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Editor's Introduction

Ada Long
University of Alabama at Birmingham

At regional honors conferences, which typically occur around the same time as the NCAA and NIT basketball tournaments, many of us have facetiously wondered aloud whether basketball teams and their coaches spend as much time talking about honors as we spend talking about basketball. Back on our home campuses, a more serious connection between honors and athletics programs often takes the form of mutual recruitment efforts, schedule coordination, arrangement of make-up tests, co-advising, and enthusiastic attendance at sports events when honors students are in the competition. Many honors programs and colleges also sponsor their own sports events, fielding intramural teams or hosting Frisbee tournaments. Academics' attitudes toward sports programs are often complex; a faculty member might simultaneously play pick-up volleyball with her students, have season tickets to the school's football games, and grumble loudly about how much attention and money are devoted to the athletic budget. Some of that complexity occurs among honors administrators as well. The complexity and diversity that we value in honors is well represented in this issue's Forum on "Honors and Athletics," where the range of perceptions fairly well covers the spectrum.

Several months ago we sent out a Call for Papers on the NCHC/Hermes listserv and in the NCHC E-letter announcing the topic of the Forum and distributing the lead essay by Sam Schuman. The Call announced "Honors and Athletics" as the topic of the Forum and included the following suggestions:

> Questions to consider might include: Is *mens sana in corpore sano* a concept relevant to honors? Are intercollegiate athletics an asset or disruption to the honors community? In what way have intramural sports added to or subtracted from the honors community? Is the analogy between honors and athletics a useful tool for gaining special privileges for honors students such as priority registration? Is this analogy apt, and are these privileges ethical? Are the honors director and sports coach natural enemies or allies? Does the special attention given to athletes help justify special attention for honors students? Does the brouhaha that surrounds high-profile athletics

help or interfere with recruiting and fundraising for honors?
Are scholar-athletes an important benefit to honors?

The suggested length, but not limit, for all Forum essays is a thousand words.

Sam Schuman has set the tone for the Forum in his essay entitled "College Sports, Honors, Five Liberal Lessons, and Milo of Crotona," in which he draws connections between honors programs and athletics. He points out the virtues in organized sports that are akin to those we seek and reward in honors: teamwork, persistence, diversity of talents, heights of achievement, and recognition of limits. Milo of Cretona carried a baby bull the same distance every day for four years until he could lift the huge weight of the mature bull; Schuman suggests that ideally athletes and honors students exert a similar ambition and persistence while also learning the limits of the weight they can carry, thus understanding an important lesson about being human.

Many of the following essays express the benefits of a connection between honors and athletics, starting with Joan Digby's "*GO HONORS!*" Digby, honors director at Long Island University, C.W. Post Campus, takes special pleasure in her honors athletes, who are often among the academic best in the program. She finds that they adjust happily to an honors culture that encourages playing well over winning, and they bring to this culture an already well developed sense of teamwork, experience at managing their time effectively, a habit of trying again if they fail, and a willingness to change direction. Digby then demonstrates how athletics can lead to creativity in two wonderful poems she wrote about her favorite sports: tennis and horseback riding.

"Bridging the Jock-Geek Culture War," by Bradley J. Bates and Carolyn A. Haynes of Miami University, is a collaborative essay about the mutually beneficial cooperation between an honors director (Haynes) and an athletic director (Bates), who have discovered how much they can learn from each other about recruiting, educating, and encouraging their students. Athletes and honors students, the authors suggest, have a lot in common given their competitive excellence and its attendant challenges, so coaches and honors educators can benefit from sharing tactics.

In the same vein, four co-authors—Rich Eckert, Ashley Grimm, Kevin J. Roth, and Hallie E. Savage—describe a joint honors/athletics project in "A Collaborative Recruitment Model between Honors and Athletic Programs." They give an account of a model developed by the honors program at Clarion University, an NCAA Division II school, for working in tandem with the athletic department on recruitment, scholarships, retention, graduation, and academic as well as athletic achievement of honors student-athletes. Preliminary data about this cooperative venture are promising based on four years of

experience and a small number of students. The results so far, the authors suggest, indicate that further research would be worthwhile.

An original collaboration at the University of Washington among honors, athletics, and academic affairs is the subject of "Student Athletics and Honors: Building Relationships" by James J. Clauss and Ed Taylor. Clauss, the honors director and a classicist, travelled to Greece with the men's basketball team, teaching them a course on Socrates while they played exhibition games. This experience became an inspiration for other joint academic and athletic projects, transforming the athletes' perceptions of themselves and encouraging more of them to join the honors program.

Another original approach to the topic is "Honors Director as Coach: For the Love of the Game" by Larry Clark of Southeast Missouri State University. In this moving essay, Clark describes directing an honors program in comparison to coaching a sports team. Both roles provide moments of triumph, great and small, as well as pressures and defeats, also great and small. Despite the highs and the lows, one constant is not just love of the game or the program but love of the players or the students. This love is what matters and also what one can count on.

The next two essays address the concept of "*mens sana in corpore sano*." In "Honors and Athletics: the 'Sound Body' Thing," James S. Ruebel writes that, despite some skepticism about the sound mind/sound body formula, his experience as Dean of the Ball State University Honors College as well as faculty representative to the NCAA and Mid-American Conference has given him a perspective from which to appreciate athletes, especially those who also commit to honors. These scholar-athletes strive for excellence in two arenas at once, receiving the benefits of each while contributing to both. In many instances these multiple commitments are an extension of their pre-college experiences and can thus serve as a good recruitment tool for honors.

Taking a different approach from Ruebel's is Kate Wintrol of the University of Nevada Las Vegas. In "Is *Mens Sana in Corpore Sano* a Concept Relevant to Honors Students?" Wintrol considers the ancient and modern usages of the Latin phrase, which in both contexts might be straightforward or satirical. She considers the combined admiration and condescension that seem always to have been part of attitudes toward athletes, providing an ironic perspective on "student athletes" and on the idea of harmony between mind and body.

Despite occasional skepticism, all but one of the essays in the Forum present positive views of college athletics. The one exception is "Honors and Intercollegiate Athletics" by Gary Bell of Texas Tech University, an essay that nevertheless surely represents the views of many in academia, including honors. Bell takes issue with Schuman's idealistic view of intercollegiate sports and suggests the darker elements of athletics on college campuses,

especially at large universities where they have often taken precedence over and displaced the academic values that we promote in honors. The big-money spectator sports—football, basketball, and baseball, especially—do not encourage athleticism in the vast majority of students, instead turning them into mindless, frequently boorish, and often obese spectators. Honors should instead encourage intramural sports and other kinds of participatory athleticism in ways that are more commensurate with academic values than the spectator sports our institutions invest in.

Now we move on to academic values and away from "Honors and Athletics" to present two research essays in this issue of *JNCHC*. The first is "Learning Outcomes Assessment in Honors: An Appropriate Practice?" by Scott Carnicom of Middle Tennessee State University and Christopher A. Snyder of Marymount University. Carnicom and Snyder present an argument, rooted in theories and practices of the social sciences as well as the history of higher education in the United States, that learning outcomes assessment in honors—not to be confused with program evaluation—is flawed in its implementation, imposed on the academy by nonacademic entities, and perilous both to academic freedom and to effective teaching and learning. The authors do not reject assessment entirely but do make a strong case that it needs to be scrutinized more carefully lest it undermine the quality of education rather than improve it.

The other research essay—and final essay in this issue—is "Information and Communication Technology Literacy among First-Year Honors and Non-Honors Students: An Assessment" by Boris Teske and Brian Etheridge. The authors present a statistical study that compares honors to nonhonors students at Louisiana Tech University and also to four-year-college students nationally in terms of their abilities to understand, negotiate, and apply digital media at the freshman level. While the study indicated that Louisiana Tech honors students performed better than the other two groups in most areas, especially in understanding the principles of technology, they needed work in navigating and manipulating digital media. In the conclusion they describe some of their curricular and instructional plans for helping their students improve their technological skills.