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JNCHC

JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL

Spring/Summer 2009

Vol. 10, No. 1

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FORUM ON "SOCIAL CLASS AND HONORS"

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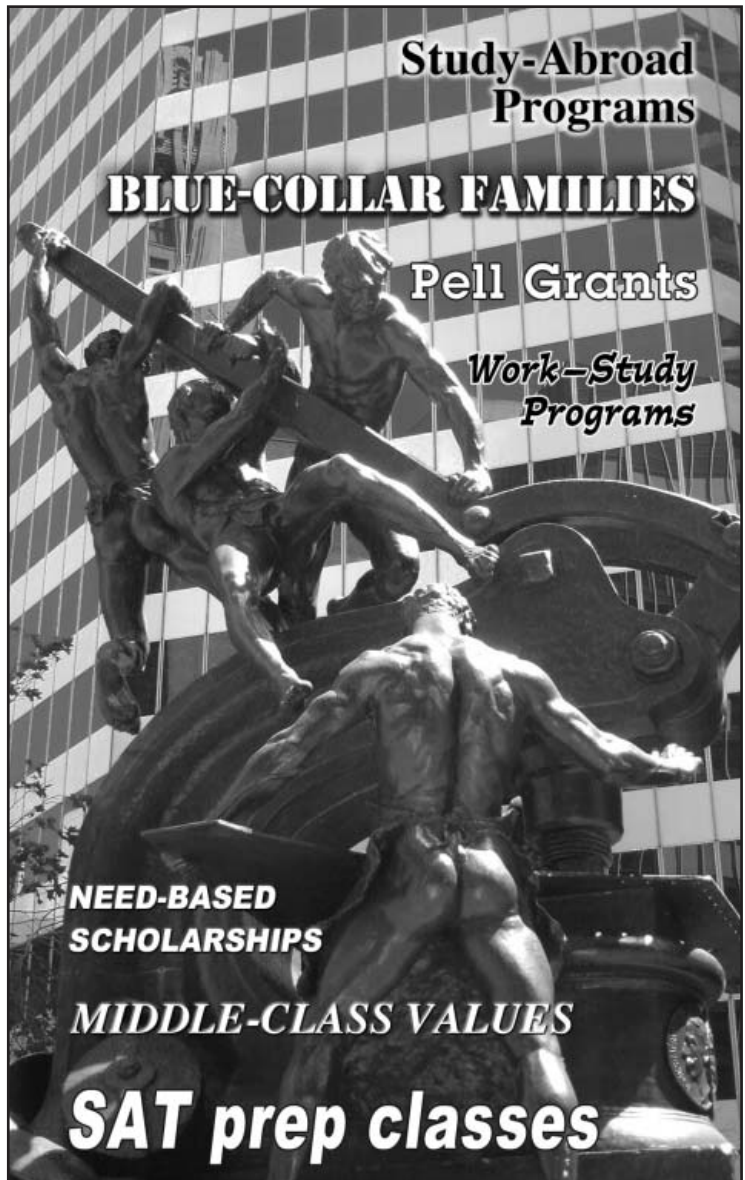
WILLIAM A. ASHTON

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RESEARCH ESSAY

KYLE MCKAY

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JNCHC

**JOURNAL OF THE
NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL**

A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL

SOCIAL CLASS AND 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.

DEADLINES

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Cover image: A monument to the working and supporting classes along Market Street in the heart of San Francisco's Financial District, home to tens-of-thousands of professional and managerial middle class workers each day (<http://commons.wikimedia.org>). A special thanks to Cliff Jefferson for his help with the cover design.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The next issue of *JNCHC* (**deadline: September 1, 2009**) invites research essays on any topic of interest to the honors community.

The issue will also include a Forum focused on the theme “Honors in the Digital Age.” We invite essays of roughly a thousand words that consider this theme in the context of your campus and/or a national context.

Topics for Forum submissions might include: the benefits and liabilities of any specific form of digital technology (word and image processing, the Internet, social networking sites, personal blogs, cell phones and PDAs, etc.); the ease of plagiarism and other forms of cheating in the digital age; the joys and travails of tracking in grading papers; new opportunities and challenges in research; the influence of digital “gizmos” on the culture of honors; technology as a creator and/or disruptor of community; technological innovations/obsolescence and honors program budgets; the effects of technology on library use; computer security issues; and illegal downloading of files on honors program computers.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We accept material by e-mail attachment. We do 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.

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 or, if necessary, 850.927.3776.

DEDICATION



MITCH PRUITT

The managing editor of a journal or monograph typically remains invisible to all but the journal editors. Since readers and authors rarely get to appreciate the work they do, we are especially pleased to honor the outstanding work of Mitch Pruitt and to express our appreciation on behalf of the National Collegiate Honors Council. Dail Mullins and I, as editors of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* and *Honors in Practice*, and Jeffrey A. Portnoy, editor of the NCHC Monograph series, rely entirely on Mitch to make us look good. Mitch is a consummate professional with twenty-five years of experience in marketing, graphics, and other related fields. He worked for major companies like Vulcan Publications and EBSCO Media until 1995, when he started his own company, Wake Up Graphics, LLC, in Hoover, Alabama. With Cliff Jefferson, his trusty sidekick and our production manager at Wake Up Graphics, Mitch started working for NCHC as a favor to us in remembrance of his and our dear friend Jerrald Boswell, who had managed the publication of *JNCHC* from its inception until his death in 2001. Besides his work on *JNCHC*, Mitch has helped us inaugurate *Honors in Practice* in 2005 and to improve and standardize all NCHC monographs. In addition to handling layout, working on cover images, dealing with copyright issues, shuttling proofs back and forth, making endless corrections, working with the printer, shrink-wrapping, addressing, posting, and other mysterious activities, Mitch handles the editors with grace, efficiency, patience, aplomb, and a necessary as well as hilarious sense of humor. He does his work with much more than professionalism; he does it with a real sense of service that he practices in all parts of his life, from co-founding the

Kaleidoscope Foundation for HIV-positive children and their families to volunteering for Birmingham AIDS Outreach and the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs. Other activities include playing the piano, writing, oil painting, and what we folks in the South call scratch-cooking. It is a great pleasure to honor the versatile and indispensable Mitch Pruitt; we send him warm NCHC hugs and gratitude.

Editor's Introduction

ADA LONG

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

EDITORIAL PRELUDE

The Forum that opens this issue of *JNCHC* is devoted to the topic “Social Class and Honors” and appears in the midst of economic and social turmoil unlike any since honors education started gaining momentum in the 1960s. As a prelude to the Forum, the time seems right to exercise some editorial prerogative and address potential implications that the financial meltdown might have for honors programs and colleges.

In his *New York Times* column on Sunday, March 8, 2009, Thomas Freidman argues that 2008 was the beginning of “The Great Disruption” (a phrase invented by Paul Gilding), that 2008 was the year when rampant greed and its inevitable consequence—abuse of the environment—hit the wall. Rather than seeing this crash as a calamity that we will need to find a way out of, Freidman sees it as an awakening to (and from) the unsustainable exorbitance of our former way of life. Our current woes just might signal the beginning of more thoughtful, careful relationships between each other and with the earth.

While the poor and the struggling-to-be-middle-class are suffering the most from this “Great Disruption,” as they always suffer the most from any economic downturn, the rich are whining the loudest and are the least imperiled (except for the Bernie Madoffs). Those of us who are middle-class—whose retirement accounts and houses are now worth half of their value before 2008—are frightened but still, for the most part, comfortable, at least for the time being. The amount of noise and anguish coming from America’s different social classes seems to be in inverse proportion to the danger each class is facing.

National Public Radio aired a talk show on Wednesday, March 4, 2009, focused on the impact of the economic downturn on young people. The callers were almost exclusively from the bottom-of-the-comfort-zone class, children who were trying to get jobs to help their parents make ends meet, parents who could no longer afford to send their children to college. All of the callers had cut back on the kinds of food and clothes they bought, often to a meager level that would have been unimaginable a year earlier. What surprised me was that every single caller had found benefit in this turn of events.

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Families that had been driven by individual desires for more goods and services, for more stuff, suddenly were becoming families of mutual cooperation, families whose members were all cutting back on spending, trying to help each other make it through rough times, discovering their collective resources rather than pursuing their individual wants. These families were discovering their reliance on each other, their love of each other.

While the economic and political pundits are identifying an inability or refusal to spend as the culprit of the downturn, maybe this drop in spending is a hopeful sign of a saner future. Maybe it is our chance to escape from addiction to “stuff” and to discover our responsibility to each other, both within and beyond families. Maybe the economic engine that has been driving us will stop using up so many of the earth's resources and stop spewing out so much of the pollution that is destroying us.

Before the current economic crisis, several commentators noted—based on surveys and polls—that members of the working and middle classes aspired to the upper class and thus voted for candidates and policies that privileged the wealthy. In my perception, these same not-now and never-likely-to-be members of the upper classes have suddenly grown angry at the rich people they used to envy, grown more aware and resentful of their privileges, more skeptical of their right to have these privileges, and less tolerant of the structures and policies that gave them the privileges.

Although the current economic crisis has had fearful consequences for higher education—shrinking endowments, sliced budgets, layoffs, furloughs, and staff reductions—an example of perhaps more welcome effects might be reassessment of salary differentials. Like CEOs and Wall Street bigwigs, college presidents have increasingly measured their worth and taken pride in bigger and bigger salaries, increasingly out of line with the more static level of faculty salaries. Now many of them are taking voluntary pay cuts and are declining some of the more opulent perks that had become part of the higher-administration culture. What used to be a source of pride has now become a source of embarrassment or even shame. The financial aspirations of the middle class have lost some of their exuberance and are tempered by increased discomfort with privilege.

Honors administrators might now consider how such cultural shifts, combined with their own shrinking budgets, can have positive as well as negative effects on their programs. As Norm Weiner argues, honors programs are a middle-class phenomenon: “We tend to be middle-class educators presenting middle-class values to our students so that they can succeed in a middle-class society.” Honors may have been moving, along with the rest of the middle class, toward a culture of privileges and perks, toward fancy banquets, honors paraphernalia, expensive trips, and lavish merit

scholarships for students with no financial need. Now may be a time to go back to our roots, to value conservation and community, to refocus on students and teachers learning together and helping each other. It may be a time to consider new ways to offer help beyond honors by, for instance, deploying our students in struggling elementary, middle, and high schools, as Bernice Braid suggests in her Forum essay, in order to help these students attain privileges we enjoy in honors.

Our culture is changing suddenly and dramatically, and those of us who are in positions of relative privilege—among whom I count all honors administrators, teachers, and students—need to be sure we deserve them and use them wisely for the benefit not just of individuals but of higher cultural values. As we inevitably complain loudly about our shrinking budgets, we can also quietly go about the business of rediscovering our collective resources, exercising mutual cooperation, and reaching out to help our broader communities. Several of the essays in the Forum on Social Class and Honors point the way toward these goals.

FORUM ON “SOCIAL CLASS AND HONORS”

In soliciting submissions to a Forum on Social Class and Honors, we distributed the following Call for Papers to the NCHC membership:

We invite essays of roughly a thousand words that consider this theme in the context of your campus and/or a national context. Questions to consider might include: Do honors programs reflect the diversity in social class of their home institutions? Should they? Do honors programs reflect America’s social hierarchy? Should they? Is a focus on issues of social class important in the honors classroom and curriculum? Are honors programs designed to provide upward mobility, and, if so, is that a worthy goal? Is diversity in social class a benefit to honors, and should it be a goal in admissions? Do honors admissions criteria implicitly discriminate against lower- or working-class students? How does the relationship between social class and race affect honors programs? How do differences in social class affect the extracurricular life, residential living, or service components of honors programs? Do scholarship programs in honors exacerbate or ameliorate differences in social class? Do study abroad programs increase discrimination based on social class? How do service learning programs help and/or hinder awareness of class issues?

Included with the Call for Papers was a lead essay by Norm Weiner of the State University of New York at Oswego and an indication that

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

“Contributions to the Forum may respond to this essay or take an independent approach.”

Norm Weiner's essay—“Honors is Elitist, and What's Wrong with That?”—offers a sociological perspective on social classes and defines the evolution of honors into a middle-class phenomenon, hence the absence of university-wide honors programs at Ivy League schools. Weiner argues that honors is not elitist if what is meant by that term is a sense of entitlement, but he suggests that it is elitist in offering middle-class students a boost up the social ladder so that they might share some of the opportunities and privileges of more socially advantaged students. This latter definition of “elitism” is one that Weiner is happy to accept and embrace.

The subsequent submissions to the Forum, most of which respond directly or indirectly to Weiner's essay, fall into two groups. The first group of four essays addresses the idea of honors as a means to give students a boost up the social ladder. The second group of six essays focuses on the issue of elitism in honors: whether it is justified and/or how it relates to class stratification.

Anmarie Guzy of the University of South Alabama provides a personal narrative about climbing the social ladder in “A Blue-Collar Honors Story.” Her history in academia and beyond is an exemplum of precisely the kind of upward social mobility that Norm Weiner defines as a function of honors. Her intellectual talents, which were countercultural in her financially challenged, blue-collar background, landed her a spot in an honors program that changed her life. Now a tenured associate professor of English and honors teacher, she can help academically gifted working-class students as her honors professors helped her. Although she often feels socially isolated from her typically middle-class colleagues, she has advantages far beyond those of her parents and is grateful to have climbed up the social and economic ladder through the mediation of honors.

Linda Frost, like Guzy, left home in her climb up the ladder, but she works with many students who feel committed to their community and are likely to make it their permanent home. In “Class, Honors, and Eastern Kentucky: Why We Still Need to Try to Change the World,” Frost describes her experience as the new honors director at Eastern Kentucky University, which serves one of the poorest regions in Kentucky and the nation. Students in the honors program face economic, social, and cultural obstacles to moving up the social ladder at the same time that they feel responsibility and loyalty to their region. Frost is learning from her students that her honors program, like them, needs to “improve what we do while remaining who we are.” While she agrees with Weiner that honors needs to help individual students climb the ladder, she also feels—unlike Weiner—that honors can and

should try to change their world by reaching out and helping the communities that these students do and will always call home.

Charlotte Pressler picks up on Weiner's discussion of the cultural attributes that upper-class children take for granted and that other children, if they wish to climb the social ladder, must acquire. In "The Two-Year College Honors Program and the Forbidden Topics of Class and Cultural Capital," Pressler provides an interesting theoretical context for considering issues of cultural capital, socialization, and student engagement. She then describes some of the ways that South Florida Community College—which enrolls primarily rural, first-generation, lower-income students—tries to provide the cultural capital that students need in order to advance their careers and broaden their opportunities.

In "On Class and *Class*," Joan Digby describes her honors students at the C. W. Post Campus of Long Island University as struggling—much like Guzy's, Frost's, and Pressler's students and like honors students across the country—to achieve a comfortable middle-class status. Their parents, often working-class, push them to achieve useful educations that will land them stable jobs in salaried positions. Parents often see these students as "cash cows," their stake in a financially viable future for their families. The challenge for honors, writes Digby, is to give these students more than a shot at higher-class status and to give them also *class*, a grounding in the arts and the intellect and—in Digby's inimitable phrase—"a vision beyond the mall."

The first of six essays that focus on elitism in honors is "To the Charge of 'Honors is Elitist,'" on Advice of Counsel We Plead 'Guilty as Charged'" by Robert Spurrier. While agreeing with Weiner that social mobility is an important function of honors, Spurrier also delivers unashamed praise of elitism as a worthy goal even, or perhaps especially, at a land-grant institution such as Oklahoma State University, where the mandate is to educate "the industrial classes." Spurrier sees no more reason to apologize for elitism in an honors program than in an athletic team or a surgical staff. Academically gifted and motivated students, he argues, are worthy of special attention as much as underprepared students, and no honors director should shy away from charges of elitism.

Anne N. Rinn of University of Houston-Downtown and Craig T. Cobane of Western Kentucky University also stand up for elitism in "Elitism Misunderstood: In Defense of Equal Opportunity." In an argument similar to Spurrier's, they defend special educational programs for intellectually advanced students because all students should receive an education appropriate to their needs. Since students with IQs in the lowest 2% receive special help, the authors suggest that students with IQs in the top 2% should also benefit from special programs. While acknowledging that the pre-college

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

public-school system under-identifies poor, minority, rural, and non-English-speaking students for gifted programs, Rinn and Cobane contend that honors at the college level is not exclusionary or elitist but is rather a form of equal opportunity for intellectually gifted students.

The following two essays present a different perspective on elitism, suggesting that inequalities at the pre-college level often lead to discrimination against lower-income students in honors at the college level and thus to an elitism of privilege rather than merit. In "Dealing with Subjective and Objective Issues in Honors Education," Michael Giazzoni and Nathan Hilberg see a serious problem with quantitative criteria for admission to honors programs since such measurements are biased by special advantages of affluence, including test-preparation programs and private tutoring. The authors describe the honors college at the University of Pittsburgh, which is based on participation rather than measurement and which takes careful steps to ensure the possibility of access for lower-income or disadvantaged students who show signs of the curiosity and love of learning that the honors college values. Their essay includes suggestions of ways to provide such access.

Lisa DeFrank-Cole, Rose Cole, and Keith Garbutt suggest another possible form of discrimination against lower-income students in "Does Broad-Based Merit Aid Affect Socioeconomic Diversity in Honors?" The authors describe the impact of West Virginia's merit-based PROMISE Scholarship program on socioeconomic diversity in the West Virginia University Honors College. In line with published research on broad-based merit scholarship programs, their data show that, as the eligibility requirements for PROMISE scholarships went up, the number of lower-income students in the honors college went down. Numerous states now award merit-based scholarships, and similar studies at other honors programs and colleges would help determine if discrimination against lower-income students is a consequence of state-sponsored merit-based scholarship programs.

In "Honors Needs Diversity More than the Diverse Need Honors," William A. Ashton, of York College, City University of New York, makes the important point that honors programs may have more to gain from the participation of lower-income students than these students do. The plurality of voices, insights, and perspectives provided by honors students from all socioeconomic backgrounds is an essential benefit to honors education whereas students who are struggling financially can risk putting themselves and their GPAs in jeopardy by joining an honors program. Honors administrators and faculty would do well to be alert to this imbalance of benefits.

The Forum concludes with "Honors and Class," an essay by Bernice Braid of Long Island University-Brooklyn. Based on her experience, wisdom, and close reading of Peter Sacks, Braid offers an argument that honors

can too easily be a contributor to social stratification, privileging the privileged, when it has the means and opportunity to work toward a more democratic educational system in the United States. In particular, she suggests ways to translate effective honors pedagogies into educational and social benefits for students in elementary, middle, and high schools, the aim being to create a pipeline for lower-income students into higher education and thus to become part of the solution rather than a contributor to the problem of unequal access.

RESEARCH ESSAY

The issue of unequal access, which is the focal point of many arguments that honors is elitist, usually centers on the ACT and SAT as potentially (or actually) discriminatory criteria for admission to an honors program or college. Two of the essays in the Forum—“Dealing with Subjective and Objective Issues in Honors Education” and “Does Broad-Based Merit Aid Affect Socioeconomic Diversity in Honors?”—argue that national test scores reflect a bias in favor of advantaged students and against lower-income students. A significant question throughout the history of honors has been whether the predictive value of the ACT and SAT for success in honors counterbalances any discriminatory bias in the tests. “Predicting Retention in Honors Programs,” a research essay by Kyle McKay, presents new evidence that the answer is “no.”

Kyle McKay provides data in support of previous research indicating that the SAT is not a predictor of success in honors. Based on his study of over a thousand students who entered the University of North Florida Honors Program over a four-year period (2002–2005), he shows—using a logit regression methodology—that the high school GPA is a strong indicator of program completion while the SAT has no predictive significance. McKay then suggests that further research in SAT- and GPA-related studies needs to be done regarding gender and ethnicity. In light of the Forum, further income-related studies in honors would also be useful. We hope that future issues of JNCHC will bring us further research such as McKay’s that can help honors administrators examine and re-examine their admissions criteria and all the policies and procedures of their programs and colleges.

**Forum on
“Social Class and Honors”**

Honors is Elitist, and What's Wrong with That?

NORM WEINER

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT OSWEGO

A few years ago, an honors colleague from a state university was attending a conference in his discipline and at lunch one day sat next to a professor from Yale. They began chatting, and the Yale professor asked, "What do you teach students in an honors program?" The honors director replied, "I teach my students how to protect themselves from your students." Although this story may be apocryphal—and I hope it isn't—it suggests that issues of social class permeate honors education.

Like many other concepts in the sociological literature, *social class* is easier to discuss than to define. Nonetheless, define it we must in order to have some common ground for discussing it and for explaining it to our students. A quick scan of basic textbooks, those defenders of sociology's virtues, gives us a definition something like this: "A social class is a group of people [in sociology, it's always safe to start this way] who share the same level of income and education and therefore share roughly the same norms, values, and lifestyle." To be perfectly clear about this, sociologists aren't saying that all people with the same income and education—say, high school English teachers—believe and act in lockstep ways. We understand and recognize the powerful effects of geography, upbringing, religion, personal choice, and the like. We are, however, saying that different incomes, values, and attitudes lead people to pursue different levels and types of education. In turn, different levels and types of education lead people to different levels of income and different lifestyles. Generally, more education is likely to lead to a job that doesn't require heavy lifting and hence to higher income and to a lifestyle with more leisure time and discretionary funds.

So how many social classes are there in the United States? To get any sort of realistic answer, sociologists have two tasks. First, we need to understand how people see themselves and others, so we ask them, "What social class are you in? What social class is your neighbor in? What are the social classes in your town?" Then we take the answers and see how they break down. Does the schoolteacher see the dentist as being in the same or a different social class? Does the sanitation worker see the teacher and the dentist occupying the same class? Unfortunately for social scientists, quantifying human behavior is

HONORS IS ELITIST, AND WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?

notoriously difficult, so the disagreements begin. A few sociologists see only three social classes—lower, middle, and upper—but most agree that this schema is too crude and doesn't capture significant value differences within each class. Hence, some sociologists posit six classes—lower lower, upper lower, lower middle, and so on—and some suggest nine—lower lower, middle lower, upper lower, and the like.

Such attempts to define social class are complicated by several other factors. First, a basic American value is equality. Although most Americans acknowledge the idea of social class, it is anathema to them. We see the United States as “a classless society,” by which I suppose we mean that we are not class-bound, like England or China, and that a person can start out as a penniless immigrant and become a millionaire—or at least a teacher. Second, Americans value individualism. We are loath to have our perceived individualism analyzed away, to see ourselves lumped with lots of others into a group. Yet, paradoxically, when sociologists ask Americans what social class they belong to, most say the middle class. Americans are uncomfortable identifying themselves as either too poor or too rich—although the latter has begun to lose whatever stigmas it carried throughout most of our history.

What does all this have to do with honors? I suggest that honors education is bound by the same issues of social class that challenge the rest of American society and that, in fact, honors education today is very much a response to these challenges.

In her monograph *Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices*, Anmarie Guzy offers us a brief yet excellent history of honors education. In its modern incarnation, honors education seems to have had upper-class, elite origins. According to Guzy, Frank Aydelotte, whom most students of honors education regard as its contemporary founding father, was impressed with the Oxford and Cambridge system of pass-honors. (Anne N. Rinn has also written about the influence of Aydelotte on honors education in “Rhodes Scholarships, Frank Aydelotte, and Collegiate Honors Education,” 2003.) Aydelotte brought his ideas to Swarthmore, where he served as president, and then to Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study, which he directed from 1939 to 1947. He encouraged the creation of courses in which students would be required to develop what we today call critical thinking skills (Guzy, 2003).

Guzy notes that, “in the late 1930s, [Aydelotte] undertook an ambitious survey of honors programs at 130 colleges and universities.” As a result of this survey, in 1944 he made “his most important contribution to honors education, . . . when he published the first book devoted entirely to honors programs, *Breaking the Academic Lockstep: The Development of Honors Work in American Colleges and Universities*” (Guzy, p. 18). Immediately the cries

of elitism began. Aydelotte responded, “The most persistent objection to this breaking of the academic lock step, to giving abler students harder work, is our academic interpretation or misinterpretation of the idea of democracy. If all men are born free and equal, why should some be given a better education than others? The word ‘better’ begs the question. The best education for any individual is that which will develop his powers to the utmost and best fit him to realize his own ideal of the good life” (Aydelotte, 1944, p. 128; quoted in Guzy, p. 19). Ironically, as Guzy points out, “these early programs were usually located in small, private East Coast colleges” (p. 19), themselves hardly bastions of democracy and equality.

Honors education went into a decline during World War II but came back even stronger in the 1950s, building on the work of Joseph Cohen, who had brought honors education to the University of Colorado in 1928. Guzy writes, “The launch of Sputnik in 1956 fostered a resurgence of interest in honors education as Cold War concerns caused Americans to rethink their positions on ‘elitist’ education in relation to preparation for competition with other countries” (pp. 19–20). Institutions began to “look to their honors programs not only as development centers for challenging, stimulating curricula but also as recruitment tools for exceptional students and faculty alike” (p. 21). By the twenty-first century, many people had come to see honors education as a way to bring “ivy league education to state universities” or to small private (often religious-based) colleges. Tellingly, no ivy-league school has a university-wide honors program today. Honors has moved from its upper-class, elite origins to a decidedly middle-class footing.

As we see, from its earliest days honors education has often been disparaged as “elitist.” The charge is still common today; it may be one of the first negative remarks that a new honors director hears or that gets leveled when a new honors program is proposed: “An honors program? Isn’t that elitist?!” Perhaps. It all depends on what we mean by “elite” and “elitist.”

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edition), *elite* is defined as “the choice part or flower (of society, or of any body or class or persons)” —in other words, the best. It seems hardly a cause for alarm that we want the best of our students in an honors program. Even the OED’s definition of *elitism* seems innocuous: “Advocacy of or reliance on the leadership and dominance of an *elite* (in a society, or in any body or class of persons.)”

Yet let us admit that this definition of elitism is not what most of us think of when we hear the word. Perhaps our more contemporary, American sense of it is better conveyed by the definition in the *American Heritage Dictionary* (First Edition): “1. The belief that certain persons or members of certain classes or groups deserve favored treatment by virtue of their perceived superiority, as in intellect, social status, or financial resources. 2a. The sense of

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entitlement enjoyed by such a group or class. b. Control, rule, or domination by such a group or class.” What these definitions suggest but never state is that elitism is in the eye of the beholder. Elitism isn’t objective, isn’t simply about being the best or selecting the best in some field, whether college students or football players. It’s subjective; it’s about some people believing that those selected for a benefit or exclusive opportunity feel superior to them, that those selected feel entitled. This sense of entitlement certainly arises sometimes—Donald Trump comes to mind—but my experience and observation tell me that most honors students do not feel this way; they feel damn lucky to have the advantages that an honors education brings them.

Nor do most honors educators feel a sense of entitlement. We see honors education as a way to bring benefits like smaller classes and a higher level of intellectual challenge to the best students at our institutions. Does this make honors education elite? Well, by every definition I can find, yes it does. Selecting the “choice part or flower [I love that word]” of our students? That’s what honors education is about.

In sociological analysis, we try to look at the functions a social phenomenon performs for the individuals involved, for the groups they belong to, for other groups, and for society as a whole. Typically we distinguish between manifest functions—the intended or obvious functions—and latent functions—the unintended or largely unseen functions. Exposing people to information and ideas is a manifest function of education. Putting people of the same economic range and educational level in a common mating arena could be seen as a latent function of education.

The manifest functions of honors education are at the center of our honors belief system, at the heart of our public relations: to provide quality education to our students, provide them with intellectual challenge, stimulate their thinking, make them more community-conscious and globally aware, present them with study opportunities that they might not have otherwise—the list goes on. These are good and noble goals. Yet let us admit that the desirability of these goals is already taken for granted among the upper classes. Children of the upper classes rarely have to question the value of such goals, which they inherit as part of their birthright and take for granted; thus, the colleges and universities they attend do not need to offer honors programs to ensure that their students pursue the goals. As for most of the poorest among us, they see these goals as simply beyond their grasp.

Why offer these goals to our students? Because at some level, most of us involved in honors education understand that successfully reaching these goals will help our students—our clients, so to speak—move up the social ladder, will make them more attractive to employers and to graduate schools. We tend to be middle-class educators presenting middle-class values to our

students so that they can succeed in a middle-class society. As a result, honors programs tend to thrive at state schools or at small, religious-based institutions. The Ivies don't have university-wide honors programs because they don't need them. Helping our students climb the class ladder is an important latent function of honors education. So is helping our students realize how smart and talented they are despite their society's assumption that the more something costs the better it must be. So is encouraging them to develop their own ideas and explore means of living up to and benefiting from their full potential.

As members of American society, our students and their families have learned to believe in American values: equality, hard work, success, individualism. Our students are often the first in their families to go to college, and they believe that hard work can lead to success, *should* lead to success, both financial and professional. College is a step up the social ladder. As honors educators, we understand this belief. We also recognize that, while our students may be highly motivated and talented, they often lack the habits and graces that will make their move to the middle class (and upward) easier. So another latent function of honors education may be to polish some of our students' rough edges, however subtly.

Honors programs have other functions. Our schools typically see honors education as a recruiting tool, as a way to attract the best students to an institution they might otherwise overlook. I remember having a conversation with a colleague at a large state university about recruiting: "Of course," I said, "I'm not looking to attract students who got offers from Harvard"; "Well, I am," she replied. While many honors directors might not see social mobility as a manifest function of honors education, I suspect that many of our students do. They recognize the benefits that honors education gives them as they present themselves to the world. As our colleague Joan Digby wrote recently, our students are often "extremely sensitive to where their families stand in the social hierarchy. A good percentage are first-generation college students, and many have been pushed by their families to achieve the highest possible credentials as a matter of pride. The students' . . . parents see an honors [degree] as a credential that will raise the status of the student" (Digby, 2008).

A society's social institutions always reflect and reinforce its values. The values of American society focus on achieving—and ascending within—middle-class status. We should not be surprised then that much if not most of what we do in honors education is in service to this goal. As honors educators we select what we hope are the best students and offer them (and their families) the opportunity and the tools to better themselves, to improve their resumé's, to acquire an education and outlook that will help them solidify and

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enhance their middle-class status. Honors then is, perhaps paradoxically, both elite and middle-class.

While I suspect that most honors educators believe that the benefits we offer—the smaller classes, the intellectual challenge—should be offered to every college student, the reality is that they aren't. Honors programs are by definition selective. As educators, most of us have learned that we cannot change the world—or even our society. We can, however, help make the lives of our own students better. Let us admit that honors students are among the best at our institutions—the elite. If it is elitist to try to improve the lives of these students, then honors education is indeed elitist. And what's wrong with that?

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A Blue-Collar Honors Story

ANNMARIE GUZY

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

*Well, I guess I was wrong
I just don't belong
But then, I've been there before
Everything's all right
I'll just say goodnight
And I'll show myself to the door
Hey, I didn't mean
To cause a big scene
Just give me an hour and then
Well, I'll be as high
As that ivory tower
That you're livin' in*

—Garth Brooks, “Friends in Low Places”

In “Honors is Elitist, and What’s Wrong with That?” Norm Weiner contemplates definitions and perceptions of elitism, looking specifically at the intersection of academic elitism and socioeconomic elitism in honors education and arguing that honors programs at state schools or smaller private schools are successful at assisting students who are intellectually gifted but economically disadvantaged to “step up the social ladder” toward middle-class careers and values. My own personal and educational experiences exemplify this sentiment, and I sometimes feel as if I could be the poster child for socioeconomic ascendance through honors education—except for the fact that, despite the improvement in my financial standing and job security, I still feel like a blue-collar imposter in white-collar academia.

A descendant of Polish immigrant grandparents, I was born and raised in Granite City, Illinois, a steel-mill town located ten miles northeast of St. Louis, Missouri. My mother, the youngest of five children, graduated from high school in 1954 and started a career in accounts payable, and my father, the youngest of four, left high school one class shy of graduation in 1952, later earning his GED, and worked at various meatpacking and manufacturing plants around the St. Louis area. Only two of their siblings attended college; in fact, my mother’s oldest brother advised his children that college was a waste of both time and money. I am the only person in my immediate

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family to have completed a college degree, and I am the first person in my extended family to have earned a Ph.D.

Throughout my elementary and secondary school years, I was neither conventionally pretty nor athletically skilled, traits highly valued in our small-town culture, but I demonstrated strong academic talents. Having begun elementary school in the 1970s at the nascence of the contemporary gifted education movement, I was routinely challenged intellectually through gifted-program activities, special individual projects, and cross-programming, in which I studied language arts with the next grade up (because of my intense introversion, my mother refused to let the school double promote me). In my junior high and high school honors programs, I excelled academically, maintaining a 5.5 GPA by taking advanced 6-point A core courses, scoring in the 98th percentile on the PSAT, and getting a 31 on the ACT. In theory, my educational future was filled with possibilities, but in reality my family's financial situation dictated some difficult decisions. When I was in high school, my father was laid off from a factory job and was trying to support a family of four on minimum wage as a security guard in East St. Louis, and my mother had stopped working after my younger sister and I were born. While many of my classmates enjoyed access to cars, expensive clothing, trips to Europe, and so forth, my family almost had to sell our house because we needed to pay for utilities and food. During my junior year, however, my mother resolved to go back to work so that she could help pay for me to go to college. Even though I elected to work in the guidance office during my study-hall period, the counselors themselves provided me precious little information or advice about scholarships and grant programs; add that to my extended family's limited experience with college, and my parents and I felt we were on our own regarding college tuition.

Fortunately, while researching programs in my prospective communications major, I found a respected, accredited degree program in mass communications at a local public institution, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, which my high school mathematics department chair uncharitably called "the high school up the road." SIUE's Presidential Scholars Program combined participation in the university honors program with a full scholarship and an assigned honors mentor. When my program application made it to the semifinalist interview stage, my mother's sister helped me buy a new outfit, and their other brother let us borrow his car so that we could drive up to the campus. The day I received my honors acceptance letter still ranks as one of the happiest days of my life.

In addition to alleviating the financial burden my college education would have imposed on my family, my undergraduate honors program provided other equally valuable opportunities I might not have had otherwise.

The honors dean gave me a student work job in the program office, and my honors mentor always had an open door and an understanding ear for me, such as during the summer between my freshman and sophomore years when my father was diagnosed with cancer. The department chair assisted me in crafting my resumé and securing an internship with a top advertising agency in St. Louis, and after I completed my bachelor's degree, an honors English professor helped me return to SIUE for a master's degree and guided me through assistantship applications, first for the school's literary studies journal and then for a teaching assistantship, during which I worked with the writing program administrator and the honors director in designing and teaching a new honors freshman composition course.

Throughout my undergraduate degree, I worked hard at my honors studies, maintaining a 3.79 undergraduate GPA while working a student job and commuting from home, where I was responsible for most household chores while my mother was at work and my father was in and out of the hospital with various cancer-related surgeries and treatments. While I was completing my master's degree, my father passed away, and my honors English professor, with whom I was taking a summer graduate seminar and whose own father had died from colon cancer as well, let me sit in the room with my head down on the desk because I needed to be out of the house. This professor also helped me transform my resumé into a *curriculum vitae* and apply for out-of-state Ph.D. programs, stating that I was the only person he knew whose standard of living would actually improve by moving away to graduate school and having only myself to take care of for a change.

Sixteen years later, I am a tenured associate professor of English and an active member of various national organizations, so I could be considered a successful example of Norm's claim that honors programs help students move up the socioeconomic ladder. Professionally and financially, I am certainly better off than my parents were, but personally, emotionally, on a day-to-day basis, I still frequently feel that I am an outsider. Granted, some of this has nothing to do with social class: for example, I am a liberal, Catholic-raised, midwestern Democrat who lives deep in conservative, evangelical Republican territory. When I travel back home to Illinois, however, my younger sister, who dropped out of college after I moved out of state and is currently working in the auditing department of a large commercial bank in St. Louis, admonishes me not to throw around my professorial vocabulary; in fact, she would probably admonish me for using the word *admonish*. Back at work, I joke that I should not be allowed around money or budgets because (1) I'm an English professor and therefore should not attempt to do math and (2) I have no money of my own with which to practice. The reality is that I grew up in a household that had no investments, no stocks or retirement

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accounts, but rather worried about keeping the lights on and putting food on the table. When my colleagues complain about the state of their 403(b)s or their stock portfolios in the current economy, I tell them that they can cry to me after they've used food stamps and eaten government cheese and powdered milk as I did in high school (perhaps my working-class bluntness is one of Norm's "rough edges" that survived the honors program's latent middle-class polishing).

As an academic with blue-collar roots, I resent the assumption that intellectual achievement is inherently intertwined with access to financial resources that provide private school education and other academic benefits associated with personal wealth, such as the opportunity to travel internationally, to hire private tutors, to participate in expensive summer camp programs, and the like. One of the reasons I support honors education so strongly is that I believe honors programs provide a challenging educational environment for academically talented and motivated students who, for a variety of personal and financial reasons, choose to attend a community college, a small liberal arts school, or a regional public university rather than an ivy or a large Research One university. Over the past three years, for instance, I have taught two honors students who scored 36 on the ACT, and even their own honors classmates sometimes question their choices to attend our school. Granted, honors program admission is based on a student's academic performance and potential, not on financial need; other financial aid options are available, and a continuing debate in the honors community concerns the benefits and detriments of attaching scholarship money to honors program participation. Honors programs are constituted of students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, and some have been more privileged or sheltered than others. I admit, though, that deep down, I'm a bit envious of my students who don't have to work, of those whose parents pay for housing or allow them to live at home without being responsible for any chores except homework.

On the other hand, for the honors students who do have to work or have serious family responsibilities in addition to attending to their studies, I have tried to be the resource that I found my own honors professors to be. Students often comment that I am one of their most accessible professors, that I lack the pomposity or arrogance with which some professors treat them. One graduate student said that I was the only professor who spoke to the graduate assistants as if they were human beings, and I wondered if it was because I was more sensitive to code-switching between my personal and professional lives or if I was simply never interested in developing the persona of the aloof, derisive academic. I sometimes feel like a Roseanne Conner in a sea of

Frasier Cranes, but then I find myself sitting in my office with an honors student in tears, like the one who curled into a fetal position on my office floor. I rarely receive office-hour visits from the more economically advantaged students unless I disrupt their senses of entitlement when I give them Bs and ruin their 4.0 GPAs, but they tend to turn toward other resources, such as sorority leaders or pre-medical advisors. Then I think about the time I sat under a classroom table during a writing workshop with an honors student who was trying to balance the demands of school and work with her own battle against alcoholism, and I recall the honors professors who extended to me a helping hand, who gave me a modicum of dignity in academic achievement that was denied by my hometown's jocks-and-beauty-queens social strata.

In my ongoing struggle to reconcile my essential blue-collar ethos with my white-collar work environment, I have learned through painful trial and error when to speak my mind and when to keep my mouth shut, when and how to challenge authority, and when to observe the political niceties for which my working-class parents were unable to prepare me. Despite these internal struggles, however, the fact is that I have moved into a higher socioeconomic class, that I have a better work schedule, better benefits, a better house, and a better car than my parents had. I would also venture to say that I also have a better appreciation for these advantages than other academics whose backgrounds permit taking them for granted.

The bottom line for me is that honors education got me out of that steel mill town and on the road toward a good career and a better life.

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Class, Honors, and Eastern Kentucky: Why We Still Need to Try to Change the World

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Norm Wiener's piece "Honors Is Elitist, and What's Wrong with That?" couldn't have come at more opportune moment for me. Having recently accepted the directorship of a well-respected program founded by the legendary Dr. Bonnie Gray and seated in one of the poorest regions of the nation—Appalachia where, as Philip Cohen sang in "No Christmas in Kentucky," "the trees don't twinkle when you're hungry"—I've been thinking a lot about class and honors lately. Eastern Kentucky is a place marked by tobacco barns, mountaintop-removal coal mining, infamous mining strikes (*Harlan County U.S.A.*, Barbara Kopple's film about one of those, won the Oscar for Best Documentary in 1977), and the "persistent poverty" that more than anything else has shaped the region.

All Kentucky state institutions of higher education are assigned a service region to further the mission of "regional stewardship," an initiative to encourage socio-economic development in the state. Eastern Kentucky University's service region includes 22 counties, many of which are the poorest in Kentucky. More than a few are among the poorest in the nation. In a recent piece on the need for environmental research and amplified educational outreach, Alice Jones writes that "Eastern Kentucky is an area of persistent poverty, and 18 counties in EKU's 22-county service region meet the federal Appalachian Regional Commission's definition as 'distressed communities.' ARC-defined 'distressed communities' are those with greater than 150% of the national average poverty and/or unemployment rate; and less than 67% of the US average market income per capita. In short, they are not just the poorest communities in Appalachia; they are the poorest communities in America." According to the *EKU Factbook, 2007–2008*, over 25% of the population in our service area live in poverty.

At graduation this December, our president, long-time Richmond resident and EKU alum Dr. Doug Whitlock, asked all of the first-generation college graduates to raise their hands. More than a third of the room's robed arms flew up. A colleague of mine in English leaned over to me and whispered, "this is

the part that gets me every time.” As part of a “university of opportunity,” EKU’s faculty pride themselves on working on behalf of a marginalized population, on helping the poor get ahead.

Our admission requirements for honors are probably low by national standards—a 26 on the ACT with all kinds of flexibility for students with lower scores—but as I look at what the program here does—offering its students book scholarships, partial tuition scholarships, paid trips to NCHC, and low-cost “cultural trips” to major metropolitan areas like Chicago and New York—I have had to think carefully this year about its most compelling purpose. In fact, Norm Weiner’s observation is precisely true for EKU’s program; since we know that neither a degree nor the job or grad school acceptance that follows it inherently solidifies our students’ move up the class ladder, “another latent function of honors education may be to polish some of our students’ rough edges, however subtly.”

As I consider changes I may want to make (no longer accepting AP credit for our core honors courses, for instance, a practice that drives many of my faculty up the wall and drove eighty students out to a pizza dinner to debate its pros and cons), I need to know more about the population this program serves and what it promises those students. Broadly speaking, the EKU Honors Program is not a place where lower-middle-class students come to get a liberal arts education at a state university price and a leg up on a prestigious graduate school education. Rather, it’s a place where poor students have a very hard time leaving their homes, even when those homes may be crumbling under generations of poverty.

It is, however, still an honors program; it offers the small, discussion-based classes that characterize honors across the country as well as the opportunity to pursue independent research in the form of the students’ senior thesis projects. My faculty gets as annoyed as any by students who don’t take their work seriously enough and who may not fully appreciate the education they receive here. But EKU honors students are different from others I’ve encountered elsewhere. Take Kara, for example, whom I met in the senior thesis workshop that I taught in the fall. Kara always looked vaguely bored in class. She was quiet, smart, a little distant. I assumed Kara might have felt that the class was a waste of her time. Then I read her personal statement for law school, and here is how it begins:

My father is a delivery truck driver for Lincoln Bread Company, better known as either Hostess or Wonderbread. My brother and I were taught not to want the things my parents couldn’t afford. My wants became very centered on my needs. For Christmas I asked for either a coat or school clothes. My father’s delivery route was local and he was able to come home

at night. To this day, he wakes up at 2:30am to drive to work and arrives home at about 7:00pm.

Kara goes on to describe how the expectations for her self-support began in high school when her parents agreed to “provide a bedroom, dinner on the table, and a daily shower. To buy clothes, soap, shampoo, and even toothpaste (as well as less necessary things) I was expected to get a job. . . . It wasn’t easy, but I found a way to take an advanced college preparatory class load in high school while working thirty-six hours per week.”

It’s important to remember when we talk about it that class is about money, not simply the money in your pocket but an economic distinction nonetheless. It might be better to think about class not in terms of money itself but of what money can buy and to recognize that one’s purchasing power begins (or doesn’t) with one’s ancestors. Money bought Kara a sense of independence, maturity, and responsibility. And all of that probably left Kara as exhausted as anything else when she was in my class.

Kara discovered ECU’s award-winning Mock Trial team at a pre-college orientation. Despite the many hours of preparation that she put into Mock Trial and her classes, Kara took a new job her junior year on the night crew stocking shelves at Lowe’s: “I would go to work from 9pm to about 6am, doing a very physical job. Then I would come home, shower, and almost immediately leave for class. . . . As of now, I am waking up at 3:30 in the morning to go to work. When I get off work at 1pm, I drive to school for classes and homework. I come home at about 9pm, shower, and try to get five or six hours of sleep. . . . I am rather proud of myself for being able to manage this schedule because it reminds me of my father’s hard work.”

Kara is an excellent student. She is a major player on ECU’s Mock Trial team, and her thesis project—a case she is sending into the national organization for consideration in collegiate competition—is a culmination of everything she has cared most about in college. One might reasonably expect that Kara and her father might have experienced friction about their very different life directions; in this case, one would be dead wrong. In fact, Kara’s work, which she fully understands is leading her down a different path, has brought her closer to her father. As she puts it, “we are even almost on the same schedule, though moving toward different goals. He continues to do honest, labor work, while I am striving toward a much different career. This experience further allows me to understand my father and has brought us even closer.”

Another student in our honors program, Kristeena, is one of a set of twins, both of whom are also on ECU’s Mock Trial team. Kristeena and her sister were raised by a grandmother “after my eighteen year old mother decided she couldn’t provide for us,” a woman who “also ran a pretty good sized

tobacco farm and an upholstery shop all while studying for her GED.” Kristeena describes the surprise of her high school teachers when confronted with “two girls on free lunch making straight As and doing very well on the ACT.” At the first mock trial tournament in which Katrina competed, a judge told her that her “accent was thick” and that she was “clearly from Kentucky”—clearly not where successful attorneys are born. Kristeena describes her reaction: “My heart sunk but I knew what I had to do. Over the next four years I worked diligently at improving upon my flaws while still retaining who I was. I learned to use my accent to my advantage. In my second year of collegiate mock trial, . . . I had a judge tell me that he actually loved my accent and noted that I was very articulate and well spoken. . . . I [also] won the overall most outstanding attorney award.”

Katrina, Kristeena’s twin, describes the impact her grandmother’s heart attack had on her decision to pursue medical school. Katrina explains that “there was only one road out of our community. One direction led you to the city of Richmond; in the opposite direction the road ended in the Kentucky River and the only way across was to swim.” The road to Richmond was dangerous in winter, when “you chose your grocery trips wisely,” and consequently no ambulance carried her grandmother to the ER that night: “There were no screaming sirens . . . and . . . no paramedics giving orders and helping my grandmother. There was only the scatter of gravel as [my uncle’s] truck left and headed for town.”

Not surprisingly, Katrina has decided to pursue a career in rural medicine. As she puts it, “the problems rural doctors deal with are very different from those in larger communities. It’s difficult to treat people who have been treating themselves for generations. However, there is a great need for those types of doctors. A community’s ambulance service shouldn’t have to consist of a pickup truck and neighbors acting as paramedics. I want to help change that, and I want to help those people who I consider my people live healthier lives.”

What I am learning about ECU honors students is how different they are from what I was like at their age. I grew up in a lower-middle-class rural community in northeastern Ohio that I was desperate to leave once I hit adolescence. I wanted the city—any city—in order to shed what felt so much to me like small-town suffocation. I used graduate school in New York in the same way my father used the Navy—to get out of Ohio. Many of the academics I’ve met in my career have had similar itches. So do many of the honors students with whom I’ve worked and I’ll bet more than a few of Weiner’s do too. But, like Kara, Kristeena, and Katrina, many if not most of the honors students at ECU, even those who are frustrated with their home situations and all the cultural ills that attend such deeply embedded poverty, do not want to

get away. They want to see more of the world, do more and experience more. They certainly want more opportunity, but they feel a bond with their home communities that a psychological class-move away from those communities would betray. In this case, then, honors can't just be about helping a group of less-than-privileged students get ahead; it also must work to help a poor community enrich itself and do more than simply endure.

I know that my students' stories are anecdotal and certainly not the most dire that we as honors faculty do and will encounter. Still, they tell me something. Perhaps the trick for us in honors is doing what Kristeena says she has tried to do—improve what we do while remaining who we are. As a new director of a program that I don't yet fully understand in a place it will take years to feel I know, it is my challenge not to impose my own definition of success upon it, not to make it something it's not nor reach for a population that may not be whom we best serve. I have to find the best ways to help our students reach their goals, and this effort will include finding potentially radical ways to transform their home communities. Here I disagree with Weiner when he says that, "as educators, most of us have learned that we cannot change the world—or even our society. We can, however, help make the lives of our own students better." In order to make my students' lives better, I think I must try to change the world—or at least this Kentucky chunk of it. If I'm going to succeed in directing them, I will have to let my students guide me in finding powerful ways to help the places they call home.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As always, I am lucky to be able to thank Ada Long whose observations about her own move to Alabama at the beginning of her career have helped me start to explore where I might head here, as a new honors director in eastern Kentucky.

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The Two-Year College Honors Program and the Forbidden Topics of Class and Cultural Capital

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From my position as honors director at a two-year college in rural Florida, in the citrus and cow-hunter country south of I-4 and north of Okeechobee, Norm Weiner's positing of honors education as a way to give students a chance to climb the class ladder seems persuasive. Honors education can, and does, help our students fulfill their middle-class aspirations. Yet much still remains to unpack in this middle-class-ness, especially in its connection to education. This territory is uncomfortable to Americans, for whom, as Weiner writes, "a basic . . . value is equality" and for whom the notion of social class is "anathema."

Weiner writes that almost all Americans wish to be, and almost all present themselves as, members of the middle class in a classless society. Yet we also know that income inequalities have been increasing for some years now and that educational opportunities may be narrowing. High school dropout rates have increased, and completion rates in two-year colleges remain on average low. While many two-year college students enter with the hope of eventually earning a four-year degree, few achieve that goal. Considerable educational literature documents the struggles of first-generation college students with the world of higher education—not with their coursework, but with the culture and expectations of the academic milieu. Meanwhile, the columnist David Brooks relentlessly popularizes the notions that education is now the means by which class status is transmitted intergenerationally and that the values and life choices of college-educated people are becoming different in almost every respect from those of high-school graduates.

While pondering these issues, I picked up a copy of the Sunday *New York Times*. In the Style section (it was March 1, 2009), a pair of linked articles were commenting on a world and kind of education very distant from my own students' experiences. The first detailed the painful struggles of a mother on the Upper East Side whose child was rejected by several prestigious

kindergarten programs. The other led with the story of a child who will not be attending a prestigious kindergarten because, thanks to the recession, its \$22,000 tuition has become out of his family's reach.

The prestigious Upper East Side kindergarten has long been an in-joke and object of satire, but I wonder where it stands as a status symbol. With the Beanie Baby or Cabbage Patch doll—some of you may remember them—a must-have because it is a must-have? With the Patek Philippe watch, a splendid example of fine craftsmanship and not to be despised even though my \$19.99 Tracfone tells time as accurately? Or is there a unique benefit conferred by attendance at a prestigious private school, and, if so, what might it be?

Weiner, in his discussion of the “manifest” and “latent” functions of honors education, provides the beginnings of an answer. He lists the attributes of an education that “children of the upper classes . . . inherit as part of their birthright and take for granted,” i.e., intellectual challenge, global awareness, and community consciousness. These intellectual experiences and dispositions can be instilled through an honors education so that students who did not “inherit” them can acquire them and use them to climb the class ladder.

In this respect, I am intrigued by the American class system as described by sociologists like Dennis Gilbert or Barbara Ehrenreich. Their six-class system includes an upper-middle or “professional” class, composed of well-paid people with advanced degrees who enjoy a high degree of autonomy in their professions, a lower-middle class of college-educated sales and office workers, and, lower still, the heavily supervised pink- and blue-collar workers whose routinized jobs offer them little autonomy and still less encouragement toward critical thinking. The correlation between the degree of autonomy in an occupation and the class status it confers is striking. All else being equal, the more routinized and supervised the job, the lower its status and income.

But an eerie correlation exists between the class system and Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives. In the upper-middle-class positions, autonomous professionals will cheerfully evaluate, synthesize, and analyze; they also hire and fire. They typically plan, design, and revise processes to improve outcomes. The sales and office workers just below them may sometimes analyze, but they generally are found applying what they have learned to new situations, summarizing, inferring, estimating, explaining, and extending. Still further down the class ladder, pink- and blue-collar workers identify, list, label, match, reproduce, and state. If the goal of an honors education is to enable students to climb the class ladder, then, would it be possible to overstress the importance of situating the honors coursework at the upper end of Bloom's taxonomy?

Yet I think building strengths in another critical area is equally important for our students if they are to climb the class and occupational ladder. They need to develop further in the non-cognitive traits and dispositions identified by many researchers as important to student success. At one time referred to as “acculturation” or “socialization,” this process is now most often called “student engagement,” a generalized label that describes students’ relationships to their instructors as well as their relationships to other students and to the college environment overall. The term I most prefer, however, is “cultural capital,” defined in Pascarella et al. as the “ease and familiarity one has with the dominant culture of one’s society.” This incipient metaphor, derived from Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological work, calls attention to the fact that college students on entrance are presumed already to have some knowledge and understanding of the cultural and social milieu of higher education. That awareness becomes the foundation for additional understanding they will acquire in the course of their college education.

The upper-class students Weiner describes may “inherit” this cultural capital, but I suspect that they are instead acculturated to it, first by their families and their immediate social circle, and then by their schooling. This cultural capital, I suspect, is what the \$22,000 kindergarten tuition really buys: extensive early training in how to move easily in the context of privileged, well-educated high achievers.

On the other hand, even well-prepared students who lack this cultural capital—and many first generation college students do lack it—may feel lost, disengaged, put off, and disconnected; they may fail to get the full benefit of their education as a result. Thus Pascarella et. al. found that, on the one hand, first-generation college students benefit more than their multi-generational counterparts from experiences, in and out of the classroom, that build cultural capital. Despite this education, however, first-generation college students are significantly less likely than their counterparts to engage in such experiences. As a matter of educational policy, therefore, they argue that first-generation college students must be ensured “access to the full range of college experiences” if they are to succeed.

In my own work as an honors director, I have made promoting access my main goal. The reasons have to do with the challenges my students are likely to have faced before they arrived at South Florida Community College, some of them unique to rural areas such as ours. We are still officially a rural area although Highlands, the largest and wealthiest county in our tri-county area, was estimated to have achieved a population of just over 100,000 for the first time last year. Of that population, the Census Bureau reports that just 13.5% have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher. The national average, in contrast, is nearly twice that number. Over 34% of Highlands County residents

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have completed no more than the high school degree or equivalency. These figures are skewed to an unknown degree by the large percentage of our residents who are retirees; we have the second highest percentage of elderly residents in the nation. My observation is that our retirees may well be better educated than their younger counterparts in the workforce. Even though census figures do not really confirm this observation, we can certainly assume that most SFCC students are first-generation college students.

Not surprisingly, our students are also poorer than average. The median household income in 2000 in Highlands County was \$30,160, compared to a national average of \$41,994, but again these figures do not reveal the whole story. The greatest income deficits relative to the national median appear in the age brackets between 35 and 54, where the Highlands County median income is 65% of the national median. Because the parents of our college students fall into this age bracket, we can presume that our students are likely to be from lower-income homes.

Yet the final and perhaps most important challenge our students face stems from the cultural isolation of the area. Like many other rural communities in the South, Highlands County is intensely inward-looking, one sign of which is that the overwhelming majority of Highlands County students who pursue higher education enroll at SFCC first. Very few go directly to a four-year university or college. Last year, for example:

With a graduating class of about 180 students, Lake Placid High had 11 students accepted to USF and five accepted to the University of Florida, but one of those students decided to go to Georgia Tech. [*Highlands Today*—Jun 2, 2008]

Not quite 10% went directly to university, in other words. Because the dropout rate for the county as currently measured hovers around 30%, the percentage of entering high school students who graduate and go directly to a university falls to around 7%. In addition, many SFCC graduates who continue to the baccalaureate degree do so through classes offered at the University Center on the SFCC campus. They do not, in other words, leave the area or move physically to the campus of a four-year college. Often the reason is cost, but students as well as their parents have also frequently expressed unease at the prospect of moving to a big university or urban area.

Dual-enrollment students in our honors courses have further challenges. Whether they have attended denominational schools that do not have a full upper-division high school or have been home-schooled, these students have often experienced a mosaic-style education, consisting of face-to-face classes, two-way TV classes, Florida Virtual High School classes, and home-schooling. They have glommed together an assemblage of whatever was

available to fulfill their requirements. The course content may have been sufficiently rigorous, but the variety of delivery methods and experiences could have given students little consistent sense of belonging to a community of learners.

In these circumstances, encouraging student engagement has become a cornerstone of the SFCC Honors Program and its policies. Becoming connected to a community of scholars and feeling a part of the college and of the academic world are behaviors we believe we must foster in our students. We use our service-learning projects as well as our coursework to connect honors students to one another and to the educated professionals in the community. Several projects have involved honors students with the local museum of the Historical Society of Avon Park and the Museum of Florida Art and Culture on the SFCC campus.

In one recent example of our service-learning initiatives, the SFCC Honors Program has just begun a joint project with the Avon Park Historical Society and Depot Museum, supported by a mini-grant from the Florida Humanities Council. The project is to record an oral history of the African-American community in Avon Park during the 1950s and 1960s. South Florida Community College will lend its recording facilities, making podcasts of the interviews available on the Depot Museum's website. Dr. James M. Denham of the Center for Florida History at Florida Southern College is overseeing the scholarly work. Honors students will earn service-learning credit for primary research in the Depot Museum's archives in support of the project. We will have a public forum and museum exhibit as a capstone, again with assistance from the honors students. In fact, one of SFCC's honors graduates has been hired as an assistant to the project. We call him our one-person WPA. He is about to join a long and honorable tradition in the community of scholars.

Through these service-learning experiences, students are immersed in the world of educated professionals, working side-by-side with them, getting to know them, and getting to know how the educated world works. Such interactions provide opportunities for students to develop the non-cognitive skills and dispositions needed for success in their university programs and their subsequent careers. To put it less formally, students learn how to be comfortable in their own skins while interacting with educated professionals in middle-class environments, a necessity if they are to succeed in the education and jobs they want to have.

Norm Weiner writes that one of the "latent functions of honors education" (and I would add that this is especially true in two-year programs) is to "polish some of our students' rough edges, however subtly." Perhaps we might think of this latent function not as "polishing," which can so easily turn into "grinding down," but as building up the students' own resources in the

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form of the cultural capital that will help them move up the ladder as they want to do. I would submit the opportunity and ability to climb the ladder is one of the most important benefits that an honors program can provide to its students.

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On Class and *Class*

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We have a long history in America of pretending that there is no class structure. If you ask students to identify their family by class, they all say “middle-class.” I, however, teach on the “Gold Coast” of Long Island where the Fricks, Vanderbilts, and Morgans owned big properties and yachts. There is no question that *they* never thought of themselves as middle-class. Indeed, Joan Harrison, my colleague in the Photography Department, just produced a wonderful photo-history of a city near campus—*Images of America: Glen Cove* (Arcadia Publishing, 2008)—showing a distribution of population from the robber barons to waves of Italian and Hispanic immigrants to the descendants of freed slaves in our region. Since this city is typical of our campus population, the question raised about class and honors at my university can be seen as having both ethnic and historic complexity.

The mission statement of Long Island University includes the twin poles of “access” and “excellence.” To be sure, euphemisms abound therein! The word “access” alludes to the great percentage of our students who are first-generation college-goers. They come from extremely diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds. What they have in common are parents who rarely had the opportunity to go to college and are therefore willing to pay (often at great sacrifice) for a high-priced, private-college education that they perceive as helping their children rise up the ladder of class. The adjusted gross income of families at my campus is \$70,850. Typically, the families of my students have two or three children either in college or getting ready for college. A tuition bill of close to \$35,000 leaves just half of the total annual income to pay for everything else, unless, of course, there are two children in college—which would leave nothing. Scholarships are therefore essential.

Eighty-five percent of the students on my campus qualify for need-based scholarships, another indicator that their families are not generally in high economic brackets. Although I am being anecdotal rather than statistical, a great percentage of the parents who accompany their children on interviews are working-class people: they drive cabs; they are landscape gardeners and building contractors; they work in restaurants, offices, retail, hospitals, law enforcement, nail salons, factories; they do whatever is necessary to raise a family, and for their family they want something better, which means that

they want their children to go to college and aim for professions higher than their own.

It is important to understand that, even though our students may think of themselves as middle-class, many of their parents are working-class people struggling to achieve that goal. Even if the parents are employed at very low-paid jobs, they appear determined to give their children whatever their friends have (designer clothes, electronics, cars—in the Long Island suburbs the demands are great). As a result, the *perception* of our campus is that it is filled with affluent suburban students, 73% of whom are women looking for a “Mrs.” degree. I did not make this up! I quote students reflecting on their peers in college. These same students also drive high-end vehicles, which sometimes require that they work an additional forty-hour-a-week job to keep them on the road. In short, what I see are aspiring families giving their kids too much of everything in order to put on a middle-class face. The most expensive gift of all is the college education; for many families, in spite of scholarships and state and federal aid, this is an enormous expense, and it takes a serious toll on both parents and children.

Though my honors students may think of themselves as middle-class, many of them lead the same working-class lives as their parents. They go to school full time, and when that part of the day is over, they work another full-time job as waiters, landscapers, bartenders, retailers, shop managers. Not only are they paying car upkeep, they are also called upon to be caretakers of grandparents and siblings during their parents’ long working hours. The result is often disastrous. I see them stand between parents in divorce cases, care for disabled siblings, and become the breadwinners when the house is threatened with foreclosure.

That my students are so tied to their family obligations and to the narrow particulars of their cultural heritage has always amazed me—at a campus only twenty miles from New York City. Few of my students (music and theater majors being the exceptions) come from families with sophisticated cultural leanings. They do not have homes filled with books. They do not have experience going to museums and art galleries. They do not eat a wide range of foods. They eat according to their ethnic backgrounds and (except for the city kids who chose college in the suburbs) are generally reluctant even to try a new cuisine (though sushi appears to be the new pizza). All of this adds up to students who are intellectually uncomfortable stepping off their square. Their family ties are their strongest bond, and a good number who tried going to college away from home right after high school found the experience too traumatic. They come back as transfer students who feel safer living with their parents and commuting to campus. If they have traveled abroad, it has generally been with family to visit their extended family, an even bigger

cocoon. Some are bi-lingual and bi-cultural by heritage, but most would prefer a week in the middle-class Magic Kingdom at Disneyworld.

What does this class background have to do with honors? In my neck of Long Island, the insular nature of these students is the problem that I have to tackle in order to get them to stretch intellectually. They have been trained to equate intellect with grades and to see themselves as projections of report cards. No wonder. They were put into gifted programs, given music lessons and special tutors, sent through AP and high school honors. On paper it looks as if they have been headed directly for honors all their lives—whether they wanted to be or not! But in a more profound way, they are entirely unprepared.

They have been hand-held through every one of their academic experiences, and they have been immersed in a utilitarian value system that prizes high numbers—whether grades or money—and education only in so far as it is “useful.” When I tell them that they will attend five not-for-credit cultural events per semester (lectures, concerts, theater performances, museum trips), they often grimace as if this were a punishment rather than pleasure, coming up with every excuse about how these events conflict with their demanding schedule of classes followed by a job.

Indeed, these same students who come in with an impressive high school average often find that they cannot do honors-level work and also continue the thirty- or forty-hour-per-week job obligations that their families expect. When college clashes with family, the trauma is enormous, leading some of these students to understand for the first time that there is a class structure in America and that they are fighting their way up.

As an honors director, I have to step in, often taking a position contrary to parental expectations. During interviews for my program, I have to separate students from their entourage of parents and baby brothers. The parents are looking for money and see a direct equation between high school grades and scholarship dollars. They are impresarios for their accomplished children, negotiating for money. I often have to tell both students and parents that going to university must become their child’s primary “job.” Students who are receiving 80% or more of their tuition costs are indeed being paid to go to college, and I try to get them to stand up to parents who insist that they work long hours on top of that. Sadly, some parents use their children as cash cows and caretakers—drones in the family hive. Just recently I had to pull a junior out of an honors course because he had to stay home for two weeks to babysit. Weaning parents from such expectations is critical to helping their children succeed.

Gender and ethnicity also play huge roles in family dynamics when it comes to balancing school and work. I still meet girls whose parents cannot understand the need for a college education and would prefer that their

daughters work or go to secretarial school. It is hard to attach ethnicity to this retrograde and conservative thought pattern, but I am never surprised when it crops up. For children from Asian families the expectations are almost too specific: Indian and Chinese parents pushing for pharmacy and medicine, Korean parents thinking ahead to the MBA from a high-profile university. And how many of their children have I seen too traumatized by parental expectations to say, “I don’t want to do that”! For all of these students in their parents’ grip, the meaning of college is firmly tied to social class, money, and status. Parents see their children in terms of achieving pride within their community—and possibly making a good marriage for them or ensuring their own financial future.

By contrast, the international students in my program are self-directed. They *are* abroad at C. W. Post, and they are completely on their own. In contrast to their American classmates, their *class* (sophistication) and consciousness of class (status) are highly developed. Most come from educated families. They are readers. They use New York for its culture, going to concerts, museums, and theaters as a natural part of their lives. They are at least bi-lingual and move in diverse society. My Bulgarian chemistry major immersed himself in the New York music scene. My Russian economics major—after taking a Ph.D. at NYU—accepted a university position in Mexico City. An Italian student, working for a designer clothing firm in the city, took advantage of our exchange program and spent a term in Korea learning about fabric production to expand his career training. My Spanish theater major, after a brilliant role as Caliban, was hired by a Hispanic theater company in Manhattan. Over the years I have had a string of African women as pre-law or pre-engineering students; one wrote a novel while she was taking her degree in physics. All of these students are great leavening agents in an honors program. They represent an “*intelligencia*” that sadly does not have much currency in the American class structure. They read and write with pleasure—and often with grammatical correctness that eludes our native speakers. They enjoy the cultural programs that are part of honors. They are clear examples of self-reliance.

Self-Reliance—a concept we associate with Emerson. Avoiding conformity and determining one’s own life were once transcendental American values and are still core values in honors education, but perhaps they are now imports like everything else. These values are in great measure what we mean by “excellence.” In fact, from one perspective, the goal of honors is shaping an “*intelligencia*”; that is why the liberal arts and sciences are still at the heart of our programs. We want our students to read deeply and write well. We want them to think beyond their majors and solve problems beyond their daily finances. Even if they see themselves as “middle-class,” our goal should

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be to give them an intellectual grounding and a vision that lies beyond the mall. Now that's *class!*

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To the Charge of “Honors is Elitist,” on Advice of Counsel We Plead “Guilty as Charged”

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Norm Weiner’s introductory essay for this issue of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* challenges us to face the charge of elitism that so frequently is lodged against honors programs and honors colleges (as well as against those of us who are involved in honors education as administrators, faculty, and students). On advice of wise counsel, my plea to the charge is “guilty as charged.”

As an honors college administrator at a large public land-grant university founded in response to the Act Donating Public Lands to the Several States and Territories which may provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts—better known as the Morrill Act (named for Congressman Justin Smith Morrill who introduced the bill in the House of Representatives)—signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on July 2, 1862, I am fully cognizant of the original legal mandate of our institution: “without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactic, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the *industrial classes* in the several pursuits and professions in life” (emphasis added). The concept of social class, therefore, was very much involved with the foundation of land-grant colleges and universities.

Consistent with this mission, our institution is committed to instruction, research, and outreach (formerly known as extension). In my thirty-seven years of teaching here, I have found an admirable commitment on the part of our faculty to reach out to students from all types of backgrounds who come to us from within our state, the rest of the United States, and many other nations. Added to the land-grant mission of our university is the fact that we live and work in a state with a strong populist heritage that includes a dim view of elites and elitism. When I became involved with honors administration more than twenty years ago, I found that there was a good deal of resistance in some quarters on campus to our goal of expanding honors education

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from the College of Arts and Sciences (where it had been in place for more than twenty years) to a university-wide honors program (now honors college) that serves students from all six undergraduate colleges. Chief among the reasons for opposition to expanding honors education were the elitism allegation and a corresponding assertion that honors had no place in a land-grant institution such as ours.

I admit to having been a bit perplexed by these challenges at first, having myself graduated from the honors college at a land-grant public institution in the same athletic conference. (I don't like comparisons of academic programs to athletic conferences any more than the rest of you, but it does seem to serve as a measuring stick in some administrative circles.) Attending my first NCHC conference in 1988, I had a keen desire to learn how other honors directors dealt with the elitism charge. No doubt I received a number of thoughtful responses, but one sticks in my memory to this day and has framed my response to the allegation throughout the intervening years. C. Grey Austin from Ohio State University was kind enough to take time from his hectic conference schedule that year to visit with an honors neophyte, and his response was, “At Ohio State, that question never would be asked.” What an eye-opening and liberating response!

In the years since that NCHC conference in Las Vegas, I have referred to Grey's comment over and over on my own campus, at NCHC conferences, and as an NCHC Recommended Site Visitor. On my home campus, my pleading “guilty as charged” had an interesting effect in that it began to wipe away misconceptions and force some colleagues to think about the mission of our university in the context of the talents and aspirations of some of our best and brightest students—whether they come from the “industrial classes” or not. Should we not offer the opportunity for these students to excel, at least in part for the upward social mobility reasons described in Norm Weiner's essay? Should we not give our best students opportunities consistent with their needs in much the same way many land-grant institutions often provide extensive resources and opportunities for under-prepared students who enter their hallowed halls? Why not challenge our finest students to be the very best and then provide appropriate support as they seek to achieve this goal?

Who, for example, would champion the “branding” (I hate that term!) of their university with the logo “Mediocrity ‘R’ Us,” set as the goal for their own academic department to be no better than average at best, or advocate issuing the clarion call that “our students are mediocre” to recruit the finest freshmen and transfer students? Who—heaven forbid—would aspire to fielding athletic teams that don't seek to win a championship? Who would discourage our students from successfully competing for Rhodes, Marshall, Goldwater, or Truman Scholarships because their selection would damage the

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institution's reputation? Outside the university setting, who needing heart surgery would intentionally seek out a mediocre cardiovascular surgeon to perform the operation? Questions such as these, in combination with frequent repetition of Grey Austin's comment, have helped us move to the point at which the elitism question almost never rears its ugly head on our campus in the twenty-first century.

If you and your honors program or honors college face the charge of elitism, I would counsel you to enter a plea of "guilty as charged" and then invite your accusers to join you in what can become their most rewarding experiences in undergraduate education. It would be too much to predict that they will rise up and call you blessed, but some of your critics may be converted over time into advocates for honors education who actually come back to thank you.

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Elitism Misunderstood: In Defense of Equal Opportunity

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At one time or another, we have all dealt with colleagues who expressed doubts about dedicating resources to honors students. They argue that gifted and high-achieving students do not need or deserve additional resources to pursue their educational goals; they will do just fine on their own. Critics of honors often comment that money spent on honors students, who will graduate anyway, should be invested in helping students with traditionally low retention rates; these latter students are the ones who need the resources. At some time in the discussion, such critics typically say that honors education is inherently “elitist” because it serves the “upper” social class. In this essay, we make the argument that honors is not elitist and that the unique needs of honors students from all social classes are no less nor more important than the needs of other students.

If we consider the normal distribution, or bell curve, in level of intelligence, we find that just fewer than 70% of the population should fall into the average range of intelligence (those with an IQ in the range of approximately 85 to 115, with 100 considered average; Eysenck, 2006; Herrnstein & Murray, 1995). Five percent of individuals fall into the extreme ranges with about 2% at either end of the normal distribution. In other words, about 2% of individuals have an IQ lower than 70, which places them in the mentally retarded range, and about 2% have an IQ greater than 130, which places them in the intellectually gifted range. Since the average IQ is 100, if we had students with an IQ lower than 70, should we provide special services for those students? In fact, don't we? In public education at the elementary and secondary levels, federal law (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, revised in 2004) mandates that states provide free and appropriate public education for all students with an IQ lower than 70. Now, what about students with an IQ greater than 130? Should they receive special services, too? The upper group and the lower group each represent about 2%

of the population, so we might assume that they should get equal treatment, but they do not. Only students at the lower end of the normal distribution are protected by federal laws, not students at the upper end. Intellectually gifted students are usually served only by state and local laws, if at all. In 1988, the federal government passed the Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, which recognized that intellectually gifted students have needs but did not require states to provide special services for them. In efforts to give everyone a chance to succeed, public schools at all levels are often guilty of ignoring the needs of the intellectually gifted with the expectation that, since gifted students are able to succeed on their own, resources should be given to students with greater needs. Also, special programs for the intellectually gifted are seen as promoting elitism.

One of the reasons that gifted programs, honors programs, and honors colleges are seen as elitist is the demographic make-up of their student populations. Those afraid of elitism believe honors students typically come from the “upper class,” or higher socioeconomic backgrounds and tend to belong to majority ethnic and racial groups. Such is definitely the case prior to the university level. Students typically under-identified for gifted programming at the elementary and secondary levels include students living in poverty, students from racial or ethnic minority groups, students living in rural areas, and students for whom English is not their first language (Borland, 2004; Borland & Wright, 1995; Frasier, 1991; Passow & Frasier, 1996). The under-identification of these groups of students leads to lower rates of inclusion in gifted programs at the elementary and secondary level, thus perhaps leading to lower rates of enrollment in honors programs at the university level. University honors programs are nevertheless not exclusionary, as some critics of elitism point out. A lack of students from lower social classes and minority racial and ethnic groups may simply be a byproduct of a faulty public education system at the pre-college level. Of course, to alleviate concern about elitism at the university level, educators and policy makers should find ways to be more inclusive of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students from racial or ethnic minority groups, and other disadvantaged students. Indeed, research shows students from racial or ethnic minority groups may particularly benefit from participation in an honors program (Shushok, 2003; Seifert, Pascarella, Colangelo, & Assouline, 2007).

Educating intellectually gifted students is not about taking the “best” students and offering them special privileges. It does not involve taking the majority race, the upper class, the English-speaking, suburban, and other advantaged groups and then offering them a “better” education than everyone else. That being said, if honors programs and colleges are not serving those from the lower class, from racial and ethnic minority groups, from rural areas,

from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and so on, it is our responsibility to make sure these students are identified and provided the appropriate education for their ability level. Honors education involves taking the abilities or potential abilities of an intellectually advanced group and nurturing those as much as possible, just as we would nurture a group of students at any level of intellectual ability, high or low. This is not “elitism”; this is providing equal opportunity. Just because these students have intellectual ability that exceeds the average population does not mean they are not deserving of the most advanced education of which they are capable. In the Jeffersonian tradition, “people are indeed all equal in terms of political and social rights and should have equal opportunities,” and so “the goal of gifted education is not to favor or foster an elite, but to allow children to make full use of the differing kinds of skills they have and can develop” (Sternberg, 1996, pg. 263). This is also a goal of honors education, as nicely illustrated by the father of honors education in the United States, Frank Aydelotte. As cited by Norm Weiner, Aydelotte says, “The best education for any individual is that which will develop his powers to the utmost (Aydelotte, 1944, p. 128 . . .).” In withholding or limiting special programming for intellectually gifted students, we are pushing them into mediocrity rather than allowing for intellectual fervor and growth. Intellectually gifted students are deprived of opportunities to develop to their fullest potential if they are not offered an advanced education. If we do not provide education that allows for excellence, then we are not providing equal education for all.

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Dealing with Subjective and Objective Issues in Honors Education

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Professionals working in higher education who are concerned with social justice need to consider questions of objectivity and subjectivity. Even though some assessments are objective and some subjective, neither kind of assessment is guaranteed to separate out the effects of socioeconomic benefits from student ability. Honors programs and colleges should therefore concern themselves with the problem of awarding membership based on test criteria because the benefits inherent to honors programs could end up being given more often to those families with extra means and therefore the ability to provide opportunities like private tutoring and test preparation classes. Such actions can reinforce class hierarchy. A critical examination of the subjective/objective social problem as addressed by Norm Weiner, followed by a discussion of the philosophy and mechanisms for distributing benefits at the University Honors College (UHC) at the University of Pittsburgh, can provide insight into alternative ways of handling the problem, even for membership-based programs.

On the matter of whether honors education is elitist, Norm Weiner suggests,

... elitism is in the eye of the beholder. Elitism isn't objective, isn't simply about being the best or selecting the best in some field, whether college students or football players. It's subjective; it's about some people believing that those selected for a benefit or exclusive opportunity feel superior to them, that those selected feel entitled.

A preliminary issue is to distinguish between two different senses of elitism. One sense has to do with undeserved privilege and the other with a concern for standards. Perhaps elitism as undeserved privilege is subjective in that one can imagine that what a person deserves is in the eye of the beholder. However, it seems that elitism as a concern for standards is plainly objective; the standards, even if they are culturally generated, would be the object

against which assessments are made, making such assessments “objective.” Could the standards by which assessments are made (e.g., SAT scores, GPA) be poor indicators of who is worthy of certain benefits? Certainly, but that is a separate matter from whether such assessments are meaningful only in the eye of the beholder. If an honors program or college has admissions criteria, then the matter of who gets admitted is objective in that the standards by which admissions decisions are made would be the object against which applicants would be measured. To be sure, such admissions criteria as SAT scores and GPAs are going to favor certain demographics, students who have better access to higher-quality school systems and support networks.

At the University of Pittsburgh, the UHC is organized on a participant model, not a membership one: the UHC has no separate admissions criteria. Therefore, although the UHC can concern itself with the question of whether our opportunities reinforce socioeconomic hierarchies, the staff has less cause for concern that we have a membership of students drawn exclusively from families of means. This isn’t to say that we ignore GPA and SAT scores; we have found, though, that high grades and standardized test scores are poor indicators for the type of inquisitiveness and love of learning that characterizes students who achieve the goals that speak to the recommendability of an institution of higher learning (e.g., admission to the graduate or professional school of students’ choice, winning national scholarships, and viability on the job market). By emphasizing the human attainment and intellectual breadth that are associated with genuinely high-achieving students (e.g., those who win national scholarships like the Marshall or the Rhodes), our conception of quality is not merely in the eye of the beholder and it is not demographically exclusionary. Emphasizing human attainment tends to ameliorate issues of social class whereas fixating on quantitative criteria might exacerbate them. For example, consider access to tutors as emblematic of social privilege. Perhaps tutors can help increase one’s SAT scores or GPA, but they can’t make a person more curious. At the University of Pittsburgh, who gets access to UHC opportunities is not merely “in the eye of the beholder.” Ours is a meritocracy of curiosity.

As a participant-based program, the UHC has students who participate to varying degrees in the experiences that we offer (honors coursework, special advising, intellectual community, and a special research-based Bachelor of Philosophy degree); perhaps honors-course participation provides the best example of how our system works to both implement objective standards and still recognize that the subjective creation of those standards necessitates work-arounds. Although there is a grade-based threshold for taking UHC courses (a combined SAT Math and Critical Reading score of 1400, or 3.25 for continuing students), if students want to take a UHC course but do not

meet these nominal criteria, they are directed to speak to a UHC advisor. If the students are on the borderline and demonstrate curiosity, motivation, and ability, the advisor awards permission. If the students have weaker records of academic achievement, they are invited to make their cases to the appropriate course instructor, who has the ability to grant that permission. In these ways, the reward of participation in an honors course is not solely tied to high school test scores, which, as mentioned above, can be influenced by previous economic opportunities. This method may be an inefficient way to offer honors opportunities, but the UHC's concern is that curious, motivated, and able students should not be blocked from an experience if they can demonstrate their readiness to participate. Although this system of organization does not wipe out socioeconomic effects, it allows for more participation than prescriptive programs offer. The other UHC programs mentioned above have similar mechanisms to allow participation by students who do not meet nominal criteria.

The results of our experience lead us to two recommendations that have served us well and can be applied even to institutions with membership-based programs:

1. Pay less attention to quantitative measures that can often be more a gauge of economic means than of ability, and look for evidence of curiosity. Use essays and interviews to help distribute opportunities.
2. Establish paths for participation (or membership) of students who do not fit the quantitative criteria for incoming freshmen but who have or develop promising intellectual signs as they progress through their studies. Develop outreach to faculty and students in order to stay open to students who were missed by high school test score criteria.

These processes are inefficient but tremendously worthwhile. If honors educators are to concern themselves with issues of class and social justice, then they must pay attention to whether their organizations can be adjusted to help the situation. We hope that these suggestions provide a mechanism to do just that.

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Does Broad-Based Merit Aid Affect Socioeconomic Diversity in Honors?

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The honors college at West Virginia University (WVU) has seen an influx of high-achieving West Virginia students since 2001, when the PROMISE Scholarship was implemented. The PROMISE Scholarship is a merit-based financial aid award for West Virginia residents. If a student qualifies by achieving a certain GPA and ACT/SAT score, he or she receives a scholarship that covers the full cost of tuition at any state college or university in West Virginia. West Virginia University has benefited greatly from the PROMISE Scholarship. About half of all PROMISE Scholars attend West Virginia University (Higher Education Policy Commission, 2007), and many are part of the honors college. Honors college administrators at WVU were interested in evaluating how the PROMISE Scholarship might have changed the college's demographics, specifically with regard to socioeconomic diversity.

Statewide merit-based scholarship programs have proliferated since the 1990s. Though researchers have hotly contested them, the development of these programs has been steady, and existing programs continue to grow (Henry, 1998 and Heller, 2002). Some claim that the broad-based merit-aid programs have been contrary to the original goals of the 1965 Higher Education Act, which sought to expand access to college through need-based financial aid (Dynarski, 2002; Heller, 2002; Lumina, 2006). Similarly, critics have suggested the inherently disparate impact of broad-based merit-aid programs: students from middle- and upper-income families who are naturally predisposed to college participation are far more likely to benefit from scholarships like the PROMISE.

Originally the PROMISE program enabled high school students with a 3.0 GPA and a score of 21 on the ACT the opportunity to receive a full-tuition scholarship to any state college or university in West Virginia. Subsequently, ACT/SAT eligibility criteria have gradually been raised. In order to attain the scholarship in 2008, students must have at least a 22 ACT score, with no one subtest score of less than 20. These new criteria have exacerbated the lack of diversity in PROMISE Scholarship recipients even further, as supported by

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data from the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission suggesting that low-income students would be disproportionately affected by higher standards.

Though the PROMISE Scholarship is based on merit and not financial need, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a required part of the application. FAFSA gauges students' and families' ability to pay for higher education and allows the federal government to determine a student's Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The EFC determines how much need-based aid a student receives from the federal and/or state governments. Tracking the EFC of PROMISE recipients enables researchers to determine families' financial need.

The researchers in this study tracked the EFC of honors college students at WVU before and after the PROMISE Scholarship. The data collection included three years prior to the implementation of PROMISE up through 2007, the most recent data available (West Virginia University IDEAS database, 2008). Using information garnered from these documents, this study assessed changes over time in honors college demographics. The implications of this preliminary research were surprising and informative.

First, there is a correlation between the PROMISE Scholarship and the number of students enrolled in WVU's honors college. Enrollment has sharply increased since the implementation of PROMISE and would continue to grow without institutional caps on the number of students admitted to the college.

Secondly, the time it takes for honors college students to graduate has decreased; the researchers see this as a positive development. The PROMISE Scholarship may provide honors college students an incentive to fit all their coursework into four years or less since PROMISE covers only eight semesters of tuition.

The last finding is less favorable: a lower percentage of low-income students have enrolled in the honors college since PROMISE was implemented. We conclude that there is a direct relationship between fewer low-income students getting PROMISE and fewer low-income students being in the honors college.

The most significant negative impact relates to socioeconomic status (SES). When tracking students pre- and post-PROMISE, researchers found fewer low-income students enrolled in the honors college now—determined by the EFC—than before the scholarship was implemented. Because PROMISE uses ACT/SAT scores as a determining factor to receive the scholarship, fewer low-income students have attained it as the requirements have increased. Heller stated in 2006 that merit-aid recipients tend to come from upper-income families (Heller, 2006). Our research confirms this statement;

as PROMISE has increased requirements, fewer low-income students receive it, and fewer low-income students enroll in the honors college at WVU.

Even though honors college criteria and PROMISE eligibility criteria are very different, honors-capable, low-income students may be affected by the sub-score requirement. Also, low-income students who may fall just short of PROMISE eligibility but who would be capable of performing well academically once they are on WVU's campus are probably not enrolling. Our study is consistent with research showing that merit-based programs redirect eligible students toward residential four-year universities while pushing capable students who receive grant aid toward community college (Binder and Ganderton, 2002). Therefore, the honors college may not have access to students who would qualify after their first or second semester because these capable low-income students are not attending WVU.

While the absolute number of low-income students in honors has increased, the percentage of low-income students has *significantly* decreased as ACT requirements for the PROMISE scholarship have gone up, confirming Heller's finding that broad-based merit scholarship programs disproportionately help middle- and upper-class students.

Nearly 5% of WVU's students are African American compared to only 3% in the state of West Virginia; the university is more diverse in its makeup than West Virginia. In the honors college, the number of African American students pre- or post-implementation of the PROMISE Scholarship has remained constant. The absence of any differential impact on minority and non-minority percentages in the college makes the effect on socioeconomic diversity even more significant.

Future research should focus on identifying effective strategies for encouraging and embracing socioeconomic diversity in honors colleges in spite of institutional challenges like the PROMISE Scholarship. Also, it would be useful for researchers to examine the experiences and challenges that high-performing students from low-income backgrounds face when they join honors as well as ways to mitigate their challenges and harness their potential as diversifying agents.

For administrators of honors colleges and programs, where the mission is to attract academically high-quality students, our research has a clear message: honors environments should strongly support *both* merit and need-based financial aid in order to maintain a desirable social diversity. Honors administrators need to share information about their experiences with different kinds of scholarships. Have other honors colleges or programs attracted a more diverse student body as the result of a scholarship program with different parameters? Has merit-based aid produced similar outcomes at other institutions? We hope to contextualize West Virginia University's experience

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with the PROMISE scholarship and diversity by comparing it to other institutions.

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Honors Needs Diversity More than the Diverse Need Honors

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Awareness of and sensitivity to social class, economic class, ethnicity and gender have been important goals of the academy and of honors for the past few decades. During this time the academy, which has always been the domain primarily of the middle and upper class, has reached out to help those whom they call “the disadvantaged.” Typically, academics see such attempts at outreach as acts of generosity or social consciousness, a kind of *noblesse oblige*. The truth is that attracting students from different social classes as well as ethnicities and nationalities brings at least as much benefit to the college as to the students we recruit. The benefit to an honors program is even greater than to its home institution. Given the emphasis in honors on small classes and discussion-based instruction, representation of the full range of social and economic perspectives is essential to effective education.

In the past, I have been associated with honors programs at homogeneously middle- to- upper-class institutions. At every one, the staffs of the programs have recognized the need to expose the students to diverse perspectives and lives. One way this concern was addressed was inviting a Native American storyteller to spend the evening with a group of students and faculty members. It was a great event, and ten years later I remember vividly—as probably the students also do—some of the stories she told and the insights they afforded us into the differences between our cultures. However, as I have recently realized, this diversity was artificial in nature: an outsider was brought in to the program in order to create a diverse experience, and then she left. In both kind and outcome, this experience was different from the natural diversity of an honors program composed of students with many different perspectives.

I am now the director of an honors program at a public college in Queens, New York City, which is the most ethnically diverse county in the United States. My college and my honors program reflect that diversity. About half of our college’s students are Black and 15% Hispanic. Forty percent of our students have immigrated to the U.S.; most are from the Caribbean, and we have sizable minorities of Middle-Eastern and East-, West-, and South-Asian students.

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The atmosphere of my college and honors program reflects so many different and unique voices that in addition to describing my college as diverse, I would also describe it as pluralistic. “Diversity,” to me, implies that a dominant power or perspective is allowing or inviting different perspectives to join the conversation. “Pluralism” implies that no group or perspective dominates; there are so many voices that there is no majority.

One way this pluralism manifests itself was made clear to me when I attended the 2008 NCHC conference with students from my honors program. When I asked them about the student poster sessions they attended, my students had critiques of some of the posters. They felt that some posters did not address important issues. What kind of issues?—gender, race and ethnicity. For example, one poster (I am disguising its actual content) described the failure of a microloan program for women in Afghanistan. The poster laid the blame for the failure on the women themselves. My students’ critique was that the poster did not discuss how the Afghan women would view the loans and said nothing about what roles were appropriate for women in that culture.

As one of my students put it, “We would never be able to get away with saying something like that in class . . . not saying anything about the women’s perspective. Other students wouldn’t let us get away with ignoring that.” She was not only referring to her fellow honors students, but to our student body as a whole. Everyday my students must—both in and out of the classroom—navigate and negotiate issues of plurality, and therefore they develop intellectual abilities that honors students from homogeneous middle- and upper-class colleges may not possess. My anecdotal observation is supported by social psychologist Philip Tetlock’s research on being held accountable. He shows that being forced to justify your statements (or the threat of that) leads to greater cognitive complexity. In later studies, Tetlock has focused on the connection among multi-cultural environments, accountability, and complexity of thought.

An atmosphere that engenders such accountability cannot be easily created artificially. Listening to a Native American storyteller or offering a class that highlights a non-dominant perspective may provide insights to students but cannot provide an overall atmosphere of accountability. Focusing on “student diversity” in an honors program’s recruitment will also be unlikely to lead to an atmosphere of accountability. Research by psychologists such as Claude Steele shows that minority “tokens” lack confidence in their legitimacy within an organization. In such situations, token honors students would be unlikely to question others or hold them accountable, unlike a situation where a true plurality exists. In order to experience multi-cultural benefits, honors programs must go beyond simple attempts at “student diversity” and attempt to create an atmosphere in the program that is pluralistic.

Creating a pluralistic honors program requires the presence of students from lower economic classes. In my conversations with students who are considering entering my honors program or students who are considering dropping out of the program, their greatest concern about the program is risk. We are asking students who enter an honors program to take personal and academic risks. To a middle- or upper-class student, the risk of failure may be minimal. To a student from lower economic classes, the risk of failure is much greater, threatening not just psychological or social damage but financial ruin.

Many of the students at my college and in my honors program live on unstable economic ground. For example, this week an honors student resigned. She had just started a new job and was concerned about the demands of supporting herself, keeping her GPA high, and meeting the requirements of the honors program. She asked me, "What is more important, for getting into grad school, a high GPA or the honors program?" I told her the high GPA was more important and she resigned from the honors program. For many of my students, my college is their only chance for a better life. It is imperative that they make no mistakes or miscalculations. They must take the more cautious route.

We are left with two conflicting needs. Honors programs create more careful and complex thinkers when they have students in the program who strongly and confidently espouse their different perspectives on life. However, honors may be a risky luxury these students cannot afford. Our programs derive essential benefits from the participation of students from the lower economic classes while the benefits to these students are fraught with risk. I cannot offer a solution to this dilemma, but awareness of it may help us design and maintain better honors programs.

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Honors and Class

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Since the 1980s a steady stream of scholarly works has examined stratification along class lines in American education. A recent work on this subject is *Tearing Down the Gates*, by Peter Sacks, which won the Frederic W. Ness Book Award in January 2009. It draws a detailed portrait of changes in demographics over the past thirty years or so. His time line allows him to pinpoint a growing polarization that shows a severely reduced college population of students from low-income families, displaced by an enormous increase in students from affluent families on our college campuses. As his subtitle indicates, this shift in economic status is a challenge to “Confronting the Class Divide in American Education.”

Several aspects of this profile give pause. Although everyone is admitted to school in K–12, what Sacks and others he cites call “tracking” begins in pre-school. The kind of teaching offered to children from middle- and upper-income homes is radically different from that given to the poor. Books (too few); equipment (too little); class size (too large): all of these exacerbate the already weak position of children whose homes have no books, whose families have a minimal education, who live in spaces too small or too cramped to read or study.

What’s striking about his argument is his conclusion that family background has so powerful a negative effect on the long-term educational outcomes of these children, who are also often from disadvantaged minority communities. What begins in pre-school continues through high school, where tracking splits the vocational from the academic (pre-college) sectors. Here everything from the kinds of courses to the number of professionals available to guide students becomes dramatically prejudicial to the poor; at one extreme public high school college counselors work on a thousand-to-one ratio, which Sacks calculates translates into one hour per year/per student of advising about kinds of colleges and how students might get into them. Given his statistics, all drawn from US Department of Education data, it is small wonder that the disparity in numbers between children of the poor and of the rich in American colleges is so great.

In what feels like a parallel universe, honors discussions about access to honors programs almost always focus on questions about: appropriate size of the entire program or of small seminar courses; selection procedures and

concerns about performance statistics students present; recruitment strategies and scholarship policies; enhancing opportunities for research and international study. Almost all comments about demographics relate to scholastic standing of applicants and, in recent years, to an interest in diversity among participating honors students. As in the case of discussions about general student admission statistics, “diversity” is defined as race, ethnicity, gender, and specialization but not economic circumstances. Where finances are mentioned, they most frequently come into play in terms of merit scholarships and only occasionally in terms of Pell Grants, which are available to the lower-income group we are concerned with here, the group currently represented in very low numbers in higher education compared to relatively very well-off students.

A few programs among NCHC member institutions have reported on versions of open admissions policies (“If they want to take an honors course, they should be allowed to”). Also, increasing numbers of honors options are available at community colleges, which according to Sacks have the majority of low-income students now in higher education in the States and are reporting success in linking with four-year schools to help their clientele move toward a four-year degree. In the context of this discussion, though, it should be noted that the connection between community colleges and four-year institutions often focuses primarily on merit scholarships, honors programs handing off students to honors programs, and on recruitment of academically very accomplished applicants who are almost certain both to earn scholarships from and be accepted into prestigious four-year schools.

Not many colleges pride themselves on providing access to students who are “diverse” both on grounds of ethnicity or race and economic status. In practice such a broad cross-section is a challenge for recruiters and is an issue that has been raised in higher-education circles for more than a decade. Given the data Peter Sacks offers and that have become important in sociology departments, the broader definition of diversity that includes economics is far more than just a challenge; it is a threat to the concept of universal education that is presumed to prepare individuals for constructive roles in a democratic society.

One of the more fascinating portions of Sacks’ argument appears in the opening chapters, where he depicts the many advantages of attending elementary school in the company of the affluent. He singles out teaching styles that are creative, methodologies based on inquiry and problem solving, and active-learning strategies. Everyone in honors will recognize immediately that this cluster of approaches characterizes the richest experiences in college honors courses. These approaches have been around in elementary school at least since the 1930s—though not in all of them, and not available

to all students. Often called “opportunity rooms,” these tracks are designed for strong academic performers, sometimes also called “the gifted” in these settings. This separating out of the already strong into more creative environments is precisely what disturbs Sacks; its appearance at the very outset of the entire trajectory, he argues, leads inevitably to the stratification he records in our colleges.

In fact, these opening comments, combined with Sacks’ conclusions about higher education, lead me to focus particularly on his book in the framework of thinking about “honors and class” for *JNCHC*. What he never mentions, and what generally does not appear in research about polarization in our educational system, is that the active-learning environments that college honors programs nourish—indeed battle to create—are deeply successful with learners of all ages. The pages of NCHC’s publications often report instances of successful application of honors pedagogy to high school populations, including those that the high schools themselves consider “not honors material.” Several of the earliest articles about City as Text™ make extensive reference to the exceptional work of S.B. Heath, who wrote about similar approaches to teaching, using experiential strategies to pull students into the fields around their schools for interviews with local farmers about their planting practices and to compare these practices with the crop theory they were reading about in their biology texts. Students were looking for patterns in their observations to support local folkways, to sort out complex analytical material, to think independently and creatively. These small-town and rural children in Appalachia, most from poor families, achieved dramatic improvement in their performance on standardized tests once they entered “the field” to ask their questions, to look at and see the world around them in analytical ways, and to present their findings in small-group work in school.

Those of us who work with NCHC’s Honors Semesters have learned much from Heath’s field explorations and have applied that insight to our own work with honors students. Her students were children, in middle school or high school, who were already able to set and solve problems once exposed to what amounts (for us) to honors pedagogy. The application of that pedagogy to high school experiments run by honors programs as outreach efforts for their campuses has also proved to be successful: as a recruiting device; as a way to bring to campus those without money who might never have breached the frontiers of college on their own; as enrichments offered to local schools grateful for the labor and imagination of academically talented college students; as working mentorships gifted to middle and high schools that they cannot afford to buy otherwise.

When students from poor families—students who have already been abused by immersion in sub-standard teaching situations—remain confused about college and unable to secure extended mentoring from overstressed

high school teachers and staff, they typically do not perform well on tests like the ACT and SAT, nor do they write eloquent application essays for whatever colleges they might hear about. As advocacy organizations within higher education have repeatedly argued in the past fifteen years, students graduating from schools that serve poor and low-income populations never show well on competitive examinations, certainly not nearly as well as those from schools serving affluent students.

Once again, some honors programs are attempting to equalize this situation by conducting in-person interviews that, among other advantages, bypass the inherent inequities of relying on massive tests that require fast recall under the pressure of time limits. Analyses of results on these tests show that, the more affluent the test-takers and the higher the educational level of their parents, the likelier they are to get high scores. By relying on interviews rather than test scores, honors programs, far from being just another instrument in the slow torture of low-income aspirants to a better life, can be an instrument for circumventing the ills of an education system that has become a business enterprise. The aspirations of this enterprise are increasingly to raise money from wealthy alumni or to gain points based on high levels of freshman talent and high numbers of outstanding competitive scholarships among graduating seniors.

In an effort to identify what exactly makes an education for democracy, perhaps we should begin by extrapolating what honors does really well—effective teaching, original research, active learning—and applying it to elementary, middle, and high schools. If we were to make sure that all the creativity, artistry, and commitment to intellectual and emotional development gets spread around a bit more to the rest of us, if we were to reach the forty or fifty percent who should take part in universal education as a right and not just a privilege, we would see that honors practices have everything to give, and nothing to lose.

Many of our colleagues in higher education are now embarked on thinking about educational inequity as a danger to our democracy and to our country. I am offering a brief opening to what I hope will be a long conversation about these matters in honors. Many works cited by Peter Sacks can inform this conversation, among them these:

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Research Essay

Predicting Retention in Honors Programs

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INTRODUCTION

A number of challenges exist in providing the honors experience. Programs must compete for resources, coordinate departments, design dynamic curricula, and work toward changing goals. Among the many challenges, one of the hardest begins before students even enter the program. Honors admissions must select the students who will likely succeed in the program. After admissions, programs must then ensure that the program design encourages academic achievement and persistence in honors. To accomplish the goals and overcome the challenges of honors, a better understanding of the predictors of success is necessary. Using a logit regression model, my study will add evidence to previous research on the effectiveness of traditional admissions criteria such as high school grades and standardized test scores, contributing to a better understanding of honors students and their likelihood of success. The results of the study also reveal areas for future research, including the relevance of gender and ethnicity to graduation rates in honors.

PREVIOUS LITERATURE

In previous studies the significant predictors of student success in honors varied by study, college, program, sample, and definition of success. As a good example, Roufagalas (1994) revealed different predictors of success for honors students from different cohorts. For the 1991 honors cohort, high school grade point average (HSGPA), high school size, SAT Math, and the Test of Standard Written English were significant predictors of college grade point average (C-GPA) during the first two years of college. For the 1992 honors cohort, only the combination of HSGPA and the Test of Standard Written English remained a significant predictor of C-GPA, with the Test of Standard Written English declining in significance. Predicting enrollment in classes rather than C-GPA resulted in different significant variables. For both 1991 and 1992, only high school rank significantly predicted enrollment in

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honors classes: students at the top of their high school took more classes in honors. Thus, within the same university different independent variables were found to be significant for different years, and the measurement of success changed the important predictors.

Roufagalas' study demonstrates two additional important dynamics of honors research regarding admissions, retention, and persistence in honors. First, significant predictors for honors programs may be different from those for standard college programs. In the Roufagalas study, SAT scores were useful for the non-honors-college population whereas HSGPA was the most important predictor of grades for honors students. Second, studies must include large sample sizes to reduce anomalies inherent to non-random sample selection. Even with sample sizes of 135 and 130, significant predictors varied by cohort. These results together reveal the importance of repeated research specific to honors in different years and schools.

A study conducted at Marquette University highlights differences between genders (McDonald & Gawkoski, 1979). HSGPA was a useful predictor of graduation with honors consistently for both males and females, but the statistical significance of SAT scores varied by gender and test section. SAT Math was significant and positively related to graduation with a .32 correlation for females and a .17 correlation for males. SAT Verbal was not significant for females but was significant and positively correlated at .14 for males. So among the four correlations, SAT Math was a much better predictor for females than any other set.

Measuring for a different type of success, Megert (2005) found that completion of an advanced high school math course was a significant predictor of honors scholarship retention and added to the predictive capacity of HSGPA scores. She concluded that honors retention could be improved by limiting scholarship recipients to students with previous advanced math course completion and high GPAs.

Researching within a single ethnicity, a study at a historically black college concluded that, in general, SAT verbal and first-semester college GPA (Coll-GPA) were useful in predicting honors students' persistence past two years of college (Allen, 2002). HSGPA and Coll-GPA were significant predictors of GPA at college graduation. On closer examination, though, the significant predictors varied greatly by demographic. The predictive validity of admissions criteria differed between genders and across majors. SAT scores were significant for some majors and non-significant for other majors. HSGPA was equally scattered, and some majors had no predictive variables. The results indicate that the predictive validity of traditional admissions criteria can vary by demographic even within a single ethnicity.

Campbell and Fuqua (2008) examined many of the same variables as my research. Campbell's research sample was also similar to the sample I used as it was conducted using a sample from a large public university. Discriminate and univariate analysis indicated that HSGPA, class rank, first-semester college GPA, honors-housing status, and gender were the most important predictors of honors program persistence and completion. Other variables were found to be relatively poor predictors of honors retention, including ACT, AP or College Level Examination Program (CLEP) credit hours, socioeconomic status, high school size, race, and initial credit-hour enrollment in honors.

The failure of standardized tests and the importance of high school grade point averages to predict honors success was also recently described by Marriner (2007), who evaluated the ability of several factors to predict college GPA for honors students, finding HSGPA to be strongly correlated and standardized test scores to be only weakly correlated.

Outside of honors, only a handful of studies have tested the predictive validity of SAT scores for specific program types. Most studies in college admissions center on predicting freshman grade point averages, but only a handful of studies use test scores and independent variables to predict completion of a specialized academic program. One study found that HSGPA and ACT Math scores were the best predictors of performance for freshman computer science classes (Butcher & Muth, 1985, p. 484). In contrast, a study conducted at Eastern Carolina University found a "weak relationship between SAT scores and college performance, confirming the suspicions and criticism of researchers and educators regarding the use of SAT scores in college admission. However, high school GPA is a relatively more reliable indicator of college level performance" (p. 481; Abdel-Salam, Kauffmann & Williamson, 2006).

Regarding retention rate differences for ethnicities and genders, research outside of honors has indicated that college success can differ greatly by demographic. Numerous studies have found differences between ethnicities, such as differences in graduation rates between Hispanics and Asians; studies have also indicated dynamics within ethnicities, such as differences between black males and females. On a national scale, women do better than men in persistence and graduation rates at collegiate institutions (Mortenson, 2008). However these differences vary by institution and demographic (Peltier, Laden, and Matranga, 1999). Some studies find gender significant; others do not (Campbell & Fuqua, 2008). Given the range of findings in both gender and ethnicity studies of retention, generalizations are not sufficient for specific institutional policy.

My research differs from previous honors literature in important ways. It is one of the largest sample sizes in honors research to date with over one

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thousand records. With a large sample size spanning several cohorts of students, the problem of non-random sampling error, experienced in smaller samples such as Roufagalas (1993), was reduced. The size of the sample also allowed for a new method of analysis via a logit regression model. In adding to the limited selection of honors research, the logit regression methodology helps present a fuller understanding of honors students and programs.

METHODOLOGY

In order to evaluate retention and the effectiveness of current admissions criteria at the University of North Florida Honors Program, the following research uses logit regressions. This type of regression uses independent variables to predict the probability that an event will occur. The logit model employs completion of the honors program as the dependent event in regression. Several independent variables were used: high school grade point average (HSGPA), SAT scores, gender, program entrance year, and ethnicity. For more information on logit regressions refer to a text such as *Econometric Analysis* (Greene, 2002).

ACT scores were converted to SAT equivalents for 300 data points in this sample, using the concordance table published by the ACT (2008). This methodology was confirmed as accurate by research at UT Austin (Lavergne & Walker, 2008) due to a very strong correlation between the two tests. Similar regressions were also run without score conversions to measure for possible bias in score conversion; the results were similar and not significantly different from those presented here.

SURVEY DATA

At the UNF Honors Program, entering students take a seminar-style, six-credit-hour class. They then must take at least two three-credit classes that draw from a variety of disciplines, a one-credit service learning class, and then a one-credit portfolio class. In order to complete the honors capstone portfolio, students must maintain a 3.0 GPA and complete the necessary honors course load before registering.

The data for this regression include the entering class of 2002 through the entering class of 2005. During this five-year period, 1,017 students registered for honors and 35% completed the program. The average student had a 1252 SAT score and a 4.16 GPA at admission. High School Grade Point Averages (HSGPAs) were calculated at the time of entrance using a weighted four-point scale. Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and American Institute for Creative Education (AICE) classes received one extra grade point, and honors classes received an extra half-point; no credits were awarded for classes in which students received below a "C."

STATISTICAL RESULTS

Table 1. Groups and Associated Data

Group	Sample Size	SAT		HSGPA		Completion Rate
		Mean	St Dev	Mean	St Dev	
Males	393	1267	91	4.08	0.33	24%
Females	622	1242	82	4.21	0.32	43%
Whites	858	1258	80	4.17	0.34	35%
Asians	53	1231	86	4.08	0.30	38%
Hispanics	53	1220	109	4.10	0.33	33%
Blacks	34	1193	123	4.11	0.28	32%
All	1012	1252	86	4.16	0.33	36%

Table 2. Logit Regression Variables

Variable	P-value	Lower Odds Ratio	Upper Odds Ratio
High School GPA (HSGPA)	0.000	2.07	5.01
SAT Score	0.098	1.00	1.00
Gender Female	0.000	1.58	2.88
Black	0.386	0.32	1.55
Hispanic	0.934	0.53	1.80
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.262	0.77	2.58
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0.024	1.39	123.85
Other	0.375	0.25	38.60
Entering Class 2003	0.199	0.48	1.16
Entering Class 2004	0.852	0.68	1.61
Entering Class 2005	0.005	1.20	2.85
Entering Class 2006	0.246	0.83	2.04

Likelihood of completing portfolio (Y=1); number of observations = 1012; log likelihood chi square = -613.067; p-value= 0.0000

SAT

SAT scores are not useful predictors of portfolio completion in honors at UNF. With an odds ratio of 1.0, SAT scores have little effect on the probability of completing honors. Furthermore, the variable is only significant at a 90% confidence level. These results parallel that of both Campbell and Fuqua (2008) and Marriner (2007), who concluded that SAT scores were poor predictors of success in honors. Other research within honors has sometimes noted significance for SAT score subsets, such as verbal scores for males, with a weak marginal effect (McDonald & Gawkoski, 1979). In general, my results confirm SAT as a poor predictor of honors completion.

HSGPA

HSGPA was the best predictor of program completion. Each quarter point increase in GPA yields an eighty percent increase in the probability of completing honors. These results are consistent with previous research, including McDonald & Gawaski (1979), Roufagalas (1993), Allen (2002), Marriner (2007), and Campbell and Fuqua (2008).

GENDER

Gender was another strong predictor of portfolio completion. The results agree with honors research by Campbell and Fuqua (2008), who found that females completed honors at a significantly higher rate than males, with females completing at 47.95% and males at 29.58%. The logit regression model in this study suggests a very similar difference in gender completion rates: each female was between 58% and 188% more likely to complete honors than a male.

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity is not a useful predictor. Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics do not differ from Asians (the excluded dummy variable in this regression) in their probability of completing the Honors program. Each ethnicity in this regression has a high p-value except for the “American Indian/American Native” category. It is difficult to draw conclusions from this category for two reasons: the sample is very small at five students, and the confidence interval is large, ranging from 39% to over 1000%. For the major ethnic groups listed in honors, ethnicity in this sample does not predict program graduation.

A number of regressions were run to test for interaction effects on portfolio completion between SAT and ethnicity, SAT and gender, HSGPA and ethnicity, and HSGPA and gender. The absence of interaction effects implies that SAT scores, GPA, and gender can be evaluated individually without

consideration for demographic distortions. As an example, the absence of interaction effects for GPA scores and gender implies that GPA scores are strong predictors of program completion for both males and females.

The results do not mean, however, that graduation rates by ethnicity are the same. The average academic profile of each ethnicity is slightly different within this honors sample. Therefore, the “average” student from each ethnicity has a slightly different probability of completing honors, but this difference is due to their gender and HSGPA rather than reasons outside of these two factors.

ENTRANCE YEAR

Among all of the cohorts, only the class of 2005 had a significantly different portfolio completion rate. The 55% increased probability of graduation compared to 2002, according to staff at the UNF honors program, stemmed from two program changes. The program decreased the credit-hour requirement and implemented more comprehensive advising policies in 2005.

Although these changes improved program completion in 2005, the benefits were not realized in 2006. The 2006 cohort graduated at a lower rate. According to staff, the drop in graduation after 2005 stemmed from staff turnover. Changes to the honors staff created a certain amount of instability that reduced the continuity and involvement of the staff with students (Heather Burk & Marcia Ladendorff, unpublished interview, July 2008). This assertion is speculative and cannot be proven through the survey data; however, the benefit of student-faculty contact is supported by previous research. The more contact students have with faculty, the more they persist in college (Endo & Harpel, 1982). Feldman confirmed this finding for honors students in a study of student dismissal and retention (1991). If the honors staff lacked the time to interact with students, or if previous relationships with faculty were dissolved with staff turnover, then the 2006 class may have been negatively affected by staff changes.

IMPLICATIONS

SAT SCORES

Given the widespread use of cutoff scores in honors programs (Brown, 2001; Pehlke, 2003), the poor ability of SAT scores to predict success has important implications for programs nationwide. The results of this study indicate that cutoff scores may reduce the diversity of a program and falsely exclude qualified demographics, as previous honors research and literature have argued (Grier, 1997). Even the College Board, owner and advocate of the test, warns against misuse of the SAT in this manner. The handbook of

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guidelines for SAT implementation (College Entrance Examination Board, 2002) states that programs should “ensure that small differences in test scores are not the basis for rejecting an otherwise qualified student” and should “guard against using minimum test scores . . . unless properly validated” (9).

At UNF, if a minimum SAT score had been strictly enforced, a reduction in the percentage of minorities accepted to the program might have occurred (see Table 1 for mean SAT scores by ethnicity). If the program had used a higher admissions score requirement, it would have eliminated Hispanics and blacks from the program. This type of policy would have also likely excluded more diverse types of thinkers who do not do well on standardized tests but who would otherwise achieve great success in honors (Freyman, 2005). The results suggest that SAT scores are fundamentally useless for predicting success in honors and are likely to exclude otherwise qualified candidates. The results suggest that programs should therefore eliminate the use of SAT scores and rely on HSGP in order to increase program retention.

HSGPA

The results of my study at UNF indicate that honors administrators should make admissions decisions based on HSGPA. HSGPA scores, calculated using only a simple weighting method, were the best predictors of success.

While the strength of HSGPA scores in predicting success should not be assumed as precisely equal across programs, previous research confirms the importance of HSGPA in other programs. Past performance is clearly a predictor of future performance in honors, and academic success in high school should form the basis for admissions decisions in collegiate honors.

GENDER

The large differences in completion rate by gender require further research and evaluation. Previous honors research has indicated that there are clear differences between males and females among high-achieving students. One of the most distinctive differences is in the number of hours spent studying. In Noldon and Sedlacek’s (1998) sample, females studied on average about 4–5 hours per week while males studied about 1–3 hours.

This difference in habits may in part explain why females finish honors at such a higher rate than males, but other systemic reasons for such large differences are likely. Previous research indicates that graduation rates differ by major in honors. In Campbell and Fuqua’s (2008) study, engineering students were about half as likely to finish honors as other majors, and each major had a different graduation rate (p. 146). In my study, college major was not included. If the distribution of academic majors significantly differs by

gender, which it almost certainly does, then the difference in gender completion rates may be partially due to the students' academic majors.

Regardless of the reasons, there are huge differences in academic performance between genders. More females enter honors at UNF, and they complete honors at a higher rate than males. It seems unlikely that the selection of an academic major can solely account for such large differences in gender completion rates.

ETHNICITY

Previous research has indicated that the predictors of success vary by ethnicity and students from different backgrounds may require different strategies for retention. However, the design of the UNF Honors Program does not appear, at least from the results in this study, to support a dominant culture to the exclusion of other cultures or ethnicities. In fact, the culture of honors may encourage more balanced completion rates across ethnicities. Ottens, Johnson, and Green (1996) argued that the retention of regularly admitted students of color is better facilitated by the presentation of opportunities and challenges than by the removal of impediments. Honors may provide a good concept for this type of environment where students are encouraged and challenged.

CONCLUSION

The results of my study suggest that HSGPA is the most consistent predictor of success and that the use of SAT scores should be eliminated. To ensure diversity and wide-ranging success within honors, programs must also evaluate the effects of program policies and develop ways to encourage dynamic cohorts to continue at high rates. The results of this study also reveal huge differences between gender completion rates that must be evaluated and addressed.

At no point will every student be equally likely to complete an honors program, but graduation rates should be roughly equal across cultural and demographic backgrounds. The success of the UNF Honors Program in maintaining relatively equal graduation rates by ethnicity indicates that this kind of success is very possible, but programs must continually refine policies and instruments.

Finally, while the results of my study indicate a clear importance for HSGPA scores, other measures should be studied. Honors programs are intended to develop curiosity, diligence, a well-rounded set of interests, and an ability to participate in community. These qualities and abilities are complex, and students deserve sophisticated evaluation.

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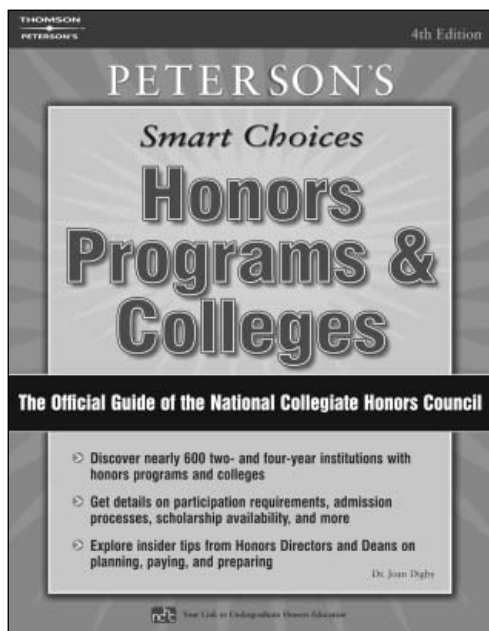
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Robert Spurrier is Director of The Honors College at Oklahoma State University and a past president of NCHC. A political science professor (public law) and NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor, he is co-author of *Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges* (2005) and founded NCHC's Developing in Honors workshop.

Norm Weiner is Distinguished Service Professor of Sociology and Director of the College Honors Program at the State University of New York College at Oswego. He is a former president of NCHC and serves on its publications board. He is currently teaching about American society, popular culture, and Jack the Ripper. (Yes, that Jack the Ripper.) And he disagrees with Charlie Slavin, believing that the study of statistics embiggens us all.

NOTES

NOTES



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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.

The Honors College Phenomenon edited by Peter C. Sederberg (2008, 172pp). This monograph examines the growth of honors colleges since 1990: historical and descriptive characterizations of the trend, alternative models that include determining whether becoming a college is appropriate, and stories of creation and recreation. Leaders whose institutions are contemplating or taking this step as well as those directing established colleges should find these essays valuable.

Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices by Annmarie Guzy (2003, 182pp). 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.

Inspiring Exemplary Teaching and Learning: Perspectives on Teaching Academically Talented College Students edited by Larry Clark and John Zubizarreta (2008, 216pp). This rich collection of essays offers valuable insights into innovative teaching and significant learning in the context of academically challenging classrooms and programs. The volume provides theoretical, descriptive, and practical resources, including models of effective instructional practices, examples of successful courses designed for enhanced learning, and a list of online links to teaching and learning centers and educational databases worldwide.

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™ as models, along with suggestions for how to adapt these models to a variety of educational contexts.

Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education edited by Peter A. Machonis (2008, 160pp). A companion piece to *Place as Text*, focusing on recent, innovative applications of City as Text™ teaching strategies. Chapters on campus as text, local neighborhoods, study abroad, science courses, writing exercises, and philosophical considerations, with practical materials for instituting this pedagogy.

Teaching and Learning in Honors edited by Cheryl L. Fuiks and Larry Clark (2000, 128pp). 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.

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