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## Editor's Introduction

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# Editor's Introduction

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As the terrible news came across our screens on April 16, 2007, honors administrators across the country thought with sympathy and horror of Charles (Jack) Dudley and his students in the Virginia Tech University Honors Program. Eventually we learned that our worries were sadly justified and that three of Jack's honors students had been killed, one had been wounded, and all had been traumatized. Our thoughts and messages flowed toward Jack on that day and the days following as we all felt sorrow for him and his students and at the same time felt the terrifying possibility that we might find ourselves in a similar position some day.

Since that terrible day, major traumas have, alas, occurred on other campuses, but most of us have only had to imagine how we would react and how we might help our students. At the same time, honors teachers and administrators try every day to find ways to help troubled students in different kinds of crises both large and small. The troubles typically do not attract national attention and may not seem dire to anyone other than the honors students suffering them, but the troubles are nonetheless urgent to the students, who often bring their problems—or, worse, do not bring them—to the honors staff, faculty, directors, deans, and advisors who might be able to help.

We all know that no easy formulas exist to guide us when a crisis occurs or when distressed students show up at our office door, but this issue's Forum on "Helping Honors Students in Trouble" provides a variety of insights, perspectives, and advice that might help us help our students. The one dominant theme throughout the essays is the importance of open and respectful communication, a theme that begins in the lead essay.

The Forum begins with "Managing Trouble in Troubled Times: A Responsibility of Honors," an essay by Charles (Jack) Dudley, to whom this issue of *JNCHC* is dedicated. Having suffered the terrible catastrophe of the Virginia Tech massacre, Dudley suggests and also models the kind of civil discourse that can possibly help prevent serious troubles for our students and, if not, can help address these troubles. He suggests a calm, rational collegiality wherein students and faculty respect and help each other as responsible adults. Dudley provides wisdom for helping students not only in major crises but in all troubles great and small.

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In “Crisis in the Wilderness,” Joan Digby, of the C. W. Post Campus, Long Island University, provides a fine example of the kind of collegiality that Dudley has suggested. She recounts a potentially dire event that occurred during a Partners in the Parks adventure at Denali National Park in Alaska this past summer. A student became gravely ill, but, because of thorough preparation for possible emergencies as well as generous attention from a park ranger, catastrophe was averted. Digby’s first principle for crisis management echoes Dudley’s and foreshadows the advice of several of the essays that follow: make students comfortable with sharing their problems.

Like Digby, Angela M. Salas, in “Helping Honors Students in Trouble,” makes the crucial points that we can only help our students if we know what their troubles are and that students often do not tell us or want us to know. She describes her use of the Noel-Levitz inventories and follow-up discussions at Indiana University Southeast to help students open up about problems that are disrupting their studies and their lives. She provides examples, sure to resonate with many among us, of problems she has discovered and of ways she was able to help students solve them.

Salas has pointed out that students typically keep their troubles secret, and in the next essay—“‘Help, I Need Somebody’: Rethinking How We Conceptualize Honors”—Richard Badenhausen of Westminster College in Utah discusses why honors students are so secretive and so reluctant to seek help. After identifying specific reasons that honors students feel especially hesitant to open up about their problems, Badenhausen provides useful and insightful suggestions for honors administrators and teachers in their efforts to discover these problems and solve them. The solutions suggested by both Badenhausen and Salas merit careful consideration by all readers of *JNCHC*.

In keeping with the major themes of the previous four essays, Margaret Walsh emphasizes the importance of listening to students and respecting their opinions. In “Listening Lessons,” Walsh builds on advice that her current honors students at Keene State College have offered to incoming students in order to suggest ways for honors administrators and teachers to offer a strong foundation for their students; such a foundation, she contends, allows students to handle the troubles that they—like all other students—are bound to experience.

The notion that honors students are like all students in needing help is the focus of “Honors Students in Crisis: Four Thoughts from the Field” by Eric W. Owens of Duquesne University and Michael Giazconi of the University of Pittsburgh. The authors investigate assumptions that honors faculty and administrators might make about their students and suggest that such assumptions may be misleading or downright wrong. Owens and Giazconi explain ways that honors students may be different from their non-honors colleagues

and thus require special kinds of help, but they warn against assuming that honors students need less help than other students.

One way that honors students may be different from other students is their more pronounced fear of failure. Bonnie Irwin of Eastern Illinois University confronts this difference head-on in “Hitting the Wall.” She describes the value of failure in a good education, providing four lessons that can teach our high-achieving students—and remind ourselves—that failure is an opportunity to learn and grow in a way that success is not.

The final essay in the Forum—“The Balkanization of University Support Systems: FERPA’s Chilling Effect on Campuses and How Honors Administrators Can Break the Ice” by Amy Beth Cyphert and Keith Garbutt of West Virginia University—explores the importance of communication between different units within a college or university in identifying and helping students at risk. The authors focus first on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (“FERPA”) and its effect of hampering communication. The laws changed after the Virginia Tech tragedy so that communication is now more open. Honors administrators especially need to be familiar with the new laws since they work closely with their students and depend on open communication to help students in trouble.

This issue of JNCHC concludes with two research essays. In “What is Expected of Twenty-First-Century Honors Students: An Analysis of an Integrative Learning Experience,” Celia López-Chávez and Ursula L. Shepherd describe an integrative learning program they developed at the University of New Mexico. Combining two honors seminars, one on biogeography and the other on social sciences, the two faculty members developed a program called From the Rockies to the Andes, which focused on achieving the outcomes encouraged by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the additional goals of intentional teaching and international education. The authors define their terms, their goals, and their success in this course that took place in both New Mexico and Argentina, including their strategies for qualitative assessment.

The concluding essay—“Honors Programs in Four-Year Institutions in the Northeast: A Preliminary Survey toward a National Inventory of Honors” by Richard England of Salisbury University—presents a survey of institutions in the Northeast that do and do not have honors programs and colleges, a survey that he hopes will become the foundation for other regional and national studies. The strategy here is clear and easy to replicate: an Internet search with precise limitations and then application of some basic traits—e.g., size of institution, Carnegie classification, and selectivity—in order to identify what kinds of institutions are more or less likely to have honors programs. This kind of data can be useful to individual honors administrators as well as the NCHC in determining where honors is and is not prevalent in the

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United States. The editors of *JNCHC*, along with Richard England, hope that honors administrators, staff, and students across the country will complete the work that he has begun so that we can all benefit from a greater understanding of the role of honors in higher education.