

## Coordinating Multi-Campus Honors Programs and Colleges

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**Abstract:** The leadership responsibility for coordinating a multi-campus honors program or college can be complex, and it needs to succeed in an atmosphere of mutual respect and flexibility. The work can be broken down into several key components: institutional context, quality standards, curriculum, faculty selection, student mobility, communication, scholarships, budget, and governance.

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When I became dean of the long-standing Kent State University Honors College (program, 1933; college, 1965), one of the charges the provost gave me was to strengthen or develop honors activity at our seven regional campuses. Over the next fourteen years I felt that I achieved modest success in terms of curriculum, faculty engagement, number of students, and harmonious policy agreement. What I learned was attuned to our institutional structure, a centralized model with local flexibility.

I intended to subtitle this essay “Conducting an Orchestra or Herding Cats?” The ideal would be a harmonious group led by the baton at the front, tuned to the oboe’s A, and playing the same score, but complicated and enriched by the timbres of various instruments and the individual musicianship of the players. The opposite would be chaos: no central control, individuals doing their own thing, cacophony—a houseful of felines notorious for their independence, recalcitrant and unpredictable. The problem with both metaphors is that they imply a central agent, one controlling and one

failing to control. In reality, another model can work. What I have learned through NCHC is that models of multi-campus honors programs or colleges, like those on single campuses, are endlessly varied. Some of these programs work cooperatively by shared authority while others succeed with loose central oversight and local autonomy.

No matter the model, certain issues of coordination continue to preoccupy honors leaders: institutional context, quality standards, curriculum, faculty selection, student mobility among campuses, communication, scholarships, budget, and governance. As the following discussion focuses on each of these, the description of a variety of ways of dealing with them will include smatterings of advice drawn from experience and pragmatic common sense, but it is informed primarily by the survey responses I received in 2019 from my informal listserv questionnaire to honors administrators, whom I promised to cite only anonymously (see the Appendix for a copy of this questionnaire and number of responses). A 1995 conference session also focused on this topic, organized by Jeff Portnoy (“In Cross-Town Traffic”), but contemporaneous notes from that session, which was over twenty-five years ago, were not available.

I am using interchangeably such terms as “main,” “central,” and “overarching” for the anchor of a system dominated by a large central honors program or college. Similarly, I use interchangeably such terms as “satellite,” “regional,” and “small” for extension campuses in such a system, avoiding the term “branch.” Different institutions have different practices for such terminology. Where the campuses are roughly equal in authority and size, I simply refer to them as the “campuses” in the system. I also use “honors leaders” and “honors administrators” interchangeably with “honors deans and directors,” and I use “honors coordinator” for the honors point person at a regional or small campus.

## INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

NCHC has long recognized the importance of institutional context in the design and operation of honors programs and colleges. Its “Basic Characteristics” documents come with the caveat that institutions vary widely and can have an enabling as well as a limiting effect on honors aspirations. One program or college must rely on the financial aid office for recruiting scholarships while another may control its own scholarship budget. A program or college may or may not be given added staff to handle a top-down push for increased enrollment. Given the character of the student body and the inclusion of professional majors, a program or college may or may not require a

senior thesis. There may or may not be a tradition of strong departmental support for faculty teaching honors courses.

This institutional diversity also characterizes those honors programs and colleges that exist on more than one central campus. The models for such combinations of campus programs seem astonishingly varied and fluctuating. A common model in large universities reflects a historical spread of those universities into regional sites. In this model (true at my university, for example), the honors program or college is centralized on the original old campus, and satellite campus programs arise gradually. The sizes of the satellite campuses may vary widely, affecting the nature and existence of honors at those campuses. A very small campus may not be able to spare faculty to offer many honors courses or have resources to fund a part-time coordinator or advisor. The student population at the satellites may be older, more often part-time, working, and commuting. Within the same institution, one campus has largely African American students and another campus mostly Hispanic and Asian. One community college system reports that students at the smaller campuses are “less urban and competitive” and that there are fewer full-time tenured faculty there. Tuition costs may be lower than at the central campus.

Some honors programs and colleges in this model report considerably varying character and even policy stances in the several satellite campuses because of location. One state institution I visited as an evaluator had recently developed a small satellite campus and was just beginning to explore honors possibilities there. One particularly complex large institution in this model has overlaid separate honors programs in schools and colleges with honors across four campuses, some of which resulted from institutional merger and some from spinning off discipline clusters into new sites. In some cases under this model, a very large, state-wide institutional system maintains an honors headquarters at the main campus with considerable outreach to and collaboration with as many as twenty-three far-flung satellite campuses.

Another model is common among two-year institutions in which multiple campuses enjoy roughly equal status and whose students move freely among campuses. In several such examples, curricular requirements and policies such as admission standards are uniform by consensus or by administrative leadership at the largest or oldest of the several campuses. Resources in terms of leadership, faculty, and scholarship support typically vary according to the size of the campus honors population. Although individual campuses enjoy some autonomy, an honors director or dean at one of the campuses may maintain some central authority in the system. In one five-campus system, individual campus honors programs have no autonomy; the largest campus

rules all. Another five-campus system also has a sixth online “campus” with its own coordinator.

The variety of institutional histories, arrangements, and moments in time suggests that there is no one correct or desirable way to establish and manage honors at multiple campuses. No matter what the institutional context, however, honors deans or directors need to have the support of their chief academic officer in conducting relations among campuses. This support is all the more important when the campuses enjoy considerable autonomy. Honors deans or directors must also enter into diplomatic relations with the chief administrator—perhaps a dean—at each campus other than their own and determine to what extent honors depends on that administrator’s attitude, budget, and even community relations. The success of honors at a particular campus depends as well on campus history, the attitudes of the faculty cadre, and the student population. Honors directors and deans have much to learn in order to avoid a patronizing or superior attitude in relation to a campus other than their own.

## **QUALITY STANDARDS**

Institutional and campus context is crucial in determining how to ensure the highest quality of student and program success. All participants, including students, share responsibility for creating this success. Some measures of quality have long been numerical, such as GPA and test scores for admission, credit-hour requirements for graduation, rates of honors completion, and survey results. Others have been less tangible, such as motivation, diversity, leadership, service, thoroughness of research proposals, and quality of writing in senior theses. It is best to avoid thinking in the business language of “quality control” or the more tactful current euphemism “quality assurance.” Nevertheless, honors leaders should have thoughtful discussions and make careful decisions about what measures and standards work best for the system and for individual campuses, and these should be articulated in policy understandings and perhaps documents. Then comes the question of how these standards are to be monitored and upheld, a question of governance.

Under the model of a central-campus honors program or college with activity at satellite campuses, for example, admissions criteria may vary within the system. The main-campus honors population may have grown so large that staff may weigh prospective students only by GPA and test scores, being unable to hold hundreds of interviews or read hundreds of essays and letters of recommendation. The minimum numbers may have been established

by the realities of the applicant pool, the surrounding institutional competition, and the capacity of the program. In an NCHC survey in 2014–2015, two thirds of honors programs and colleges had a required minimum ACT/SAT score for admission (“NCHC Admissions, Retention, and Completion Survey”). Even in large programs, however, a trend is underway to rely less on numbers and adopt more holistic admissions evaluations for the sake of both diversity and predictability of success. In some cases, the mission of the honors program or college may have been defined more specifically than academic development—say, in terms of community service, in which case the main criterion will be the prospective student’s past service experience and apparent motivation to continue.

At a related satellite campus, on the other hand, especially if many prospective students are not fresh out of high school, honors leaders can take time for interviews, essays, and recommendations and take into account the prospect’s maturity, work experience, and motivation. As a result, the main campus’s strict minimum 30 ACT score, for example, will likely not be the defining guideline, and the incoming honors population may look different from the one at the main campus but be just as successful or even more successful in completing honors work. Applying a single admissions standard across campuses is thus not always appropriate, but it may make sense in the case of co-equal campuses of similar size. In rare instances, programs have no admission requirements, only the student’s self-nomination.

Honors administrators or advisors typically monitor students’ progress in honors and may have annual benchmarks for honors courses or credits and for GPA. Policies about normal progress, warnings to delinquents, probationary terms, reinstatement, and dismissal again may vary across campuses. A smaller campus may have difficulty offering enough honors courses or research experiences; honors course scheduling may too often conflict with students’ other required courses, and online honors courses may not be available. Honors coordinators at such campuses usually recognize this challenge and use a contract system by which, for example, a student can add one honors credit hour to an existing non-honors course (for a thorough discussion of contracts, see Kristine A. Miller’s monograph *Building Honors Contracts: Insights and Oversights*). If the honors progress or graduation requirement is stated in credit hours rather than number of courses, the student is at a disadvantage unless all the course hours—non-honors plus contract—count as honors work. Four-year campuses typically recognize honors completion with such acknowledgments as medallions, cords, certificates, and diploma

and transcript notations. Although some two-year campuses follow this practice, it should be more widespread, even when a student is transferring to a four-year campus intending to complete honors work there.

A diligent oversight of formal contract proposals, progress reports, and products of final honors contract work is necessary for maintaining quality, assuring that proposals are well thought out and well written; that faculty members are working conscientiously with students to create a total honors experience for the student; and that the final product, graded entirely by the instructor but shared with the honors coordinator, meets honors standards.

Depending on the structure of a multi-campus honors system, formal approval of independent research proposals and capstone theses or creative projects may or may not reside with the individual campus. If the campuses are relatively autonomous and co-equal, such approval is likely to be local. Even in a main campus/satellite campuses model, the on-site honors coordinator will know best the students and faculty members involved in independent research. The thesis/creative project proposal should, nevertheless, probably come under the purview of the central honors director or dean to ensure uniformity of standards. The same questions arise about the clarity and thoroughness of the proposal and the qualifications of the faculty member. Where central approval of thesis proposals is required, it should occur as expeditiously as possible to prevent delays in registration at the regional campus. Ideally, the central dean or director should also read the final results—the thesis or the creative project—even though the instructor assigns the grade and a thesis committee may have approved. The use of assessment tools should be uniform across campuses. Such tools include not just numerical standards but also student evaluations of instructors, thesis surveys, surveys of graduating or departing students, and alumni surveys.

Ensuring quality in curriculum and faculty selection can be tricky. Honors leaders and faculty need to agree on what constitutes honors education: its goals, character, and methods. This agreement might be achieved in a workshop or through discussions in an advisory council, and it should produce a document perhaps entitled “The Nature of an Honors Course.” This document should be widely shared and should be available on the honors website along with course descriptions for the current academic term. Such a listing could include offerings on all campuses, or each campus could have its own printed or online course list, accompanied by the generic desiderata. Where students move freely among campuses in any given term, they will find a central repository of all honors courses, including online courses, useful. At any

moment, all members of the honors community should be able to access the overarching statement as a reminder of their common goals and to review course descriptions against the desiderata therein. Both faculty and students should see that they are held accountable to these standards for creating an authentic honors experience.

## CURRICULUM

Course offerings, including opportunities for individual research, may well vary among campuses. They may be similar, even uniform, if all campuses are about the same size and have similar student populations, but such situations are relatively rare. Uniformity would be especially desirable when students move freely among several campuses for their coursework. Particularly important is the offering of a foundational freshman honors course across all campuses. If smaller campuses have primarily two-year programs, their other honors courses are likely to be required general education courses in the disciplines, supplemented perhaps by contracts or what one dean calls “embedded classes,” a section of honors students within a larger non-honors section. With limited honors populations and limited resources, these programs may not be able to offer the sorts of unique interdisciplinary seminars that may be available at the large central campus. One solution may be offering online honors courses that are available to students at all campuses. Honors coordinators should take care to ensure that their students complete enough honors courses to be able to transfer to the central campus or to another institution, to be in step with honors students there, and to complete a four-year honors degree.

In the case of a central honors program or college wishing to extend honors opportunities to a satellite campus, the logical starting point is the foundational freshman honors course that exists at the central campus, assuming that there is one. If an honors coordinator has not been named, the central campus honors leader needs to collaborate on instructor selection and share information about the foundational seminar, including course parameters and sample syllabi. This element of curricular similarity, even if additional course offerings come to vary widely, is critical for fundamental parity in students’ honors experience at the institution.

Alternatively, or if no foundational freshman honors course exists, a satellite curriculum may be anchored by one or two popular required general education courses taught in a separate honors section. I say “popular” so that the number of honors students will be sufficient to form a separate section.



Again, the central honors leader needs to work closely with prospective faculty to ensure a common understanding of what makes an honors course different for both student and instructor. As the campus honors population grows, the central honors leader can work with the campus administrator to establish an honors coordinator with reassigned time and a growing list of course offerings. In cases where the campuses are relatively close geographically and where students are mobile among campuses, honors leaders should collaborate carefully on scheduling courses so that campuses are not competing with each other for students in a given course at the same time. Online courses may solve the problem of accessibility to honors courses but complicate the problem of competing campuses.

In some cases, curriculum may look quite different at different campuses. If one campus specializes in a specific discipline cluster, such as engineering or business, its honors courses beyond general education may reside within that disciplinary focus and be unavailable at other campuses in the system. Similarly, a two-year satellite campus may offer technical degree programs not offered at the main campus. Honors students in those programs will find it useful to have honors courses as well as contracts and individual research opportunities in their specialty.

## **FACULTY SELECTION**

Deciding who should teach an honors course requires both determination to uphold standards and diplomacy amid the vagaries of campus variety and politics. Faculty selection will depend partly on the demand for faculty in other courses—on whether the department or campus can spare the instructor. Financial compensation may also be an issue, either to the instructor or to the department or campus. A current policy or tradition of such compensation may already exist in the institution or in the central honors program or college. Compensation may come from an existing honors budget or from funding by the chief academic officer or other campus administrator. The campus administrator may be involved in negotiations about faculty selection if the campus honors program is in its early stages, and certainly department chairs will have a say. Later a campus honors coordinator should have the responsibility for faculty selection and for negotiating both the reassignment of faculty for honors courses and the cooperation of faculty for contracts and individual research. If all campuses are equal, the individual honors program may be responsible for faculty selection, but in at least one community college system an overarching honors council approves honors faculty. Even in



the model of a large central honors program or college, the satellite campus will likely have this authority.

Whatever the institutional context, having written expectations about honors courses, e.g., “The Nature of an Honors Course,” will furnish a starting point in orienting prospective honors faculty to the task. Faculty generally agree that teaching an honors course is more demanding than teaching a non-honors course. Honors may involve more written work, small-group projects, individual attention, student initiative, flexibility, high standards, and creative thinking. Often honors courses are uniquely designed and sometimes interdisciplinary. Instructors have considerable and pleasurable freedom in creating such courses, but they need to be well prepared and know what to expect. Faculty members who wish simply to repeat what they do in a non-honors course or who plan simply to lecture will not be good candidates. Honors leaders should provide support in the form of, say, faculty workshops, sharing of syllabi, referrals to veteran instructors for informal consultation, and reference to helpful NCHC documents on honors teaching and learning (e.g., Clark and Zubizarreta; Ford and Zubizarreta). They may also establish teaching awards, either local or institution-wide, to recognize high-quality honors instruction.

This sort of preparation upfront will help ensure success, but an honors leader should also have access to student evaluations, listen to current student complaints, and seek alumni memories of honors instructors. Sometimes it becomes necessary to “unselect” an honors instructor; when student or in some cases peer evaluations are consistently negative and specific flaws emerge, a consultation between the honors leader and instructor is in order. An instructor may have opted out of some of the desiderata of honors education or grown tired of the extra work involved. An arrogant attitude toward students and inability to encourage individual points of view and initiative are counterproductive. The honors leader must decide if the instructor can be “rehabilitated” or if it is best not to put the instructor in the honors classroom again.

## **STUDENT MOBILITY**

Of signal importance is the ability of honors students to move seamlessly among campuses. Such mobility is easy in the case of multiple campuses equal in authority and in close proximity. When an honors student might be taking classes on two or even three campuses simultaneously, the task of the honors advisor can be challenging. Most helpful, as at one institution, is a

common electronic database of honors students accessible to honors staff at all campuses.

Similar mobility may also exist in a system with a large central program or college and satellite campuses if, say, two of the satellites are proximate and students typically commute from home. Often, however, the satellites are far-flung, not all of them have honors courses, and students feel attached to their “home” campus. In such cases the problem can be alleviated by online honors courses available to students at all campuses. If a larger satellite campus offers a four-year degree and a full array of honors opportunities, its honors students do not have to leave that campus to graduate in honors. The same is true if (1) a satellite campus has only an associate’s degree but has a full two-year honors program with perhaps an honors completion certificate and (2) the student has no interest in pursuing a further degree.

In most cases, however, honors leaders must take special care to ensure mobility of students. It is all too easy for transfer or “transitioning” students to get lost. From the point of view of the satellite campus honors coordinator, students should have a clear path to continued honors work not only at the central campus but also at other four-year institutions to which they may wish to transfer. In the latter case, the coordinator needs to ascertain whether the institution’s honors program or college has articulation agreements with honors programs at other, especially nearby, institutions. Coordinators should not attempt to establish such agreements on their own—that is the purview of the dean or director.

More often, satellite honors students wish to continue and complete their studies, including their honors work, at the central campus. The overarching honors program or college needs to establish clear policies and an implementation system to ensure a smooth transition for such students so that

1. the central dean or director knows that a student is coming;
2. students know if they are required to fill out a transfer application;
3. the qualifications in terms of GPA and previous honors work are clear;
4. the student can be neatly folded into the advising system at the central campus before the term in which the transfer takes place; and
5. it is clear whether access to scholarship support is earmarked for such transfer students.

These questions can be answered by something like an articulation agreement between the central campus and satellite campuses. To begin with, the

dean or director—or in large operations a specific staff member—should serve as a liaison with each satellite honors coordinator and periodically visit that campus. The satellite coordinator should keep this liaison apprised of students contemplating transfer; logically, that liaison should become the student's honors advisor upon transfer—ideally, in advance of transfer for planning purposes. The liaison can also access the student's transcript and determine if the student's honors progress and GPA meet expectations at the central campus for continued progress. For a properly seamless transition, however, the student should not have to file an application for transfer admission to honors. If the program or college has a procedure for accepting transfers from honors programs at other institutions, it may require a transcript, an application, perhaps even a letter of recommendation, but for in-house transfers from satellite honors programs, a warm welcome should not be cluttered with any doubts about acceptance.

Problems may arise when, as is often the case, a satellite student feels an especially strong tie to the original campus—to its faculty, culture, and location. A student may plan to commute from home near the satellite campus or may need only a few upper-division courses in the major at the central campus that were unavailable at the other campus. A student may also have too little time at the central campus to find a faculty member with whom to develop a thesis proposal and complete that work. The central honors administrator should respect such student realities as variations to negotiate, not reject. Even if the student has undertaken two solid years of completion at the central campus but developed a strong, nurturing relationship with a faculty member at the previous campus, the student should be allowed, nay encouraged, to complete a thesis or capstone project with that faculty member. The central-campus honors liaison should, however, still play the main advising role and sign off on the proposal; also, a committee of thesis readers can include someone from the central campus.

## COMMUNICATION

Clearly good communication is crucial to success in the coordination of multi-campus honors programs and colleges, requiring not only good communicators and listeners in staff positions—always desirable—but having agreed-upon policies and procedures in place. Open channels of communication by email, listserv, telephone, texting, Zoom, Skype, and in person ensure careful planning, useful information sharing, and prompt problem solving among honors staff and institutional administrators at various campuses. As

we have discovered in the current pandemic, Zoom meetings, where people can see each other and do sidebar chats, have been invaluable in maintaining personal contact and group solidarity.

A campus executive officer needs to have the blessing of the chief administrative officer of the institution for the campus honors program. The campus executive officer needs to understand the nature and benefits of honors for the campus and the duties of a campus honors coordinator. Especially for a startup program, this orientation will come from the institutional honors leader, who may also need to be persuasive about the benefits of honors for the campus students and the reputation of the campus. A campus honors coordinator should have the ear of the campus administrator and be a crucial contact point for honors staff at other campuses. Excessive turnover in campus coordinators will significantly weaken honors at those campuses. At the same time, such coordinators will likely be teaching faculty, not honors professionals, so their honors experience and knowledge—and their very time—will be limited, which is all the more reason for the coordinator to have the advice and support of the honors dean or director.

In the model of a main campus with satellite campuses, the dean, director, or other honors liaison from the central program or college provides a crucial communication link. Such liaisons should be remote contacts for satellite honors coordinators but should also visit the satellite campus from time to time, perhaps on a regular schedule, to discuss issues and to attend graduation ceremonies and showcases of student work. Coming to talk to students in person, perhaps toward the end of the year, about transfer to the central campus will not only inform them about the procedure but also assure them of a warm welcome and allow them to meet and talk with the person who will become their advisor when they arrive on the main campus. This liaison or the dean/director should also attend important honors ceremonies at the satellite campus and vice versa, the campus honors coordinator attending central campus events, including the graduation of students who originally started at that satellite campus. At one institution, student liaisons are assigned to specific campuses to report back on student spaces, events, and other issues. Communication between main and satellite campuses are also smoother if the faculty advisory or policy council at the main campus includes at least one member from the satellites, preferably a campus honors coordinator. At one system with two campuses, one larger and the other smaller, representation on the honors council is typically proportional to the student populations at the two campuses.

One momentarily unpleasant absence of communication occurred in my time as dean, when I discovered long after the fact that the ambitious coordinator of our largest regional campus honors program had acquired an independent campus membership in NCHC on her own, which I had not known was possible or desirable—my own ignorance. However, since my budget and the needs of my large main-campus honors population had not allowed me to take regional campus students to the annual conference, it made sense for a satellite program, if it had the resources, to seek membership separately and be able, for instance, to serve on NCHC committees and nominate a thesis student for the Portz Scholar Award (which indeed happened, with a successful outcome). Typically, though, while the central honors dean or director should encourage regional coordinators to attend state, regional, or national honors conferences and to read honors publications, the time of the coordinator, as a teaching faculty member, is too limited for national involvement. Perhaps the dean or director can occasionally send notice of an honors article or monograph relevant to a specific current issue or problem faced by the coordinator.

Where campuses are roughly equal, periodic meetings of all the campus honors coordinators will be necessary at least annually (in one case, even monthly), perhaps varying the location. Honors coordinators can share successes and problems at their campuses, and their colleagues can applaud and help think about solutions. In one example, besides three main campuses, a small satellite campus is served by the coordinator at another campus but needs and deserves its own on-site coordinator; the various coordinators could collectively lobby for more resources to make this happen. In most cases, some sort of central office or coordinator at the largest or oldest of the campuses is responsible for communications, for calling such meetings, for staying in touch continually with other campus coordinators, and for collaborative planning. One large honors consortium holds regular meetings of its twenty-four widely spread campus coordinators. No matter what model characterizes the institutional arrangement, faculty teaching workshops, including syllabus sharing and helpful anecdotes, are a useful way to bring together honors faculty from all campuses, and their setting can vary from one campus to another.

Student-to-student communications across campuses may not be on the agenda of most honors leaders, but they can be useful in stimulating discussions of, or adjunct learning for, a common foundational course. They can also be connected to a specific event or to an announced annual theme for the

honors community. One such experiment, as reported by Laura A. Guertin and Courtney L. Young, used a photo-sharing method for students to express their reaction to an announced theme related to current or historical events. The project stimulated thoughtful conversations among students but “was also a success for the coordinators. It provided us an opportunity to collaborate on a project in a way we had not in the past” (59).

## SCHOLARSHIPS

Some programs and colleges have no scholarships to call their own. Some have scholarship allocations from their institutions—sometimes paltry, sometimes generous. Some have to do fundraising for the only scholarships they are likely to have. Some have endowed scholarship funds. Some are just beginning to offer scholarships of their own. Main-campus honors operations with scholarships may not make them available to students at satellite campuses, or they may make them available only as satellite students transfer to the main campus. The central honors dean or director should ensure, if the context permits, that several such scholarships are available to satellite campus honors students and communicate the application process to the campus honors coordinator.

If a local campus has scholarship funds for its students, it should have the authority for selecting recipients. This scholarship support will end when a recipient transfers completely to another campus, but where students have high mobility among several campuses, the recipient should retain the scholarship as identified with the person, not the place. Students attending especially smaller regional or satellite campuses often have significant financial need even if those campuses have lower tuition than the central campus. The students may have families, may be working, and may be commuting from nearby homes. If these campuses do not have scholarship support for honors students, the central honors administrator should work hard to persuade the campus executive to institute such scholarships even if need as well as merit serves as a criterion. The two should seek initial and continuing support from local donors and businesses for such a proud cause.

## BUDGET

Because the availability of scholarships is dependent on budgets, which are likely to be separate at separate campuses, there may seem little about this issue for honors leaders to “coordinate.” Honors administrators or

coordinators at each campus should have annual budget conversations with their immediate superior, whether a campus executive, college dean, provost, or provost's budget officer. Such meetings are an occasion to review the past year and project the coming year in terms of needs, such as recruiting, growing numbers of students, faculty reassigned time or compensation, advising staff, space, student newsletter, events, and scholarship support. Planning for such meetings, including developing persuasive arguments, can be bolstered by good communication among honors leaders, who likely discuss the issue of resources on a regular basis. Where there is an overarching honors college or program, the central dean or director may be able to add a voice on these budget issues.

Budgets are often constrained institutionally, all the more so if state or donor support has declined. Many honors operations have barely enough support and even face extinction. Here is where fundraising comes in. Honors leaders can work with development officers and campus executives to explore support from local business leaders, organizations, and donor prospects for a high-quality educational program. Unfortunately, an honors coordinator at a small campus program with, say, only one- or two-course reassigned time, will not have time for such activity unless aided by the campus executive, the central campus honors dean or director, or a development officer, but even small successes with corporate sponsorship, thesis adoptions, or scholarship donations will alleviate a difficult budget situation (see my *Fundraising for Honor\$* handbook).

## GOVERNANCE

Who's the boss? Who has honors authority at any campus or over all campuses? In multi-campus systems, where individual campuses enjoy a degree of autonomy in the institution, honors authority is also likely to be similarly distributed. Where the campuses are far-flung geographically, this autonomy is likely to be greater. Regional campus honors programs should have their own on-site faculty coordinators with the support of their campus executive. These coordinators, typically teaching faculty rather than professional honors educators with knowledge of the national honors scene, should have the authority to negotiate with departments for honors courses and faculty. They should have a budget allocation for recruiting, special events, and perhaps scholarships as well as for student activities, research support, and travel. They should also engage in ready communication with their honors colleagues at other campuses. In one community college system of roughly equal



campuses, an overarching honors council has authority to approve faculty, vet courses, approve contracts, and apportion budget. In another community college system, the honors director finds that the program “is strengthened by having a strong central team,” seeing no need for honors coordinators on the various campuses. Again, institutional context is critical. What works well deserves respect.

In some areas, the satellite program coordinators share authority with the overarching honors program or college. A well-coordinated system implies a commonly agreed-upon set of policies about such matters as the nature of honors courses, the nature of a first-year foundational course, the use of contracts, oversight of individual research, expectations of normal progress, certification or graduation requirements, and mobility among campuses. Staff at all campuses should use a common set of forms, such as contract proposals, thesis proposals (which may require central approval), advising forms, and teaching evaluation forms. Such consensus about the basics leaves room for sharing innovative ideas, airing complaints about problem situations, and offering mutual support and advocacy.

Satellite coordinators, faculty, and students can easily feel like second-class citizens, especially if they have not had the opportunity to participate in honors activities beyond their campus. Deans or directors can alleviate this feeling by sponsoring honors events and guest speakers at regional campuses and by sponsoring regional campus students, faculty, and coordinators to attend state and regional honors conferences. In a large overarching honors system, central deans, directors, and staff, who exercise considerable authority, should studiously avoid condescending or patronizing attitudes toward the satellite faculty and students, demonstrating at all times the proper respect due to colleagues in the noble enterprise of honors education. Where guidance or advice is appropriate, it should be gentle. One honors director says the following about her admirable relationship with other campus coordinators: “We are all friends and work together very well. I think there is a level of respect among everyone. . . . In the end, as director I am responsible for what happens. So I have a lot of authority. [However,] I tend to work by consensus and rarely, if ever, issue directives.”

## CONCLUSION

To return to my opening metaphors, honors leaders in multi-campus systems are neither orchestra conductors nor cat herders. “Coordinating” means “creating order together.” To do so requires two other “co-” words:

collaboration (“working with”) and communication (“sharing; making in common”). “Withness” is the soul of honors education, which seeks to avoid authoritarianism and to nourish shared experience. Multiple campuses can see their honors programs thrive through such common effort, mutual respect, and dedicated attention to our students.

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## APPENDIX

The questionnaire below was posted on the now defunct honors listserv hosted by George Washington University <[listserv@hermes.circ.gwu.edu](mailto:listserv@hermes.circ.gwu.edu)> in summer of 2019. It received fourteen responses.

### **Multi-Campus Honors Programs and Colleges—Questionnaire**

At any point in your responses, you may indicate problems, solutions, and advice. In my writing I will not cite specific names and institutions.

#### **Institutional Context**

1. How many campuses does your honors program/college have?
2. Characterize the general relations between the home/main campus and the satellite campuses. Mutual respect? Antagonism? Does the home or central campus honors program/college have authority over satellite programs? Or are all campuses equal?
3. Are there differences in the student body and culture among campuses? Explain.

#### **Curriculum**

4. Compare the range of curricular offerings among campuses.
5. Are students at the satellites able to complete all honors requirements and graduate in place? If they are earning an associate's degree, can they earn something like a two-year certificate for their honors work there? Do the satellites rely more on contracts?
6. Do students at the satellites transfer to the home/main campus to complete their honors requirements? How does the transition work?

#### **Governance**

7. Do the satellite campuses have on-site honors coordinators?
8. Are satellite campus honors programs represented on the central honors advisory council?
9. How much autonomy do the satellite programs have in the selection of honors faculty and course offerings, budget, and approval of contracts, individual honors work, and thesis work?

10. Characterize relations of the satellite campus's administrator/dean with its honors program and with the central honors administration.
11. What governance *procedures* do you follow in your relations with the satellite campuses?

### **Communications**

12. What challenges have you experienced in communications between the central honors leaders and those at satellite campus programs?
13. How is advising handled?
14. Do you schedule visitations both ways for honors leaders and faculty to work together? For information to be conveyed to students? For student and faculty concerns to be voiced?
15. Are staff members in the central office assigned liaison duties for specific satellite campuses?
16. Are ceremonies at the various campuses completely separate? Does the central honors administrator regularly attend satellite ceremonies?

### **Quality Standards**

17. Are honors admission standards the same at all campuses, or is there a difference in standards or admissions protocol between the home/main campus and the satellites?
18. Have you experienced differences in standards for faculty selection, contracts, individual honors work, or thesis work? Explain.

### **Budget**

19. What is the budgetary relationship between central and satellite honors programs?
20. Are scholarships available at the satellite campuses? Are any program scholarships earmarked for transfer to the central program?
21. Are there other issues not covered above? Or do you have additional comments or anecdotes?

