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Editor's Introduction

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In a letter to the editor of *The New Yorker,* Ryan Walker—responding to an essay by James Surowiecki in the 21 November 2011 issue on the rising costs of higher education—identifies an important cause of the rise as the "vast layer of university administrators" that increased thirty-nine percent between 1993 and 2007 while student enrollment increased only fifteen percent and academic staffing eighteen percent. Walker writes, ". . . universities are building an expensive management structure around an academic core that's becoming more and more hollow" (*The New Yorker*, 19 December 2011). NCHC conference conversations often turn to observations about this phenomenon on our home campuses, rarely with approval. One question honors administrators might ask is whether we are also following this trend toward administrative bloating and, if so, what advantages we are gaining from a multiplication of associate and assistant directors, national scholarship advisors, recruitment officials, and other positions that, based on job announcements and anecdotal evidence, seem to be increasing in kinds and numbers.

Another letter writer in the same issue of *The New Yorker* (19 December 2011), Josh Wand, mentions the diminishing state support for higher education, asserting that in Colorado, for instance, "the percentage of the state's budget that funds higher education has fallen from about twenty percent to six percent in the past thirty years." This dramatic decrease in state funding obviously has economic implications for honors programs, which must compete with other programs on campus for limited funds, and this high-stakes competition requires that honors programs not only face budget cuts in many instances but also must justify more forcefully their financial requests—all in a context where higher education seems to be falling from grace as well as from state budgets.

Given the intense focus on economic issues in higher education, not just by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and other education-related journals but by the popular media, and given the impact of all these issues on honors programs and colleges, the time is clearly right to offer a Forum on "The Economy of Honors." Consequently, in the fall of 2011 we invited essays of roughly a thousand words that consider this theme in an institutional,

national, or international context. The lead essay by Richard Badenhausen of Westminster College (Utah) was distributed on the NCHC listserv and website; forum contributors could but did not have to respond to the ideas that Badenhausen presented in his essay. Other questions that contributors were invited to consider included:

> Under what circumstances should honors administrators accept, protest, or defy budget cuts? What are the best strategies for adapting to funding cutbacks? Are cutbacks always bad for the program, and are funding increases always good?—what might be some counterintuitive consequences to budgets changes? What are the impacts of large (or small) endowments and scholarship funds on the quality of honors education? How have honors programs and colleges fared over the past decade or more in comparison to the institutions in which they are housed?—has the comparison been favorable or unfavorable to the status and success of honors? How has the expanding role of fundraising and money managing affected individual honors directors and deans?—how has it affected the NCHC? What is the best economic model for an honors program: a market, barter, or gift economy, or some other model? What are the implications for honors and for the NCHC of the wide range of compensation for honors administrators, salaries averaging $123,198 for honors deans (2011–12 Almanac Issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*) while some directors receive no special remuneration for their honors duties?

We received four responses.

In his lead essay, "Costs and Benefits in the Economy of Honors," Badenhausen investigates the numerous meanings of "economy" in the context of honors education. Some of these meanings signal threats to honors programs and colleges in the form of tightening budgets and downsizing; some suggest personal threats given our tendency as academics to avoid the increasingly business-related character of higher education; some describe inevitable components of our positions as money managers within our programs or colleges; and some are a call to action as we try to protect and advance honors education in the face of financial and cultural changes in academia. Badenhausen suggests that, however we view the economy of honors, we are misguided if we imagine ourselves inhabiting a lofty life of the mind above the fray of financial concerns.

Responding to several of Badenhausen's key points, Annmarie Guzy of the University of South Alabama offers a faculty perspective on the impacts

of tightening budgets in the current cost-centered culture of higher education. Her essay "Can Faculty Afford Honors?" makes the point that faculty members who are eager to teach in honors have a hard time with logistics, especially when a service culture has given way to a money culture. Fulfilling departmental teaching obligations, given the constriction of full-time faculty lines, can make volunteer honors commitments—interviews, application reviews, advising, socializing, and extracurricular events—seem onerous and abusive. Directors and deans need to respond by compensating honors faculty as generously as possible, informing them of financial options, supporting their membership in NCHC, and subsidizing faculty development.

Angela M. Salas, in "Articulating the Distinctiveness of the Honors Learning Experience," homes in on Badenhausen's assertion that, if honors is to transcend the financial motives and aspirations of our students and their families as well as our colleagues and institutions, we must first define what is distinctive about the learning experience in honors. Salas found inspiration in this assertion to spell out the distinctive features of her honors program at Indiana University Southeast and to describe these features on the program's website. While much of what she learned in trying to define what made her program special could not be adequately conveyed on a website, she discovered the strengths and flaws of her program in the process of trying and shares these discoveries in her essay.

Larry Andrews of Kent State University offers a postscript to Badenhausen's essay in "If Not Sufficiency, at Least Empowerment." Andrews emphasizes the value of establishing a discretionary fund and suggests how best to implement such a fund for an honors program. As his title suggests, Andrews is not claiming that such a fund should let higher administrators off the hook in providing the necessary funding for honors; rather, he is suggesting that such a fund can make a significant difference in enhancing the honors experience of our students.

In "Protecting and Expanding the Honors Budget in Hard Times," Brian Railsback offers four specific strategies that have worked at Western Carolina University to turn an impoverished honors program into a thriving honors college despite fiscal limitations. Three of these strategies will be familiar to many readers: moving from a program to a college structure, appointing an all-student advisory board, and creating an external advisory board. The other idea that Railsback suggests—opening the honors college to all students doing undergraduate research—has rationales and benefits that are of special interest given the significant expansion of undergraduate research beyond honors into the general undergraduate population at most institutions during the past decade or two. Furthermore, the rags-to-riches story of the WCU Honors College is an inspiring way to conclude this Forum on "The Economy of Honors."

This issue of *JNCHC* includes two important research essays. In the first, "Honors Dissertation Abstracts: A Bounded Qualitative Meta-Study," Debra K. Holman and James H. Banning of Colorado State University have provided an invaluable service to future researchers by providing a quick and handy guide to and analysis of forty-nine doctoral dissertations on honors education produced from 1987 through 2006. Readers may be surprised at the amount and range of scholarship on honors that doctoral candidates have created in this twenty-five-year period, especially on the topics of evaluation, curriculum and instruction, and achievement. Sixteen of the dissertations have led to journal articles (four in *JNCHC*), and three have led to book publications (one in the NCHC Monograph Series), indicating that honors education is a burgeoning field for research. Holman and Banning conclude their essay by suggesting two areas that are most promising for future research: quantitative or mixed method studies of evaluation and ecological studies of the personal attributes of honors students.

The final essay in this issue of *JNCHC* is "The Power and Utility of Reflective Learning Portfolios in Honors" by Christopher R. Corley of Minnesota State University, Mankato, and John Zubizarreta of Columbia College (South Carolina). The authors argue that portfolios, which have become commonplace in higher education, are especially appropriate for honors programs and colleges, promoting student-created documentation of learning outcomes that have practical, academic, and personal value to the education of honors students. Corley and Zubizarreta contend that programs as well as students benefit from portfolios, which have greater value in assessing student progress than numerical indicators such as credits and grades. They illustrate their general argument by describing in detail the redesign of the honors program at Minnesota State University, Mankato, which shaped its new policies, standards, and curriculum around electronic portfolios. Honors educators who are considering adoption of a portfolio approach will find here a wide range of details and suggestions about incorporating portfolios as a central educational as well as assessment strategy.