff development, OPS or permanent funds to compensate faculty teaching in honors, and space to create a true

living-learning community and to administer an effective program. While we will detail these concerns below and suggest possible solutions, we want to underscore the concern that budget resources have failed to keep up with honors program growth, even though “expand honors recruitment” is noted as a strategic goal in CAS.

As is too often the case in higher education, when an outside consultant says the exact same thing that has been internally ignored for years, for some reason the administration finally listens, as the dean’s response to the report indicates:

*6. Substantially increase budget resources.*

We are very sympathetic to this central criticism of the report. Despite the dramatic growth in the program, the funding levels have not only not kept pace, but in some ways Honors is substantially less well funded than we used to be. Given the challenging economic environment in which we find ourselves, it is unlikely that we will be successful in a campaign for new money. However, we have targeted some potential resources that might be reallocated for Honors support as a start.

Hence I am hopeful that the next significant QJ will eventually appear, just not this year. And maybe not the next. But at the least, the issue is finally part of the official discussion that extends beyond the campus (all results from Program Reviews in Florida have to be reported to the Florida Board of Governors), and this usually means that problems do get redressed—maybe not immediately, but at some point the resources do flow.

But lest this seem like excessive whining, I would like to point out that the QJ effect is by no means limited to honors. During my strange career, I have been a department chair (for a total of thirteen years, spanning two departments in different disciplines) as well as Director of the School of Fine and Performing Arts in addition to directing an honors program for nearly a decade. In terms of day-to-day management, it didn’t really matter whether the financial crunch was in the Honors Program or the Department of English, Foreign Languages, Art, Music, or Theatre. In each case funding did not smoothly appear (or disappear) as the number of students waxed (or waned) but rather appeared in significant QJs related to specific circumstances. In Theatre, for example, after years of lobbying we broke the equipment-funding barrier (previously, allocations for equipment funding at UWF were reserved exclusively for the hard sciences) and received a significant funding QJ that allowed us to replace ancient sound and light boards as well as some lighting instruments and many of the shop tools. In Art, a QJ allowed

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us to renovate the graphic design lab; in Music, a QJ funded by an external donor allowed UWF to become an All-Steinway school. Years ago, a QJ resulted in both scholarships and graduate assistant funding for the masters program in English. In every one of those cases, funding had been basically flat regardless of the specific enrollment pattern, and realistically, even if there had been steady incremental increases in funding that matched enrollment growth, the total increases would not have resulted in the amount of funding needed to accomplish any of those projects. That's the downside of Hidden Danger #1: funding based on enrollment growth simply decays to the steady state in the long run and never permits innovation or enhancement.

Although I have never done a systematic investigation (one probably needs to be done), I would suspect that nearly all honors programs depend on QJs to support both growth and program enhancement. The sheer number of anecdotal stories of how this or that new president or provost stepped in and doubled or tripled the honors funding at this or that institution suggests that QJs are a common practice in honors (I myself know of at least six such true cases of significant honors QJs). My conversations with deans and associate deans at other institutions, some similar in size and focus to UWF, some not, confirm my suspicion that QJ funding is fairly widespread throughout higher education. If that is so, then it would seem logical to me that those of us in honors should work collectively to devise methods to improve the chances that the resources for honors programs and funding flow appropriately.

I've articulated the downsides of QJ funding above; on the upside, when it happens, QJ funding does infuse substantial resources into an honors program. There seem to be roughly three moments when honors programs can reasonably expect QJs in their funding. First, and most obvious, is the QJ at program startup. Despite the temptation is to do it on the cheap as much as possible, almost every Honors program receives start-up funding. The variable here is the size of the quantum—too often the QJ is simply a one- or two-course-release model along with token operational funding rather than an allocation sufficient to begin establishing a program “grounded in its core mission to provide an enriched learning environment for high-achieving students” (Sederberg). The second and often most lucrative QJ is what I would call, for lack of a better term, the Administrative Imperative QJ. Sederberg describes the conditions that enhanced the funding for the Honors College at the University of South Carolina:

Overall, the budget for the Honors College more than doubled between 1993 and 1999.

These happy consequences, then, arose from two factors:

- A university leadership committed to the goal of an enhanced Honors College in terms of both size *and* quality.

- Relatively prosperous times in the state that contributed to modestly increasing appropriations for higher education.  
However, two further background factors were also important:
- A relatively steady state in terms of overall undergraduate enrollment.
- A president committed not simply to the Honors College as an island of excellence but to enhanced overall undergraduate opportunities.

As most of us in honors openly or covertly acknowledge, the best friend an honors program can find is the president who embraces advancing the program as a central piece of her/his personal agenda to advance the entire institution. When those stars align, the funding flows. A sub-species of the Administrative Imperative QJ occurs when the decision is made on a campus to elevate honors from program to college status—that metamorphosis by necessity needs the backing of the upper administration and normally entails a noteworthy infusion of dollars. The third type of QJ increase is triggered by an external review. In a very sad way, nearly every department chair or program director on a public campus is expected to whine and whine loudly about being under-resourced. And we do. We do it often and well. And we are ignored. But when someone from the outside shows up and whispers the very same thing, the administration suddenly sits up and takes notice; often funding for the department or program is increased as a consequence. That's just one reason why a review by the NCHC-Recommended Site Visitors is extremely important, and it was a major factor in my decision to bring two consultants to my campus. I knew that Bob Spurrier and Kate Bruce's words would have more weight than my own.

When their collective impact is summed, the three types of QJ funding could probably serve the needs of most honors programs or colleges well, even those that are growing rapidly, *if*, and this is a huge if, both the frequency and the size of the QJs are adequate. If the frequency of QJs can be measured in terms of decades, as they can be at UWF, then funding will be a huge problem. Likewise, if the increases are token or minimal, even if frequent, then there will be no way to use them to enhance or expand the program since such funding essentially amounts to steady-state funding. What is needed, in my opinion, is the creation of an environment in which QJ funding for honors occurs at reasonable intervals—probably at least once every four to seven years, and in which the quanta are sufficient not only to manage the enrollment growth that probably occurred during that interval but also to enable meaningful enhancement of the program in at least one area (i.e. service learning or international experiences added or enhanced, a first-year

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experience or other curricular changes instituted, community or cultural opportunities added or heightened).

Since in truth there probably is nothing that the honors education community can do to eliminate QJ funding or institute a different model—we just don't have the clout or leverage necessary—I suggest that we look soberly at what we can do to enhance our position within the present system. The challenge, as I see it, is to do our best to manage QJ funding so that it has an optimal impact on our programs. To that end, we should probably recognize that those of us in the NCHC can do very little to manage QJs of the first or second types. Decisions about the parameters of a new honors program are made beyond our collective purview and often without our knowledge; nor would it be possible or desirable to insert honors education into the process of hiring a provost or president. But there is something that we might be able to do about the third type.

As I look over the status of departments and programs across my campus, I am struck by the fact that some programs are infrequently stressed by resource shortfalls regardless of whatever whining or yelping the program director or chair happens to be doing (admittedly, my current status as Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences lets me poke my nose into enrollment figures, budget spreadsheets, and operational costs others my not be able to see). At UWF, those areas include Education, Engineering, Business, Music, Chemistry, Nursing, Clinical Lab Sciences, and Social Work. Areas where the shortfalls look to my eye to be far more persistent and pervasive and the stress far more acute include English, Communication Arts, Criminal Justice, Government, Philosophy, History, Foreign Languages, Theatre, and, of course, Honors, just to name a few. I am not suggesting that there is a group of haves and a group of have-nots at UWF since most of those areas have been enhanced in recent years. But it seems to me that the funding QJs for the first group have, over the last two decades, been both more frequent and more substantial than the QJs received by the other group. A major reason for the disparity, I suspect, can be found on page 10 of the current *2007–2008 UWF Catalog*. All the programs in the first group are accredited by outside agencies: Education by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), Business by The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), Electrical and Computer Engineering by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), etc. As an anecdotal confirmation of that phenomenon, I can with certainty report that during the 2006–2007 academic year, when the College of Arts and Sciences was allocated one and only one new faculty line, that line went to the Department of Music. Why? Because the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), which paid an accreditation visit

to the UWF campus in 2005–2006, stated in their program review report that the UWF Music accreditation would be in jeopardy unless someone with expertise in music theory was added immediately to the Music faculty. In the resource allocations for that year, the substantial need in areas that had experienced sizeable if not explosive enrollment growth for years—History, Philosophy, and Honors, to name just three—were pushed aside so that the concerns of the accreditation agency could be met swiftly.

The moral of the story? Accreditation matters. And accreditation matters especially in terms of making certain that the accredited program has the resources needed to deliver a high-quality program. As Sederberg so nicely puts it, all of us managing honors programs have to make certain that our resources can support the quality of the experience for our students. Underfunding more or less guarantees that

Every aspect of the program/college will be stressed. Honors residential opportunities will be woefully inadequate to handle the demand; the freshman advising system will be overwhelmed; honors course availability will not accommodate the demand; operating budgets will run deficits; faculty will complain as their sections increase in size (if that's even possible); students will feel cheated; and parents will be angered.

As I said above, we all know that the external voice of a consultant trumps the internal voice of a director or chair every time. I would like to suggest, however, that when that external voice comes from an accrediting agency, it comes as close to being as irresistible as it can within an academic environment.

Perhaps it is time, and I think it is, for NCHC to give serious thought to becoming an accrediting body. No other single action would, I submit, do as much to ensure that honors programs everywhere receive both the respect and the resources that they deserve. On the resource management side, an accreditation review every five to seven years would most likely ensure that the scrutinized honors program would receive a substantial funding QJ every five to seven years as well. If I had been able to argue that the NCHC-accreditation status of the UWF Honors program hinged on UWF's immediate investment of funds in Honors, as stated in the official program review report, I would be far more confident those resources would appear. Meanwhile, wish me luck as we struggle through what is very likely to be an extremely difficult year.

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JEAN E. McLAUGHLIN

# The (Un)familiar Library: Managing the Transition for a Growing Number of Honors College Students

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One consequence of the substantial growth in honors programs and colleges that perhaps gets too little attention is the challenge of teaching library research skills to large numbers of students in a way that captures their interest and prepares them to do serious undergraduate work in a variety of fields. Yet these skills are the foundation for college success. This paper attempts to give some perspective on the exciting challenges of extending expertise in library research skills to a growing number of honors scholars.

All students arrive at a university with a preconception of what a library is based on their high-school or community library. Libraries feel familiar; students have been using them all their lives. The familiarity factor can impede development of research skill competency. As students enter this new world, they may feel that the comfortable milieu of their youth has grown into an incomprehensible and impenetrable fortress of knowledge. Honors college students new to a university research library observe the size of the book collection alone with trepidation. Many have never seen a library that contains millions rather than thousands of physical volumes. When they are then exposed to hundreds of thousands of items available virtually, many feel overwhelmed by these “invisible” resources. Effective introduction to and guidance in navigating these scholarly portals is essential for honors college students, who need to embark on research in their first semester.

In contrast to the daunting resources of a university library, Google and other search engines are seductively easy, reinforcing feelings of competency in information retrieval. Even though the breadth of information available on the Web is also unimaginable, students feel successful when they retrieve thousands of “hits” and grab a couple from the first page or two. It is not surprising that many students start off thinking that retrieving 181,000 Google results for a Social Informatics search is better than finding a few relevant books in the library catalog.

## THE (UN)FAMILIAR LIBRARY: MANAGING THE TRANSITION

When required to find scholarly information on a specific topic without using Internet sources, students' comfort with their level of research competency diminishes. Faced with an assignment to find U.S. and foreign newspapers from the years 1850 to 1900, students may find their sense of competency challenged even further. They have not yet discovered how to find newspaper indexes or foreign publications or database options to set date limits.

Honors students faced with these assignments are not in upper-division courses but are typically in their first semester as new matriculating members of a fast-paced community. They are just starting to absorb a diversity of information about many subjects, develop critical thinking skills, discover the vast expanse of knowledge, and appreciate scholarly activities. They face all these new challenges, and they do not have the tools to traverse the terrain.

Information literacy skills taught in courses and cooperative efforts with librarians significantly influence how quickly students can move forward with real research, develop a love of learning, and feel confident in their own abilities as scholars. A solid grounding in the expanse of library resources and in how to access resources beyond the library walls, both physically and virtually, is essential to acquaint students with the world of college and university research.

Library orientation sessions in the first semester are helpful in providing a glimpse into resources at hand. Librarians hope to stem the fascination with Google by introducing efficient and effective methods for finding information that meets course requirements. Students may only have a few weeks to acquaint themselves with scholarly publications before their initial resource lists, outlines, and draft bibliographies are due. Librarians can guide students to more effective research strategies.

As the Honors College Librarian at the University at Albany, State University of New York, I offer tours, orientation sessions, and basic instruction. Some of these sessions are listed as Honors College activities, of which seven are required each semester. The sessions are meant to offer an introduction to the library for first-year students who are not enrolled in Information Literacy classes. Basic instruction takes place as a cooperative effort with faculty teaching Honors College courses.

Since this is only the second year for the Honors College Librarian position, both the position and its duties are evolving. As the Honors College grows, so does the need for more support, including support for senior theses. Managing this growth, while continuing to offer quality instruction and guidance, is a challenge. This challenge provides incentives to continually reevaluate how the library can most effectively respond to developing scholars through cooperative efforts with faculty, online tools and tutorials, and one-on-one and classroom instruction. The fact that my position was established

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is a very positive and proactive step in a growing Honors College and one important way to manage growth for the benefit of the students.

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ROBERT H. HOGNER

# Balancing Low Growth with High Success

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2003, following a growing recognition of the excellence of the Honors College at Florida International University (FIU), administrators within the university's College of Business Administration decided to initiate an honors program within the CBA. Now entering its fourth year, the small International Business Honors BBA Program is a centerpiece of the CBA's undergraduate international business program development efforts, having figured prominently in the CBA's achievement of national rankings for such programs.

This essay will trace the development of FIU's IBH program to its current state, emphasizing how a small program may achieve recognition and success without large student enrollment. It will describe how strategic partnerships and linkages, resource allocation, student leadership and achievement, and serendipity can successfully overcome a mentality that program growth is a dominant measure of program success. And it will describe how these dynamics present not only challenges but opportunities for success.

## BACKGROUND

FIU first opened its doors in 1972. Reflecting the prevailing powers within Florida and by legislative mandate it was to be an upper-division university, i.e., limited to junior-senior undergraduate and graduate-level programs. With those limitations it offered no competitive challenge to the older Florida public universities, to the immense Florida community college system, or to local private universities. Indeed, rules that were then in place prohibited a football team and Ph.D. programs.

By 2003, FIU was a full-scale university, now known as South Florida's *public research university*. It had a wide range of traditional masters and doctoral programs and had recently opened a law school. Its 2003 enrollment was approximately 35,000; 38,000 by 2007. Central to the theme of this essay, in 2003 it was passing the twenty-year mark of its first freshman class and the ten-year mark of its small but thriving Honors College.

## BALANCING LOW GROWTH WITH HIGH SUCCESS

The Honors College at FIU fits the model of a well-crafted *independent* honors program or college. Students from various majors align themselves with the College, take multidisciplinary courses taught by College fellows individually or in teams, and then graduate with two degrees, one in their major and the other from the Honors College. Their honors courses substitute for a series of required or elective courses as part of their degree program. The Honors College has its own administrative staff and budget. Its faculty, some assigned full-time to the College but most on part-time loan, come mainly from the arts and sciences with a sprinkling from other colleges and schools.

The College of Business Administration, like other FIU schools and colleges, is an enterprise parallel to the Honors College. The CBA was a part of the original “1972 FIU”; by 2003 it had its own doctoral programs and internationally competitive masters programs. The CBA was and continues to be known for its international flavor and its focus on research and graduate-level studies. At the undergraduate level it has been a major FTE engine of the university. Its international BBA program has been nationally recognized as “better” by virtue of its large yearly production of international business BBA majors. The CBA also has had in place since 1992 a Civic Engagement Initiative to support its community and service-learning activities. Finally, on the 2003 horizon was the approval for Miami-Dade Community College to become Miami-Dade College with four-year programs that included a BBA program.

The year 2003 saw FIU’s Honors College as a high-quality independent center of honors learning with accompanying “honors equals excellence” access to the central FIU budget. The CBA had a very large BBA program with a strategic focus in international business built upon its graduate programs’ reputations and on the size of its undergraduate IB BBA program; like most such programs in Florida and across the country, it also had almost insurmountable budget problems.

### **THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS HONORS BBA PROGRAM**

The IBH program as originally envisioned was to be a four-year BBA program with a full complement of CBA honors and elective courses, along with standard “breadth and background” courses in the arts and sciences. The model, reflective of a typical four-year experience, would have had students matriculating as freshmen and remaining in the business school for four years; this was to be the first departure from the “declaring a major as a sophomore” tradition held over at FIU from its 2+2 beginnings.

Reviewing a budget for this still to-be-proposed program led to vast rethinking of the model. As originally conceived, the IBH-BBA program would have required its own staff infrastructure: recruiting, admissions, advising, and so on. Further, it would have required a complete set of honors BBA courses, required and elective, for international business majors. In essence, the original model for the IBH-BBA program was as an independent and complete honors program *within* the CBA, mirroring the FIU Honors College structure within the larger university. Further, with the university one year out of a contentious period revising its undergraduate core curriculum, the chances were zero of the business school receiving university faculty approval for a stand-alone four-year program that crafted its own core curriculum.

Pragmatic thinking led to a call for revising the model. This task was given to an experienced CBA faculty member with ten years of experience as an Honors College Fellow. The rules were: *develop an IBH-BBA program, do it quickly (!), and do it more cheaply than was originally modeled.*

The new model was developed in consultation with the Honors College, faculty in the CBA, and faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences. IBH students would have to be admitted to and graduate from the Honors College. They also had to be admitted to the CBA in their junior year. CBA admission at the junior level is a rather routine matter, following the 2+2 tradition. For the Honors College, admission at the freshman or junior level requires a significantly higher standard for grade history, test scores, and writing ability. In essence, any student in the FIU Honors College who met prerequisites for BBA study would simply have to declare IBH their major. The result was the program no longer required new CBA admissions or advising staff, and the Honors College recruiting staff now had extra recruiting and retention features.

As redeveloped, the program required ratcheting up requirements for the BBA. The key elements of the program included:

- six to twelve credits of Honors College interdisciplinary honors courses, depending on how students structured their senior-year honors experience;
- six credits of new, CBA honors sections of international business and international management courses;
- six credits of ratcheted-up requirements for required BBA courses, e.g., an international law course rather than business law and a higher-level macro-economics course;
- a senior thesis requirement, a first for FIU and for the Honors College;
- a community-service requirement, a first for FIU; and
- restricted electives with an international focus.

## BALANCING LOW GROWTH WITH HIGH SUCCESS

The key elements of this program can be summarized as (1) introducing a limited number of honors classes *inside* the CBA; (2) partnering with the Honors College to offer a degree program; (3) stiffening learning objectives associated with required and elective courses, including selecting outside CBA courses that had significant writing requirements; and (4), establishing a senior thesis and a community service requirement.

The CBA funded two honors sections per year, a faculty director (paid with either a stipend or two course releases), faculty time associated with senior thesis supervision, and a small advertising and promotion budget.

### IMPLEMENTING AND DEVELOPING THE IBH-BBA PROGRAM

The program was implemented in 2004 with an initial complement of eight students. These students were existing Honors College students who had planned to major in the CBA and therefore met program prerequisite requirements. Now in their junior year, they simply designated the new IBH degree program as their major. This initial group, along with other students interested in international business, quickly formed an informal program “advisory and development” group. Alongside and partly stimulated by this student group, an informal CBA undergraduate international business development faculty group was formed.

In November 2004, an IBH student service project—the Bangkok Global Leadership and Service Project (GLSP)—was planned for Spring Break 2005. Twenty-two undergraduate students participated in 2005, twenty-six in 2006, and twenty-seven in 2007. In partnership with programs and students from Thai universities, students spend their Spring Break in Thailand serving community and government sites that work with Thai children. They spend the months leading up to Spring Break in leadership training, team development work, and massive fund raising efforts. In addition to a student cost of \$1000 and student-raised funds, the university supports the GLSP concept with funding from the Honors College, the College of Business Administration, the International Studies Center, the Center for Leadership and Service, and the Center for International Business Education and Research.

Intertwined with GLSP project development was the November, 2004 formation of the International Business Honor Society, chartered at FIU as a national honor society. IBHS is the first university **and** national-level international business honor society. IBHS developed quickly as an organization through which the GLSP’s were organized. It also quickly developed a reputation as the CBA’s and probably FIU’s most active student organization.

Students during this period also developed an undergraduate journal focusing on business and social issues surrounding globalization: the *FIU Undergraduate Journal for Global Business and Community* (JGBC).

During the period 2004–2008, something unusual and exciting was obviously happening with undergraduate business education at FIU, and all the development experiences noted above were publicized within the national business school community. *The U. S. News & World Report*, now for four years in a row, has ranked FIU's undergraduate international business programs. While understanding that such rankings mean *nothing*, they also mean *everything*. The *USNWR* rankings became an IBH recruiting tool, a CBA faculty recruiting feature, and a part of the general public relations effort for the CBA and the university.

### NON-GROWTH AS SUCCESS

The IBH-BBA Program presents its own set of development and growth “issues.” Some of these issues relate to the incongruities of trying to start an honors program in a public urban university in a state historically low in per student spending in public higher education—currently the lowest in the country (*Miami Herald*, 27 August 2007, p. 1). Other issues relate to replacing institutional with entrepreneurial efforts. Still others relate to conceptual questions about such a program: for instance, is it simply another degree column in a distribution of students matrix, or must it be considered more broadly?

These growth and development issues exist within the context of IBH-related achievements: national rankings; an international journal; the Global Leadership and Service Projects; and the International Business Honor Society. In that context, growth and development issues persist.

First, the small size of the program presents a challenge to conventional thinking. It is the *smallest* BBA program with only sixteen students combined at the junior and senior level. Consequently, a series of business honors courses is being offered with eight students in each class. Recruiting efforts have resulted in a large increase in students who say as freshmen that they want to major in IBH, but when the junior-year threshold arrives, roughly ten percent (eight students including transfers) declare IBH as a major. These small class sizes have been redefined as a desirable program attribute that can serve as a reward for teaching assignments and that has helped win faculty support for the “small is successful” concept.

Ordinary thinking about the program leads CBA managers to want thirty to fifty students in each of the eight-student honors classes. They relent a bit, however, when faced with the challenge of finding faculty to supervise thirty to fifty senior theses. Sixteen students per year has become a “sufficient” level, with twenty-four seen as a “satisfying” level.

## BALANCING LOW GROWTH WITH HIGH SUCCESS

Program development and growth issues have also provided an opportunity for another CBA/Honors College joint venture. Shackled with FIU's two-plus-two history, the CBA continues to "have ownership" of undergraduate students only after they declare a major in their junior year. Reflecting a continuing vision to strengthen its relationship with the Honors College, the CBA initiated a joint effort with the Honors College to establish the Business Honors Community. With the motto "At FIU, Honors Means Business," the BHC will provide a place for freshmen through senior business students, CBA faculty, and South Florida business people to meet. Not incidentally, it will also provide freshman and sophomore students with the value-added intentional learning that the Honors College and CBA want to promote. In essence, the strategy of this program is to increase the size of the CBA-Honors pie by stemming the junior-year flow out of the Honors College of "intended" BBA majors. It is an intensive effort to provide, on the shoulders of the Honors College, a four-year CBA Honors experience without having a four-year CBA program. The BHC was initiated fall of 2007.

### SUMMARY

The International Business Honors BBA Program at Florida International University is a four-year experiment in a degree program that partners a traditional College of Business Administration and an independent Honors College. To date, despite low enrollment and accompanying pressures to increase it, the program continues to provide a unique, challenging, and beneficial student learning experience of great value to the CBA, the Honors College, and the university.

A combination of student and faculty entrepreneurial spirit, a strategic vision supporting the concept, and trust across institutional boundaries provided the nurturing environment for this program's success. Where it has not succeeded, specifically in an acceptable level of enrollment, that same environment has provided for another innovate project, the Business Honors Community. That project, should it have its intended impact, will not only solve IBH enrollment challenges but also provide a greater degree of student retention and excitement.

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MIKE DAVIS

# Nothing Succeeds Like Failure: Managing Loss in a Renascent Honors Program

MIKE DAVIS

CAMERON UNIVERSITY

## INTRODUCTION

I work at Cameron University, a regional institution in Oklahoma that will be celebrating its centennial in 2008. Our administrators see the revivification of the Cameron University Honors Program as an important component of their “Centennial Plan,” and they have appointed me to make that revivification happen.

I benefited greatly from reviewing Dean Sederberg’s observations concerning the South Carolina Honors College. Initially, I suspected that his insights would be primarily useful for those in charge of far more developed programs than the one I have been tasked with directing, but from the moment I encountered his warning against “‘biggering’ for the sake of ‘biggering,’” I realized that I could count myself as a member of his implied audience.

As I hope to have indicated with my title, my purpose here is partly to engage, amplify, and comment on some of Sederberg’s points in “Nothing Fails Like Success: Managing Growth in a Highly Developed Honors Program.” However, the fact that my program includes fewer than 100 students (whereas Sederberg oversaw the growth of the SCHC from 700+ to 1200+ students) suggests that I might be looking at some of the points in his article through the wrong end of his telescope. I suspect that my remarks will primarily be useful to directors of honors programs at community colleges or to fledgling directors or to directors of fledgling programs. And I won’t pretend that I expect them to be useful in and of themselves. I can only hope that they will spark a conversation that will help those of us who are finding our way to do so as successfully as Sederberg has.

## THE PRESSURES TO GROW

Sederberg’s description of the “reverse Groucho Marx effect” is spot on. Counter-intuitive though it may sound, one of the reasons that we have

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trouble maintaining our population in the CUHP is that our admissions process is so extraordinarily painless. Students are invited into the program based on ACT scores, GPA, and class rank, but we have been reluctant to ask them to fill out an application or submit a writing sample or go through an interviewing process because we were afraid that such hurdles might put off some of our best students.

Certainly, there are some students who are in the program now who wouldn't be if they had been required to write an application essay. But there are other students whom we might like to recruit who would be more receptive to us precisely because of such demands. If I can add a sort of postscript to Sederberg's point about people wanting "to be in a club that won't have them," it would run something like this: "We won't have *any* people lining up for admission to the program until we start turning *some* people away."

The difficulty here is that one of the easiest ways for the administration to assess my performance as a director is to count the number of students involved in the program. As certain as I may be that raising standards next semester will pay dramatic dividends three or four years from now, I might not be around in three years to capitalize on that development if the new application process results in severe attrition for the CUHP.\*

I am attempting to address the problem of potential attrition through two means: 1) curricular rejuvenation; and 2) recruitment. The CUHP is currently offering team-taught courses for the first time in its history, and students who never paid attention to the CUHP before are dropping by my office and stopping me between classes to find out about "that class with all the different professors." I am also taking it upon myself to visit area high schools and inform graduating seniors about the CUHP. I hope to generate enough new interest in the program to offset any losses that we can expect from the new (more demanding) application process, but I cannot comment at this point on how dramatic those losses will be or how fruitful my recruitment efforts will be or how much of the campus "buzz" about the new course offerings will translate to students asking to be admitted to the program.

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\*Lest I be misconstrued here as suggesting that I am supervised by mindless bureaucrats, I want to stress the point that I respect and get along perfectly well with all of the administrators who supervise and/or work with me in my capacity as CUHP Director. However, since academe is no stranger to administrative turnover, I am concerned about my ability to account for my decisions to potential newcomers to Cameron's administration. Much can be done on the basis of an understanding with one's supervisor, but when one's supervisor moves on (or the responsibility of supervision is shifted to a new office), a new understanding has to be negotiated—often in light of precisely such hard facts as the number of students one's program appears to be benefiting.

MIKE DAVIS

## MANAGING LOSS: SOME CONSIDERATIONS AND A QUESTION

In his section on “Managing Growth,” Sederberg reflects on the concept of “poorly managed growth.” I am currently attempting to persuade various levels of the administration at Cameron that we can distinguish “poorly managed loss” from “properly managed loss.”

Sederberg sees the tweaking of the admissions process and the leveraging of resources as linked in his discussion of growth. My fear is that they could be too closely linked at my institution. Will the limited budget that I have for guest presentations, field trips, various curricular enhancements, and faculty development be reduced if the changes I envision for our admissions process result in a smaller population next year than the one I have this year?

Sederberg was able to generate growing administrative support for a growing program, but is it reasonable for me to expect growing support (or even undiminished support) for a program that is likely to shrink?

I think that expectation can only be reasonable if I can demonstrate that the program is shrinking “well,” and I would ask my colleagues at other institutions to respond to this essay with guidelines that they would expect to pass muster with their own supervisors (and perhaps with mine) about how we can tell the difference between a program that is simply dying and one that is managing loss effectively.

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JANET C. MYERS AND MARY JO FESTLE

# Getting More for Less: When Downsizing in Honors Yields Growth

JANET C. MYERS AND MARY JO FESTLE

ELON UNIVERSITY

In an anonymous response to an honors senior survey on the question “How are you different now than when you first came to college?” one student reflected:

One of the biggest things is that I am much more confident in myself and in how I want to spend my life. . . . Also, the idea of Graduate school and the work involved no longer worries me. Instead, I am confident that I can succeed and am very excited to do so. This is largely due to writing for [Honors] classes, and most of all, my thesis experience.

. . . Overall, I have become a better person.

Another student wrote:

Before coming to Elon, I did not have a grasp on my academic passions. While here I discovered I have a great interest in issues of income inequality, especially in the case of Latin America, and I discovered graduate school would be the best path for me to continue pursuing my interests in solving problems in this area.

The outcomes described in these two student voices represent the best of what we hope for in an undergraduate education in an honors program: the pleasure in discovering one’s academic passions; the self-assurance that comes with identifying personal strengths and developing a sense of purpose; and the curiosity and confidence to seek out future opportunities to extend one’s learning whether in graduate school or elsewhere.

These students are representative of the first class of honors students to graduate in Elon University’s newly designed Honors Program, which was revamped to create a smaller, more structured program beginning in 2003–2004. After reviewing NCHC materials and the characteristics of other honors programs nationwide, a committee of Elon faculty, administrators,

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and students set out to design a new structure that would, as our new mission statement says, “prepare [students] to excel in graduate or professional pursuits as independent, hard-working, open-minded, lifelong learners and honorable community members.” To achieve these goals, we work to expand students’ minds by introducing them to new ideas; improve their critical thinking, research, and communication skills; provide an intellectual community inside and, to a lesser extent, outside the classroom; and challenge and support them in the highest possible academic achievements.

The most important and most obvious change to the Elon Honors Program entailed decreasing the size of the program. The new program accepts half as many students each year, striving for an incoming class each fall of forty versus eighty students. This reduction, in turn, has allowed our program to evolve in the following important, interrelated ways, all of which we see as strengthening the program considerably:

- the program offers a more structured, yet innovative curriculum;
- the program’s curriculum now includes an extensive thesis requirement;
- the program offers enhanced opportunities for students to extend learning beyond the classroom and become part of a strong intellectual community.

In forging these changes, we elected to measure growth not by the size of the program but by the degree to which the new program meets the goals of our mission statement. We believe the program’s new courses have created a more consistent challenge, that the thesis has resulted in significant individual learning and impressive academic achievement, and that greater attention to matters beyond the classroom has dramatically improved the development of a true intellectual community.

Reducing the size of the Elon Honors Program made it possible to enhance the coherence and academic rigor of its curriculum. In the old program, students were required to take any four honors courses at any time over the course of four years. These courses were basically “honorized” versions of existing courses, and, though many were excellent and they offered the advantage of flexibility, students nonetheless had divergent experiences of the program depending on the particular set of courses they took. Needing to offer courses for fewer students made it easier for the program to revise the curriculum into one that is more structured and that provides students with a more consistent classroom experience.

In the new program, students take one honors course per semester for their first two years at Elon, followed by one more course sometime during their third or fourth year. The table below summarizes the four-year honors curricular requirements, based on a four-hour curriculum in which students typically take sixteen hours per semester. Honors requirements constitute

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about 22% of an honors student's credit load over four years, and most fulfill the university's General Studies requirements.

Year	Fall Semester	Spring Semester
<b>First Year</b>	The Global Experience— Honors section	Discipline-Based Honors Seminar (in the liberal arts)
<b>Second Year</b>	Team-Taught Interdisciplinary Seminar I	Team-Taught Interdisciplinary Seminar II
<b>Third Year</b>	Thesis Preparation Workshops	Thesis Proposal General Studies Interdisciplinary Seminar (may be taken any semester in 3 <sup>rd</sup> or 4 <sup>th</sup> year)
<b>Fourth Year</b>	Thesis Research	Thesis Research and Defense

Courses in the Honors Program are taught by professors with a strong record of teaching who offer discipline-based or team-taught interdisciplinary seminars that are intentionally designed with honors learning outcomes in mind. All are *new* liberal arts courses that present concepts through multiple lenses, require reading beyond a textbook, encourage the development of research and writing skills, and promote good critical thinking. They are expected to stimulate sophisticated questions and teach students how to find and evaluate answers. They should have a great deal of student discussion and engagement, and they offer students a significant but reasonable challenge. While the courses differ from one another (and rotate), this attention to meeting Honors Program outcomes insures that students are exposed to a more uniform set of experiences, ideas, and skills.

Faculty have responded enthusiastically to the call to design innovative new honors courses, and students report being challenged by courses that expose them to novel ideas, theories, and ways of looking at the world. Examples of first-year, discipline-based seminars include *Vulnerability and Resilience Across the Lifespan* (Psychology), *The Humanities and Love* (Art History), *Re-Reading the Nineteenth Century* (English), and *Self and Society in Modern America* (Sociology). Examples of interdisciplinary team-taught seminars have included *The Challenges of New Reproductive Technologies* (Biology and Religious Studies), *The Civil Rights Movement in Memory and Literature* (History and English), *Literary Journalism* (Sociology and Communications), *The Cold War in Press and Politics* (Communications and Political Science), *Exploring Consciousness* (Psychology and Religious

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Studies), and *Disability Past and Present* (History and Education). While some individual courses are more popular than others, in general student evaluations indicate they provide extensive, stimulating opportunities for class discussion and for the development of research and writing skills.

Student evaluations and other feedback suggest that there are multiple benefits to the new curriculum. Because the program admits a group of forty students per year, we can offer small classes (of about twenty) that help create a strong sense of intellectual community within each cohort of students. One faculty member, reflecting on her honors course at mid-semester, identified a spirit of collective engagement as an especially prominent, and positive, feature in her classroom:

They have been a good group overall and . . . are very high on social cohesion! I have never ever seen group evals where all members rated each other 100% effort. I believe they all contributed too. Amazing. There are some real shining stars in the class that make it a pleasure to discuss the material. And they LOVE each other.

This strong sense of community often extends beyond the classroom, with students reporting that they frequently continue discussions about provocative ideas after class, on the way to lunch, and in their dorms.

In addition to promoting intellectual community, the courses challenge students in a number of ways. (Indeed, 100% of students said their honors courses were challenging in a recent senior survey.) First, by taking both discipline-based and interdisciplinary courses, students learn that knowledge is not based solely in one discipline; like the professors who model this approach, they are challenged to make connections between ideas and approaches from one class to another. In end-of-semester evaluations, one student wrote, “The multiple approaches to understanding material were incredibly intriguing.” Another elaborated further on the provocative nature of the courses: “Really cool content + readings, mind-blowing discussions + new ideas, left me thinking about it after class all the time, really cool having discussion from these two different fields.” Students in both types of courses undertake challenging individual or group research projects suitable for the course topic. These projects in turn provide the necessary scaffolding to assure the Honors Program, the faculty mentors, and the students themselves that they will be well prepared to take on a more substantial project in their own field when they begin the capstone thesis in the third year. Although students, especially in the first year, are sometimes intimidated by the prospect of a substantial research project, most appreciate the experience they gain—sometimes only in hindsight—through these early challenges.

One noted, "I know many students were overwhelmed with our two major writing assignments, though I realize they were 'beneficial' in helping me prepare for the fast-approaching thesis."

Complementing the coursework, another component of the program that contributes to the coherence and academic rigor of the overall curriculum is the honors thesis project, which is perhaps the most dramatic innovation of Elon's smaller program. The senior honors thesis is a substantial independent capstone project undertaken with the assistance of a faculty mentor in which the student studies a carefully defined question or problem over the course of at least a year and a half. Prior to revamping our program, some honors students opted to perform undergraduate research, but scaling down the size of each class has allowed us to increase the level of challenge and support for such endeavors. Because Elon is a small university of about 5200 (primarily undergraduate) students, requiring eighty Honors students per cohort to undertake undergraduate research (at the same time other Elon students participated) would have put a serious strain on the faculty and might have been impossible. But with forty or fewer honors students in each cohort, there are enough mentors and we can expect more sustained and higher-quality faculty engagement with honors students. In addition, again because of the smaller numbers, the program has been able to gain an institutional commitment to compensate faculty mentors for their work at a very generous rate. In exchange, mentors work closely with individual students on a thesis for an extended period, from the initial stages of developing a topic and formulating a proposal, to creating an impressive product appropriate to the discipline, to presenting the work for an audience that typically extends beyond Elon.

While the final products our first graduating class of students created were impressive, often exceeding program expectations in terms of both length and quality, another benefit of the smaller cohort and more intensive mentoring was consistently evident in students' own written, end-of-semester reflections. In many ways, these reflections attest to the fact that students had gained a genuine understanding of what true research is, including the joys and setbacks that go along with it. One student summed up the importance of this benefit when she wrote that "participating in this research experience has given me insight into all the work that goes into each and every one of these scholarly journal articles that I have been reading over the past three years. Though I have not yet completed my project, I already have a greater respect for researchers." Students gained this kind of informed perspective on research first and foremost by learning the basics—by going through the steps that are necessary before doing a large project and by learning research skills that are applicable across disciplines. These included a complex array of skills that ranged from how to manage their time when there were no class

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meetings or tests telling them when to do what, to how to write for different audiences, to how to do hundreds of citations.

An important outcome of the “less is more” approach to our program was that students were transformed in various ways by their thesis experiences. They became practitioners of their discipline—using its terminology with ease, using sophisticated methods and equipment, analyzing data perceptively, and writing like a political scientist, mathematician, or biologist. They also honed essential research skills like conducting interviews, coding psychological data from videotaped observations, writing survey questions, and making and using contacts in the accounting world. They increased their confidence that they can do these things independently. They realized that learning is a process, not just a limited time effort put forth for a class and grade.

These lessons that I have learned are a whole lot deeper and meaningful to life than I ever thought I would gain from working on a research paper. But I have found that this thesis is much more than a research paper, because when you put your effort and heart into a project combined with others, it takes on so much more significance.

When describing themselves while reflecting on the thesis process, students used adjectives including “excited,” “proud,” “confident,” “amazed,” and “absolutely thrilled.” Most found that the work was rewarding. Sixteen of nineteen surveyed said they were glad they had done a thesis. And when asked what they were most proud of in their entire undergraduate career, in stark contrast to students in the old program who rarely mentioned intellectual work, over half volunteered that it was their thesis.

And students had ample reason to be proud. Their projects were ambitious. One student traveled to Florida to interview (in Spanish) a hundred and one migrant farm workers and ran a number of different economic analyses on the data she obtained; others visited numerous historical archives, including some while spending a semester studying abroad; a mathematics student made a significant new finding; another opted to write her fifty-plus page thesis in Spanish as a “personal challenge.” There was also external validation of the quality of their work. While honors students are required to present their thesis research publicly somewhere, with the minimum standard being Elon’s own Student Undergraduate Research Forum, many took their work to regional or national audiences. Out of twenty-two students, eight were accepted to the National Conference on Undergraduate Research, and others presented at venues ranging from student conferences to regional and national discipline-based conferences. Examples included the Symposium for Young Neuroscientists and Professors of the Southeast (SYNAPSE), the Joint

Mathematics Meeting of the Mathematical Association of America, the Phi Alpha Theta (history honor society) Regional Conference of the Carolinas, and conferences for the Society for Applied Anthropology, Eastern Economics Association, Water Resources Research Institute, and Association for Research on Mothering.

Students also found the intensive mentoring relationship involved in a thesis to be enriching. Indeed, in an unusually unanimous response to a question in the senior survey, *every single one* of the students agreed with the statement, "I had a helpful thesis mentor." One student wrote:

One of the things I'm most pleased about is how well [my mentor] and I have worked together this semester. She has been extremely supportive of all that I've done. She tells me that she finds it gratifying to have a student who's passionate about what they're (sic) doing, and in that same way I find it gratifying to have a professor who so obviously appreciates the effort I'm putting in.

Another student attested to the intellectual stimulation and professional growth in a discipline that can occur as a result of such mentoring:

One of my favorite aspects of the thesis has been the weekly meetings to discuss the research we have read. Usually the discussions begin with the assigned material, but we almost always end up talking about a wide range of topics related to the field . . . I have been most pleased with the opportunity the honors thesis project gave me to form a one-on-one relationship with a professor in my major. This has been extremely helpful when going through the graduate application process.

Students appreciate the fact that faculty mentors are clearly welcoming them into the world of academia. As a result, many are considering continuing in intellectual communities after they leave Elon. Sixteen out of nineteen respondents on a senior survey administered in the spring indicated that they planned to attend graduate or professional school while seven had already been accepted into one or more graduate programs. Particularly at a small university, the intensive mentoring that fosters such interests is only possible by limiting the number of students who do undergraduate research projects of this scope.

The last benefit of decreasing the size of the Elon Honors Program is that we have been able to put more emphasis on learning outside the classroom and on building community. A number of students in the old program complained that they did not feel a part of the program. "There should be more interaction between Honors students," one noted, "something to help us bond

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as a group.” Greater community came about in part simply because of numbers. In cutting the number of students in half, it became easier for students to get to know one another, which is a prerequisite for building community. Some familiarity with one another’s ideas and interests happens naturally through the newly revised curriculum; although a multitude of factors determine which students take which of the two courses offered each semester, the odds are that they know everyone in their cohort fairly well by the end of the second year. Learning outside the classroom also results from the expectations that honors students attend at least five extra-curricular cultural or intellectual events each semester. Some honors courses integrate outside speakers and events into their courses, and the Honors Program encourages attendance with occasional discussions and incentives like prize drawings.

Greater attention to learning outside the classroom has also been enhanced significantly by putting more emphasis on honors learning communities. Adding a new housing alternative as part of the program’s restructuring meant that Honors Fellows now have the option of participating in one of two honors learning communities. In one of them, Honors occupies a floor of a residence hall that has thirty-one beds. That opportunity existed before the program’s restructuring, but the floor did not have a faculty advisor and in reality was merely a living space rather than an intentional community. In the other community, the recently built Honors Pavilion offers a nicely equipped, free-standing building that houses twenty-two students. Both learning communities include a student Resident Advisor and a faculty advisor who assist residents in setting goals, planning activities, and consciously thinking about what it means to be part of a community. In the Honors Pavilion, the faculty member lives on site, and there is also a lounge, a kitchen, and two classrooms, which are available for study, discussion, and film screenings after normal class hours. This arrangement of space intentionally blurs the lines between academics and other aspects of campus life.

It has been our experience that building community and traditions within these learning communities takes time and can depend a great deal on the personalities involved, but reducing the size of the program has helped make these efforts more successful, if the reporting of students and faculty advisors, the choices of students to continue living with one another, and the numbers of activities (both planned and spontaneous) serve as evidence. Students from the Honors floor reported with pride that they functioned best as a community: eating meals together and regularly taking over the local coffee shop; studying together in the hallway; creating T-shirts for themselves; winning a competition against other learning communities; performing a service project; maintaining active committees; celebrating each other’s birthdays; and attending plays and lectures together. Students in the free-standing William

R. Kenan Jr. Honors Pavilion (affectionately nicknamed the “Billy House”) were also very close, frequently referring to their community as a family. In his housing application, one current resident hoping to remain in the house for another year wrote that he was a bit skeptical before he moved in as a freshman, having seen the Facebook group that claimed, “The Billy House is the Best Place to Live Ever!” But soon he was convinced. “During my first semester, I went through the same orientation, took the same core courses, and traversed the same campus as every other freshman; however, I was one of only a handful with a family waiting at home each night,” he reported. “I understand that the term ‘family’ is about as cliché as it gets, yet I believe that it is the single most appropriate word to describe the community within the honors pavilion.”

While one could argue that such strong bonds may be common within any learning community, the honors communities seem to be especially successful at integrating the personal and the intellectual. The comments of another Billy House resident ably illustrate how students’ personal and academic lives are interwoven:

The family dynamic of Billy House is amazing. Every person in the community is a unique individual, and these personal differences are recognized. We each have our own lives . . . but at the end of the day we are a family. These are the people I share my meals with; the ones who take care of me when I am sick; the ones with whom I can go to Cook-Out at 3 a.m. and end up in a deep philosophical conversation about morality. I look to the people in Billy House for guidance when deciding where to eat, registering for classes, making plans for the weekend and exploring my study abroad options.

The way this student’s description interweaves aspects of daily life with distinctively academic concerns such as philosophical discussions or academic planning begins to suggest how a learning community might function to integrate these elements. Another student reinforces this unique balancing of personal and academic pursuits: “We all focus on academics and so the atmosphere of the learning community is calmer and quieter than other dorms . . . It really is like a family where we care about how the other is doing. We want to see one another succeed and that’s a connection that’s rare to find anywhere else.” We feel certain that the learning communities succeed in meeting the goal of facilitating the discussion of ideas outside the classroom and strengthening bonds between the students. We suspect this sense of community is beneficial not only because it helps personal comfort and development but also because it contributes to students’ intellectual engagement and confidence.

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The new Elon Honors Program is not perfect. Some students complain about a lack of choice in the new curriculum; some of the new courses are more successful than others; some students are intimidated by the challenge the thesis presents; and some students still drop out because the program is not right for them. But from our point of view, it is a significant improvement over the old program. In general, honors students in the new program have been challenged and engaged. The more structured curriculum, higher expectations for undergraduate research associated with the thesis, and greater attention to learning outside the classroom have led to intellectual challenge, personal development, and community just as envisioned in our mission statement. Current Elon Honors Program students have gone further in their intellectual achievements than previous honors students. They have done so in part because of the increased and more effective support of the university, individual faculty, the Honors Program, and one another.

And evidence from university admissions suggests that Elon's Honors program *is* growing, not in the traditional sense of increased size but in enhanced reputation. One unintentional effect of decreasing the size of the program has been that the program has become more competitive, as reflected in higher averages for SAT scores, high school grades, and class rank for each incoming class in recent years. Although the university made a substantial new financial investment in the thesis as part of the program's restructuring, this shift in selectivity came about without having to significantly supplement scholarship resources since cutting the program in half meant that these resources had effectively increased. So for the Elon University Honors Program, less has meant more. While we have focused here primarily on the opportunities the new program provides to students, honors at Elon has also offered benefits for faculty, administrators, and the institution. Faculty affiliated with the new program profit from opportunities to design and teach innovative new honors courses or to mentor talented, motivated students on the thesis. Administrators and indeed the institution as a whole benefit from sheltering an increasingly selective honors program that will help to shape highly successful graduates whose achievements will in turn reflect well upon Elon. But ultimately, we are most pleased with how our choice to downsize has meant more for our students: in terms of more growth, more learning, and more achievement.

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# Research Essays



ROBERT SPURRIER

# Honors Growth and Honors Advising

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## ABSTRACT

This article addresses the issue of providing quality honors advising when honors enrollment at Oklahoma State University has increased by 325% since 1988. Following a brief review of NCHC publications that address honors advising and an explanation of the institutional setting addressed by this article, a description of our approach to honors advising will be presented. Qualifications for honors advisors will then be outlined, followed by results of the honors advising evaluation process.

## HONORS ADVISING AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF HONORS PROGRAMS AND HONORS COLLEGES

NCHC's "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program" indicates that there should be "provisions for special academic counseling of honors students by uniquely qualified faculty and/or staff personnel," and honors advising has been the subject of commentary in several NCHC monographs. Ada Long's *A Handbook for Honors Administrators* (1995), p. 15, lists honors advising in a checklist of honors responsibilities: "regularly scheduled formal advising sessions; unscheduled, unpredictable, informal advising sessions; liaison with departmental advisors; career counseling; and personal counseling (usually an inevitable and major part of the job)." Samuel Schuman, in *Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges*, (1999), p. 28, indicates, "The advising of Honors students is a task which often falls to the small college Honors Director, either directly or in some sort of oversight capacity." Schuman then discusses two models: one centered in the honors program and the other with decentralized honors advising. In *Beginning in Honors: A Handbook* (4th edition, 2006), p. 63, Schuman elaborates on this point:

An important point to keep in mind as regards honors advising is that honors students can be expected to have at least as many, and as complicated, problems as other students. . . . Honors students, just like their non-honors peers, are sometimes plagued with doubts about their academic careers and their

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futures; they are going to have problems with their love lives, fights with roommates (sometimes these last two are the same), scheduling conflicts, health problems, or intrusive parents. In fact, because their academic expectations and goals are oftentimes higher than those of their non-honors peers, honors students will sometimes have more academic and personal counseling needs than other students.

In *A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges* (2006), p. 23, Theresa A. James writes:

Honors students need guidance and advice from counselors and advisors as much as do non-honors students, and perhaps more guidance because they have so many options available to them. Honors students have just as many pressures on them and difficulty making wise decisions as do non-honors students. Some honors students may even have special concerns and exit high school with preconceptions that may be counter-productive to their educational well-being.

James then discusses several general models for honors advising that in many ways parallel those noted by Schuman.

More detailed discussion of several approaches to honors advising in different types of institutions is found in “The Nuts and Bolts of Honors Advising” by Andrea Labinger *et al.*, 17 *National Honors Report* 13 (Fall, 1996).

Jacqueline R. Klein, Lisa French, and Pamela Degotardi, in “More Than an ID Number or a GPA: Developmental Advising in Honors,” 3 *Honors in Practice* 101 (2007), state that “[i]n a developmental advising relationship, students continuously interact with the advisor to achieve personal and educational goals” in an advising system that “balances challenges and support” and provides a “collaborative advising relationship.” They then explain how the City University of New York’s Macaulay Honors College addresses the challenges of providing developmental honors advising across seven individual CUNY campuses, each with its own honors director and at least one full-time designated honors advisor.

Tables 8 and 9 in James P. Hill’s “What Honors Students Want (And Expect): The Views of Top Michigan High School and College Students,” 6 *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* 95 (Fall/Winter, 2005), indicate that honors advising is considered valuable and significant by honors students at his institution.

Bob Spurrier, in “Honors Advising at NCHC Institutions,” 22 *National Honors Report* 55 (Summer, 2001), reports the results of a 2000 survey of

## ROBERT SPURRIER

NCHC institutions that indicated the following distributions of providers of honors advising, whether honors advising is required or voluntary, and whether there is a formal evaluation of honors advisors at least annually:

Who Provides Honors Advising? (multiple responses possible)

(N = 162)

Administrators = 117 (72%)

Faculty = 67 (41%)

Professional Staff = 58 (36%)

Student Peers = 21 (13%)

Required or Voluntary (N=158)

Required (at least for some students) = 78 (49%)

Voluntary = 80 (51%)

Formal evaluation of honors advisors at least once a year

(N=162)

Yes = 32 (20%)

No = 130 (80%)

While the responses to the first two questions listed above were not unexpected, that only 20% of the respondents indicated that honors advisors were formally evaluated at least once a year was surprising. Jacqueline Reihman, Sara Varhus, and William R. Whipple, in *Evaluating Honors Programs: An Outcomes Approach* (1990), p. 26, comment on the evaluation of honors advising in a general way. Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurrier, in *Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges* (2005), p. 17, include a checklist that asks for information about the evaluation of honors advising as part of the process of external honors program and honors college reviews. Appendices H-1 and H-2, pp. 49-50, to the Otero and Spurrier monograph include honors advising survey instruments from Kent State University and Oklahoma State University.

In addition to or in conjunction with honors advising, numerous honors programs and honors colleges are actively involved with preparing students to compete for prestigious national and international scholarships. See Bob Spurrier, "Major Scholarship Competition Preparation at NCHC Institutions," *22 National Honors Report* 12 (Fall, 2001).

These NCHC publications clearly indicate that honors advising is a vital part of the honors educational mission.

### **THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING OF HONORS ADVISING AT OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY**

This section describes how Oklahoma State University has approached providing quality honors advising in The Honors College. Oklahoma State

## HONORS GROWTH AND HONORS ADVISING

University (OSU) is a public doctoral institution with 21,235 students on its Stillwater campus in the 2006 fall semester (18,737 undergraduates). Six undergraduate colleges offer baccalaureate degrees and provide regular academic advising to their students. In some colleges faculty members provide the academic advising, but the trend over the years has been toward professional staff advisors. The College of Arts and Sciences began its Honors Program in the mid-1960s and awarded the first OSU honors degrees in 1969. In 1988 there were 282 active honors students in the College of Arts and Sciences. The University Honors Program was established in 1989 to serve students from all six undergraduate colleges, and in 2000 it became The Honors College. In the 2006 fall semester, 916 students were active participants in The Honors College, surpassing our strategic planning goal of 850 students by 2010.

The Honors College Degree at OSU requires that students complete a total of 39 honors credit hours with minimum 3.5 OSU and cumulative grade point averages. The first component of the Honors College Degree is the General Honors Award that requires 21 honors credit hours distributed across four broad subject areas and including at least two special honors seminars or interdisciplinary honors courses for a minimum of four credit hours with 3.5 OSU and cumulative grade point averages. The second component is the Departmental or College Honors Award (“honors in the major”) that requires 12 upper-division honors credit hours including the senior honors thesis or other creative component, again with 3.5 OSU and cumulative grade point averages. Finally, students must earn at least six additional honors credit hours to reach the total of 39 and have the required 3.5 grade point averages at graduation. Only honors credit hours completed with a grade of “A” or “B” may be counted toward any Honors College award or the Honors College Degree. Study abroad, off-campus internships, and cooperative education experiences may be used in lieu of regular honors credit hours to a limited degree, and AP/CLEP credit may be used to waive up to 3 of the 39 honors hours (1 honors credit hour for each three AP/CLEP hours, up to a maximum waiver of three honors credit hours).

We discovered very early that we could not expect all regular academic advisors across campus to be fully conversant with our honors requirements or to be supportive of honors in general. Some academic advisors were among our best advocates, many were essentially neutral, and a few were overtly hostile to the entire concept of honors education. If we were going to do a first-rate job of honors advising, we had to do it ourselves; of course, we clearly understood that we would need to work closely with the academic advisors across campus who were responsible for encouraging and tracking their advisees’ progress toward their degrees and major requirements and that our responsibility was to do the same in terms of honors requirements.

## ROBERT SPURRIER

Honors advising at OSU sometimes begins before students matriculate. We send individually signed letters to high-school seniors who appear to be eligible and who have listed OSU among their top three institutions when taking the ACT. A glossy fact sheet about The Honors College is enclosed with the letter, and potential students are encouraged to contact us with questions. (Additional applicants come from OSU's general online application system, which includes an application to The Honors College along with other application materials.)

For most new honors students, however, in-person honors advising begins when they come to campus in the summer before their freshman year to enroll for fall-semester classes. We have a 20-minute initial session in the morning during which honors advisors and current honors students provide a brief overview of The Honors College and respond to questions from students and parents. This session is mandatory for students already accepted into The Honors College and also open to new freshmen still exploring the possibility of being an honors student at OSU.

Later in the enrollment process, entering freshmen meet individually or in groups with academic advisors in one of the six undergraduate colleges to prepare a draft class schedule for the fall semester. The students then come to The Honors College to meet individually with an honors advisor who discusses honors course options that are available within the confines of the draft schedule. (A student may not enroll in honors courses until an honors advisor has made an honors entry in the student's electronic data on the university's enrollment system.) On occasion, the student and his or her honors advisor may conclude that a different honors course would be preferable to a course on the draft schedule. In this situation, the honors advisor contacts the regular academic advisor to be certain that the proposed schedule change is acceptable. If the academic advisor is not immediately available by telephone, the honors advisor sends an e-mail message explaining the schedule change and making it clear that, if any problems arise, the change can be undone as soon as the academic advisor contacts The Honors College.

During the summer enrollment process, honors advisors explain Honors College requirements and also make certain that the entering freshmen understand the definition of being an "active participant" in The Honors College. Active participant status is required on a semester-by-semester basis to earn Honors College fringe benefits including priority enrollment, extended library checkout privileges, use of the Honors Study Lounge and computer laboratory, and living in the honors residence hall. First-semester freshmen must undertake a minimum of 6 honors credit hours. In succeeding semesters, honors freshmen and sophomores must achieve a running total of 12 honors credit hours combining the previous semester's honors credit hours earned

## HONORS GROWTH AND HONORS ADVISING

with grades of “A” or “B” plus a minimum of 6 honors credit hours in the current semester. Juniors and seniors must undertake a minimum of 3 honors credit hours each semester for active participant status, but there is no running total requirement that takes into account the prior semester’s work for juniors and seniors.

When the fall semester begins, new Honors College freshmen are encouraged to make initial honors advising appointments within the first two or three weeks of the semester. These sessions allow the students and their honors advisors to become familiar with each other. During the initial advising appointments, honors advisors review Honors College requirements and let the students know that they should feel free to contact The Honors College with any question at any time. If necessary, the advisors explain the mechanics of undertaking an honors contract project in a regular course.

The next cycle of honors advising precedes priority enrollment, and honors advising is mandatory each semester. The Registrar places an enrollment hold on the record of every active participant in the Honors College student to block enrollment in *any* courses for the next semester, and only honors advisors may remove this electronic hold. This procedure ensures that honors students contact their honors advisors at least once each semester, but much more frequent contact certainly occurs and is encouraged.

Between individual honors advising appointments, honors advisors frequently email students about approaching deadlines; opportunities for scholarships, study abroad, and undergraduate research grants; speakers and other events on campus; and anything else that might be of interest and benefit to Honors College students. Honors advisors are available, of course, for students who simply want to drop by the office. If questions arise that the honors advisors cannot answer, they carefully determine the appropriate contact person or office on campus (Bursar, Counseling Services, Study Abroad Office, Institutional Technology, etc.) so that they can make an immediate referral.

With such extensive honors advising and the 325% increase in the number of honors students since 1988, the obvious question is how to continue to meet the honors advising needs of our students. In 1988, all honors advising was the responsibility of the Director of the Arts and Sciences Honors Program. In 2007, the Director and Assistant Director of The Honors College advise approximately 100 students each. In addition, three full-time administrative and professional staff Honors Academic Counselors, our formal designation for honors advisors, advise approximately 250 students each. All five of these positions are full-time, twelve-month appointments. With the exception of one of the Honors Academic Counselors, these positions are funded from the regular Honors College budget. The third Honors

Academic Counselor's position is funded through the Provost's Office from the academic advising fees paid by all OSU undergraduates. With central administrative support and increased budgetary resources, we have kept pace with the increased number of Honors College students, but without that support we could not hope to continue providing top-quality personalized honors advising.

## **QUALIFICATIONS FOR HONORS ACADEMIC COUNSELORS**

Given the importance OSU places on honors advising and the resources committed to it, what are the qualifications for our Honors Academic Counselors? Our most recent position announcement included the following criteria:

An Honors Program or Honors College Bachelor's Degree, preferably from an institution affiliated with the National Collegiate Honors Council, is required by university policy. Advanced degree preferred. Minimum 3.50 undergraduate cumulative grade point average. . . . Excellent communication skills needed as well as the ability to work with students from different colleges and majors and a demonstrated record of ability to work independently with minimal supervision. Election to Phi Kappa Phi or Phi Beta Kappa desirable. Computer experience is required.

An advanced degree is a plus in our selection process, but according to university policy it cannot trump the lack of an honors program or honors college degree. Merely graduating with honors based on grade point average is insufficient. OSU requires an honors program or honors college degree for a variety of reasons. Among the most important is that it gives honors advisors instant credibility in the eyes of their advisees. Whether in the initial freshman inquiry about whether honors is worthwhile or in a response to a junior with apprehensions about undertaking an honors thesis in the senior year, the Honors Academic Counselor can respond on the basis of personal experience and success.

In addition, individuals who have completed honors program or honors college degrees typically are self-starters who learn quickly and can be brought into our honors advising system smoothly and swiftly. They tend to be articulate, enthusiastic, and willing to do what it takes to maintain our record of excellence in honors advising. Given the value they place on their own honors achievements, they know the importance of making certain that their advice to others is accurate and appropriate.

## HONORS GROWTH AND HONORS ADVISING

The question may arise whether requiring an honors program or honors college degree rather than simply a high grade point average unduly limits the pool of applicants. Our most recent Honors Academic Counselor search resulted in applications from thirteen fully qualified individuals from six states, and we were pleased with the range of applicants from which we made our selection.

The one drawback to our approach is that, by hiring such extremely talented individuals for entry-level positions, we have on occasion faced turnover problems, which have frustrated students whose honors advisors have changed during their undergraduate careers. OSU has addressed this problem on a university-wide basis by developing a promotion program based on additional degrees earned and length of service in academic advising in general. In addition, we in The Honors College encourage our Honors Academic Counselors, if they are so inclined, to pursue graduate degrees at OSU, and we adjust work schedules to make it possible for them to enroll in the classes they need for their graduate programs.

### EVALUATION OF HONORS ADVISING

Although we may believe that we hire outstanding honors advisors, we cannot simply rely on our own assertion that this is the case. The Honors College employs two instruments to gauge student response to honors advising. A questionnaire is distributed each spring semester to all active participants in the Honors College. Based on a four-point scale, with the numerical response average for each person responsible for honors advising being given equal weight to reach the composite score reported here, the 2007 questionnaire produced the following results:

Knowledge and explanation of Honors College policies	3.83
Assistance in planning honors class schedule	3.85
Ability to refer to other services on campus (if requested)	3.81
Availability to answer questions	3.89
Cares about you as a person	3.87

In addition to the annual spring honors advising questionnaire, our exit questionnaire for Honors College Degree candidates includes the following item: "Was having an Honors Advisor in The Honors College Office beneficial to you? Please explain briefly." Some representative responses are provided below:

## ROBERT SPURRIER

It was very beneficial for me (I had . . . for 3 years). She was able to offer me insight that helped me take classes that would fulfill multiple requirements in a short amount of time.

Yes, having an Honors Advisor in the Honors College Office was extremely beneficial to me because I could always come to them with questions and get the help I needed.

Yes! I don't know what I would have done without . . . ! First of all, she convinced me that it really wouldn't take that many more hours to get my honors degree, instead of just my general honors award. Secondly, she helped me arrange all my classes so I could graduate on time with honors. I have emailed her numerous times with many questions and she has always been quick to respond and extremely helpful.

Yes, having an Honors Advisor in the The Honors College was definitely beneficial. My advisor has been amazing, always helpful, and fun to talk to. I feel that my advisor has helped me to remain in the Honors College even when I was thinking of quitting.

Not every student believes honors advising to be particularly beneficial, of course. One of the less positive responses is given below:

During my freshman and sophomore year, yes. After that I knew what was going on and having to go in for enrollment got a bit annoying. But it was nice to have someone to approach with questions.

The consistent pattern of evaluation responses over many years on both survey instruments demonstrates a continuing pattern of student satisfaction with honors advising at OSU.

## CONCLUSION

Honors advising is recognized as a crucial part of the overall operations of an honors program or honors college, and NCHC publications indicate that a variety of models are employed to provide this essential support for honors students. This article has summarized one approach that has been demonstrated to be successful over an extended period of time, but it is by no means held forth as one to be adopted regardless of institutional context. Whatever model is selected, however, it is well to recall that NCHC's "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program" call for "uniquely qualified faculty and/or staff personnel" to perform this vital task.

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SRIRAM KHÉ

# The Irrelevance of SAT in Honors?

SRIRAM KHÉ

WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

The Honors Program at Western Oregon University is like most other programs when it comes to admission: we have established minimum requirements for SAT/ACT scores and high school GPAs. Over the last couple of years that I have been directing the program, I have consistently and incrementally raised these requirements. At the same time, I have been increasingly intrigued by one question: do these minimum requirements really matter? If high school GPAs and SAT scores are used as measures of students when they enter the university and the Honors Program, then how do these students measure up to comparable metrics when they graduate?

At the outset, I concede that this is a huge research question and a highly controversial one too. An analysis would require discussion of the problems with the SAT such as those described by Nicholas Lemann; it would address the classist nature of American society and higher education as elucidated by, for instance, Walter B. Michaels; and it would involve a host of issues such as grade inflation in high schools. The potential for heated arguments is, in academia, no excuse for staying away from research topics; in fact, it is all the more reason to ask such questions. Thus, despite the many complexities of the topic that lie beyond the scope of this essay, I wish to examine the SAT- and GPA-related data for the five years that I have been at my current institution, not all of them as Director of the Honors Program. My hope is that this five-year analysis will serve as a pilot study from which I can then frame a more rigorous research agenda.

All along, I had assumed that high SAT scores and high school GPAs would four years later result in high academic success. However, a preliminary investigation of this hypothesis, which is described in this pilot study of data from five cohorts of honors students at a regional public university, reveals that there is no such consistent pattern. This relatively counter-intuitive finding calls for not only additional and detailed data analysis but also rethinking of the admission requirements for honors.

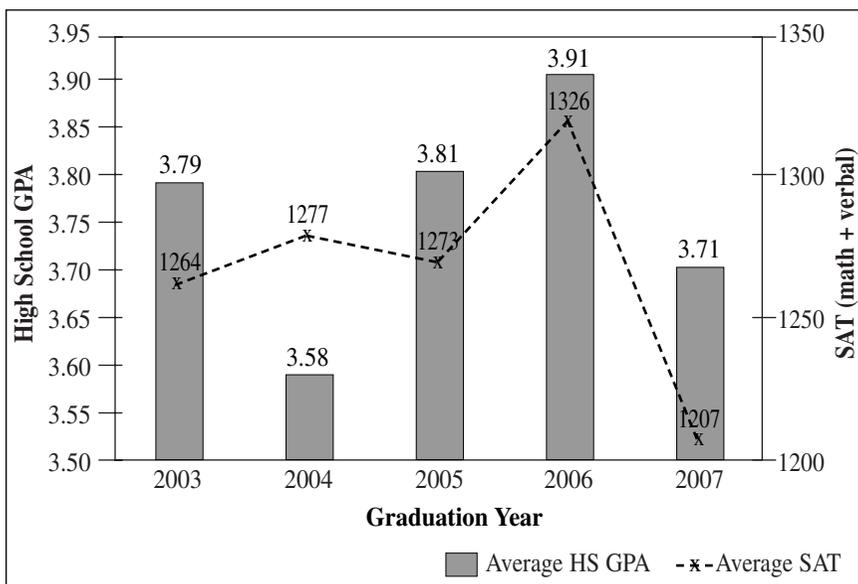
## DISCUSSION

The Honors Program at Western Oregon University was initiated in 1984 and has grown in size over the years. In the early years of the program, seldom did a freshman class number in the double digits. However, in recent years we have admitted, on average, about twenty students in each freshman class.

In order to be considered for the Honors Program, students are required to have, at a minimum, an SAT score of 1180, an ACT score of 26, or high school GPA of 3.5. Figure 1 describes the average SAT and high school GPA of each honors graduating class. (ACT scores were converted to equivalent SAT scores.) Note that these are averages of students who graduated from the program and not of the entire class that was admitted during those years; our program typically retains about sixty percent of a freshman class all the way through to graduation. Over the five years, students who graduated from the Honors Program qualified for it as high school graduates with an average GPA of 3.76 or an average SAT score of 1270.

SAT scores result from a common, standardized test as opposed to high school GPAs that do not have common curricula and assessment mechanisms. Unfortunately, or fortunately, we do not have a common, standardized test when students exit the university. Because only a smaller subset of the graduating class goes on to graduate school, not all of them take the GRE, which could serve as a standardized test. Comparing GPAs across majors is a problem, too—it is, in a way, like comparing GPAs of students coming from

**Figure 1: Profile of the Honors Graduates: When They were Freshmen**

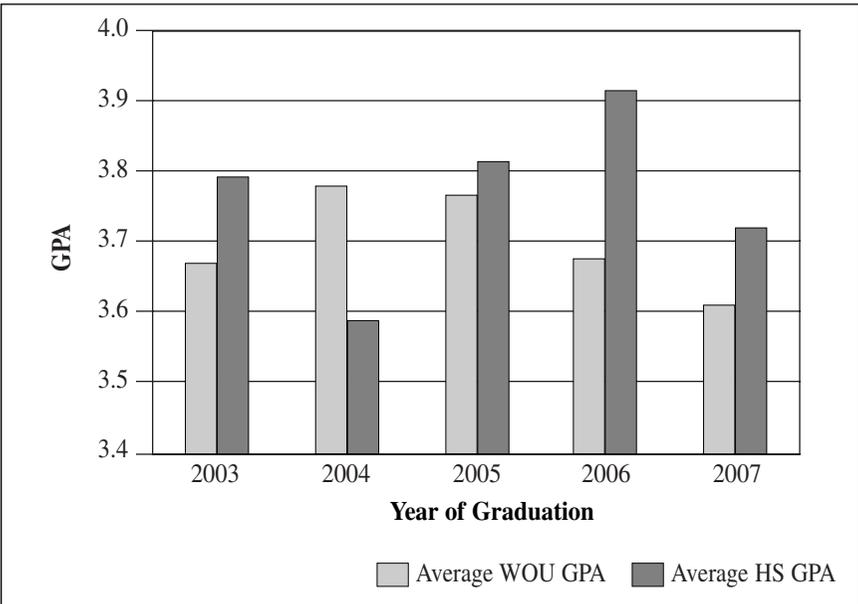


different “high schools” within the university, where the curricula and assessment for majors differ widely. Thus, it is quite possible for student X with a lower high school GPA than student Y to graduate with higher university GPA because of a different major. In fact, in most universities students whisper, and sometimes loudly talk, about majors and courses where earning the top grade is relatively easy.

Despite the complexities in comparing GPAs across the different majors, I have compared the average GPAs for the entire graduating cohorts in a manner similar to the way high school GPAs were averaged for this study. Figure 2 is a comparison of the average GPA at graduation and the respective high school GPA for each cohort. It is interesting that the average GPA at graduation for the cohort that graduated in 2004 is higher than the average high school GPA. For the other four cohorts, there is a significant decrease in the average GPA. The decrease in GPA from high school to college supports my intuitive understanding from observing students over the years: for most students, the college GPA will be lower than the high school GPA. Incidentally, if this were indeed the case across academia, we might want to discuss it during freshman orientation sessions in order to prevent the disappointment that most well prepared students feel when they earn the first B of their lives.

University GPA is also the measure that defines whether a student is “lauded” with *cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, and *summa cum laude* notations

**Figure 2: University (WOU) GPAs of Honors Graduates and their Respective High School GPAs**



## THE IRRELEVANCE OF SAT IN HONORS?

on the diploma. Generally, honors students are expected to graduate with such notations. However, as can be seen in Figure 3, not all honors graduates earned even the *cum laude* status.

As Figure 3 shows, the lowest percentage of honors students graduating with “laude” (total of the three “laude” classifications) honors was in 2006, which is interesting because it was also the same cohort that had the highest SAT and GPA coming in. The immediate follow-up is to relate the freshman profile in Figure 1 with the graduation honors of Figure 3, and this is captured in Figures 4 and 5. These two figures are similar in that neither the SAT scores nor the high school GPAs appear to correlate with graduation honors.

The conclusion that can be derived from this pilot study is a variation of what Wall Street investment firms always remind customers: past performance does not guarantee future success. For a cohort, high SAT scores or high school GPAs do not directly lead to high GPAs in college. Whether there might be individual-level variations that could establish any relationship needs to be explored.

Of course, the data analysis presented here is not statistically rigorous enough. In addition, a number of other issues need to be discussed, such as:

- comparing honors graduates with students who were admitted into the same cohort but withdrew from the program: is there any significant difference in their academic success, and how much of that difference can be attributed to the Honors Program?

**Figure 3: Percentage Graduating with “Laude”**

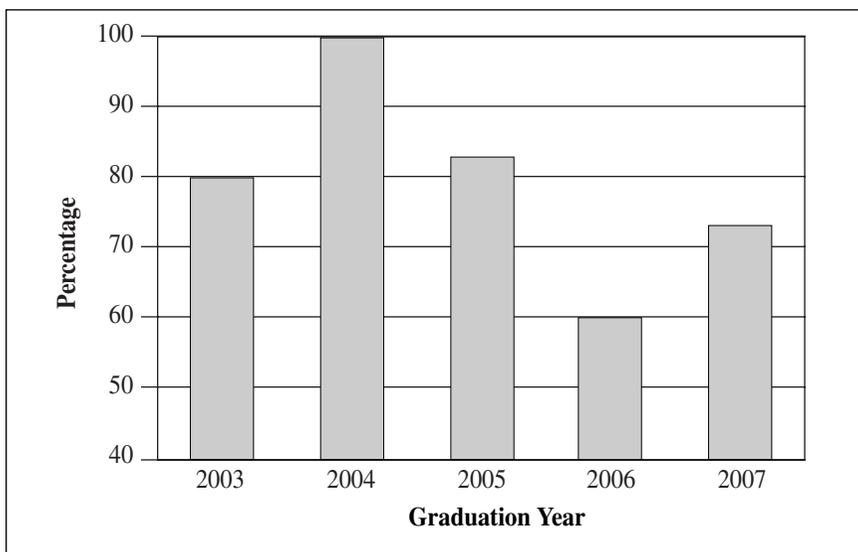


Figure 4: SAT and Graduation Honors

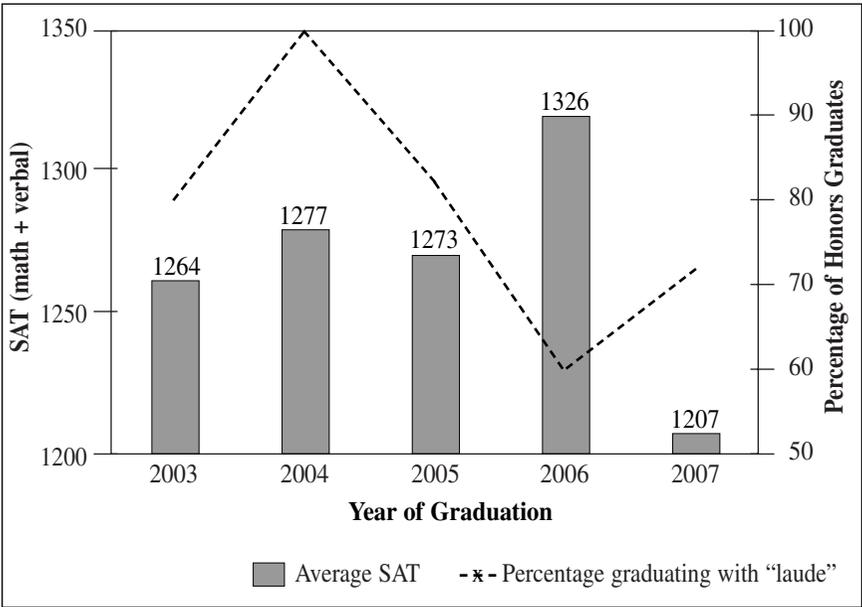
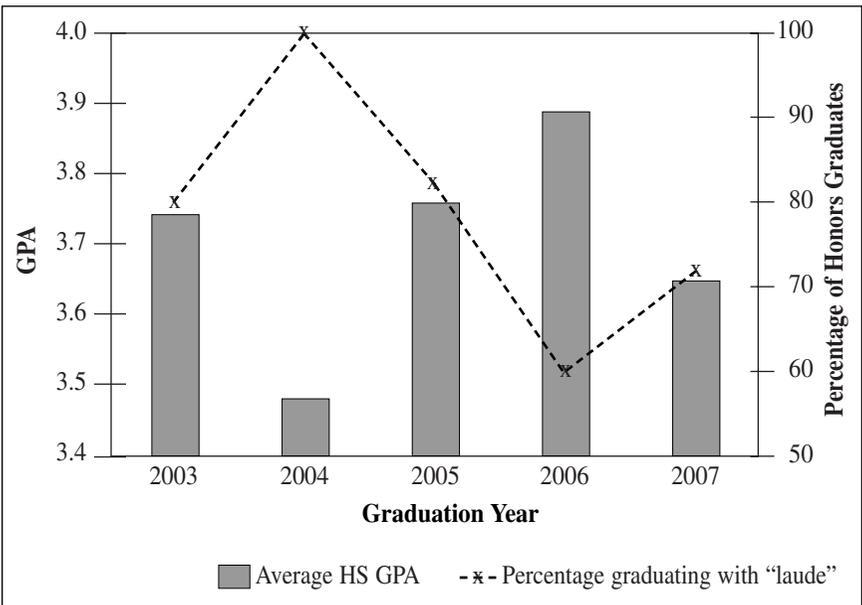


Figure 5: High School GPA and University Graduation Honors



## THE IRRELEVANCE OF SAT IN HONORS?

- comparing the GPAs of students in the common core of honors courses with those in non-Honors courses: in the “standardized” honors environment, how much can high school GPA and SAT score predict a student’s scholastic performance?

Above all, two important questions stand out:

1. If it is indeed the case that admissions criteria do not necessarily promote a certain academic performance desired by the institution, then what can be the rationale for continuation of the criteria? Should we follow the precedent set by a few colleges and universities that have decided not to require SAT scores from applicants?
2. How do the admissions criteria relate to the mission of the program?

The second question is even more complicated than the first because it can be quite difficult to establish criteria that relate admissions to the vision and mission of the program.

The vision and mission of our Honors Program are quite broad and do not easily lend themselves to quantifiable metrics that can then be adapted as guidelines for admission.

The vision of the Honors Program at Western Oregon University is to foster a way of life in which faculty and students understand that inquiry and learning happen everyday, and in a shared and continuous mode.

Towards this vision, the Honors Program considers its mission to:

- Develop a learning community committed to scholarly inquiry;
- Offer a rigorous disciplinary environment to prepare students for excellence in and out of the classroom; and
- Create and sustain an interdisciplinary curriculum that will encourage faculty and students in their intellectual pursuits.

It is not clear how raising the minimum high school GPA or SAT scores will ensure progress toward the vision of fostering a way of life where learning is an ongoing activity. In a recent research note from the College Board, which administers the SAT tests, Jennifer Kobrin notes that “many colleges use SAT scores in conjunction with HSGPA to predict students’ likelihood of success at their institutions. Many of these colleges calculate an academic index, which is usually based on institutional research about the performance of enrolled students.” Kobrin further comments that “the elements and weightings used to create the academic index, and how this index is actually used, reflect institutional priorities.” This pilot study indicates that there

## SRIRAM KHÉ

might be a need to revise the academic index used for admission to the Honors Program at Western Oregon University.

Of course, the vision and mission of honors programs and colleges at other universities will not be identical to those at the institution examined in this pilot study. But it is possible that an examination of the relationships among the entry requirements (SAT/ACT and GPA), the vision/mission of honors, and the outcomes might yield results that are comparable to those discussed in this pilot study. It is the author's firm belief that such analyses will help efforts to improve quality not only in honors but also in academe.

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# What is an Honors Student? A Noel-Levitz Survey

DONALD P. KACZVINSKY

LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

. . . for Rodney K. Delasanta, *il miglior educatore*

In an impressive article published in the 2005 summer issue of *JNCHC*, Cheryl Achterberg laments the lack of empirical data available to provide a workable definition for honors students. While she duly notes that there is an “ideology” that honors students are “superior” to other students in an institution or of “high ability” or “the best and brightest,” she laments that “[t]here are few characteristics of honors students that can be standardized, measured, or uniformly compared across institutions” (Achterberg 75). She concludes her article with these considerations: honors students are “not a homogeneous group with a set of absolute or fixed characteristics”; they “have much in common with other non-honors students of their own age group”; they “are (or should be) academically superior to their non-honors counterparts *within* any given institution”; and they “are probably little different today than the honors students of yesteryear.” Achterberg calls for more research to understand “how honors students develop academically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and as leaders relative to their non-honors peers” (79).

In the same issue of the *JNCHC*, Rosalie C. Otero finds honors students “ask probing questions that tend to differ from non-honors students” in their depth of “understanding and frequency” (52). They “all have interests in many areas” (52), and they “either can’t settle on a major until their sophomore or junior year or they come to the university already focused on their goal” (52). Unlike Achterberg, however, she suggests that today’s honors students are different from those of the past. While honors students in the late 80s and 90s were “superachievers,” they now “seem to be more cheerful and deal with things with humor” (52). Furthermore, they are “less influenced by hype and status,” “more optimistic and inclusive,” “enjoy collaborative learning and working in groups,” and “selfless”; they are “e-learners,” often “into extreme sports,” and they “value speed” (52). But these characteristics might just as easily be attributed to their whole generation, as applicable to non-honors as honors students.

## WHAT IS AN HONORS STUDENT? A NOEL-LEVITZ SURVEY

Most honors directors or deans would probably agree that honors students are academically superior to their non-honors students, but beyond that, few—if any—could pinpoint what defines an honors student. After teaching both honors and regular courses for over fifteen years and having been Honors Director for six, I know that not all the best and brightest, or even the most enjoyable, students I have taught were honors students. However, I have also found honors students somehow different from non-honors students: they are quirkiest and more engaged, unconventional but also subject to the same problems, frustrations, and anxieties as their non-honors counterparts.

Trying to define an honors student with some precision is not simply of academic interest but addresses the very basis of honors education. Murray Sperber famously lambasted higher education and large public universities in general for abdicating their responsibilities and reserving a quality education for a few that should be available to all. But Sperber is ignoring the practical, economic, and demographic realities of higher education today. Most honors programs have not been created and promoted (at least at the administrative level) to address high-achieving students' special needs or characters but rather to convince heavily recruited students (and their parents) to attend a particular public institution as an inexpensive alternative to a private liberal arts college or university. Given that honors programs will continue to be part of higher education, Achterberg makes an important point:

The key question each institution must answer in practice, within its own context, is whether the honors students within the institution are sufficiently different from other students to necessitate and justify differences in the pedagogical, curricular, and personal advising experiences offered them. (80)

While there is no absolute way to determine the differences between honors students and other students within an institution, I would like to contribute some empirical data that may help to characterize those at my own institution, Louisiana Tech University.

### **LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM**

Louisiana Tech University is a selective-admissions comprehensive public university. In 2005–06, the university reached “Tier 3” status in the *U.S. News & World Report* for National Research Universities. In 2004–05, the year in which my study was conducted, the total enrollment was 11,710 with a freshman class of 1,914. The Honors Program had over 230 students, including 87 freshmen. While the university has excellent students in all five academic colleges, honors students, as might be expected, tend to enroll in

the College of Engineering and Science. Of the 87 honors students accepted in the 2004–05-freshman year, 53, or 61%, initially enrolled in the College of Engineering and Science as well. The Honors Program does not select students from a pool of applicants; instead, any student who applies with a composite score of 26 or better on the ACT or who graduates in the top 10% of his or her graduating class is accepted. Students with a composite score below 28 must also write an essay on a designated topic. Incoming freshmen must maintain a 3.3 GPA overall to remain in the program. By the end of the 2004–05 year, when the freshman transcripts were reviewed, 59 of the original students had a GPA of 3.3 or above. Of those students, 30 were in Engineering and Science for a retention rate of 57% while 29 students (85%) were retained from the other four colleges. That is to say, while honors students tended to be engineers in the freshman year, the engineering honors students had a much higher rate of attrition, so by the sophomore year the percentages of engineers and non-engineers in the Honors Program were about even. This high rate of attrition among engineering majors may well be a result of more stringent grading standards in that field—a discrepancy in grading patterns that has been widely discussed in honors journals and conferences.

## THE NOEL-LEVITZ SURVEY

At Louisiana Tech University, incoming freshman students take UNIV 100: University Seminar, a one-credit course that orients freshmen to the university by teaching practical study techniques and attitudes associated with college, identifying goals for incoming freshmen, and developing skills in time management and scheduling. In this university-wide required course, the Honors Program has three sections: one section for its non-engineering students and two sections for its engineers. Each of the sections has approximately twenty students each. As one required activity in the course, students must take the *College Student Inventory* (CSI), part of the Noel-Levitz Retention Management System. The CSI is a 194-item questionnaire meant to help the student “discover the learning path that best suits [the student’s] unique personality” (CSI 1) and to identify dropout proneness in freshmen. The CSI has nineteen independent motivational scales, and the survey creates two reports, one for the student and one for the advisor/counselor. The scores are organized into five main sections: Academic Motivation; Social Motivation; General Coping Skills; Receptivity to Support Services; and Two Supplementary Scales. The survey provides a percentile rank and bar graph as part of what the *Advisor’s Guide* calls a “visual profile” (AG 16) of the student. The national norm for all the scales is the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. High scores (80<sup>th</sup> percentile or above) indicate high levels of the characteristic described

in the scale name while 20<sup>th</sup> percentile indicates low levels. The report is also tested for internal validity and designed to help the advisor “begin fruitful conversation with a student—perhaps through an appeal to his or her openness, intellectual interests, sociability, background or yet another area” (AG 2). Furthermore, the survey provides action statements like “Discuss family problems with counselor” or “Get help with exam skills.”

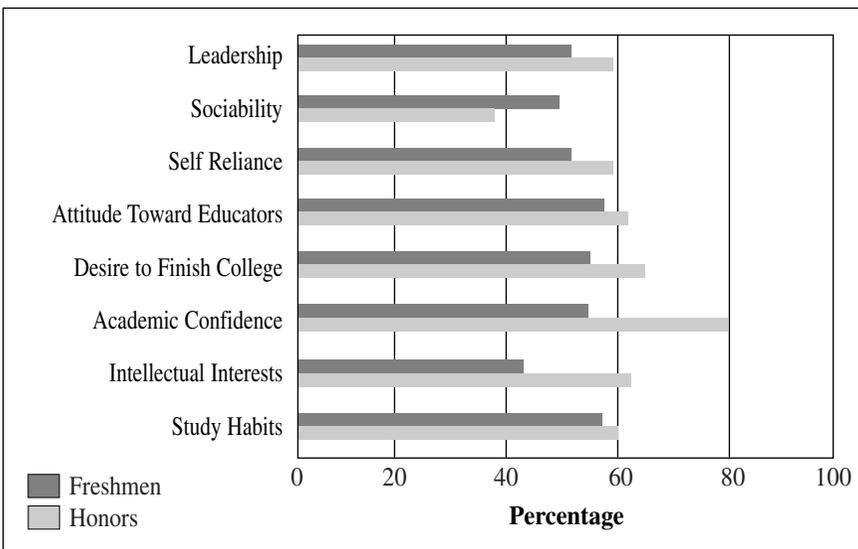
## COMPARISON BETWEEN HONORS STUDENTS AND THE FRESHMAN CLASS, 2004–05

The following study compares the averages of 58 honors students (in one non-engineering and two engineering honors sections) with students in the entire freshman class, or the 1,496 students who took the survey in September 2004. The internal validity for the honors students’ surveys was “excellent.” As expected (and appreciated by this Honors Director), the incoming freshman honors students indeed showed themselves, in general, to be more highly motivated than their non-honors counterparts. This is not to say that every honors student was more highly motivated. There was, as Achterberg suggested, a great variety within each category. Indeed the maximum and minimum range spanned from the single digits to the 90s in each of the categories. The honors students scored higher in their intellectual interests (though sadly still not very high), their desire to finish college, and their attitude toward educators. They were slightly more self-reliant (defined as a student’s capacity to make his or her own decisions and carry through with them) and had a somewhat greater sense of their own leadership skills. Figure 1 below shows a percentile comparison of the honors students to the entire freshman class.

Where the honors students far outscored the freshman students overall was in their academic confidence: the students’ perception of their ability to perform well in school, especially in testing situations. This scale measures the “student’s willingness to make the sacrifices needed to achieve academic success” (AG 16) and focuses on “effort.” A sample question, for example, is “I study hard for all my courses, even those I don’t like.” Significantly, the *Advisor’s Guide* points out that the scale “is intended as an indicator of academic self-esteem and should not be used as a substitute for academic assessment” (AG 17). In fact, the honors students’ academic confidence far exceeded (22.7 percent higher) the non-honors students’ even though the honors students’ study habits were only slightly better (4.3 percent higher). Importantly, the distinction between confidence and study habits became even more pronounced between those students who made the required 3.3 GPA to stay in the Honors Program and those who fell below the mark after their freshman

year (see Appendix). These data suggest that, while most honors students are confident in their academic abilities (after all, they are “honors students”), they may not have developed sufficient study habits to make them excel in college. These students may have done well in high school because they were “smarter” than their fellow students or took courses that did not challenge them, or they may simply have been good at taking standardized tests. In my Honors UNIV 100 seminar, students often told me they did not have to work very hard in high school to do well. The survey seems to confirm this perception. Where the honors students fell far short of the entire freshman class, however, was in “Sociability”: “the student’s general inclination to join in social activities” (AG 18); here honors students scored 37.3 while the rest of the student body scored 50.5. The survey thus indicated that the students in the Louisiana Tech Honors Program were highly intelligent, confident in their abilities, and driven to complete college, but they were less socially inclined than their classmates and lacking in some of the essential habits needed for success in college.

**Figure 1: Academic and Social Motivations**

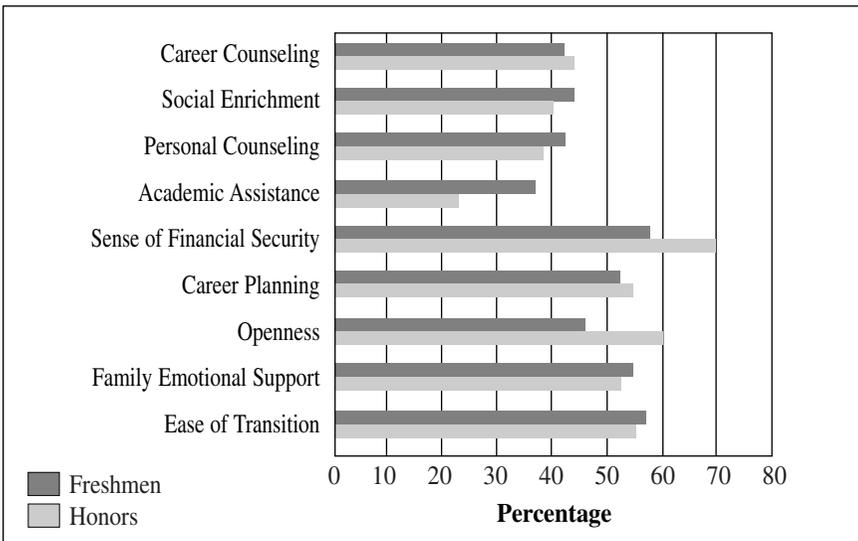


In the survey questions that concentrate on general coping skills and receptivity to support services, there was much more parity between the honors students and the entire student body: that is to say, honors students had the same emotional and transitional problems as their counterparts, an observation Achterberg made as well. However, another part of the survey (see Figure 2 below) suggests that honors students at Louisiana Tech University were much more open “to new ideas and to the sensitive and sometimes

## WHAT IS AN HONORS STUDENT? A NOEL-LEVITZ SURVEY

threatening aspects of the world” (AG 19) and felt far more financially secure than their non-honors counterparts. The two are probably not unrelated. In his brief but insightful essay “Imitation, Economic Insecurity, and Risk Aversion,” Jay Mandt has suggested that economic insecurity is one of the key motivating factors for today’s students: “When one’s parents are mired in a dead-end situation, ‘opportunity’ means . . . choosing the ‘sure thing’ instead of the dream, seeking an education for success, not for enlightenment, and above all, not making ‘mistakes’” (44). A student may be more open to new ideas and “threatening” aspects of the world if he or she feels financially secure. Indeed, financial security may be one of the major factors behind a student’s willingness to participate in an honors program. However, as the appendix suggests, those that succeeded in the program had a lower score (62.3) than those who fell below the necessary 3.3 GPA (72.8). Financial security may increase openness to new ideas and willingness to take chances, but at a certain point it may also lower a student’s motivation to do the hard work necessary to succeed in a challenging educational program. Alternatively, some level of risk aversion may lead to playing it safe, making higher grades, and thus remaining in an honors program.

**Figure 2: General Coping and Receptivity to Support Services**



Once again the honors students seemed slightly less inclined toward social enrichment—“the desire to meet other students and to participate in group activities” (AG 20)—than the rest of the student body, and, surprisingly, they were even more unlikely than their non-honors classmates to seek academic assistance or “individual help with study habits” (AG 19). That honors students’ study habits might not be appreciably better than the rest of

the student population's is an important possibility for honors administrators and teachers to take into account.

## CONCLUSION

This study is not meant to give a full statistical analysis of the results of the Noel-Levitz survey but simply to provide a "visual profile" (AG 16) of incoming honors freshmen, based on a comparison of percentages with non-honors students, that is likely to be similar to other universities across the country. A further study might have the honors students take the Noel-Levitz survey at the end of their careers at Tech to see how their motivational patterns and attitudes have changed during their years in college. The survey itself has restrictions, too. Since it is meant to identify those students who are at risk of dropping out rather than succeeding, the Noel Levitz survey has limitations as an instrument for understanding the character of honors students. For instance, the survey does not measure why a student joined an honors program in the first place, whether the motivation was based on intrinsic rewards (for instance, valuing an undergraduate education for its own sake) or extrinsic rewards such as believing that honors classes look impressive on applications for medical school. Nor does this survey help us find out how honors students today might differ from honors students of the past.

Nonetheless, Tech's honors students are, in general, the proverbial "best and brightest." When compared to the rest of the student body, they are more academically confident, have greater intellectual interests, and are more willing to challenge their accepted values, beliefs, and ideas. They are more financially secure than the average student. They can benefit greatly from the demanding courses offered; however, they may have never developed the study habits needed to succeed in this more academically rigorous university environment. Furthermore, the honors students are far more likely to be loners, less likely to join groups or social organizations. The smaller class sizes and lower student-teacher ratio of honors classes are particularly important and may help support the honors students, especially those unlikely to seek the academic assistance provided by other services or programs at the university. The honors students, however, have the same anxieties and difficulties with coping that the rest of the student body has. Their very presence in the Honors Program may afford the best opportunity for the students to develop friendships and form social bonds while also satisfying the intellectual interests they cannot get in other courses or clubs at the university.

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I would like to thank Norm Pumphrey, Director of Retention and Advising at Louisiana Tech University, for looking over a draft of this article and offering useful suggestions for revision.

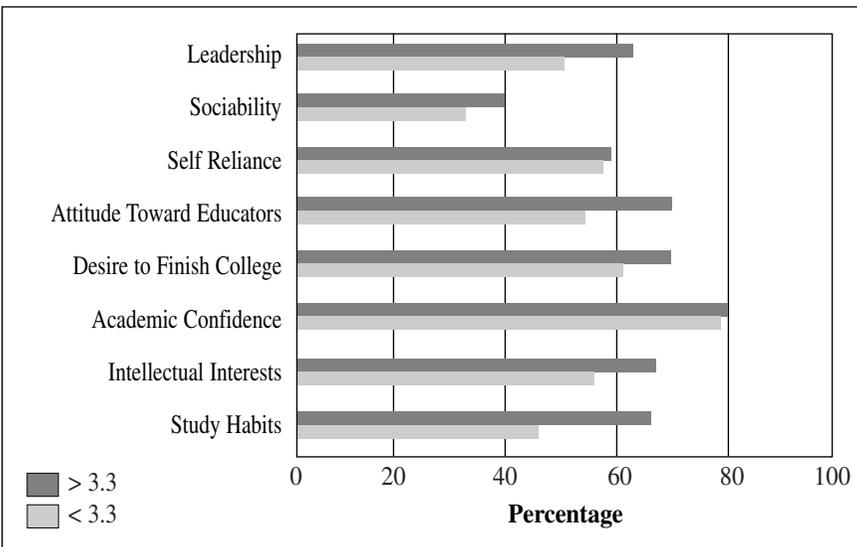
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## APPENDIX

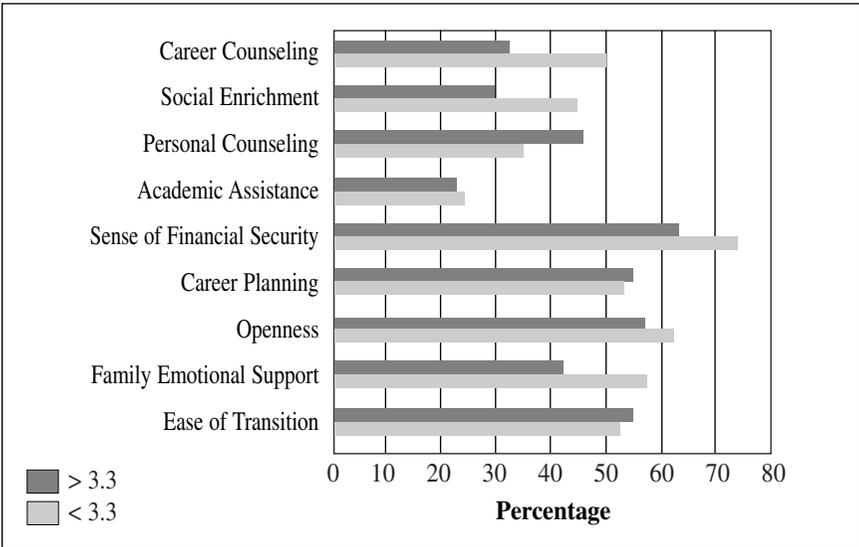
The following graphs provide a comparison, based on the same categories as those in the text, between the freshman honors students who retained a GPA greater than 3.3 and those who fell below that mark after their freshman year. In this case, the students who maintained a 3.3 and stayed in the Honors Program had a higher percentage in every motivational category with a significantly higher percentage in terms of their intellectual interests, (66.6 to 55.2 percent), study habits, (65.6 to 47.9 percent), and attitude toward educators, (68.5 to 54.2 percent).

**Figure 3: Academic and Social Motivations**



On the other hand, those students who succeeded were lower on the scale in categories that measured the student’s desire to seek help or participate in group activities. An unexpected result is the low sense of family emotional support for those with a GPA over 3.3, especially since this factor “has emerged in the validity studies as a strong correlate of attrition, particularly in academically successful students” (AG 18). This result may be an aberration but is an area of concern and for further study.

**Figure 4: General Coping and Receptivity to Support Services**



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JOHN MIHELICH, DEBBIE STORRS, AND PATRICK PELLETT

# **Transformational Experience through Liberation Pedagogy: A Critical Look at Honors Education**

**JOHN MIHELICH, DEBBIE STORRS, AND PATRICK PELLETT**

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

## **ABSTRACT**

**I**n the context of the national debate over the advantages and disadvantages of honors education, we developed a two-semester honors curriculum designed to draw upon the benefits of integrating teaching and research through student participation in an ethnographic research project. This paper recounts the process of the pedagogy and curriculum and discusses some key findings and outcomes of the students' ethnographic study. Liberation pedagogy framed the critical questions addressed in the ethnographic study exploring how students in honors programs make sense of their academic selves and their honors program. We emphasize student-researcher findings concerning status and elitism among honors participants and then reveal how engaging in research helped transform student-researchers' own self understandings. We conclude by arguing that liberation pedagogy through scholarship in discovery can serve as an effective tool to help honors participants construct more democratic ideals of honors programs and higher education in general. More importantly, liberation pedagogy can lead to a transformational educational experience as students engage in discovery and self-reflection.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A central concern of honors programs nationwide is the debate over individual and institutional benefits of honors programs and the inequalities such programs can perpetuate. The many benefits of honors programs are clear. Thriving honors programs enhance the academic reputations of institutions as they enable universities to recruit and retain "more intellectually motivated students to the university" (Pehlke 2003, 28). They also benefit students through unique curricula, small course sizes, innovative pedagogy, and "experimental interaction between faculty and students" (Pehlke 2003, 28).

However, honors programs have been criticized for benefiting only a small portion of students with advanced curricula and pedagogy. In comparing honors and non-honors courses, Barfelts & Delucchi (2003) found significant differences in curricula, interactions, and classroom tasks as students in honors courses experienced more opportunities to develop higher order thinking and reasoning skills. Considering how this differential experience adversely affects non-honors undergraduate education, Pehlke states that “Undergraduate education as a whole cannot afford to be left to the wayside while honors students and faculty focus on advanced forms of study, innovative seminars, and individualized advising that are not typically extended to the greater student body” (2003, 32).

Others have pointed out how the selective admissions policies of honors programs that rely on measures such as grade point averages and standardized testing limit access to honors education and, thus, unintentionally reproduce class and racial inequalities. Sociologists of education have revealed the class bias of standardized measures (Toutkoushian & Curtis 2005) and the contribution standardized testing to a “problematic ethics of access for students of color” (Pehlke 2003, 29). As such, these policies perpetuate class and racial disadvantage and limit the diversity of students as they restrict access to the benefits of honors programs.

In the context of this national debate over the advantages and disadvantages of honors education and whose interest it serves, we developed a two-semester honors curriculum consisting of a fall semester Introduction to Sociology course and a spring Special Topics Research course. Like other scholars, we recognize the benefits of integrating teaching and research through student participation in research projects (see for example Chang 2005; Harding 2002; and Mullin 2000). Taking advantage of the innovative pedagogical possibilities characteristic of honors courses, we designed the curriculum to introduce honors students to sociological methods and analysis and to engage students in an original ethnographic research project. Liberation pedagogy, which questions social hierarchy through asking particular research questions directed toward creating more liberatory and empowering social structures, served as the foundation for the courses in which this research was conducted (Feagin & Hernán 2001). Liberation pedagogy framed the critical questions addressed in the ethnographic study exploring how students in honors programs make sense of their academic selves and their honors program.

This paper recounts the process of the pedagogy and curriculum and discusses some key findings and outcomes of the students’ ethnographic study. We begin by discussing the course and the liberation pedagogy that guided our teaching and methodology and then briefly summarize the student-research

findings consistent with the literature on educational inequalities. We emphasize student-researcher findings concerning status and elitism among honors participants and then reveal how engaging in research helped transform student-researchers' own self-understandings. We conclude by arguing that liberation pedagogy through scholarship in discovery can serve as an effective tool to help honors participants construct more democratic ideals of honors programs and higher education in general. More importantly, liberation pedagogy can lead to a transformational educational experience as students engage in discovery and self-reflection.

## LOOKING CRITICALLY AT HONORS: THE COURSE & METHODS

The students began the research experience in the honors Introduction to Sociology course, which explored sociological theories, methods, and concepts through a primary focus on education. An upper-division honors course convened the next semester to conduct the ethnographic research project applying sociological critical theory to honors education through engaging students in the discovery of research. In this course, student-researchers engaged in an ethnographic study of honors participants' sense-making about honors education.

The research course embraced a "problem-posing" praxis rather than the traditional "banking" educational pedagogy. Freire contrasts the two dichotomous pedagogical approaches:

Banking education (for obvious reasons) attempts, by mythicizing reality, to conceal certain facts which explain the way human beings exist in the world; problem-posing education sets itself the task of demythologizing. Banking education resists dialogue; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality. Banking education treats students as objects of assistance; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers. Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the *intentionality* of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world. . . . Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality. . . (Freire 1970, 83–84)

The problem-posing pedagogy was aligned with liberation pedagogy's commitment to social justice and learner empowerment. Consistent with our field, sociology, key tenets of liberation pedagogy led to "looking beneath the surface" through interpretative and qualitative methods in order to

liberate individuals and challenge multiple forms of domination (Feagin & Hernán 2001). Such tenets shaped the pedagogy, ethnographic methodology, and research questions that engaged student-researchers in the upper-division course.

To help students see the connection between empirical reality and their own personal subjectivity intertwined with larger hegemonic educational ideologies, students studied critical sociological perspectives on education. The faculty encouraged students to look beneath the surface of hegemonic articulations of honors education through ethnographic methods that included participant observation, archival data, and interviews with honors participants.

The student-researchers and faculty members on the research team were all involved as students or teachers in the honors program under study. The team viewed the close involvement and membership in honors as an advantage and also employed “critical autoethnography” (Baker 2001; Defrancisco, Pruin, Kuderer & Chatham-Carpenter 2007) to inform the research. “Critical autoethnography” involves a reflective process in which researchers ask themselves difficult questions about a social environment in which they are members. Student-researchers participated in frank classroom discussions and engaged in reflective journaling to enhance their self-awareness, critical thinking, and learning. In the weekly journal reflections students shared their concerns, ideas, and thoughts about the research process. The use of reflective journaling was also consistent with the symbolic interactionist perspective as it could allow access to students’ internal meaning constructions (Hubbs & Brand 2005). The faculty intended the reflective journal to enhance students’ learning about themselves as student-researchers and the program in which they participated. Students also participated in online discussions with their research teams to discuss data, methodology questions, and any group issues that emerged. Journal entries and online discussions were not graded, but they were an important part of students’ overall participation requirement.

Engaging in educational research in the context of coursework posed concerns because of the power differentials that exist between instructors and students (Beatty & Brew 2004). Faculty recognized this potential for oppressive practices even as they envisioned the pedagogy in this honors course as aligned with emancipatory teaching (Ellsworth 1989). To address this issue, faculty offered students the opportunity to request that their journals entries not be used as data, although all students still were required to engage in journal reflection to assist in understanding and responding to their concerns during the research process. In addition, to clarify that the use of their journal entries as data was separate from the course, the faculty did not evaluate them for content.

The ethnographic project focused on an honors program with 500 members at a land-grant institution in the Northwest. Students conducted participant observation at numerous honors social events and cultural enrichment trips as well as various academic settings such as classes and panel discussions on graduate school. Student-researchers used a non-probability sampling technique called purposive or judgmental sampling in which they selected subjects to interview whom they considered typical of the wider honors-student population at this institution. Student-researchers interviewed other honors participants including thirty-seven honors students and ten administrators and/or faculty who taught in the honors program. In addition, they held a single focus-group discussion with four honors administrators. Interview questions focused on experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of honors courses, faculty, and higher education as well as individuals' educational autobiographies.

Student-researchers tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded interviews for sociological themes and patterns. Other student-researchers cross-reviewed the interview transcripts. They also analyzed and coded fieldnotes for similar themes. Exit surveys collected by the honors program for assessment purposes, honors advisory board members' email dialogues and meeting minutes, and honors program informational website materials were also coded for themes. Student-researcher journal entries were analyzed only by faculty researchers for evidence of a countersystem perspective, an ability to move beyond hegemonic understandings of society in favor of a more critical view (Feagin & Hernán 2001). We employed pseudonyms for the honors students interviewed, including student-researchers, for confidentiality reasons.

## **THE DISCOVERY PROCESS: CONVEYING THE HONORS DISTINCTION**

In the analysis of data, student-researchers discovered that their honors program constructed a distinct status and educational experience for honors students in a variety of ways. The unique academic relationships honors students experienced in high school and college played a central role in this construction process. A close relationship with high school teachers represented a common theme in honors students' educational histories. The majority of interviewees successfully completed several advanced placement classes during high school. Small class sizes and alternative pedagogical methods fostered more frequent interaction between students and their high school teachers. Honors classes in college replicated this experience. Honors professors formed a bridge connecting high school with college and eased the transition between the two by creating a comfortable environment, as Bonnie illustrated when she said, "You can get to know your professor a little more, more

like what I had in high school, more like what I am used to.” Honors students described such experiences as motivational. For example, Annie explained:

They’re just good professors—they’re like the best here. They really want to teach it; it’s just something they really enjoy. They’re excited about it and that’s what gets you excited about it.

Based on these findings, student-researchers concluded that honors students effectively interacted with honors faculty because of their previous educational capital. They recognized honors students’ university experiences provided continuity between college and their previous tracking experiences in advanced placement classes and that the educational process facilitated their cognitive and critical thinking skills in ways not accessible to most non-honors students.

In addition to specialized curricula, small classes, and preferred teachers, the university’s honors program provided its students with other resources including individualized academic advising, scholarships, a rich array of extracurricular events such as concerts, plays, and films, distinguished speakers, social occasions, and cultural enrichment trips to communities in the Pacific Northwest. The honors program also hosted a special convocation graduation ceremony. In conjunction with the special recognition at the university’s general graduation ceremony, these sanctioned activities signaled to students their special status. Student-researchers argued that their evidence suggested honors students’ status of distinction reflected social-class capital rather than simply merit. This conclusion came as no surprise as it was consistent with, and likely shaped by, the critical literature on the sociology of education students read in the course of their research (see, for example, Anyon 1980, Barfels & Delucchi 2000, Costa 1997).

## **IDENTIFYING WITH DISTINCTION: HONORS STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC IDENTITIES**

In addition to the organizational construction of the honors status, student-researchers also explored how the college experience played a key role in the construction of students’ identities (Kaufman & Feldman 2004). Given the cultural context in which students developed a sense of academic identity, students expectedly found that the vast majority (70%) of honors students interviewed felt themselves to be academically elite and deserving of academic privileges. Student-researchers noted that interactions with honors administrators and faculty afforded students opportunities to see themselves in such a light. While the college honors identity had formed relatively recently for honors students, they legitimized this identity and honors privilege through

recalling their academic past. This process of linking the past with the present is characteristic of those engaging in any identity transformation (Berger & Luckmann 1966/1986). Honors students in our study did so through consistently positioning themselves as skilled, curious, and gifted children. At the same time, students often revealed the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital as they discussed their parents' educational credentials. For example, Billy, whose parents earned higher educational credentials, typified the honors students interviewed. His comment revealed his family's educational cultural capital:

My mom went to Berkeley . . . my dad went to Harvard then came back and went to the University of Oregon and got a Masters in math.

Eric described his family in similar ways and connected his current honors status with his early exposure to reading and the transmission of cultural capital:

I got started real early on the whole biology thing and my mom, she's a marine biologist. . . . When I was a kid I went out with her over the summer to her research camps. And as far as reading goes I guess I just got started early and my parents read to me a lot . . .

Another honors student, Kim, explained that "academics have always been important" to her and attributed her academic success to both her parents and her work ethic:

. . . [My parents] are both teachers, so it's always been instilled that you need to get good grades and they haven't been harsh about it at all, they're just very supportive and helped me along the way and so I kind of established my own study habits and my own goals and personal standards.

Seventy-four percent of honors students interviewed had at least one parent with higher-educational credentials. In addition to educated parents, honors students entered the program with other significant advantages stemming from family privilege. The vast majority (90%) of the honors students we interviewed had past experience with special educational camps and/or advanced placement (AP) courses, enhancing their opportunities to develop critical thinking, reading, and language skills.

Honors students' previous academic experiences and successes led most to internalize honors' organizational and faculty expectations and identify themselves as different from "normal" students as Alfie revealed when she stated, ". . . as everybody knows . . . it's the cool thing to be a smart person."

One interviewee, Belinda, unabashedly explained she had participated in her high school honors program because she “. . . was smarter than everybody else.” Honors students’ academic identities directly linked to how others viewed them and their academic successes. Honors students described themselves as “motivated,” “competitive,” “over-achieving,” “determined,” “nerdy,” and “driven.” They discussed the need to live up to others’ expectations of their academic abilities. For example, Jane said that her peers “always labeled me the teacher’s pet and the smart kid,” and she identified herself primarily in terms of her academic abilities and success.

As a result of viewing themselves as academically elite, honors students desired processes that could help distinguish them from others. For example, one honors student, Joseph, was disappointed with the honors program and argued:

. . . it should be considerably more difficult to get into the honors college. This would give the program some prestige and make classroom interaction more even and enjoyable . . .

Joseph encouraged honors administrators to limit the number of incoming freshman in order to increase the prestige of the program. The honors student advisory board, which served as a liaison between the honors program students and administrators, also discussed the issue of admission. The advisory board met regularly to discuss extracurricular events, provide input on the selection of honors classes and seminars, and assist with the Honors Convocation. On several occasions the board discussed the selective nature of the admissions policy and engaged in email discussions concerning admissions following the meeting. In the following email exchange, two honors advisory board members discussed the strategy of raising grade point averages (GPAs) for continued inclusion in the honors program:

Rodney: I know that we will be discussing the GPA thing later, but what is the real reason for it? Are we trying to become a more elite group? Are there too many members and not enough resources? I would think that most anyone that wants to join the honors program should be able to. Think about it, mainly what we do is offer extracurricular activities that are culturally enriching. Honestly, I think the GPA is a tad high just because it does seem to make us an elitist group. What is the real purpose of the honors program? To earn an honors degree, or to shut people out because they don’t learn as well or as fast as everyone else? Thanks

Bob: I disagree with you about the GPA thing. I think the GPA needs to stay high because the honors program is intended for

honors students. There needs to be some criterion for students to fulfill in order to prove that they are honors-worthy. GPA, especially in college-level classes, is a good measure of this. Also, a few of the great things about being in the honors program are that it raises the intellectual bar in classes, the classes are smaller, and honors students receive priority registration. If the honors program became less competitive, then it would be less credible and less beneficial to the members who do qualify.

Rodney: Sure grades are important, and we should not completely drop the GPA requirement, but I think we are focusing on the wrong things. What if the criteria are a mix between grades and involvement? What if the more honors classes you take on average, the lower your GPA needs to be? Why should a 3.3 GPA student that takes a 1 credit honors seminar once a year be allowed in when a 2.9 GPA student that takes multiple honors classes a semester is left out. Think about it.

In this interaction, Rodney questioned the purpose of increasing GPA requirements for honors admission and, in doing so, illustrated his rejection of elitism. Bob took a different tack, arguing in favor of more exclusive acceptance criteria to enhance the value and therefore capital of the honors program and membership. In response, Rodney encouraged a broader consideration of the types of classes that might shape one's grade point average. The contrast in positions between Rodney and Bob reflected what student-researchers found among their honors sample, though more honors students were aligned with Bob's position.

One reason many honors students interviewed favored selective criteria was because it differentiated them from non-honors students in terms of academic abilities, with some even arguing that such abilities were innate. Others went further, arguing that their academic abilities ought to be rewarded with special opportunities that the honors program provided. For example, Tom displayed evidence of elitism in response to being asked how the honors program helped him:

. . . it's shaping a higher echelon of people. They're selective, yes, in their people. That's a good thing because you are making sure the people that want to do it are doing it versus just everybody getting this opportunity.

Opportunities that the honors program provided were salient to the honors students we interviewed. Despite the fact that many honors programs offer a "superior liberal arts education that forces students to stretch" (Lord

1998), two-thirds of the honors students we studied emphasized other outcomes or rewards associated with honors. Edgar was typical of the honors students we interviewed in his utilitarian explanation for why he joined the honors program:

Well . . . the main thing of course was the scholarship; that was the main thing for me. The other thing was the opportunity to sign up early for classes and that . . . ensures that you have the best chance that you can have an expedient education . . .

The majority of honors students interviewed cited their honors membership as important because of honors scholarships, early registration opportunities, career or graduate school mentoring and networking, and other extrinsic rewards. Perhaps because of the benefits of honors membership, the majority of honors students interviewed supported restricting access to the program through heightened eligibility requirements though they used arguments of special skills, status, and abilities to legitimize their positions.

While the vast majority of honors students interviewed embraced the distinctive status and its attributes concerning their academic abilities, some did not. Student-researchers found nearly a third (30%) of honors students interviewed resisted the distinction and its ideology concerning intelligence and academic superiority. For example, Daniel stated:

. . . to be honest the honors program is an arbitrary division. I mean I think there are amazingly bright students outside the honors program, and I think there are not so bright students in the honors program as well.

Another honors member discussed his concern that the honors program facilitated elitism. He argued:

I was a little disappointed in the attitude of superiority present in some of my peers that seemed to be fostered by the program . . . [and I] am concerned about the attitude of intellectual superiority that it seems to foster. On several occasions there was the sentiment that honors students are more intelligent than any non-honors students. I would hate to see the honors program foster the establishment of a class system within the university. If nothing else, sociology or a similar class should be required. In addition, I believe the program should be open to all that personally desire an opportunity for a more rigorous and diverse learning experience and the fact that it looks good on a resume or transcript should be de-emphasized.

Elitist posturing was a common and consistent theme emerging from the data, both among individuals who expressed this attitude and those who questioned the innate abilities that many students believed initially admitted them into the honors program. One individual wondered what could be done to minimize other members' superior and elitist attitudes:

It is the people that most often bother me. Many of them act like they are better than other students because they are honors students. That is the wrong attitude and those are the types of people I choose not to associate with. . . . I cannot think of what you can do to change people's attitudes when it comes to their status on campus. That would not be an easy task. Maybe there isn't anything you can do about it.

In an exit survey, a student echoed similar concerns:

Far too many people in the honors program carry with them an opinion of superiority over others. This can be felt within the program and from the advisors as well and made me not want to be a part of the program.

Another honors student desired “. . . a less elitist, scholarly attitude and activities that attracted a wider variety of people.” In one interview, Amber attempted to distinguish herself from other honors students by referring to other students in the honors program as “honors program people.” Yet another honors student, Alice, noted that some honors students found it difficult to let go of academic status obtained in secondary school. When asked why she did not participate in the honors ice cream socials and other activities exclusively designed for honor students, she replied:

Because, frankly, I don't always like the people that are in the program that participate in everything. . . . [Being valedictorian] is something that you should be proud of, but when you get into something like the honors program and you think that you're special because you were valedictorian in high school, you need to realize that you're in a group of people where you're no longer special for that reason. You're in a group of people, and 5 out of 6 of them are probably going to have relatively the same achievements that you do. It's not like that specific conversation comes up every time you have an interaction with somebody in the honors program, but it's definitely come up enough that I get frustrated and irritated and don't really want to associate with people that are in the program

because I don't feel like you should walk around and think you're so special because of that.

Alice's explanation revealed some contradictions. On the one hand, she rejected the notion of being academically special. This rejection did not stem from an understanding of how social and cultural capital were often linked to academic success. Instead, her rejection focused on the fact that there were other students with equal levels of academic skills, and, thus, honors students should not feel superior to others. Alice was representative of honors students interviewed who, at some level, rejected the bestowal of distinction but who simultaneously continued to embrace ideological assumptions about intelligence.

### **STUDENT-RESEARCHERS' TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCE: THE VALUE OF LIBERATION PEDAGOGY**

As a privileged group of students, honors students benefit from smaller classes, engaging pedagogies that develop higher-order cognitive skills, close relationships with faculty, specialized advising, scholarships, academic honors credentials, and academic distinction. However, people in dominant groups don't escape the negative consequences of privilege though often such group members are unaware of the costs (Johnson 2006). Student-researchers found the vast majority of the peers they interviewed experienced a sense of academic superiority and a focus on the extrinsic rewards associated with their honors membership. They also discussed and noted the societal costs that are incurred through reinforcement of meritocratic beliefs and the unequal distribution of quality education.

One way to minimize such costs is through teaching liberation pedagogy, which encourages students to understand the unequal nature of social relations and to take actions against it (Feagin & Hernán 2001). Liberation pedagogy is informed by Freire (1993), Giroux (1981), and other critical theorists who share the belief that this teaching/learning environment can enhance individuals' understanding of power in society and, as a result, open up new possibilities for social organization. In such a model, people are not "objects or recipients of political and educational projects, but actors in history, able to name their problems and their solutions to transform themselves in the process of changing oppressive circumstances" (Wallerstein & Bernstein 1994, 142.) Engaging students in research and critical self-reflection provides one way to accomplish action and transformation.

Through the course of the research project, faculty and students realized the possibility for student-researchers simply to echo what they thought

faculty wanted to hear. However, aside from establishing a rapport with students and providing, through open and frank exploratory discussion, a safe space for students to express their thoughts, faculty also designed journal assignments to allow for free expression of ideas. Specifically, journal contents were not graded. The researchers were confident that students' journal entries reflected their honest understanding as it developed through the project.

Among other values, journal entries demonstrated an enhanced understanding of equity in the context of honors education. Early on, student-researchers began to explore the link between honors and inequality despite the fact they were members of the program. For example, student-researcher Darlene wrote:

I am just fascinated with this idea of honors. Why do we even have the word and why does it apply to so many domains of social reality? Why do we feel the need to stratify society or to elevate certain members? Further, is a university honors program intended to promote "unusual academic achievement" and urge students to excel in academics? Does the reward give students extra drive to do well in school, or increase their motivation in desire for the label or recognition?

As student-researchers explored issues of elitism, inequality, and attitudes towards learning in their ethnography, they began to question their own participation in the honors program and their academic motivation and learning. As student-researcher Jane noted:

Interviewing is an interesting process to undertake as it makes you think about yourself, whether you would respond in a similar fashion, tons of other things that are important as well that you don't even think to think about!

Students' multiple identities as honors students and researchers required them to engage in self-analysis and reflection, often to their discomfort. Rick jotted the following questions to himself early on in his journal:

Why am I in honors? Get high off of the elitist tones? Enjoy the supposed superiority? Yes; most probably I do. What can I do/how can I make that better?

Student-researchers also critically evaluated how they benefited from the honors system. For example, Holly journaled about the confusion she felt as a result of the inequalities she perceived honors education reproducing. She wrote:

Do I do a directed study under the honors program or not? If I do it under the honors label, I'll be able to keep my scholarship. If I do the directed study under the sociology label, I won't have the scholarship, but I won't be colluding in a program with which I'm coming to have more and more problems with. I'm torn and don't know where to go. The money would be nice . . . and the scholarship would allow me to save more money. The money would be helpful when I graduate to pay off loans, help relocate, etc. but is it worth it? I don't know. I think I might feel guilty about taking the scholarship.

Holly ultimately decided to accept the directed study and scholarship. Although she had qualms about the privileges of her honors membership, she realized that, as a first-generation college student, academic scholarships were her only avenue toward financial security while most other students could count on family assistance. She arrived at some "peace of mind to have this knowledge and understanding" and noted that she was able to "critically look at [her]self and society in an attempt to better it."

Student-researchers, as revealed in their journals, also found the assigned sociology of education literature emotionally disturbing as they saw themselves in the studies they read. Students read a variety of articles on students' orientation towards learning (Holland 1990), student isolation (Evans & Eder 1993), and students' sense-making concerning animal dissections (Solot & Arluke 1997), among other articles that illustrated ethnographic approaches to education. Victoria said she was "surprised to find that the research did actually affect my sense of self." She was particularly taken by an article that explored strategies of identity construction by first-generation students in law school (Granfield 2003). A first-generation college student herself she noted,

I have started to see myself as very much "making it by faking it." I do have a desire to be seen as intelligent and scholarly, but it is mainly out of fear of disappointing others in my life.

She continued to discuss her desire to be accepted particularly by her conservative religious parents, a difficult situation in view of her recent identification as lesbian. She concluded the journal entry with this comment:

I think some people fake it because they want to feel a certain way and accomplish certain things. I, on the other hand, want others to feel a certain way. I really do want to make my parents proud, but I want to be happy too. . . . I know that this long road has just begun, but I know that by doing things like research projects where I reflect and look back at myself and my own life I can really figure out what is going on.

The readings and research participation also prompted students to reflect on their experience and selves in other ways. Some wrote more extensively on the theme of feeling less than sincere with their peers, teachers, and parents about who they were. Johnny, after reading an article on students who were isolated in school (Evans & Eder 1993), discussed his own construction of self:

I try very hard to project a certain sense of my self to the world at large. Part of this is that I am smart, part of it is that I am quirky and unusual. More recently I've seen the quirky/unusual side to be interfering with the smart projection. I'm angered by that but am also too stubborn to give up on the quiriness because I CAN'T be mundane or normal. . . . I'm better off maintaining what friends I have, even though I pretend, rather than risk revealing me—even if I do not become vastly more popular while pretending.

Another student-researcher, Kelli, agreed that honors students were successful, having “made it” because they could “fake it.” However, she noted a slow transition in her own attitudes towards the course and research requirements. She, along with other student-researchers, focused her attention on honors students' orientation towards learning and noted how students varied in their emphasis on learning and external rewards. Like other student-researchers, she found that honors students tended to emphasize either learning, citing the value of a liberal education, or grades, scholarships, and other extrinsic rewards associated with honors membership. Immersed in this analysis, she realized her own shift in attitudes:

The class and this research have forced me to evaluate myself and my motivations. I don't want to be a primarily extrinsically motivated student. I want to possess some of the intrinsic desires to learn that some of our interviewees had. . . . There's so much irony here. We are living what we're researching!

Another student-researcher, J.C., was majoring in engineering, which limited the number and type of electives she could take. Through the research she became more critical of the engineering curriculum, the type of skills it neglected, and the distinction bestowed upon her by her college-student status. She explained:

It has been disturbing to see that my classes keep me from the liberal education that I'd rather work toward. It's been sad to try and jump back into the fun, free-flowing, essay-writing classes when the rest of the classes seem to discourage the use of more than one part of your brain at a time and say “no way”

to communication skills. I realize that I'm lucky to even have the opportunity to be here because not everyone gets the chance nor do I believe that college will make me an "oh so better" person than anyone else.

Paul, a non-traditional student who once was employed in a post office, was reminded through the research how he had emphasized grades often at the expense of expanding his learning. He noted:

Regarding my academic experiences, I would have to say the one thing that has stood out for me over the past three years is to remember to enjoy the journey. I get so focused on grades at times and just jamming and cramming class material in my head that I forget to take advantage of the opportunity that I have to expand my boundaries and intellectual horizons.

In contrast to what he described as the monotony of paid labor, he felt privileged to have the opportunity to pursue his bachelor's degree. In his journal he encouraged himself to:

. . . slow down and remind myself of how fortunate I am. The grades are important, especially for where I want to go from here, but I cannot let them be the only reason I am attending college.

Through the ethnographic research, student-researchers developed a critical perspective on their academic engagement and identities. They came to understand how honors distinction was constructed and conferred through organizational practices and teachers, parents, and other individuals in their lives. They reflected on the social and cultural capital they held as a result of their family and social-class backgrounds and how these shaped their academic opportunities and skills. Ultimately they realized how they and others internalized the honors distinction in their academic identities. Forced to reflect and reconsider who they were as students, honors students began to ask difficult questions of themselves and, in the end, developed a conscious critique of education, honors, intelligence, and the construction of academic differentiation—not to mention how structural inequalities work in general. As a result of the discovery and self-reflection process, student-researchers demonstrated a transformation as students, as selves, and (we hope) as citizens.

Ironically, this transformational experience was made possible in this case study because of the privileges honors students receive through honors programs—the small course sizes, special attention, and innovative curriculum. However, such student discovery and transformation could also occur in non-honors courses, perhaps social-science capstone courses, through similar

ethnographic research opportunities. For example, students could explore student orientation to higher education, its distinctions and assumptions, with reference, for instance, to the principles of a liberal education outlined by William Cronon (1998). Students could also be encouraged to openly discuss and critique the ideals, values and substance of liberal education and reflect upon what it means to them (Mihelich 2005). The case for undergraduate student ethnographic research is based on this experience of students' empowerment through social-science knowledge, application, and self-reflection. Helping students develop their critical and self-reflective capacities as they study the world is a liberating experience for students. We conclude with Holly's testament that reflects this liberation:

I have learned so much about life and how the world works through this research. I feel I can engage in the world and critique it with a critical eye. I feel so much more knowledgeable and wise. . . . I think that once you have had your eyes opened and start to see how the world operates for the first time it becomes impossible to ever put the blinders back on. . . . I still have a long road ahead of me and it seems daunting at times but it is also incredibly exciting.

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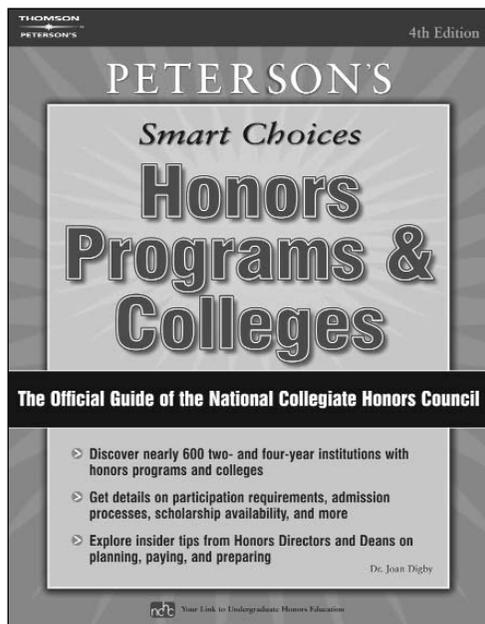












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*Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook* by Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurrier (2005, 98pp). This monograph includes an overview of assessment and evaluation practices and strategies. It explores the process for conducting self-studies and discusses the differences between using consultants and external reviewers. It provides a guide to conducting external reviews along with information about how to become an NCHC-recommended Site Visitor. A dozen appendices provide examples of "best practices."

*Beginning in Honors: A Handbook* by Samuel Schuman (Fourth Edition, 2006, 80pp). Advice on starting a new honors program. Covers budgets, recruiting students and faculty, physical plant, administrative concerns, curriculum design, and descriptions of some model programs.

*A Handbook for Honors Administrators* by Ada Long (1995, 117pp). Everything an honors administrator needs to know including a description of some models of Honors Administration.

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

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

*Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges* by Samuel Schuman (Second Edition, 1999, 53pp). How to implement an honors program, with particular emphasis on colleges with fewer than 3000 students.

*Innovations in Undergraduate Research and Honors Education: Proceedings of the Second Schreyer National Conference* Edited by Josephine M. Carubia and Renata S. Engel (2004 145pp). Essays on the importance of undergraduate research, course models, connections to service learning, and learning strategies that support undergraduate research.

*Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning* edited by Bernice Braid and Ada Long (2000, 104pp). Information and practical advice on the experiential pedagogies developed within NCHC during the past 25 years, using Honors Semesters and City as Text<sup>®</sup> as models, along with suggestions for how to adapt these models to a variety of educational contexts.

*Teaching and Learning in Honors* edited by Cheryl L. Fuiks and Larry Clark (2000, 128 pp). Presents a variety of perspectives on teaching and learning useful to anyone developing new or renovating established honors curricula.

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

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

*NCHC Handbook*. Included are lists of all NCHC members, NCHC Constitution and Bylaws, committees and committee charges, and other useful information.