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JNCHC

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council

Spring/Summer 2012

Volume 13, Number 1



in this issue

Forum on The Economy of Honors

Forum Articles

Richard Badenhausen
Annmarie Guzy
Angela M. Salas
Brian Railsback
Larry Andrews

Research Essays

Debra K. Holman
and James H. Banning
Christopher R. Corley and
John Zubizarreta

JNCHC

**JOURNAL OF THE
NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL**

A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL

THE ECONOMY OF HONORS

JOURNAL EDITORS

ADA LONG

DAIL MULLINS

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

The National Collegiate Honors Council is an association of faculty, students, and others interested in honors education. Executive Committee: Gregory Lanier, President, University of West Florida; Rick Scott, President-Elect, University of Central Arkansas; Bonnie Irwin, Immediate Past-President, Eastern Illinois University; Jim Ruebel, Vice-President, Ball State University; Bob Spurrier, Secretary, Oklahoma State University; Gary Bell, Treasurer, Texas Tech University. Executive Director: Cynthia M. Hill, headquartered at University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Board of Directors: Kyoko Amano, University of Indianapolis; Lisa Coleman, Southeastern Oklahoma State University; Barry Falk, James Madison University; Laurie Fiegel, Iowa State University; Emily Harris, Montana State University; Jerry Herron, Wayne State University; Rachael Hurd, Ball State University; Emily Jones, Oklahoma State University; Joe King, Radford University; Kim Klein, Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania; Jared Knight, Iowa State University; Jon Kotinek, Texas A&M University; Jaskiran Mathur, St. Francis College; Marjean Purinton, Texas Tech University; Jeremiah Sammons, Gallaudet University; Art Spisak, University of Iowa; Elaine Torda, State University of New York-Orange; Audrey Van Acker, Ball State University.

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EDITORIAL POLICY

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council is a refereed periodical publishing scholarly articles on honors education. The journal uses a double-blind peer review process. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology, articles on interdisciplinary efforts, discussions of problems common to honors programs, items on the national higher education agenda, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education. Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu.

DEADLINES

March 1 (for spring/summer issue); September 1 (for fall/winter issue)

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JNCHC ANNOUNCEMENT/ CALL FOR PAPERS

The 13.2 issue of *JNCHC* (fall/winter 2012) will focus on “Honors Around the Globe” and will feature essays about honors programs in countries other than the United States and designed for students in those countries, not for U.S. students. Current plans include essays on the Netherlands, Chile, Peru, Mexico, China, Australia, Qatar, and Oxford, UK. Honors administrators, faculty, and students from countries other than the U.S. are invited to submit essays that might describe their programs, curricula, extracurricular activities, or other practical and/or theoretical matters connected with honors education in their national context. **The deadline for the 13.2 issue is September 1, 2012.**

Given the focus of the 13.2 issue of *JNCHC*, we will be including neither general research essays nor a Forum, but those features will return with the 14.1 issue (spring/summer 2013), for which we invite research essays on any topic of interest to the honors community. That issue will also include a Forum focused on the theme “Nontraditional Students in Honors.” **The deadline for the 14.1 issue is March 1, 2013.** As always, authors are invited to submit at any time and will receive external reviews and decisions about publication within, typically, two weeks.

Please send all submissions to Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We accept material by e-mail attachment. We do not accept material by fax or hard copy.

The documentation style can be whatever is appropriate to the author’s primary discipline or approach (MLA, APA, etc.), but please avoid footnotes. Internal citation to a list of references (bibliography) is strongly preferred, and the editor will revise all internal citations in accordance with MLA guidelines.

There are no minimum or maximum length requirements; the length should be dictated by the topic and its most effective presentation.

Accepted essays are edited for grammatical and typographical errors and for infelicities of style or presentation. Authors have ample opportunity to review and approve edited manuscripts before publication.

Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu or, if necessary, 850.927.3776.

DEDICATION



HERBERT LASKY

Famous as the Frequent Flyer of NCHC, Herbert Lasky was an influential member of the National Collegiate Honors Council for almost twenty-five years. Having received his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in history from New York University, and having taught at NYU, Queen's College, and Hunter College, in 1966 Herb started his thirty-eight-year career at Eastern Illinois University, where he chaired just about every major university committee at one time or other. He founded the honors program at EIU in 1981 and later became founding dean of the EIU Honors College. He started occupying chairs in the NCHC in 1990 when he became chair of the Finance Committee, a position he maintained until 1996 when he was elected to the sequence of NCHC offices: vice president, president-elect, president, and past president. During the 1990s, he also took charge of the printing and distribution of *Forum for Honors*, the precursor of *JNCHC*, and he served on the Publications Board and numerous conference planning committees, chairing the committee that planned the 1997 conference in Atlanta. When Herb wasn't chairing, he was flying . . . and figuring out new and ingenious ways to get the best deals from Delta and Avis. He gave a conference session on his famous travel tips one year, and NCHC became a beneficiary of this special talent when Herb wangled free airline credits and special deals for NCHC to sponsor travel to meetings. Herb perhaps flies less but certainly hasn't settled down since his retirement in 2004. Very active in conservation and tree culture, he and his wife buy land, clear debris, plant trees, reduce

erosion, develop wildlife habitat, and work to restore the balance of nature. Herb's chair-sitting days may be over, but we honor and appreciate his hard work for the NCHC back in the day trying to restore the (ledger) balance of honors. We gratefully and appropriately dedicate this issue of *JNCHC*, with its focus on "The Economy of Honors," to Herbert Lasky.

Editor's Introduction

ADA LONG

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

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,

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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.”

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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.

**Forum on
“The Economy of Honors”**

Costs and Benefits in the Economy of Honors

RICHARD BADENHAUSEN

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

As I write, the Dow Jones Industrial Average has fallen two thousand points over the past three weeks, the national unemployment rate hovers stubbornly above 9%, and Congress is playing a dangerous game of chicken during debates about the country's finances—one that threatens the nation's already fragile economy. But the honors community is immune from these worries, right? We have the privilege of dealing with the life of the mind rather than sully ourselves with more mundane matters like budgets, taxes, and making money. We stand with Socrates, who was well known for his modest lifestyle and equated having no wants with godliness, even using the fact that he was not paid to teach as part of his trial defense.

A quick glance at the NCHC conference pre-program for the meeting in Phoenix would seem to suggest the answer is a resounding "Yes!" In sessions featuring honors staff and faculty, the words "money," "economy," and "economics" are not mentioned once, not a single time in 384 pages. "Teaching" appears in the descriptions of over two dozen sessions. The ethos of honors is grounded in the Socratic tradition that values the inner life over material things; the "good life" is one that is beautiful and just. Thus in his utopian vision for educating Greek youth in *The Republic*, Plato hopes to cultivate a lack of desire for money in future leaders. Is it possible, then, that there is an irresolvable tension between honors and, for lack of a better phrase, the money project? And is this tension only increasing in light of the country's economic trials and what students hope to get out of their college educations? According to UCLA's annual national survey of incoming students, almost 73% of fall 2010 freshmen indicated that "the chief benefit of college is that it increases one's earning power," which was an all-time high for answers to that particular question ("Incoming College Students").

It would be easy to misread the situation I have just described and imagine that we in honors have simply stuck our collective heads in our books, hoping we won't have to dirty our hands with economic concerns. Certainly the stereotypical version of what we do in the academy turns on an image of absent-minded professors sitting behind ivy-covered walls pontificating on abstract ideas that have nothing to do with "the real world."

However, to be in honors is to be engaged in many different economic arrangements and exchanges. All of us, for example, work in concert with our admissions offices while recruiting high-achieving students whose decisions often hinge on how much money the institution can offer in the form of discounts to tuition and financial aid. Honors programs that tie scholarships more directly to honors admission deal with an even more vexed question: do they love us for our innovative learning or for our money? Those of us who do not have faculty lines in honors must typically “buy” the services of colleagues in other departments or hire adjuncts to staff classes. In fact, we spend much of our time as honors administrators tracking numbers tied to financial considerations: protecting our budgets, cultivating donations, massaging the entering honors class to hit prearranged recruiting targets, keeping up FTEs, and watching endowment returns if we are lucky enough to benefit from such support.

Many industries use language to disguise the fact that the professional relationships within those fields are centered in economic transactions in which individuals pay for a service. Lawyers call their customers “clients,” doctors call them “patients,” and prostitutes use the term “John.” As Catherine McDonald pointed out recently, “the words we use to describe those who use our services are, at one level, metaphors that indicate how we conceive them,” and such representations are particularly tied up in questions about status (115). Academics are somewhat guilty of the same obfuscation in calling our customers “students.” Yet what interests me more is why we engage in this practice. What would be at stake in being more up front about acknowledging that we are providing a beneficial service that has an established value, albeit a fluctuating one, in the marketplace? Might we be making ourselves more vulnerable in effacing the transactional nature of the educational project even as we complain about the corporatization of higher education?

For example, there may be tangible benefits for colleges and universities that foreground the economic aspects of higher education and ask faculty to take a more overt role in discussions about that side of institutional life. Martin Ringle, chief technology officer at Reed College, made this very argument at a 2011 conference of IT leaders. He suggested that liberal arts colleges have made a mistake in insulating faculty members from the business side of running institutions because it is harder to enact meaningful change when professors are not on board and because potentially unique solutions to these economic challenges could emerge from this group. Another CIO urged administrators and faculty to get together and discuss “in real concrete terms” the value of students’ education (Kolowich). Of course, faculty involvement would also require most administrations to be much more transparent about their own priorities and spending patterns.

I have found that, because of my own collaborations with my college's admissions office during the recruiting of honors students, I have a much deeper appreciation of the economy of honors education even though this is not knowledge that many of my fellow faculty members seem to share. Just the other day, a friend who has been at the college for over a decade expressed shock that we purchased names of prospective students in what are essentially highly involved and extended direct-marketing campaigns. I also find myself appreciating the honesty with which admissions officers discuss and label potential students as they move through the enrollment funnel, first as "prospects," then as "admits," then as "deposits," and finally "enrollees."

In some respects, it is both the best of times and worst of times in honors education. Some institutions, aware that the population of high-achieving students prepared to do honors-level work is a finite one, are pouring money into enhanced honors experiences like study abroad programs and fancy residential learning centers. They are also going after these students with generous scholarship packages, in some cases literally paying students to attend the institution. Donors are getting involved, too. In the case of the University of Arkansas Honors College, the civic-minded Walton family contributed over \$100 million to endow the college as a way of attracting talent to the state's flagship institution. Some of these efforts are driven by presidents and boards chasing higher rankings in outlets like *U.S. News & World Report*, and they see honors as a key piece of this enhancement puzzle; surely most honors directors play up this benefit during conversations about their budgets. Other institutions, pressured by declining state support for higher education and by families struggling to afford the costs of college during perilous financial situations, are cutting honors budgets, increasing class sizes, and even shuttering entire programs.

For colleges and universities that are able to increase honors funding, especially in the form of endowment support and scholarships, the landscape might appear rosy, but ancillary costs accrue to framing the educational experience primarily in economic terms. Kevin Knudson's recent cautionary tale in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, which highlights the increasing sense of entitlement among students he recruits to the honors college at the University of Florida, makes perfect sense in an environment where all of us are chasing the same limited pool of high-achieving students with promises of benefits, advantages, and enhancements. Why wouldn't a parent request to see the layout of the honors residence, as Knudson notes, to "ensure that her son's room location was optimal"? We have enabled and encouraged such behavior in the way we discuss honors with potential students. I would argue that we are all better served by a recruiting process that emphasizes the distinctiveness of the *learning experience* in honors and that we should spend

most of our time educating families about the way honors classes are different rather than better. Of course, this strategy only works if honors faculty have thought intentionally about the unique features of honors pedagogy and if programs do not rely heavily on honors contracts or h-options. Finally, we should ask if the “haves” in the NCHC have a responsibility to the “have-nots” that might take several forms: formulating a tiered NCHC dues structure based on a program’s annual budget; scaling back on some of the more ornate and expensive features of the annual conference; or finding other creative ways of being as inclusive as possible as an organization. University presidents raised this very issue over the past summer as it applied to athletic programs, exploring ways to close the gap between the wealthiest and poorest programs through plans like revenue reallocation even though meaningful change is unlikely any time soon (Sander). Still, we might have something to learn from this group.

The escalating cost of a college education has a number of good and bad consequences although the effects are heavily weighted in the negative column. The primary benefit is that increased expenses have encouraged families to ask hard questions about the value of the education we are providing, therefore giving even greater momentum to the burgeoning assessment movement that privileges learning over teaching and outputs over inputs. While some faculty members still frame the educational project in terms of their interests, their ideas, and their research, I’d like to think that honors educators have been out in front of the crusade to make learning primarily about the student experience. On the other hand, this boon is slight in comparison to the harm wrought by skyrocketing tuition and fees, costs that are soberly chronicled by economists Robert Archibald and David Feldman in their new book *Why Does College Cost So Much?* In the past twenty-five years, the cost of a college education has risen at a rate well in excess of two times the rate of inflation while at the same time revenues are increasingly devoted to non-instructional areas (Archibald and Feldman 6–7). Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus point out that “between 1976 and 2008, the ratio of college administrators to students basically doubled” (30). Such changes have created skepticism about higher education even though more women than men still see the value of college; according to a recent Pew Research Center study, 50% of female graduates gave the U.S. higher education system good or excellent marks while only 37% of male graduates were similarly satisfied (Wang and Palmer).

The money-squeeze has consequences for the honors classroom. Increasing pressures on college balance sheets potentially raise class sizes, thus striking at the heart of the interactive, discussion-based honors seminars. An increasing reliance on adjuncts potentially harms the honors student

experience; the close relationships between honors students and mentors are challenged by the increasing numbers of contingent faculty, who often have no permanent offices and have varied responsibilities on multiple campuses. By far the most insidious effect is restricted access to the honors classroom for low-income and first-generation students, or students from other under-represented groups. Honors programs and colleges have a noble history of providing excellent educations for gifted students who might not be able to afford an expensive private education or whose families have experienced other hardships, which is why I am always depressed when honors programs get labeled as elitist. At my own institution, for example, I am proud of the fact that the members of last year's entering honors class had slightly greater financial need than the incoming freshman class as a whole while having an average ACT score about six points higher—an impressive statistic since it is well-documented that scores on standardized tests are closely correlated with family income.

I wish we could do a better job making these sorts of cases for honors education to audiences beyond our own listservs and publications. I also wonder if, as an organization, the NCHC could get out in front of some of the conversations about higher education and economics so that we are influencing the debate instead of reacting to decisions made by others. In some respects, we are trained as academics to be reactive: to refute arguments, find fault, and ask questions (*vide* Socrates). But the perils of becoming entrenched in reactive habits in today's rapidly changing economy are right in front of us, whether they take the form of the music industry's struggles to adapt to the digitalization of songs or network television's stumbling around amidst challenges from video games, cable television, computers, and Netflix. Both these examples reveal threats tied to the delivery of content, which just so happens to be one of the ways to describe the higher education business. Honors should thrive in this environment because it has often been about more than content, but we need to make that case clearly enough and to the right audiences, especially since we seem not to be talking about such issues even at our own meetings.

"Economy" comes from a Greek word that means, roughly, household management; the economy of honors places directors in the position of managers, a role that some of us do not want or feel trained for. Exacerbating that challenge is the fact that the "new normal" in higher education is to do more with less, even though this flies in the face of honors, which has always been about doing more with more: taking advantage of the motivation and talent of high-achieving students, asking them to challenge themselves in a supportive environment, and thus yielding benefits for the student, the class, and the institution.

Yet as honors directors and deans, we must have actual resources to manage. One of my most memorable early lessons as a young impressionable honors director occurred while listening to Ted Humphreys from the Barrett Honors College at Arizona State explain at a conference that senior administrators will take advantage of you if you let them, even “stripping the very skin off your back.” (The passing of time may have made the trope more vivid in my imagination, but I don’t think so.) Ted’s point was that honors directors and deans can only do so much with limited resources, and, if those resources aren’t forthcoming, we should not kill ourselves trying to turn water into wine. I actually took his good and fair advice at a previous institution where I resigned after four years of building an honors program because the administration would not step up and support us with more money. It was one of the best decisions I’ve made in twenty-five years in academia. At my current institution, I have been blessed by material and emotional support from my president, provost, and dean, assistance that has translated into a thriving, vibrant program.

Part of managing involves planning. Oklahoma State’s Bob Spurrier always encourages colleagues to have a list of “wants” ready at hand, which is excellent advice because you never know when opportunities might present themselves. However, in these times of shrinking budgets, it helps perhaps to be even more aggressive—though not necessarily to the extent of David Mamet’s salesmen in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, who are driven by the mantra “Always be closing” (72). With the added challenge of thick administrative chains of command, we have to be a bit bold and enterprising about pressing our case, which is not a habit typically cultivated in graduate school. Perhaps we should say, “Always be asking.”

One of the well-kept secrets of academia, which took a while for me to unearth, is that funds are always available to do interesting (and uninteresting) things at colleges and universities. Money is always sloshing around in the institutional coffers. In fiscal year 2008, public and private four-year institutions took in over \$360 billion in revenue (“Finances of Colleges and Universities”). You just have to know whom and how to ask, which is especially important in honors programs since they can be seen as expensive by an institution’s accountants: the tuition of our students is often deeply discounted, class sizes are often smaller, and costly supplemental experiences are the norm. Adding to the difficulty of campaigning for funds is the fact that we have no natural constituency of the sort that gives a critical mass of students to disciplinary departments. Most honors programs and colleges have few if any dedicated faculty, further isolating honors in the university hierarchy, and this is why it is so important to have direct access to the offices where such decisions get made, a reality acknowledged in NCHC’s “Basic

Characteristics,” which suggest that honors directors and deans report to the institution’s chief academic officer. One way to protect an honors program’s economy is to advocate for faculty lines since they lend stability to scheduling, provide allies in making the case for honors, and put a human face on potential budget cut-backs.

While we might not typically think about honors in economic terms, there are myriad benefits in doing so. Highlighting some of the economic advantages of honors to institutions might put programs on firmer footing in debates about funding while at the same time demonstrating to families that their valuable tuition dollars are being well-spent, especially if we are able to discuss honors in terms of distinctive learning experiences rather than entitlements. Engaging faculty more overtly in the economies of their universities might lead to more creative thinking about financial challenges, which can often result from collaborative approaches to problem solving. Foregrounding discussions about monetary matters in our own meetings and publications might help us better understand the challenges and opportunities that exist on the campuses of our colleagues and perhaps enable NCHC to speak with a firmer and more intentional voice during national debates about the economy of higher education.

We might easily get discouraged or resentful in the face of recent critiques of higher education that identify massive deficiencies in the learning experiences of today’s college students (see, for instance Arum and Roksa). But if honors can play a part in helping students envision the learning project as something deeper and more meaningful than boosting their earning power, then we have created something of real value.

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The author may be contacted at

rbadenhausen@westminstercollege.edu.

Can Faculty Afford Honors?

ANNMARIE GUZY

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

In “Costs and Benefits in the Economy of Honors,” Richard Badenhausen identifies several pressing issues regarding the economic status of honors in the current financial climate of higher education, including the role of faculty in addressing those issues. The crux of his argument regarding faculty seems to be that faculty are generally unaware of the budgetary issues involved in administering an honors program. For instance, he states that his work with the admissions office on the costs of recruitment strategies has given him a “much deeper appreciation of the economy of honors education even though this is not knowledge that many of my fellow faculty members seem to share.” As a non-administrative faculty member myself, I would argue that honors program directors should take the initiative in ensuring that honors faculty are informed about and invited to participate in discussions concerning the program’s financial status. By opening these lines of communication, honors directors can also become more intimately aware of the increasingly difficult professional decisions that faculty have to make as a result of the “new normal” economy. If funding is, as Badenhausen argues, “always sloshing around in the institutional coffers,” then honors directors should consider allocating some of these funds to enhance faculty knowledge about the economics of honors in the following ways.

PROVIDE COMPENSATION FOR HONORS COURSES AND PROJECTS

After honors directors have negotiated with administrators about budgetary options for staffing honors courses, they need to disseminate this information widely so that faculty and department chairs can make informed decisions about accommodating honors in teaching assignments and course rotations. Is money available to hire an adjunct to teach the regular course not covered by a faculty member who teaches an honors course? Will honors courses be considered on-load or off-load in a particular department? Are faculty who teach honors courses aware of differences in teaching load policies among departments and programs on their campuses? I have been fortunate enough to teach all my honors courses on-load, including not only honors composition, which is considered part of our department’s normal freshman

CAN FACULTY AFFORD HONORS?

composition rotation, but also the honors seminars listed under our department's special topics designations. Other departments allow faculty to teach honors courses only if the administration will pay for an adjunct to teach the regular course not being covered by the full-time faculty member. Some of my colleagues, however, would like to teach an honors course or seminar but are not allowed to because of their departmental teaching commitments; faced with increasing enrollment and long-term hiring freezes, some departments simply cannot afford to release faculty from upper-division and graduate courses for which specific faculty specializations are needed.

Even if on-load, compensated off-load, or adjunct options are available, faculty must carefully weigh their obligations to their home departments and to their own professional development. Just like everyone else in the “new normal” economy, faculty are being asked to do more with less, such as teaching courses with higher class caps to accommodate increasing enrollment and to compensate for dwindling faculty lines. We are also obligated to our chairs, colleagues, and students to cover upper-division and graduate course rotations so that students can graduate as close to on-time as possible. Can we really afford—and not just in the financial sense of the word—to take more time away from our regular teaching and research commitments to prepare for extra honors work?

Badenhausen also laments the fact that “[m]ost honors programs and colleges have few if any dedicated faculty, further isolating honors in the university hierarchy.” At most schools, faculty who teach honors are not hired for dedicated honors lines, but many are certainly dedicated in terms of being enthusiastically committed to honors education. We find ourselves acquiescing to pleas from beleaguered honors students who need thesis advisors, committee members, and honors contracts to graduate; we gladly report for duty when applications need to be reviewed, when interviews need to be conducted, when orientations and retreats and socials and fundraisers need to be staffed. Traditionally, many of us have undertaken this extra work because of our dedication to the honors community. We can also add these activities to our annual review forms, but this is not the primary incentive for honors educators. If faculty members are being asked to set aside old-fashioned, romantic notions about the vocation of teaching and get down to dollars and cents, then perhaps we need to reassess how much uncompensated volunteer work is too much.

PROMOTE NCHC RESOURCES

Another way that honors directors can foster faculty awareness of honors finances is to share the wealth of information generated by NCHC members. As a member of the *Honors in Practice* editorial board, I get annoyed when

I read manuscripts from authors who have obviously never read any previous issues of *HIP* or *JNCHC* or any of the monographs. This neglect of the body of scholarship in our organization might be attributed in part to the high turnover rate for honors directors; the previous director may have absconded with or discarded the hard copies, or the new director may not have found time to review the publications either in paper or electronically through the NCHC website. In any case, the director can take the initiative to circulate copies of monographs and journal articles among the faculty. If you want faculty to learn about the economics of honors, you might start by purchasing multiple copies of the monograph *Fundraising for Honors* by Larry Andrews or by downloading and emailing copies of Greg Lanier's "Growth = Bucks(?)" essay from the *JNCHC* forum on "Managing Growth in Honors."

When an honors program joins NCHC, the director is considered the institutional representative and receives membership benefits that include publication subscriptions, member rates for conferences, and eligibility to vote, to run for office, and to serve on national committees. Other faculty at member institutions can also attend conferences for member rates, but, if they want to serve on committees or subscribe to hard copies of publications, they must purchase individual professional memberships. Institutional memberships are paid through a program's budget, but professional memberships are usually an out-of-pocket expense; this counts as an "unreimbursed business expense" for tax purposes, but it is still paid by an individual, not the program. (I tip my hat to those directors who elect to purchase a professional membership in addition to the institutional membership.) Some of my colleagues have changed jobs and ended up at schools that are not NCHC members, and they would love to continue to participate in the national conference, but they would have to pay prohibitively expensive non-institutional member registration fees. Directors need to be aware of the individual costs involved as they promote faculty involvement in such opportunities.

SUBSIDIZE TRAVEL TO HONORS CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

Badenhausen also observes that, in reviewing the program for the 2011 NCHC conference, he saw many sessions listed for teaching but no sessions with "money" in the title. When I reviewed the program, however, I saw an increasing number of sessions devoted to administrative issues, such as the Best Honors Administrative Practices (BHAP) track that included presentations on "Fundraising Fundamentals for Honors" and "Budget, Space, Staffing: External Consulting Help for Internal Issues." The Developing in Honors (DIH) program also included panels on "Appropriate Staffing for Your Honors Program/College," "Budgeting in the Age of Shrinking

Budgets,” and “Fundraising for Your Honors Program/College.” In this economy, NCHC should indeed be providing such sessions, and directors should be attending them, but directors need then to return to campus and share this information with their honors faculty. If directors want to raise faculty awareness of issues in honors economics, they need to relay this information effectively to faculty.

Similarly, fundraising for travel to NCHC conferences typically focuses on bringing as many students as possible to present papers and posters and to participate in academic and social events. Directors should also consider bringing faculty to learn about not only pedagogical approaches to honors education but also administrative and financial issues faced by honors programs. Most faculty members travel to disciplinary conferences to give presentations, to learn about new research, to network, and maybe to check the “presentation” box on their annual review. I use my faculty travel allotment to attend NCHC because the cores of my research agenda are honors composition and honors education, but my situation is uncommon. Informing faculty about the conference and perhaps instituting an attendance rotation for interested faculty could expand the number of sessions covered per year for information gathering and, in turn, strengthen the sense of community for the program.

Aside from the annual NCHC conference, faculty members have other travel opportunities with which to learn about honors administration and economics. The six regional honors organizations hold annual conferences in the spring, and various state honors organizations hold annual meetings; faculty travel to these might be easier for a program to support. Many NCHC committees schedule face-to-face meetings during the annual conference and then conduct their year-round business electronically. Some committees, however, such as the Publications Board and the Honors Semesters committee, have traditionally held a mid-year meeting; terms on the Board of Directors and Conference Planning committees also necessitate travel throughout the year. NCHC seminars, workshops, and institutes provide additional opportunities for faculty immersion in honors issues. Funding faculty travel for these types of honors activities is an investment in the infrastructure of the honors program and invigorates faculty interest and involvement in honors issues.

SHARE WITH US THE FINANCIAL INFORMATION YOU THINK WE SHOULD KNOW

Badenhausen notes that “there may be tangible benefits for colleges and universities that foreground the economic aspects of higher education and ask faculty to take a more overt role in discussions about that side of institutional life.” Involving faculty in financial discussions is particularly germane to

contemporary grappling with concepts of transparency and shared governance in higher education. Many of the recommendations listed above would cost money rather than save it in a time of diminishing budgetary resources, but if that money really is “sloshing around,” then funding faculty development would be a worthwhile investment. Rather than simply express surprise that faculty members are unaware of the arcane economic underpinnings of higher education administration, sit us down and share with us the information that you feel we need to know so that we can be more effective advocates of and participants in honors education.

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The author may be contacted at
aguzy@jaguar1.usouthal.edu.

Articulating the Distinctiveness of the Honors Learning Experience

ANGELA M. SALAS
INDIANA UNIVERSITY SOUTHEAST

Richard Badenhause’s essay “Costs and Benefits in the Economy of Honors” has been a splinter in my mind since I first read it. As Director of the Honors Program at Indiana University Southeast, I have been immersed in what Badenhause describes as the financial issues that honors faculty and administrators may not, as a group, be sufficiently aware of. Yet, despite wrestling on a regular basis with student financial difficulties, finite honors program scholarship resources, long-term planning (in which I propose improvements that cost money), I find, thanks to Badenhause, that I have been neglecting the issue of the distinctiveness of the honors learning experience. He writes:

I would argue that we are all better served by a recruiting process that emphasizes the distinctiveness of the *learning experience* in honors and that we should spend most of our time educating families about the way honors classes are different rather than better. Of course, this strategy only works if honors faculty have thought intentionally about the unique features of honors pedagogy. . . .

If we want to move beyond career goals and entitlement privileges as motives to join honors, Badenhause argues, such questions about what makes honors special need careful thought and specific responses.

Since reading Badenhause’s manuscript, I have sought to learn what the Indiana University Southeast Honors Program students consider distinctive about their honors experience as well as to ascertain the hopes and assumptions of the Honors Council and honors faculty. Because we “buy” our faculty out of their departmental teaching obligations to teach within the honors program, the challenge can be harrowing to offer a useful array of courses for our students and at the same time assure that faculty understand their role in the larger learning experience. In the past, I have hoped that the carefully

worded call for faculty applications, followed by the Honors Council's selection process, weeds out people who are temperamentally unsuited to work with our students; now I have begun to think about ways both to solicit faculty commentary and to offer a consistent, coherent narrative of honors learning in order to develop a sense of common purpose.

While addressing the issue of educating students, their families, and prospective faculty members requires a multipronged approach, I have discovered that the website is potentially our best way of disseminating information about the program, its possibilities, and its culture. The site is, at this moment, a huge weakness. Websites certainly evolve over time, but ours resembles an untended garden. The weeds—out-of-date, conflicting, and ambiguous information—are crowding out the vegetables, and it is time for a lot of weeding, pruning, and preparing the garden for a new season.

We in the Indiana University Southeast Honors Program are thus undertaking a large revamping of the website to make sure that any visitor will easily find answers to the questions that brought them there. This process requires that we define the distinctive nature of the honors learning experience at Indiana University Southeast. I offer our definitions to my honors colleagues in case Badenhausen's essay has made them also consider the importance of assuring that students, their families, faculty colleagues, and the institution itself have a readily accessible source of information about what makes honors a desirable component in the undergraduate experience of particular students.

In preparing to revamp our website, I have been surveying people, poring over Noel-Levitz results, chatting with Honors Council members, and talking to honors program alumni. I have learned that honors students particularly remember and value their co-curricular activities, and so, to the extent that it remains possible in difficult budgetary times, we will continue to see plays or go to lectures together. I have also learned that our yearly trips to the Mid-East Regional Honors Association (MEHA) conference are our most effective team-building experiences; that our honors program can do more to encourage students to study abroad or to pursue internships; and, to my chagrin, that some of our current seniors have been too proud to ask for help in preparing for life after graduation and that I have been so non-intrusive in my efforts to help them that I have been less effective than I should have been.

I have learned that recent graduates think that the distinctiveness of their honors education involves their ability to handle ambiguity, to tolerate disagreement, to be friends with people of different political stripes, and to be more intellectually self-sufficient. Seniors with whom I have been speaking this semester say that they are better researchers than they think they would be without the honors program and that they are both more confident and

more humble intellectually. They say they appreciate the small classes, the interaction with their classmates, their relations with their faculty members, and the reliable source of positive reference letters. Their satisfaction with the level of academic and personal support they have received is ironic in light of their not having asked for nor received all the help they need to make a smooth transition into post-graduate study or work.

One of the distinctive qualities that honors students lend to the program and to our school, is their gratitude. Most are smarter than they know, and they also bring more to the honors program and the university than they know, but they well up with emotion about honors faculty members or scholarships or the friends they have made in and out of their honors classes. I am not a hugger, but they make me want to hug them—a distinctive feature that does not, alas, have a place on our website.

Perhaps the most useful fact I have learned as I pursued Badenhausen's suggestion to wrestle with the distinctiveness of the honors learning experience is that it seems to have more to do with student dispositions and their connectedness to the institution and each other than with specific class assignments. While a solid curriculum, high expectations, and a good assessment plan are indispensable, they are not what students remember. They remember human moments, events, achievements, and interactions, positive and sometimes negative, within the honors program itself. While a website can neither distill nor capture these distinctive features, the act of revamping the site, in a quest to answer Badenhausen's challenge, has yielded a great many possibilities for our program's future.

The author may be contacted at

amsalas@ius.edu.

Protecting and Expanding the Honors Budget in Hard Times

BRIAN RAILSBACK

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

In difficult budget times, especially at state colleges and universities, honors programs might seem too easy for budget-cutters to reduce, cut, or lose in the shuffle of administrative reorganization. Recent years have been financially perilous and hardly an easy time for honors programs or colleges to increase budgets. Using Western Carolina University (WCU) as a case study, I can nevertheless offer essential strategies to help sustain, preserve, or even expand honors on campuses where tight funding is the “new normal.”

In 1996, the honors program at Western Carolina University (WCU) was nearly dead. For a decade, the program existed in the basement of a building littered with surplus furniture and a few cast-off computers. Honors students numbered seventy-seven in all, with the support of a full-time secretary and a faculty member with half-time course release to serve as director. The program was almost unknown on campus after a succession of directors who sometimes did not last more than a year. Even in good budget years, paltry requests for additional funds for the program were often denied.

Today the program is a thriving honors college, housed in a new \$51 million residential living complex for honors students and supported by a dean and three full-time staff members. While the university’s overall enrollment grew from 6,809 in 1997 to 8,919 by spring 2012, honors enrollment in the same period grew from 77 to 1,326. The standards for admission and retention in the program were raised. The total budget grew by nearly 600%. External revenue generated in that period topped \$250,000. Even in the harsh budget years since 2009, there has been no talk of reducing the size of the college or cutting it; on the contrary, some operating budget cuts will be restored in 2012–13.

Four strategies largely account for the funding and capital increases that grew a nearly dead program into one of the most thriving enterprises on campus.

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

On February 16, 1996, WCU Chancellor John Bardo, in his first year on the job, gave a speech in which he talked about an honors college as a

possibility to help the institution raise academic standards. “An honors college is not just an expansion of an honors program,” he said, “it represents a fundamental commitment of the university to educational excellence.” Not long after, the usual arguments against the establishment of an honors college emerged: there is no need to create a new college; the elitism of such an organization defies democratic ideals; high-achieving students do not need additional resources. Many faculty members and deans agreed on one point in particular: the university does not need another dean. In response, Chancellor Bardo made a critical point that proved to be true in the quest for increased recurring budget dollars: *honors will thrive only if its leadership has a seat at the table where budget decisions are made—that means an honors dean who sits on the council of deans.*

INTEGRATION INTO THE UNIVERSITY

The WCU Honors College was established on July 1, 1997. In the vigorous debate of the faculty senate before passage of the plan to create the college, it became clear that honors had to integrate with the university; the underlying fear was that the college would become insulated and, in fact, isolate high-achieving students. The new dean searched for a university-wide niche for the honors college and discovered a perfect one: undergraduate research. The university lacked a coordinated approach to undergraduate research, and management of interdisciplinary undergraduate research programs at WCU could be the role of the new college. To fully integrate with the campus, the dean decided to open the honors research programs to all undergraduates who could qualify. Over time, honors at WCU became associated with the university’s successful undergraduate research programs; for example, WCU had little or no presence at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research before the honors college but since 2005 has been among the top ten universities in papers accepted at NCUR. If the university cuts the honors budget too drastically, one of its high-profile successes beyond the honors college will be hurt as well. *The more integrated the honors program or college is with top university programs or priorities, the harder it is to cut the honors budget.*

STUDENT LEADERSHIP

Honors students are powerful allies if they are allowed a significant leadership role in the honors program or college. In 1997, the new honors college at WCU took a radical path, establishing the dean’s only week-to-week, on-campus advisory board composed entirely of honors students. Honors students, through the Honors College Board of Directors, are involved in all policies of the college, including admissions, commencement, community

relations, curriculum, programming, and scholarships. The more students are allowed to lead the honors program or college, the more pride they take in their organization. Innovations that resulted from student leadership at WCU helped fuel the college's rapid enrollment growth and improved retention of high-achieving students. With 14% of the total student population at WCU in honors, their collective voice has become powerful. For example, the honors residence was originally budgeted at \$18 million, but a strong student voice resulted in changes that greatly improved and augmented the original plan. With strong student participation and advocacy in budget discussions, the honors director or dean can more easily make the case that honors is an important university priority. Strong, effective student support depends on real student leadership. *The greater the honors students' sense of ownership in the program or college, the more difficult it becomes to cut the honors budget.*

DEVELOP PRIVATE FUNDING

Given the situation since 2009, significant budget increases for higher education are unlikely through the traditional means of increasing state revenue or tuition hikes. In times of budget cutting, honors programs or colleges need to rely on external dollars to sustain or expand programming. Donors with the capacity to help must be engaged in the honors enterprise, and, like students, they need a voice in the honors program or college. *The best way to achieve significant donor interest in honors is to create an external advisory board.* Our board is made up of the honors dean and, for the rest, potential donors from outside the university. Donors might be alumni or interested members of the community, people who want to help the institution's high-achieving students and who want to be part of a prestigious organization. The WCU Honors College has had an external advisory board since 2005. Its members have donated or pledged over \$200,000 to the college, taking special interest in a grant program for honors students going abroad, which cannot be funded with North Carolina state dollars. The board has allowed the college to sustain or expand programs even during years of budget cutting.

Implementing these four strategies requires long-range planning. The two that were most difficult for us were installing an honors dean and creating an effective external advisory board, strategies that many larger and richer institutions have been able to implement for quite some time. The rags-to-riches story at Western Carolina University demonstrates that a wide range of honors programs or colleges can become essential to their home institutions and can thrive even in hard times.

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The author may be contacted at

brailsba@wcu.edu.

If Not Sufficiency, at Least Empowerment

LARRY ANDREWS

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Richard Badenhausen has offered a generous range of ways to think about “the economy of honors” and has concluded with a call for honors leaders to be aggressive in seeking appropriate funding from the upper administration. He passes over, however, the need to be equally aggressive in raising money from private donations, seeming to worry that pursuing “endowment support” runs the “ancillary cost” of “framing the educational experience primarily in economic terms.” He also refers to some honors administrators as spending their time “watching endowment returns if [they] are lucky enough to benefit from such support.”

Indeed, endowment gifts sometimes arrive as a matter of luck. An affluent donor on rare occasions surprises us with a large donation, or the development office finds a lead and cultivates a relationship, bringing us in to clinch the deal for honors. But most endowment fundraising success results from hard work: developing a prospect list, working with development people who have different mindsets than ours, writing case statements, traveling to meet potential donors, and conversing with confidence, knowledge, respect, and discretion. This work is often fruitless and frustrating, but the reward is potentially so valuable—a degree of economic self-sufficiency for the program—that it justifies the time and effort. Of course, our institutions must allow us to pursue such activity on behalf of honors in the first place.

I do not wish to argue here, however, that all honors leaders need to spend their precious time in pursuing large gifts. For most of us, time, timorousness, inexperience, or institutional policy constrains such efforts. What I urge is a baby step toward economic self-empowerment, if not self-sufficiency: developing an all-purpose fund of small donations, usually held by the institution’s foundation, that we can tap for any need that promotes the learning experience of our students and the stability of our program. (I discuss such a fund further in my NCHC monograph, *Fundrai\$ing for Honor\$*.) Such a fund allows us complete control over its use. Depending on its size, we might use it to send students to the NCHC conference, a regional honors conference, an NCHC Honors Semester, or the NCUR conference. We might draw on it to support thesis research or study abroad. We might simply be

able to afford refreshments at honors student events, purchase a teaching aid for a classroom, or print an anthology of student writing.

Sometimes called a “discretionary” fund, this pool of spendable dollars grows from small donations, usually from honors alumni. If the program is well-established and mature, it has a significant pool of alumni approaching or exceeding mid-career status. Even young programs, however, quickly establish an annual pool of new alumni, even if they lack much earning power and labor under student-loan debt. The first step in establishing a discretionary fund is to secure the right to do so from the chief academic officer and the development office. For several years my graduate institution has dunned me for contributions, but no matter how much I preferred that my small gift go to my doctoral department, it ended up in a large general fund for graduate assistantships. Finally I persuaded the department chair to establish a discretionary fund, and now I am a much happier, still modest but annual, donor.

After establishing the fund, we must communicate its existence to our alumni and interested others. Accurate mailing or email addresses and perhaps an effective alumni Facebook page are crucial for spreading the word. A periodic newsletter, in whatever medium, serves to keep alive the bond between former students and the program. Most important is an appeal to graduating seniors and a contact during their first year out. We can appeal to their “pay-forward” motivation because most of them have relished their honors experience and may have benefited from scholarship support. To get started, why not ask each senior to donate at least \$25—a couple of pizzas, after all—as a parting gift? A class gift could be directed to such a fund rather than to a less useful physical object. The important thing is to establish a tradition, an expectation, in fact a *habit* of giving back. Then we can follow up with a request for a gift renewal in the first year out and then build that up to a regular solicitation, gradually increasing the suggested amount but keeping it realistic for the nature of the alumni pool we have. Constant renewal of the fund is critical.

Developing a discretionary fund does not mean the abandonment of ongoing efforts to secure appropriate and stable support from the upper administration, nor should possession of such a fund—or even an endowment, for that matter—let these administrators off the hook. Working to implement and then increase such a fund, however, offers us not only a source of support for small projects but a sense of empowerment and perhaps an end to whining as the only alternative to generous institutional support.

The author may be contacted at

landrews@kent.edu.

Research Essays

Honors Dissertation Abstracts: A Bounded Qualitative Meta-Study

DEBRA K. HOLMAN AND JAMES H. BANNING

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

A potential source of useful information about undergraduate honors education can be found in doctoral dissertation abstracts that focus on honors. We sought to explore this resource by undertaking a bounded qualitative meta-study of such abstracts using document analysis. Three sub-questions focused our inquiry:

- What are the general attributes of dissertations on honors education?
- What are the thematic subjects and topics associated with the dissertations?
- Have these dissertation findings been published in higher education journals or books?

What follows is an account of our research, including information on the meta-study framework we used, our selection of the dissertations for analysis, and our methods and procedures for analyzing the dissertations. At the close of this article, we discuss our findings, summarize publication-related trends for dissertations on honors education, and provide recommendations for future research.

A BOUNDED QUALITATIVE META-STUDY FRAMEWORK

A meta-study framework explores and synthesizes research for the purpose of addressing specific research questions (Lipsey & Wilson). Most often, the meta-study is based on a quantitative approach (Glass) using effect size data to permit meaningful comparisons across a group of studies (Lipsey & Wilson). A qualitative framework can be an important strategy (Noblit & Hare; Major & Savin-Baden) when researchers seek to analyze studies for common themes. The qualitative framework can also be used to examine attributes of the research and researchers, as demonstrated in 2001 by Paterson, Thorne, Canam, and Jillings.

For our study, we used a qualitative meta-study framework limited to or bounded by a specific activity: the production of dissertation abstracts on honors education. Additionally, we selected a specific time period (1987–2006) in which the dissertations were produced to further bound and focus our analyses. In using a bounded qualitative approach, we were applying a specific meta-study framework used successfully in several recent studies on education, including Banning and Folkestad’s 2011 study of education-related dissertations on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); Davies, Dickmann, Harbour, & Banning’s 2011 study on community college-related dissertations; and Banning & Kuk’s 2009 and 2011 studies on dissertations covering collegiate student affairs organizations and residence life.

SELECTION OF THE DISSERTATIONS

In 2007, Holman undertook a study on publications of research related to collegiate honors and to high-achieving, high-ability, and gifted and talented education. Her findings were detailed in a report to the External Relations Committee of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) and disseminated broadly, both as an annotated bibliography and EndNote library files, in two NCHC National Conference sessions in Denver, Colorado, that same year. As part of her study, Holman (2007a) sought to locate dissertations on collegiate honors and on high-achieving, high-ability, and gifted and talented education in ProQuest. Using a list of 25 search terms, she located a total of 132 dissertations, which were incorporated into her EndNote reference library; this material was published in her *Annotated Bibliography: Honors Research*. We selected this subset of 132 dissertation-related entries for our qualitative meta-study framework and analyses. Before undertaking our review, we reran Holman’s dissertation search in the current version of Digital Dissertations: ProQuest to include any additional data that might have been added to the ProQuest entries for the dissertations of interest.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

BOUNDING THE SAMPLE

One of the primary research questions we had posed concerned the publication of dissertation-related findings in higher education journals or books. We chose to bound our study to the most recent twenty-five-year period, from 1987–2011, to gain a sense of current topics and trends in publishing on honors education research. We further determined our specific analyses of the dissertations would focus on those produced between 1987 and 2006 so that, in searching for related post-dissertation publications, we would extend to the

authors a five-year window—until 2011—to have had their research published in higher education journals or books.

To formally bound our sample, a query was run in EndNote to locate those dissertations published in the twenty-year period of 1987–2006 and containing the specific terms “honor” or “honour” in any search field. A total of fifty-one entries met the criteria. The abstracts for all entries in the query were subsequently reviewed to confirm the research had been conducted as a dissertation focused on some aspect of undergraduate honors program or honors college education. Two entries were removed, one for being a master’s thesis and the other for focusing on high-achieving students earning awards and honors but not participating in an honors program or college. The remaining forty-nine entries were retained as the sample for the bounded meta-study.

QUALITATIVE DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Qualitative document analysis (QDA) (Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, & Schneider), also known as ethnographic content analysis (Altheide), served as the primary analytical approach within our meta-study framework. QDA is a form of qualitative content analysis that examines documents in both deductive and inductive manners (Altheide) as opposed to the strict deductive coding and numerical analysis typically associated with classical content analysis (Krippendorff). Within the QDA framework, coding is undertaken as template analysis (King). In this method, *a priori* (deductive) codes are used along with new codes produced through an inductive approach to the data.

The *a priori* codes for our study were year of degree, awarding institution, author gender, research methodology used, comparative analysis with non-honors program(s) or college(s), and type of doctorate awarded. (When an author’s gender was not readily identifiable in the name, an online search in Google was conducted to locate the author and confirm his or her gender through a published photograph. In all such search instances, the author was located and a photo found either at his/her place of employment or via a public social networking site, e.g., LinkedIn or Facebook.) Our thematic analyses of the dissertation subjects and topics used the inductive coding strategy of the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss); each dissertation abstract was assigned a subject and topic code, and, from the listing of codes, a thematic structure was induced. The process of peer debriefing was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the inductive coding process (Creswell). We jointly examined our separate subject and topic coding of the dissertations, and the final assignment of dissertations to subjects and topics was determined by consensus.

CARNEGIE RESEARCH CLASSIFICATION FOR INSTITUTIONS

Our analyses included identifying the Carnegie Basic Classification for Institutions of Higher Education for each university granting a doctoral degree for the dissertations in the meta-study. Carnegie identifications were made by visiting the website for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2012) in January 2012 and searching for institutions by name to learn their current classification standing.

AUTHOR PUBLICATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION JOURNALS OR BOOKS

The search for journal articles or books resulting from dissertations was done in early fall 2011 using the following databases: Educational Abstracts, PsychInfo, the Humanities International, and Academic Search Premier. A follow-up search was then completed in late January 2012 in Google Scholar. Articles and books published by the dissertation authors were selected if the titles or abstracts of the publications were clearly identifiable as relating to the authors' dissertation titles or abstracts.

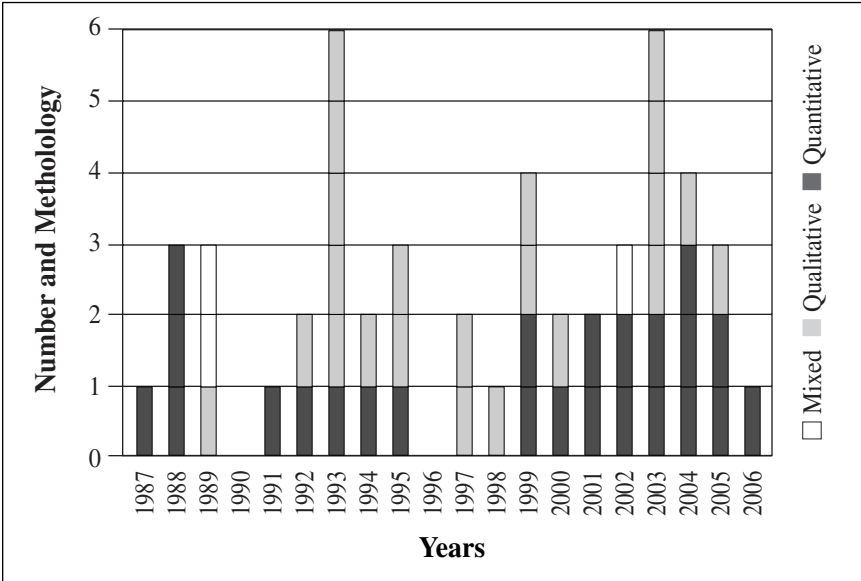
FINDINGS

UNIVERSITY PUBLICATION INFORMATION AND GENERAL ATTRIBUTES FOR DISSERTATIONS

As shown in Figure 1, over the period of 1987–2006, dissertations on honors education were published at the rate of two to three dissertations per year. In four years—1993, 1999, 2003, and 2004—four to six dissertations were published, and in two years—1990 and 1996—no dissertations were published. Figure 1 also shows a general trend from 1999 to 2006 toward a quantitative methodological approach in the dissertation research whereas in the prior twelve years most dissertations relied on qualitative methodological approaches.

For the 49 dissertations under study, a total of 37 universities served as the publishing entities for the research undertaken, with Arizona State University and Indiana University having the highest publication rate of three dissertations each during the twenty year period of 1987–2006. Eight institutions—Morgan State University, State University of New York at Buffalo, Texas A&M University-Commerce, The Ohio State University, The Pennsylvania State University, The University of Alabama, The University of Connecticut, and University of South Carolina—each published two dissertations. Table 1 shows that only six dissertations—12% of the total—were produced at universities in the Western United States, with half of those at

Figure 1. Dissertation Publication Rate by Year and Methodology, 1987–2006



Arizona. A few dissertations were published by universities in the Upper Midwest or Midwest. The majority of the dissertations were published by universities in the Eastern and Southern United States.

Table 2 presents our findings on the general attributes for the dissertations, including author gender, research methodology, comparative analysis with non-honors program(s) or college(s), type of doctorate awarded, and institutional classification by Carnegie. By gender, 73% of the dissertations were produced by female students and 27% by male students. A little over half the dissertations, 25 total, relied on quantitative methodology, but, with 21 dissertations having a qualitative focus, there was no substantively demonstrated preference in methodologies. As previously noted, however, and as displayed in Figure 1, there was a preference for using quantitative methodology in dissertations published from 1999 to 2006. There was also a preference—over the entire period under study—for doing research that focused exclusively on honors education, with just over three-quarters of all the dissertations not incorporating some element of comparative analysis with non-honors programs, colleges, or students. When looking at the types of doctoral degrees granted, 69% were found to have been awarded as doctors of philosophy, 29% as doctors of education, and 2% as doctor of arts. The large majority of degree-granting institutions, a total of 83%, were classified by Carnegie as having RU/H or RU/VH status, indicating that most students undertook their dissertations on honors education at institutions with high to very high research activity.

HONORS DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

Table 1. Summary of Dissertations Included in Meta-Study (N = 49)

Author (Year)	Institution
Abrams, D. J. (2004)	George Mason University, Virginia
Adkins, K. K. (1994)	The University of Alabama, Alabama
Allen, N. E. (2002)	Morgan State University, Maryland
Aryulina, D. (1995)	Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Virginia
Billingsley, L. C. (1994)	Nova Southeastern University, Florida
Bouldin, E. L. (1998)	The University of Alabama, Alabama
Brown-Myers, P. A. (1989)	Auburn University, Alabama
Bulakowski, C. (1993)	Loyola University of Chicago, Illinois
Campbell, K. C. (2006)	Oklahoma State University
Capuana, J. A. (1993)	State University of New York at Buffalo, New York
Chmiel, S. M. (1993)	State University of New York at Buffalo, New York
Christopher, M. M. (2003)	Texas Tech University, Texas
Cook-Goodhue, N. R. (1989)	University of South Carolina, South Carolina
Cosgrove, J. R. (2004)	The Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania
Cummins, C. F. (2004)	Texas A&M University–Commerce, Texas
DeHart, K. E. (1993)	The University of Akron, Ohio
Enochs, P. P. (2001)	Tennessee State University, Tennessee
Freeman, M. G. (1988)	The Ohio State University, Ohio
Gagliardi, C. J. (2005)	Arizona State University, Arizona
Galinova, E. V. (2005)	The Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania
Gibboney, R. K. (1997)	Indiana University, Indiana
Green, S. M. (2005)	Delta State University, Mississippi
Guzy, A. (1999)	New Mexico State University, New Mexico
Haarlow, W. N. (2000)	University of Virginia, Virginia
Harrison-Cook, R. R. (1999)	University of South Carolina, South Carolina

Table 1. Continued

Author (Year)	Institution
Higginbotham, L. G. K. (1992)	Indiana University, Indiana
Hollister, D. L. (2001)	University of Central Florida, Florida
Huggett, K. N. D. (2003)	The University of Wisconsin–Madison, Wisconsin
Lapp-Rincker, R. H. (2003)	University of Kansas, Kansas
Lease, J. A. (2003)	University of Georgia, Georgia
Longo, F. C. (1995)	The University of Southern Mississippi, Mississippi
Mathey, C. K. (1993)	New York University, New York
McCrimmon, C. A. (1988)	Brigham Young University, Utah
Meel, D. E. (1995)	University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Montgomery, W. L. (1991)	Illinois State University, Illinois
Park-Curry, P. S. (1988)	The Ohio State University, Ohio
Peterson, S. S. (1989)	Vanderbilt University, Tennessee
Phillips, G. W. (2003)	Sam Houston State University, Texas
Pittman, A. A. (2003)	The University of Connecticut, Connecticut
Powell, G. S. (1992)	East Texas State University, Texas
Ringle, J. A. (1999)	Oregon State University, Oregon
Rinn, A. N. (2004)	Indiana University, Indiana
Sell, D. K. (1987)	Kent State University, Ohio
Shushok Jr., F. X. (2002)	University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland
Shute, L. D. (1999)	The University of Connecticut, Connecticut
Smith, G. P. W. (2000)	Morgan State University, Maryland
Viger, D. V. (1993)	Arizona State University, Arizona
Wallace, M. L. (2002)	University of Missouri–Columbia, Missouri
Wheeler, J. I. (1997)	Arizona State University, Arizona

Table 2. Dissertation Attributes (N =49)

	Subject	
	n	%
Gender of Researcher		
Female	36	73
Male	13	27
Methodology for Study		
Quantitative	25	51
Qualitative	21	43
Mixed	3	6
Comparative Analysis with Non-Honors (all quantitative studies)		
Yes	12	24
No	37	76
Degree Granted		
Ph.D.	34	69
Ed.D.	14	29
D.A.	1	2
Carnegie Classification (n = 37)		
RU/VH: Research Universities (very high research activity)	19	51
RU/H: Research Universities (high research activity)	12	32
DRU: Doctoral/Research Universities	5	14
Master's L: Master's Colleges & Universities (larger programs)	1	3

DISSERTATION SUBJECTS AND TOPICS

Although we determined primary subject and topic categories by consensus, many of the dissertations could have been coded into more than one category. Ultimately, we settled on six distinct subject codes and sixteen related topic codes induced from a constant comparative analysis of the dissertation abstracts. As shown in Table 3, the most common subject pursued in the dissertations was evaluation, followed closely by curriculum and instruction and then achievement. Other subject areas of interest were recruitment and retention, student development, and residence life.

For those dissertations focusing on evaluation, three forms (topics) of evaluation were common: program/operational assessment, historical

Table 3. Dissertation Subjects (alpha-ordered) and Topics (frequency-ordered)
(N = 49)

	Subject		Topic	
	n	%	n	%
Achievement	10	20		
Honors & Gifted Education			4	8
Peer/Familial Relationships			2	4
Perfectionism			2	4
Self Esteem/Self-Efficacy			2	4
Curriculum & Instruction	11	23		
Literature/Composition			4	9
STEM Education			3	6
Learning Styles/Strategies			2	4
Other			2	4
Evaluation	15	31		
Program/Operational Assessment			9	19
History			4	8
Student Satisfaction			2	4
Recruitment & Retention	6	12		
Persistence/Completion			4	8
Recruitment			2	4
Residential Life	1	2		
Engagement/Involvement			1	2
Student Development	6	12		
Identity/Interrelationships			3	6
Psychological Evaluation			3	6

examination, and assessment of student satisfaction. Nine dissertations involved program/operational assessment, with Powell (1992), Bulakowski (1993), Viger (1993), and Phillips (2003) focusing on community college settings; Peterson (1989) looking at honors in nursing; Cummins (2004) examining honors in private, Catholic school settings; and Billingsley (1994), Huggett (2003) and Christopher (2003) evaluating some other aspects of honors programs or colleges. Capuana (1993), DeHart (1993), Haarlow (2000),

and Galinova (2005) each undertook evaluation involving a historical examination of honors education. Finally, two dissertations (Montgomery, 1991; Enochs, 2001) centered on evaluation in relation to student satisfaction.

Subjects related to curriculum and instruction were the second most common found among the forty-nine dissertations in the meta-study. Literature/composition was the most common topic, pursued by Mathey (1993), Wheeler (1997), Guzy (1999), and Abrams (2004). The topic of STEM education in relation to honors was found in three dissertations (Aryulina, 1995; Meel, 1995; Wallace, 2002). Additionally, Ringle (1999) and Hollister (2001) took topics related to learning styles/strategies; Cook-Goodhue (1989) looked at teacher education; and Gibboney (1997) examined service learning.

A fifth of all the dissertations took the subject of achievement. Four authors (Longo, 1995; Shute, 1999; Rinn, 2004; Green, 2005) looked at achievement through the lens of honors and/or gifted education. Achievement was also examined topically in relation to peer/family relationships by Bouldin (1998) and Smith (2000) and in relation to self-esteem/self-efficacy by McCrimmon (1988) and Lapp-Rincker (2003). Two authors (Higginbotham, 1992; Adkins, 1994) explored the topic of perfectionism in relation to achievement.

Six dissertations focused on recruitment and retention, another six on student development, and one on residence life. For the dissertations on recruitment and retention, the topic of persistence/completion was most common with four of the six authors (Allen, 2002; Cosgrove, 2004; Gagliardi, 2005; Campbell, 2006) exploring some aspect of persistence and/or completion in their studies while two authors (Sell, 1987; Harrison-Cook, 1999) looked at recruitment. Under the subject of student development, three dissertations focused on aspects of student identity/interrelationships; these dissertations had sub-topics of role (Park-Curry, 1988), peer relationships (Lease, 2003), and race (Pittman, 2003). Two student-development-based dissertations focused on psychological evaluation of first-year/freshman students in honors (Brown-Myers, 1989; Shushok, 2002), and one dissertation (Chmiel, 1993) undertook psychological evaluation of honors students in STEM education. The remaining dissertation (Freeman, 1988) in the meta-study was concerned with engagement and involvement of honors students in residence life.

PUBLICATION RESULTS

Using Educational Abstracts, PsychInfo, the Humanities International, and Academic Search Premier, 8% of the dissertations, a total of four authors (Adkins, Bulakowski, Christopher, and Rinn) were found to have published articles related to their dissertations. When the search was repeated in Google

Scholar, we found that almost 20% of the dissertations, a total of ten authors (Adkins, Bulakowski, Campbell, Christopher, Cosgrove, Guzy, Huggett, Meel, Rinn, and Shushok), had either published articles related to their dissertations or had their dissertations highlighted in published reviews.

Table 4 provides a summary of the journals that published the honors-related dissertation research. Rinn, with five publications since her dissertation was completed in 2004, was the most successful author in getting her dissertation-related research on honors education published in articles or reviews. Both Adkins and Huggett were also able to publish twice in relation to their dissertation research.

Although not highlighted in Table 4, three of the 49 authors with honors education dissertations were found, through the search in Google Scholar, to have been successful in getting their dissertation-related research published as monographs or books. In 2004, Guzy authored *Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices*, an NCHC monograph which remains available in print and can be obtained from the NCHC national office. In 2003, Routledge published Haarlow's *Great Books, Honors Programs, and Hidden Origins: The Virginia Plan and the University of Virginia in the Liberal Arts Movement*. Finally, Peter Lang published Pittman in 2009 under the title *Whited Out: Unique Perspectives on Black Identity and Honors Achievement*.

In total, 12 of the 49 authors—almost 25%—had some portion of their dissertation-related research published in education journals or books. Those 12 authors were responsible for generating a total of 16 articles, 2 books, and 1 monograph. The remaining 37 authors, just over 75%, either did not pursue post-dissertation publication or were unsuccessful in getting their dissertation research published for the higher-education readership.

Some additional attribute-related highlights of those who were published include: 6 of the original dissertations used quantitative methodology, and 6 used qualitative methodology; 11 of the 12 authors received PhDs, with the twelfth receiving an EdD; all of the authors published their dissertations at institutions ranked by Carnegie as having an RU/H or RU/VH research status. For those authors whose work appeared in journals, the average time between the publication of their dissertation and the first appearance of their work in a journal was 1.8 years. The journals publishing more than one article were: *JNCHC* (4), *Gifted Child Quarterly* (3), *Roeper Review* (3), and *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education* (2). For the three authors with monograph or book publications, the average time between publication of their dissertations and publication of the monograph or book was 4.3 years.

Table 4. Summary of Journals & Articles Published with Dissertation-Related Findings

Journal	Author(s) and Year
<i>CBMS Issues in Mathematics Education</i>	Meel, D. E. (1998)
<i>Community College Journal of Research and Practice</i>	Bulakowski, C., & Townsend, B. K. (1995)
<i>Gifted Child Quarterly</i>	Rinn, A. N. (2007) Rinn, A. N., & Cunningham, L. G. (2008) Rinn, A. N., & Plucker, J. A. (2004)
<i>Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice</i>	Campbell, K. C., & Fuqua, D. R. (2008)
<i>Journal of Secondary Gifted Education</i>	Parker, W. D., & Adkins, K. K. (1995) Rinn, A. N. (2005)
<i>Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council</i>	Cosgrove, J. R. (2004) Guzy, A. (2004) Huggett, K. D. (2003) Shushok Jr., F. (2006)
<i>NACADA Journal</i>	Huggett, K. D. (2004)
<i>Roeper Review</i>	Blanchfield, S. L. K., Christopher, M. M., & Lee, M.-S. (2004) Chin, C. S., & Rinn, A. N. (2004) Parker, W. D., & Adkins, K. K. (1995)

DISCUSSION

Through our bounded qualitative meta-study of doctoral dissertation abstracts on undergraduate honors education, we learned a great deal. Ten universities, with two in particular, Arizona State University and Indiana University, have taken a leadership role in supporting doctoral research on honors education since the mid-1980s. Those universities granted more PhDs for honors-related dissertations than EdDs, at an almost three to one ratio from 1987 through 2006. During that time, 84% of the dissertations were also published at institutions with an RU/H or RU/VH Carnegie research classification.

In a three-to-one ratio, more women than men authored doctoral dissertations between 1987 and 2006; this is consistent with previous studies of higher-education-related dissertations (Banning & Kuk, 2009 and 2011). Also consistent with previous studies was the balanced distribution of quantitative and qualitative methods across the dissertations, although a trend toward quantitative-based methodology in honors-related dissertations may have started developing in around 2000.

Typical subjects for honors-related dissertations from 1987 through 2006 were, in order from most to least common, evaluation, curriculum and instruction, achievement, recruitment and retention, and student development. Just over three-quarters of all dissertations produced did not involve a comparative study with non-honors programs, colleges, or students.

PUBLICATION-RELATED TRENDS FOR DISSERTATIONS ON HONORS EDUCATION

The number of dissertations on honors education is on the increase with 21 published in the ten-year period 1987–1996 and 28 published in the subsequent ten years, representing overall a 33% increase decade to decade. Education journals and publishing houses have taken notice of the increased interest in honors education. Over the twenty-year period examined, 12 of the 16 dissertation-related articles that were published appeared in print after 2000. Additionally, the NCHC monograph and two books generated from the dissertation research have all been published since 2003.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on our analyses, we have two sets of recommendations for those interested in undertaking future honors-related doctoral research. The first recommendation is directed toward individuals considering evaluation-based orientations for their dissertation. A strong preponderance of qualitative-based methodology (11 out of the 15 dissertations) characterized the dissertations on evaluation, and none of the evaluation-oriented dissertations sought comparative analyses with non-honors programs, colleges, or students. To provide balance in evaluation-based research on honors, we recommend more dissertations take a quantitative or mixed methods approach. In particular, Teddlie and Tashakkori in 2009 provided a valuable resource for those considering mixed methods. Additionally, in an effort to better understand what makes honors distinct from other collegiate education experiences, evaluation ought to incorporate some comparative analysis with appropriate non-honors education paradigms.

Our second recommendation is for researchers in social science or educational psychology disciplines. We found that many of the dissertations

focused on personal attributes of honors students, typically examining the attribute in relation to some aspect(s) of the students' collegiate or honors-specific experience(s). The results of these studies typically pointed to the value of honors education in students' overall collegiate success. When considering future studies of honors students' personal attributes in relation to major or honors program characteristics, an ecological framework may be of interest. The ecological framework not only focuses on dynamics among personal attributes and environmental conditions related to behavioral outcomes but also helps structure interventions (Felner & Felner). Therefore, an ecological framework could support the following kind of question for honors education research: What student attributes under what kinds of program characteristics promote what kinds of behavior? Answering such a question within a mixed methods approach could further support student success outcomes for participants in honors programs and colleges.

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The authors may be contacted at
kaye.holman@colostate.edu.

The Power and Utility of Reflective Learning Portfolios in Honors

CHRISTOPHER R. CORLEY

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO

JOHN ZUBIZARRETA

COLUMBIA COLLEGE (SOUTH CAROLINA)

LEARNING PORTFOLIOS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The explosive growth of learning portfolios in higher education as a compelling tool for enhanced student learning, assessment, and career preparation is a sign of the increasing significance of reflective practice and mindful, systematic documentation in promoting deep, meaningful, transformative learning experiences. The advent of sophisticated electronic technologies has augmented the power of portfolios and created a virtual industry dedicated to platforms and strategies associated with electronic portfolios and the diverse purposes they can serve in curricular, programmatic, and institutional assessment efforts. Today, the substantial and still growing literature on electronic portfolios has taught us the capabilities of digital media to offer students a robust and flexible mechanism for not only collecting multiple types of selective evidence of their learning but also engaging in a critically reflective process that helps them understand, integrate, connect, apply, and develop the metacognitive habits and skills we associate with higher-order learning.

The intellectual and practical relevance of such innovations in the honors context is clear. Honors programs and colleges often struggle to identify and supply evidence of the value added to honors students' education, a challenge that is not easily or adequately met by standard measures such as tests, surveys, or essays. The portfolio, on the other hand, provides a vehicle for bringing together judiciously selected samples of students' work and achievements inside and outside the classroom for authentic assessment over time. A typical learning portfolio may include both academic materials and personal profiles and may designate some of its contents as public or private. Designed to prompt insight and discovery, a well-constructed, comprehensive portfolio

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will contain items that fall into the following general categories, which are suggestive rather than prescriptive or complete because a portfolio should represent the individuality of the student:

1. *Philosophy of Learning* (reflective narrative[s] on learning process, learning preferences, strengths and challenges, value of learning, personal profile);
2. *Achievements in Learning* (records: transcripts, course descriptions, résumés, honors, awards, internships, tutoring);
3. *Evidence of Learning* (direct outcomes: research papers, critical essays, field experience logs, creative displays/performances, data/spreadsheet analyses, course online forum entries, lab research results);
4. *Assessment of Learning* (instructor feedback, course test scores, exit/board exams, lab/data reviews, research project appraisals, practicum/internship supervisor reports);
5. *Relevance of Learning* (practical applications, leadership, relation of learning to personal and professional domains, ethical/moral growth, affiliations, hobbies, volunteer work, affective value of learning); and
6. *Learning Goals* (response to feedback; plans to enhance, connect, and apply learning; career ambitions). (Zubizarreta, *Learning Portfolio 22*)

More importantly, the focus on reflection and on the vital mentoring that is needed to introduce and sustain what has come to be known widely as “folio thinking” helps the student to address a number of critical questions about his or her own learning (Chen and Black). Such questions can provide crucial information about the unique characteristics and value of the honors experience:

- What have I learned? Why did I learn?
- When have I learned most? Least? In what circumstances? Under what conditions?
- How have I learned or not, and do I know what kind of learner I am?
- How does what I have learned fit into a full, continual plan for continual learning?
- Where, when, and how have I engaged in integrative learning? Has my learning been connected and coherent?
- Is my learning relevant and applicable?

- When, how, and why has my learning surprised me?
- What have been the proudest highlights of my learning? The disappointments?
- In what ways is what I have learned valuable?
- What difference has honors learning made in my intellectual, personal, and ethical development?

One important takeaway lesson here is that “portfolio thinking” involves more than knowing content information, accumulating credits, and earning grades. Knowledge and performance are fundamental and desirable goals for a student’s undergraduate pursuits but are not enough to help students become reflective learners who can understand and evaluate themselves as “lifelong” and “lifewide” learners (Chen 29). The learning portfolio, then, becomes more than a product, a simple repository of artifacts; it becomes a process of reflection, of organizing, prioritizing, analyzing, and communicating one’s work and its value, which may prompt insights and goals that align with the mission and objectives of an honors program or college (Zubizarreta, “Learning Portfolio” 124). Add the practical benefits of the electronic portfolio in creating a multi-faceted, multi-media resource that gives a rich picture of a student’s academic and personal development over the course of a class, a program, a major, or a complete undergraduate career, and we see why many individual instructors, directors, departments, and institutions are adopting portfolios to improve and assess student learning and program or institutional effectiveness.

Honors can reap these same benefits, and an increasing number of honors programs and colleges are incorporating portfolio work in their courses and assessment plans. Models of both paper and electronic portfolios in honors from diverse institutions are readily available (see Appendix A).

The honors program’s electronic portfolio project at Minnesota State University, Mankato, offers an example of a thoughtful, well-planned effort to engage students in meaningful portfolio work. A great part of the project’s success comes from developing clearly defined competencies for Minnesota State Mankato honors students and faculty during the academic redesign phase, then emphasizing reflection as the core principle of sound portfolio development, and finally tapping its efficacy in providing useful information for program assessment. The Minnesota State Mankato portfolio has begun to transform student learning, enrich students’ preparation for post-baccalaureate education or careers, and strengthen the program’s assessment plan through multi-sourced evidence of its impact on students and on the institution. This essay contributes to the research on portfolios in higher education

by focusing on a single program's shift toward competency-based learning within an honors context.

SHIFTING TO THE HONORS PORTFOLIO DURING CURRICULUM REDESIGN

Faculty at Minnesota State Mankato redesigned the honors curriculum in 2008–2009. From the beginning, the designers agreed that the program redesign process should serve as an incubator for curriculum experimentation across the university while complementing the institution's perceived strengths, fields of study, and institutional goals.

After meetings with various stakeholders—including students, faculty, alumni, business owners and political leaders—faculty designers decided to focus the program on key learning outcomes, or competencies. Prospective employers told us that they admired our students' knowledge and skills related to professional fields, but that they had hoped our graduates would be better able to work in teams, take charge of important projects, and effectively lead groups of people. Trends in global markets and immigration patterns also evidenced the need for students to navigate intercultural relationships in their communities and work places to an extent not seen in previous decades (Friedman; Moodian; Reimers; Rhoads and Szelenyi).

For these reasons, the faculty believed that honors education at Minnesota State Mankato should focus on developing demonstrable leadership and intercultural skills in addition to strong inquiry, research, and presentation skills, long the hallmarks of a successful honors education. We moved in this direction because the university has no major course of studies focused exclusively on leadership or global citizenship, yet, like most institutions of higher education, our diverse academic and student activity programs have much to offer in the development of these skills. At the same time, the three skill sets—leadership, research, and global citizenship—could complement the students' major fields of study. In essence, the process of redesign (the consultations with stakeholders) and the outcome (a renewed focus on interdisciplinary competencies that includes the traditional liberal arts and remains relevant to today's employment market) provide a potential rejoinder to vocal public criticisms about the inability of university departments and programs to meet the changing needs of contemporary society (Bok; Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson; Grafton; Taylor).

All future courses and co-curricular experiences, then, would be vetted through this tripartite lens of leadership, research, and global citizenship. We then faced the question of how the students would demonstrate their skills in these areas. Our stakeholders were emphatic about the importance of moving beyond GPA and credit completion as marks of success, and increasing

numbers of faculty were intrigued by the discussions about competency-based education that occurred in the late 1990s (Voorhees; Cambridge; Jones, Voorhees, and Paulson).

Focusing on competencies allowed the faculty to come to a shared understanding of learning goals for the program, leading us toward a common language and process for assessment without overly limiting the flexibility inherent in successful honors programs. The emphasis on competencies has other benefits that include creating a framework, a “story” for a program’s conversations with external audiences, and assisting in the formation of a community of scholars with a shared purpose. Finally, establishing clear and transparent competencies “enables sharing power with students” (Cambridge 52), a characteristic that many faculty members consider fundamental to honors education.

The literature on the subject suggests that competencies-focused projects take years to establish and often require multiple small steps and consistent evaluation to determine if this approach to learning is working. The faculty at Alverno College, an institution widely regarded as having one of the most developed ability-based programs in the nation, readily acknowledges that their mini-steps toward curricular change have taken nearly three decades to develop (7–13).

THE BENEFITS OF PORTFOLIOS IN THE HONORS CONTEXT

The honors faculty’s focus on competencies and demonstrations gradually moved our redesign committee to consider the usefulness of student learning portfolios (Banta; Stefani, Mason, and Peglar; Zubizarreta, *Learning Portfolio*). Student learning portfolios are collections of student work accompanied by personal reflections that consider what they learned, how their learning has changed over time, and how their learning might be applied in different contexts (Zubizarreta, *Learning Portfolio* xxiv). Portfolios can be developmental in that they track student learning over the course of their educations; they can also be used as demonstrations when students choose their best work to showcase as evidence of competency completion or, more significantly, as evidence of their skills for prospective employers and graduate schools.

We eventually achieved consensus that, for three main reasons, portfolios might allow demonstrations that make the traditional transcript/grade/credit model appear obsolete. First, portfolios demonstrate student work beyond the mere grade. Because students archive examples of their work, they can review it to track their learning over the course of a semester or several years. Second, while transcripts focus only on credit-bearing courses, a portfolio

allows inclusion of co-curricular components of a student's learning, such as participation in campus and community clubs, organizations, and service activities as well as paid employment. Evidence to this effect could be provided in the form of personal photographs, minutes of meetings that tested leadership skills or the ability to work in groups, performance reviews by advisors or employers, and, most significantly, personal reflections. The third reason for portfolios is that, with proper structure and mentoring, they can serve as effective spaces for personal reflection and integration of learning across the student experience, in and outside of the lecture hall, seminar room, and lab (Huber and Hutchings 5–7; Kuh 28). The process of creating a portfolio—of choosing among artifacts and explaining one's choices, of sensing connections between various learning activities, and of assessing one's progress in relation to learning outcomes—fosters deep metacognitive skills that normally take years to develop (Loacker; Moon, *Learning Journals*; Moon, *Reflection*; Yancey, *Reflection*; Yancey, "Reflection"; Zubizarreta, *Learning Portfolio* 3–16).

Once the benefits of using portfolios became clear, the committee decided that the student portfolio, not the traditional honors thesis, would henceforth serve as the honors capstone project. Student demonstrations of skills in leadership, research, and global citizenship would be embedded within their portfolios, and portfolio development would be introduced in the honors first-year seminar. Evidence of mastery of such skills can vary but are likely to include demonstrated leadership in campus or community organizations (for leadership), undergraduate research or creative work supervised by a faculty mentor and followed by public dissemination of results (for research), and acquisition of second-language competency and understanding of diverse cultures through engagement with such populations either through a study abroad or a significant intercultural experience at home in the United States (for global citizenship).

Our faculty shared a broad consensus about the benefits and challenges of electronic and paper portfolios, and the prevailing assumption was that portfolios would be electronic (Cambridge, Cambridge, and Yancey; Chen and Light; Herrington and Oliver). Electronic portfolios appear to offer advantages in ease of use, storage, adaptability, and flexibility. The electronic environment allows the incorporation of various media types, including images, sound, and video, and it allows the portfolio to be linked to other online communities of the student's choice, thus enriching the portfolio by placing it within a wider context. While our students are adept at establishing a social presence on the web, they have much less experience creating a professional lens through which others might view them, and electronic portfolios helped them create such a lens. Our state context also led us in the

direction of electronic portfolios. The state of Minnesota was also a fruitful context for electronic portfolios; it was an early advocate of free web presence for all its citizens, and, by the time we considered using portfolios, eFolioMinnesota had already been established as a viable option within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (Olson, Schroeder, and Wasko). The staff at MnSCU offered helpful advice as we moved through the implementation process. So far, our students have embraced the electronic portfolio model, perhaps because they can choose to leave their portfolios private. One could, however, clearly enjoy similar pedagogical and metacognitive benefits from a traditional paper model.

Even in the brief time this approach has been implemented, many faculty members believe that the new focus on competencies and portfolio demonstrations has significantly altered the honors experience in two significant ways. First, the program feels more actively tied to its mission than before the redesign. Administrative decisions are guided by the honors competencies. When faced with financial decisions, such as a request to co-sponsor a campus event or speaker, the governing faculty council and director look to the competency areas to make effective choices; courses and most program-sponsored co-curricular activities are designed to foster development in at least one of the three areas. When courses are proposed, the faculty members indicate the extent to which their course will develop select honors competencies, and they identify significant demonstrations of these competencies that students will be able to propose as artifacts for their portfolios once the course is completed.

Second, the mentoring and advising experience has significantly changed. To maintain their status in the program, students must submit an annual personal learning plan to the program office by the end of September. The learning plan must indicate the extent to which students expect to develop their leadership, research, and global citizenship skills over the course of the year and how they will demonstrate successful achievement of their curricular and co-curricular goals. Students are encouraged to include other goals related to their major course of study or work. Some students include more personal matters, such as their physical fitness or spiritual development. Program staff and faculty then meet with each student during the fall semester to review their goals and curriculum. Although we believe we can follow this advising model with 150–200 students overall, larger enrollment would require further staff assistance than our current full-time honors director, half-time administrative assistant, and graduate assistant.

Students' learning plans and goals change, and mentoring must be flexible. New opportunities, unforeseen in August or September, emerge during the course of a year. We believe that the process of creating a plan is more

significant than worrying about whether each specified component is carried out. During the academic year, especially during the winter and spring breaks, we encourage students to collect evidence of their work, select the most significant examples of their development, and reflect on their growth over the course of the year. At the end of May, we request that all students make their portfolios available to the program office by providing electronic access passwords, and during the first week of June the director and three faculty council members review the portfolios and provide an assessment of each student's progress. We take a day to align our expectations and use of the rubrics, then divide up the work, and send assessments to students later that month. The faculty members use the assessments to identify any mechanical or presentation issues in the portfolios; they identify the approximate development level that the artifacts demonstrate, from emerging to mastering; and they offer appropriate praise and suggestions for improvement. The assessment is holistic; no grades are used in the process. Ideally, students use the faculty feedback on their portfolios to inform the following year's learning plan, thereby increasing the complexity of their demonstrations over time.

This mentoring and advising process occurs each year until students take the Senior Portfolio seminar, which has two major goals. First, students revise their portfolios to ensure that they have the proper demonstrations of necessary competencies. Second, the instructor guides the students toward moving away from developmental portfolios, where students focus on themselves as learners, to demonstration portfolios, where students focus on their best work with an eye toward the job search process. The portfolios can be taken with them anywhere they go, and students can adapt them according to their own needs after graduation.

Time and resources are significant variables to consider, and we will undoubtedly face both challenges in the near future. However, many of the artifacts included in the portfolio have already been vetted, reviewed, and graded in classes. The portfolio assessment occurs at a more global level beyond the embedded assessment in courses. The amount of work in reviewing portfolios is significant, but rubrics, collaboration among faculty, and embedded assessment make the job manageable and worthwhile.

TROUBLESHOOTING THE PROCESS

In constructing a program focused on competency demonstrations and portfolios, we encountered several problems, some of which are unsurprising to faculty and administrators who have overseen academic redesign. One problem arose from implementing competencies, rubrics, and evaluations of demonstrations that sounded great in a faculty conference committee but presented hurdles in real life. While we had clear goals in our competency-based

approach, some paths that students could use to reach the goals were intentionally vague. As a result, we quickly discovered that our honors students, and indeed some of our faculty, prefer clear and precise goalposts as they approach a problem. Even today, many faculty and most students are unfamiliar with the language of competencies and rubrics, and the idea that multiple demonstrations might meet the same competency is confusing to some, horrifying to others. Some students and faculty do not readily see value in reflection and consider the project an extra burden. For honors faculty acclimated to teaching “content,” articulating how their course helps to develop competencies while also attending to the development of students’ metacognitive skills can be frustrating.

A related issue arose with the rubrics themselves. The faculty designers created unnecessarily complex rubric statements, making them difficult for students to understand. Indeed, to some faculty our honors course proposals begin to look like general-education learning outcomes on steroids. A further problem has been that our leadership rubrics, again designed in faculty committee rooms, did not align well with actual student demonstrations.

The net result of having identified these problems is that we are revising and clarifying rubrics with student assistance, and we are finding more effective means to have students articulate their understanding of the competencies earlier in their program of study. All students enrolled in Honors First Year Seminar, for example, complete the course having spent weeks discussing leadership, research, and global citizenship. They all compose personal reflective essays on the subjects and then include them in the first rendition of their portfolios. We have developed a student handbook and will be creating podcasts for students who do not have time to attend sessions about developing their portfolios.

To help the faculty, we have offered honors orientations and development seminars on portfolio and reflective learning strategies. Modeling successful examples of embedding the portfolio into courses has probably been the best way to reduce faculty anxiety. We have streamlined the course proposal process while allowing the better honors syllabi and student portfolios to serve as examples for others; we offer examples of student portfolios through our website <<http://www.mnsu.edu/honors>>, and faculty receive examples of course syllabi upon request.

PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES

Despite the hurdles, two unexpected benefits have emerged through the redesign. First, at least anecdotally, we believe the sense of community among students and faculty is far deeper than in previous renditions of the program. The program is designed not for all high-performing students at

Minnesota State Mankato but for those who readily accept the significance of developing skills not just in research but in global citizenship and intercultural awareness. The faculty select the students, at least in part, based on their interest in studying global cultures and in developing skills in a second language. Students who embrace these challenges tend to enjoy attending the same cultural events and lectures and to enroll in similar courses.

Second, we believe that we have more real-time updates of our students' progress through our program than in a program that relies on credit completion and honors thesis capstone requirements alone. From an enrollment management perspective, we have the very important benefit of often identifying retention and completion issues in students' first or second year in the program; early on we can spot students who fail to submit a learning plan or show little development in their portfolio from one year to the next or make little progress toward their language competency. Moreover, aggregate data compiled from the individual annual portfolio assessments can identify weaknesses in program offerings or problems in communication with the students and faculty. The portfolios also allow more dialogue between faculty and students.

Because the program redesign occurred only a few years ago, we cannot yet assess the efficacy of portfolios for students' job or graduate school placements, but we are working with our career resources center and individual members of the regional business community to clarify their expectations of what they would like to see in students' demonstration portfolios.

CONCLUSIONS

In his November 2011 column for the electronic newsletter of the National Collegiate Honors Council, Greg Lanier, NCHC President, explained the challenges to honors education created by dwindling resources and by the institutionalizing of undergraduate research, which for decades had been the staple of honors education. The fear, Lanier argued, was that the "links to [undergraduate research's] origins in honors have been lost" along with several other significant high-impact practices such as first-year seminars, learning communities, experiential education, and collaborative projects, many of which were first tested in honors classrooms in the 1960s and 1970s. Lanier concluded by challenging honors directors to "find ways to . . . let everyone in academia know how central honors is to the core mission of teaching undergraduates on every campus."

Our argument is that the sustained use of learning portfolios in honors education can provide one avenue for meeting Lanier's challenge. "Portfolio thinking" can help honors faculty discover, reflect upon, and then communicate their programs' identities within their institutions while continuing to

serve as incubators for effective, interdisciplinary curriculum design and student learning. In the spirit of the “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program,” a movement toward learning portfolios allows the program to maintain its vitality and highlight its purpose within an institution:

The honors program, in distinguishing itself from the rest of the institution, serves as a kind of laboratory within which faculty can try things they have always wanted to try but for which they could find no suitable outlet. When such efforts can be demonstrated to be successful, they may well become institutionalized, thereby raising the general level of education within the college or university for all students. In this connection, the honors curriculum should serve as a prototype for educational practices that can work campus-wide in the future. (NCHC, 2006)

Honors directors, faculty, and staff might justifiably cast critical eyes on frequent calls for innovations in program design. We hear about innovations all the time at conferences, too often from advocates who excel at communicating their latest curricular fads but do not have the depth of experience to know whether the learning outcomes are significantly better than those of the past. However, international research on the use of portfolios in individual courses and programs has affirmed the usefulness of portfolios in higher education settings. The number of portfolio models in honors is growing, thus allowing other programs to individualize projects that meet their needs, values, and campus experiences. We believe that the honors classroom is the ideal place to experiment with portfolios and the deep learning experiences they offer our students and faculty.

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The authors may be contacted at
christopher.corley@mnsu.edu.

APPENDIX A

HONORS PORTFOLIO PROJECTS

Experimentation with reflective learning and portfolios is emerging in honors programs throughout the United States. Portfolio projects and capstone experiences take various forms. Below, we offer several examples and web addresses for more information.

Brigham Young University

<http://honors.fye.byu.edu/sites/default/files/student_files/PortfolioRequirements.pdf>

Florida International University

<<http://honors.fiu.edu/academics/improvement>>

Heidelberg University

<<http://www.heidelberg.edu/academiclife/distinctive/honors/portfolios>>

Kent State University

<<http://www.kent.edu/honors/academicsandresearch/heo.cfm>>

Miami University

<<http://muhonorsportfolio.blogspot.com>>

San Diego State University

<<http://uhp.sdsu.edu/dus/honors/seniorportfolio.aspx>>

St. Mary's College of Maryland

<<http://www.smcm.edu/nitze/portfolio.html>>

University of Cincinnati

<<http://www.uc.edu/honors/eportfolios.html>>

University of North Dakota

<<http://und.edu/honors-program/shp.cfm>>

University of Washington

<<https://sites.google.com/a/uw.edu/the-honors-portfolio>>

About the Authors

Larry Andrews is Dean Emeritus of the Kent State University Honors College. His Rutgers PhD in comparative literature led to a forty-one-year academic career that included teaching in Poland and Russia. He has published on Russian, French, and African American literature as well as on honors fundraising.

Richard Badenhausen is Professor and Kim T. Adamson Chair at Westminster College, where he has directed the honors program since 2001. A former NCHC Board member, he teaches classes in the humanities, trauma literature, and theories of place. In his non-honors life, he is the author of *T. S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration* (Cambridge UP, 2004) and is completing a book entitled *T. S. Eliot's Traumatic Texts*.

James H. Banning is a professor in the School of Education and former Vice President for Student Affairs at Colorado State University. Banning's research is centered in environmental psychology and has focused on the role physical environments play in educational settings, particularly the non-verbal messages related to cultural diversity.

Christopher R. Corley is Associate Professor of History and Director of the Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He has been on the faculty at Minnesota State Mankato since 2004. He teaches honors seminars and first-year courses on preindustrial European history (from Classical Greece to the Reformation) and advanced courses on early modern (c. 1300–1800) social and cultural history.

Annamarie Guzy is Associate Professor of English at the University of South Alabama, and she holds a PhD in rhetoric and professional communication from New Mexico State University. She currently serves on the NCHC Teaching and Learning Committee and the editorial boards for *Honors in Practice* and *First-Year Honors Composition*.

Debra K. Holman is a doctoral student in the School of Education and Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University. Previously, she served as Associate Director of the Center for Honors, Scholars and Leadership at the University of Northern Colorado and is a past president of the Western Regional Honors Council. Her research interests include environmental and honors education.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Brian Railsback is Founding Dean of the Honors College at Western Carolina University, where he is Professor and former Department Head of English. He has published, among other works, *Parallel Expeditions: Charles Darwin and the Art of John Steinbeck* and a novel, *The Darkest Clearing*. He is president of the North Carolina Honors Association.

Angela M. Salas is Professor of English and founding Director of the Honors Program at Indiana University Southeast. She is particularly interested in student success and persistence in universities and colleges as well as the ways honors programs can serve the communities from which they spring.

John Zubizarreta is Professor of English and Director of Honors and Faculty Development at Columbia College. A Carnegie Foundation/CASE U.S. Professor of the Year, John is the author of *The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning* (2004, 2009) and a past president of NCHC and SRHC.

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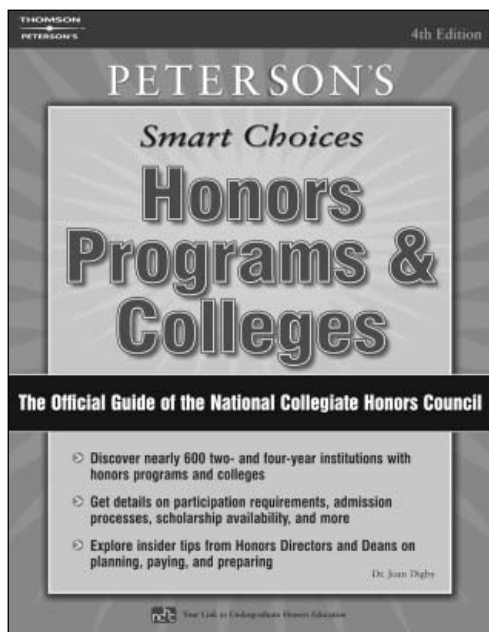
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Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook by Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurrier (2005, 98pp). This monograph includes an overview of assessment and evaluation practices and strategies. It explores the process for conducting self-studies and discusses the differences between using consultants and external reviewers. It provides a guide to conducting external reviews along with information about how to become an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor. A dozen appendices provide examples of "best practices."

Beginning in Honors: A Handbook by Samuel Schuman (Fourth Edition, 2006, 80pp). Advice on starting a new honors program. Covers budgets, recruiting students and faculty, physical plant, administrative concerns, curriculum design, and descriptions of some model programs.

Fundraising for Honor\$: A Handbook by Larry R. Andrews (2009, 160pp). Offers information and advice on raising money for honors, beginning with easy first steps and progressing to more sophisticated and ambitious fundraising activities.

A Handbook for Honors Administrators by Ada Long (1995, 117pp). Everything an honors administrator needs to know, including a description of some models of honors administration.

A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges by Theresa James (2006, 136pp). A useful handbook for two-year schools contemplating beginning or redesigning their honors program and for four-year schools doing likewise or wanting to increase awareness about two-year programs and articulation agreements. Contains extensive appendices about honors contracts and a comprehensive bibliography on honors education.

The Honors College Phenomenon edited by Peter C. Sederberg (2008, 172pp). This monograph examines the growth of honors colleges since 1990: historical and descriptive characterizations of the trend, alternative models that include determining whether becoming a college is appropriate, and stories of creation and recreation. Leaders whose institutions are contemplating or taking this step as well as those directing established colleges should find these essays valuable.

Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices by Annmarie Guzy (2003, 182pp). Parallel historical developments in honors and composition studies; contemporary honors writing projects ranging from admission essays to theses as reported by over 300 NCHC members.

Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges by Samuel Schuman (Third Edition, 2011, 80pp). Practical and comprehensive advice on creating and managing honors programs with particular emphasis on colleges with fewer than 4000 students.

Inspiring Exemplary Teaching and Learning: Perspectives on Teaching Academically Talented College Students edited by Larry Clark and John Zubizarreta (2008, 216pp). This rich collection of essays offers valuable insights into innovative teaching and significant learning in the context of academically challenging classrooms and programs. The volume provides theoretical, descriptive, and practical resources, including models of effective instructional practices, examples of successful courses designed for enhanced learning, and a list of online links to teaching and learning centers and educational databases worldwide.

Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks by Joan Digby with reflective essays on theory and practice by student and faculty participants and National Park Service personnel (2010, 272pp). This monograph explores an experiential-learning program that fosters immersion in and stewardship of the national parks. The topics include program designs, group dynamics, philosophical and political issues, photography, wilderness exploration, and assessment.

Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning edited by Bernice Braid and Ada Long (Second Edition, 2010, 128pp). Updated theory, information, and advice on experiential pedagogies developed within NCHC during the past 35 years, including Honors Semesters and City as Text™, along with suggested adaptations to multiple educational contexts.

Setting the Table for Diversity edited by Lisa L. Coleman and Jonathan D. Kotinek (2010, 288pp). This collection of essays provides definitions of diversity in honors, explores the challenges and opportunities diversity brings to honors education, and depicts the transformative nature of diversity when coupled with equity and inclusion. These essays discuss African American, Latina/o, international, and first-generation students as well as students with disabilities. Other issues include experiential and service learning, the politics of diversity, and the psychological resistance to it. Appendices relating to NCHC member institutions contain diversity statements and a structural diversity survey.

Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education edited by Peter A. Machonis (2008, 160pp). A companion piece to *Place as Text*, focusing on recent, innovative applications of City as Text™ teaching strategies. Chapters on campus as text, local neighborhoods, study abroad, science courses, writing exercises, and philosophical considerations, with practical materials for instituting this pedagogy.

Teaching and Learning in Honors edited by Cheryl L. Fuiks and Larry Clark (2000, 128pp). Presents a variety of perspectives on teaching and learning useful to anyone developing new or renovating established honors curricula.

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC) is a semi-annual periodical featuring scholarly articles on honors education. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology, articles on interdisciplinary efforts, discussions of problems common to honors programs, items on the national higher education agenda, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education.

Honors in Practice (HIP) is an annual journal that accommodates the need and desire for articles about nuts-and-bolts practices by featuring practical and descriptive essays on topics such as successful honors courses, suggestions for out-of-class experiences, administrative issues, and other topics of interest to honors administrators, faculty, and students.