

2015

Editor's Introduction

Ada Long

University of Alabama at Birmingham, adalong@uab.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchchip>

Long, Ada, "Editor's Introduction" (2015). *Honors in Practice -- Online Archive*. 237.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchchip/237>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the National Collegiate Honors Council at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors in Practice -- Online Archive by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Ada Long

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Sam Schuman is a legend among honors teachers, students, and administrators, and we open this issue of *Honors in Practice* by paying tribute to his legacy. In “Remembering Sam Schuman,” a brief introduction to the facts of his life is followed by eleven tributes to his personal and professional influence on the evolution of honors in the United States. The subsequent essays in this journal are no doubt beneficiaries—direct or indirect, tacit or acknowledged—of his influence. His legacy lives on in all of us.

“Remembering Sam Schuman” is followed by a revised version of James S. Ruebel’s 2014 presidential address at the NCHC conference in Denver. As a classical scholar, Ruebel roots his title, “. . . and we are a-changing, too,” and his theme in the words and works of Ovid, who wrote in the *Metamorphoses*, “*Omnia mutantur, nihil interit*” (“Everything changes, nothing dies”). After taking us on a lovely amble through relics of ancient Roman history and literature, Ruebel applies Ovid’s statement to the recent history of the NCHC as this organization tries to “sustain and continue its strengths, its center, while adapting to a new era, new challenges, new responsibilities, and new expectations both in the United States and abroad.”

Two essays in this volume present the results of research studies about honors. The first is “A Quality Instrument for Effective Honors Program Review” by Patricia Joanne Smith of the University of Central Arkansas. Smith conducted a survey of some seventy members of NCHC, whom she defined as experts by virtue of their leadership positions within the organization. The survey, consisting of 215 items, was completed by forty of those surveyed, and, after “elimination of aberrant participants,” thirty-two participants remained. “The end result was an instrument reduced to 93 items in 12 dimensions with a CVI of 0.94.” Smith presents the data that resulted from her study in a lengthy set of appendices. Smith’s study has formed the basis of subsequent discussions within the NCHC of certification and, more recently, official NCHC program review and thus should be of current interest to readers of *HIP*.

The next essay—“Community Building at Honors Programs in Continental Europe”—is by Nico Brinkel, Floris van Rees, Margit Ruis, and Florian Sloots of Utrecht University in the Netherlands. Brinkel and his co-authors interviewed students, alumni, and coordinators of honors programs in

Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands to ascertain the most important features of community building. The features that emerged from their study were “social contact among participants,” “responsibility and ownership of students,” “personal profit from participating in the honors community,” “involvement of the coordinator,” “functioning of communication channels,” and “program size.” The authors discuss each of these features and provide numerous quotations of the coordinators and students they interviewed in their study.

The next two essays in this volume describe and discuss honors study abroad programs that have a strong active learning component. In “Setting the Standard for Challenge: Teaching English in Dimen, China,” Cynthia W. Weick et al. tell the story of a program at the University of the Pacific that sends groups of honors students to teach English as a foreign language to middle-school students in a rural Chinese village. In preparation for teaching a two-week English course, two teams of six honors students—the first team providing the pilot project—spent six months studying theoretical models, methods, and techniques, quickly learning once they were in Dimen that the most important lesson they had to learn was flexibility. For the honors students, this program has combined experiential learning, scholarship, cross-cultural learning, and community service; for their young Chinese students, the program has provided greater proficiency and interest in English as well as friendships with U.S. college students.

Steven Engel and Howard Keeley of Georgia Southern University describe another kind of study abroad program in their essay, “Honors Inquiry in Ireland: Developing a Research-Based Study Abroad Experience for Honors Students.” They created an experiential learning experience by initiating a high-level student research project within a larger GSU study called the Wexford-Savannah Axis. After preparation back home that included extensive archival research on the experiences of nineteenth-century Irish immigrants from Wexford in Savannah, the students traveled with their two faculty leaders to their Irish base at the Waterford Institute of Technology and for two weeks examined archives in and around Wexford and at the National Archives in Dublin. The students presented the results of their research to two Irish audiences: one a public gathering of seventy people and the other a forum of twenty academics. The authors provide information and advice about how to produce a successful, research-based, study abroad experience for honors students.

Heather C. Camp of Minnesota State University, Mankato, describes another collaboration, this one local rather than international, in “Writing toward Community Engagement in Honors.” Like the Georgia/Ireland project, this one involved archival research, community interaction, and public presentation but without involving study abroad. The students in Camp’s Honors English 101 class teamed up with the *Mankato Free Press* to produce a well-researched, follow-up magazine story about a bear mauling that took place in Mankato in 1934. Throughout the semester, student teams worked on archival research, interviews, photography, layout, design, and all the elements that go into producing a magazine article for a large, public audience. Camp provides a helpful list of lessons learned from this collaborative and community-oriented honors project.

James D. Bell describes his course on social entrepreneurship at Texas State University as an example of engaging honors students in practical applications of their college education to campus and community improvements. In “Teaching and Fostering Change in the Classroom, Campus, and Community,” Bell describes the course goals, structure, methodology, and assignments, including both individual and team work on semester-long projects. He describes his role as “the workplace supervisor, manager, investor, and outside guiding-coalition member.” The students form outside coalitions with campus or community leaders, who are then invited to attend their final presentations—or “executive summaries”—at the end of the term. Bell describes a variety of successful projects that have included establishing a recognized campus UNICEF chapter and improving the university orientations for freshmen and transfer students.

In “City as Text™: To Blog or Not to Blog,” Margaret T. Konkel and David Gammack describe the redesign of an honors seminar at Marymount University that attracts primarily first-year students but also admits upperclassmen. The redesign is modeled on the NCHC’s City as Text™ (CAT) pedagogy and uses blogging as the format for the written work that is an essential feature of active learning. One important discovery arising from their experiment is that blogging in the context of CAT is much more effective with freshmen than with upperclassmen. Another interesting result of their study is their conclusion that perhaps rubrics are not an effective tool to improve learning in the context of blogging for CAT whereas blogging that promotes reflection before writing is a useful strategy.

The next two essays focus on fostering the subjective and personal experience of honors students. In “Cultivating Awareness in Honors: First-Person

Noting and Contemplative Practices,” Kathy J. Cooke of Quinnipiac University suggests that the practices of mindfulness are an important complement to the traditional academic stress on critical writing, reading, and discussion. She describes her use of “open-monitoring mindfulness” and specifically First-Person Noting as a way to help students focus on the subjective and “to enhance critical thinking, promote understanding of self and one’s own traditions, develop a stronger narrative imagination, and nurture the little-discussed educational virtue of intellectual humility.” Student evaluations, she writes, indicated that First-Person Noting promoted “critical examination,” “openness and curiosity,” and increasing presence “in the day-to-day experience of learning.”

Christine Rockey advocates a different form and goal of subjectivity, focused on issues of life satisfaction, in “Using *The Happiness Advantage* in a College Honors Program.” Rockey describes adopting the principles of Shawn Achor’s book *The Happiness Advantage* in a freshman honors seminar at Coastal Carolina University. Fifty students in her three sections of the seminar took a Life Satisfaction Survey before addressing the concepts in Achor’s book and then took the test again three weeks later. The results showed significant improvement in eighteen of the twenty-five questions on the survey, including items like “healthy coping,” an “attitude of gratitude,” and “strong faith.” Rockey infers that teaching life-satisfaction concepts should be included in honors education as an enhancement of their academic and personal success.

In this volume’s final essay, Susan Yager of Iowa State University addresses another kind of satisfaction in “‘Something he could do without being taught’: Honors, Play, and *Harry Potter*.” Yager explains some of the reasons that the “Potterverse” has become and remained popular in the academic world, including honors education. The collaborative possibilities of the Pottermore website; the myth of the hero’s journey; the setting in a school; the encyclopedic scope of allusions and learning; the rewards of multiple re-readings: these are a few of the benefits that the Potter series brings to an honors classroom. What Yager most values is the fun that studying Rowling’s series brings to the classroom, and she describes the wide variety of creative projects that Harry Potter has inspired in her honors students.

Sam Schuman might have said of this volume, as he often loved to say, “Here is God’s plenty.”