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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

Ada Long
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In his farewell column for *The New York Times* (12 March 2011), Frank Rich wrote that "the point of opinion writing is less to try to shape events, a presumptuous and foolhardy ambition at best, than to help stimulate debate and, from my particular perspective, try to explain why things got the way they are and what they might mean and where they might lead." Rich's remark could serve as the motto for the regular Forum section of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, in which opinions—both individually and in the aggregate—serve not to "shape events" in honors but to "stimulate debate." Debate is especially crucial on matters that seem to have gained universal acceptance.

One universally accepted focus of higher education these days seems to be study abroad, an opportunity that was restricted to the affluent throughout much of our history but that has now become an essential offering at almost all colleges and universities, perhaps especially in honors. Some debate about the value of study abroad, its assets and problems, is thus the Forum topic of this issue of *JNCHC*.

In September, a description of the "Forum on Honors Study Abroad" and a call for submissions were sent out to the NCHC membership in the newsletter and on the listserv:

> The lead essay for the Forum . . . is by Carolyn Haynes, Director of the Miami University (Ohio) Honors Program. Her essay presents both the benefits and potential drawbacks of study abroad, including suggestions for enhancing the benefits and limiting the drawbacks. Contributions to the Forum may—but need not—respond to her essay or the issues she addresses. Questions to consider might include: What differentiates honors study abroad from other study abroad programs? What strategies succeed in making honors students effective ambassadors rather than ugly Americans? What are—or should be—the goals of honors study abroad? Should honors students be required to learn the language before studying in a non-English-speaking country? Do honors study abroad programs

> discriminate against students who cannot afford the expense? What should be the essential components of an honors study abroad program? What are the benefits and liabilities of programs that require home residence? Should teachers ideally be from the student's home institution or from the country being visited? Is the whole study abroad movement just another fad in U.S. higher education?

Six essays on the forum topic constitute the first section of this issue of *JNCHC*, followed by a Portz-Prize-winning essay and then by four research essays on various honors-related topics.

In her lead essay, "Overcoming the Hype of Study Abroad," Carolyn Haynes argues that, given the rush during the past decade to multiply international learning experiences, honors programs need now to weigh the advantages against the pitfalls to assure a meaningful education. Ideally, study abroad increases a student's global awareness, cultural understanding, communication skills, love of learning, and personal maturity. Not all programs encourage these ideals, however, and can instead provide opportunities for students to party, skim cultural surfaces, hang out with students just like them, and indulge in self-promotion. Haynes offers six sets of advice on how to make study abroad live up to its ideals.

The other contributions to the Forum address strategies for living up to the ideals Haynes outlines and examples of how honors programs have embodied the values she defines. In "A Case Among Cases," Bernice Braid and Gladys Palma de Schrynemakers offer an eloquent argument in support of Haynes's recommendations for quality study abroad not just for international programs but for all education designed to promote cultural understanding, self-reflection, and deep learning. The authors support their argument with learning models offered by numerous scholars and educational organizations as well as their own experiences at Long Island University Brooklyn, where they have developed and taught a Core Seminar that provides many of the same outcomes as study abroad.

In "Honors in Ghana: How Study Abroad Enriches Students' Lives," Leena Karsan, Annie Hakim, and Janaan Decker focus on two of Haynes's key indicators of a strong study abroad program: meaningful engagement and critical reflection. The authors illustrate these indicators by describing the evolution and implementation of an interdisciplinary and service-oriented study abroad program in Ghana developed by the faculty, staff, and students of Grand Valley State University's Frederik Meijer Honors College. They stress the importance of student initiative, teamwork, and flexibility in creating an educational experience that combines engagement and reflection in a way that changes both the students and the places where they study.

An illustration of Haynes's indicators of quality in international programs can be found in "Taking It Global" by Soncerey L. Montgomery and Uchenna P. Vasser. The authors describe the shift that occurred in the function of study abroad during the twentieth century so that it now serves to educate our students in cultural diversity, communication skills, and global awareness. In line with these goals, the Winston-Salem State University Honors Program has collaborated with the Department of English and Foreign Languages to design a five-week, affordable, summer immersion experience in Mexico. The authors explain the theoretical and practical considerations that have shaped this international honors experience.

While Montgomery and Vasser describe a successful program in which students live with local families, study at local schools, and immerse themselves in the culture, Rosalie C. Otero provides another model in "Faculty-Led International Honors Programs." Otero argues that, while all study abroad is beneficial to a student's education, the best format is international study that is not only sponsored by an honors program but led by honors faculty members. She provides numerous reasons for thinking that this structure is ideal, providing examples from international study programs run by the University of New Mexico Honors Program.

In the final essay of the Forum, "The Honors Differential: At Home and Abroad," Neil H. Donahue suggests a strategy for making study abroad a meaningful and reflective honors experience. The Hofstra University Honors College requires that students write and keep an honors abroad journal during their international study. Donahue describes the contexts, requirements, functions, and values of such a journal in creating the kind of self-reflective and culture-conscious experience advocated by Haynes and by all the other contributors to the Forum on Honors Study Abroad.

An illustration of self-reflection and culture-consciousness in not only honors study abroad but all honors study is Molly MacLagan's essay "Realizing Early English Drama." Each year, the NCHC selects four outstanding student researchers as Portz Scholars, who then present their research at the annual conference. On rare occasions, the editors of *JNCHC* select one of the Portz Scholars' essays for publication. In her outstanding essay, Molly MacLagan describes her experience in mounting a production of *Play 13* from the fifteenth-century *Chester Cycle*. She and her fellow honors students at Kent State University spent over a year studying the literary, dramatic, social, and historical background of the play; doing research on acting styles; learning the appropriate language, setting, and costumes; and putting all their knowledge into practice after practice for their part in a production of the entire twenty-four plays of the *Chester Cycle*, sponsored by the *Poculi Ludique Societas*, at the University of Toronto in 2010. MacLagan's essay, a condensation of her honors thesis, is both a fascinating account of an

exciting project and a tribute to the high quality of honors ambition and achievement.

The first of four faculty research essays is an important pioneer study of honors programs and colleges at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The essay is titled "Honors Education at HBCUs: Core Values, Best Practices, and Select Challenges," and the authors are Ray J. Davis of North Carolina A & T State University and Soncerey L. Montgomery of Winston-Salem State University. Based on thirty survey responses (a 37.5% response rate), the authors determined that, in most ways, honors programs and colleges at HBCUs seem to reflect national norms at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) but have some special features that include their emphasis on debate and perhaps also their focus on social justice, economic empowerment, and leadership development, values that connect HBCUs to their historical and social contexts.

Another survey is presented in the essay "National Survey of College and University Honors Programs Assessment Protocols." Marsha Driscoll of Bemidji State University presents the results of a survey on assessment that she distributed to a hundred honors programs that are NCHC members and seventy-three that are nonmembers, with a total of thirty-eight respondents (a 21.3% response rate). She concludes from her survey results that assessment activities are generally inadequate in both member and nonmember honors programs and that the only significant difference between the two groups is that directors of NCHC-member programs have a higher percentage of their time allotted to honors. Her main argument is that honors programs need to do more rigorous and regular standardized assessment.

In a coincidental point/counterpoint argument, Christopher A. Snyder of Marymount University and Scott Carnicom of Middle Tennessee State University present the opposing side in "Assessment, Accountability, and Honors Education." The authors make the argument that the assessment and accountability movement is a symptom of and contributor to the corporatization of higher education, taking away the autonomy and academic freedom of faculty members; subjecting the arts, humanities, and sciences to the tactics of the social sciences; and stifling the innovation and creativity that are hallmarks of honors education. Illustrating Driscoll's point that many honors directors are resistant to assessment, Snyder and Carnicom provide more than a dozen reasons for their resistance and why they think it is appropriate in the context of honors.

This issue of *JNCHC* concludes with an essay called "Ethnogenesis: The Construction and Dynamics of the Honors Classroom Culture" by Melissa Ladenheim, Kristen Kuhns, and Morgan Brockington. The authors describe the emergence of a distinct classroom culture (i.e., ethnogenesis) in the

University of Maine Honors College. Based on a faculty survey, a survey of students who had taken honors classes the previous year, and classroom observations by upper-class honors students, the essay addresses the question of how a culture of mutual trust, respect, and intellectual engagement evolves in first-year honors classes.