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Stan Van Ginkel
Wageningen University

Pierre Van Eijl
Utrecht University

Albert Pilot
Utrecht University

John Zubizarreta
Columbia College

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Building a Vibrant Honors Community among Commuter Students

STAN VAN GINKEL

WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY, THE NETHERLANDS

PIERRE VAN EIJL AND ALBERT PILOT

UTRECHT UNIVERSITY, THE NETHERLANDS

JOHN ZUBIZARRETA

COLUMBIA COLLEGE, U.S.

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that honors programs often provide active networks of students that contribute to the development of the students' talents (De Boer & van Eijl; van Eijl, Pilot & Wolfensberger). These contact networks are also described as "learning communities" (Wilson et al.) and "honors communities" (van Eijl, Pilot & Wolfensberger). Such communities foster productive interaction among students, teachers, and other professionals during their affiliation with the program and beyond. As a result of such connections, students discover new learning opportunities and gain experience in organizational and leadership skills. In honors programs, in particular, these contacts are an essential component of what defines and separates honors activities as special enhancements of a student's overall educational experience (van Eijl, Wolfensberger & Pilot). Our study focuses on design principles, key characteristics, strategies, and successful examples that characterize the development of honors communities.

We focus particularly on commuter students because they comprise the majority of honors students in the Netherlands. Nearly all universities in the Netherlands are city universities, where students either rent rooms in the neighborhood or live at home. One of the challenges for an honors director is to create a vibrant honors community within this specific context. We make the assumption that for commuter students a more careful and intentional implementation of an honors community is necessary because most students leave campus when classes are finished (Jacoby). And, as Kuh, Gonyea and Palmer found in their research, commuter students are overall less engaged

than students who live on campus. Extra activities have to be organized and strategically timed to suit these students, and the challenge is complicated by competition with numerous other events taking place in the city. Our study analyzes five different honors communities of commuter students in order to suggest some best practices for creating maximum benefits for students.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Our focus on communities in education is supported by constructivist learning theories, which assume that learners construct knowledge in an active manner within an authentic context (Brown & Campione). Socio-constructivist learning theories further suggest that learning is more effective when it occurs in a social context (Wenger) rather than as an individual, isolated activity that usually occurs in a classroom. The learning theory of situated cognition (Greeno) states that learning is embedded in social interactions among people in a specific situation and has a positive effect on personal development. For example, when newcomers join an established community, they develop critical knowledge and practical skills by observing and performing tasks in that community while learning how the group works, thus in time becoming full participants.

McMillan & Chavis consider a community in general as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (9). Cross defines learning communities more specifically as “groups of people engaged in intellectual interaction for the purpose of learning” (4). Cross combines the concept of learning communities with the design of a curriculum and cites the structuring of the program and the frequency of contacts between students as important factors.

Wilson, Ludwig-Hardman, Thornam, and Dunlap also stress the connection with the curriculum by introducing the concept of a “bounded learning community.” According to these researchers, a learning community is bounded by a particular course or curriculum. Participating students collaborate with other students and a teacher, working together within a fixed timetable and with an explicit requirement to seek contact with others by communicating and working online; the teacher plays a crucial role in facilitating the creation of such a learning community. Besides factors such as “shared goals of the community” and “safe and supporting conditions,” teachers are a critical component of learning communities (Sherin, Mendez & Louis; Shulman & Sherin); their task is to provide the infrastructure for work and interaction, model effective collaboration, monitor and assess learning, provide feedback, troubleshoot and resolve problems, and establish trusting relationships with students (Wilson et al. 8).

The structure and dynamics of learning communities vary depending on the characteristics of the program. Although there are several existing models for the development of a community (Tuckman; Wenger; Wilson et al.), three broad stages can be distinguished. In the case of a bounded learning community, these stages can be termed *initiation*, *participation*, and *closure*. Wilson et al. explain the stages as follows: “Students are asked to engage in a pre-defined sequence where they first learn the ropes, then enter into intensive interaction with peers, then conclude the experience with reflection and some kind of ritualized closure experience” (11). Within such a community, not every member is equally active, creating layers of participation: the core group, active members, and passive members (Hanraets, Potters & Jansen). Another characteristic of the community structure is the existence of significant networks (Roxå & Mårtensson) that take place in both formal and informal situations.

Such communities can enhance learning outcomes (Lankveld & Volman; Tinto & Russo), increase the pace of study (Eggens), raise the level of reflection (Cross; Tinto), improve the attitude of students (Tinto & Russo), and strengthen emotional support among students (Lankveld & Volman). Furthermore, these contact networks can influence the extent to which students interact outside classrooms (Tinto & Russo), support a positive evaluation of the program (Light), and create a “sense of community” (McMillan & Chavis). This latter aspect is a challenge for many honors directors and teachers (Koh, Chaffee & Goodman) because education tailored to high-achieving, motivated, and talented students—particularly those in honors programs—should also take place in an atmosphere of excellence in order to empower the students (van der Valk, Grunefeld & Pilot). This atmosphere or culture of excellence is frequently mentioned as an important characteristic of an honors program (Ford; Mariz; Slavin; van Eijl, Pilot & Wolfensberger).

Previous research has shown that communities are essential to many honors programs (De Boer & van Eijl, 2010), but we know little about the specific factors and mechanisms for success. This knowledge is needed to establish design principles for community development in the context of commuter students in honors. The following research questions served as a guide for our analysis of several case studies:

1. What characterizes honors communities of commuter students?
2. What are the functions of honors communities for commuter students and faculty?
3. What strategies, factors, and design principles promote community building among commuter students in honors programs?

METHOD

In this exploratory study, a mixed methods approach was used for both data collection and data analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark). Within this approach, qualitative and quantitative methods are combined because answering each research question requires a combination of different types of data. To achieve a set of initial design principles for community building among commuter students, we conducted a cross-case analysis in the Netherlands (Bryman). From four universities, the following five cases were selected: Utrecht Law College; Professional School of Arts; Top Class Healthcare; Honors Program in Biology; and Interdisciplinary Honors Program. Our data collection was based on interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. Furthermore, we interviewed teachers and students from different American honors programs in order to gain insight into (1) the key characteristics and additional qualities of honors communities, (2) their functions, and (3) development strategies. The results of these interviews and insights were arranged to present a basic set of characteristics, functions, and strategies. This framework was used to conduct an interpretative analysis of information on the five Dutch case studies with a member check for confirmation and specific case details.

The yield of the study consists of three tables presenting the extent to which the key characteristics/additional qualities, functions, and strategies to develop communities are recognizable in the Dutch case studies of communities within the population of commuter students. These tables can be found in the appendices. In addition, the characteristics, functions, and strategies are scored for each case study, with each judged on a three-point scale: “+” (fully present), “+/-” (partly present), or “-” (not achieved). We used the criterion “fully” when eighty percent of the students acted according to at least eighty percent of the criteria (Juran). If none or just one or two of the students acted according to the formulated characteristics, functions, and strategies, we used the term “not achieved.” The term “partly” refers to outcomes in between “not achieved” and “fully achieved.”

RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS IN THE U.S.

At the NCHC conferences in Kansas City (2010) and Phoenix (2011), eight interviews were conducted with teachers and eight with students from various honors programs of different American universities. Interviews with NCHC-recommended site visitors at the NCHC conference in Philadelphia (2007) were also included (van Eijl, Wolfensberger & Pilot). The interviews with honors teachers revealed that they considered honors students to be the prime members of the honors community and that they saw themselves as

catalysts for creating a community among honors students. Both teachers and students indicated that developing a sense of community was crucial for the formation of study groups, the stimulation of personal growth, and the development of effective study habits.

The interviews further showed that size, structure, and level of activity and interaction vary among honors communities. Two types of communities can be described as (1) minimal learning communities with little contact among students and (2) living-learning communities where students live together and have intensive contact with each other. Living-learning communities are common because many American universities have campuses where students live in dormitories. Other universities have more commuter students (i.e., students who live a distance from the university) and are thus similar to the Dutch situation in which students rent a room near the university and continue to travel back to the family home.

From the interviews, several characteristics of honors programs emerged that may strengthen the sense of community among students. First, mutual contacts are more easily made if students are in the same class or group. Second, these contacts are enhanced by the use of “linked courses” in which students study together for several courses. Third, these contacts become more intensive if students work closely together on a challenging task in the context of a project.

In addition, honors staffs in U.S. universities regularly organize social and extracurricular activities that deepen the bonding of the community. One example is a sponsored event such as “Pizzas and Profs,” where students come together with teachers in an informal way to discuss course topics. Other such efforts to bridge students’ learning experiences within and outside the classroom include guest speakers and excursions. The interweaving of social and professional activities helps create a seamless learning environment where students’ intellectual, social, and personal lives can come together. Another important factor in promoting community is a permanent place or shared accommodation for students on the university campus.

CASE STUDIES ON HONORS COMMUNITIES WITH COMMUTER STUDENTS

From previous literature and the interviews conducted with American honors teachers and students, the following five key characteristics of honors communities can be posited: a network with frequent contacts, a shared passion for challenge and excellence, a sense of community and shared ownership, a culture of excellence, and a common interaction repertoire (see Table 2 in the Appendices). Accompanying these key characteristics are some additional qualities such as a core group of active students, shared status and

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interests, a safe environment for encouraging the development of talents, a physical location for honors students, and the opportunity to live together. In order to meet our definition of a fully developed community, all key characteristics have to be present. The additional qualities provide a more complete picture of the community.

In addition to the key characteristics and associated qualities, the functions of communities and the strategies to build honors communities specifically within the context of commuter students are further arranged within three matrices to match the five Dutch case studies (see Tables 2, 3 and 4). First, we will present a short description of the five cases.

UTRECHT LAW COLLEGE (ULC)

The Utrecht Law College in the research-oriented Utrecht University provides a three-year honors program for a Bachelor of Law. This program focuses on motivated students who are willing to take the initiative to deepen and extend their education. Seventy-five places are available annually, and applications outnumber available places three to one. During the program, students gain experience through internships, extra assignments, research projects, guest lectures, and legal practice courses. Students of the program have formed their own association called Sirius, which organizes an impressive range of social and extra-curricular activities.

THE PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL OF ARTS UTRECHT (PSAU)

PSAU is a selective, interdisciplinary, one-year master's program organized by Utrecht University (UU) in collaboration with the School of Arts & Technology Utrecht (University of Applied Arts Utrecht, HKU). Approximately ten to fifteen master's students from various BA disciplines can be admitted to the program. This master's program is divided into a profession-oriented semester and a more research-oriented semester. The first semester consists of challenging real-life tasks involving external clients. During this period, PSAU and HKU students with specific knowledge and expertise work together in groups in order to create a computer game or documentary. In the next research-oriented semester, the PSAU students write their thesis, sometimes combined with an internship. In addition, students have many opportunities to take courses at other universities.

TOP CLASS HEALTHCARE

Bachelor students from the Faculty of Healthcare at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (HU) attend the Top Class program on top of their regular disciplinary bachelor's program. The objective of the honors program is for students to focus on personal development in relation to their field of

study and to acquire skills beyond their own discipline. The size of the group averages between twenty and twenty-five students, which is about five percent of the total number in the regular program. During this two-and-a-half-year program, students develop skills in leadership, collaboration (by participating in multidisciplinary teams), research, and innovation (by discovering new methods in healthcare). Students who participate in this Top Class are involved in special projects, and they learn to collaborate with students from other disciplines within the Faculty of Healthcare.

HONORS PROGRAM IN BIOLOGY

The Honors Program in Biology at Utrecht University is offered in addition to the regular biology curriculum. This program, specially developed for approximately fifteen to twenty motivated and talented biology students, broadly consists of five parts: thematic meetings with discussions, using (popular) academic books and articles; a group assignment in which students perform all (professional) activities necessary to write a book, including writing chapters, peer feedback, editing, lay-out, making illustrations, and presenting the product in a self-organized symposium; an individual or group assignment in which students prepare and perform a challenging educational session in a (first-year) course for their fellow students; performing an individual assignment (honors thesis) focused on research or professional practice; and participation in the interdisciplinary honors program of the Faculty of Science. In 2010, a number of students wrote and published a book on topics that will be of importance within the field of biology in the twenty-first century; in 2011, the theme of the students' book was "Synthetic Eden," focused on various aspects of biotechnology; and in 2012 the theme was "Sustainability."

INTERDISCIPLINARY HONORS PROGRAM

This three-year program at the University of Applied Sciences Leiden is offered in addition to the regular curriculum. Approximately twenty-five students from different disciplines in this university may be admitted to the program. Ambitious students interested in interdisciplinary problems are given real-world assignments by faculty members or external clients, and each student works with students from different disciplines in smaller thematic groups. Examples of program assignments are innovation in a virtual environment, diagnosis of Lyme disease, and new acquisition methods for charities. The students have their own space to work on assignments and engage in informal contact, and they are guided by teachers committed to developing their talents.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HONORS COMMUNITIES WITHIN COMMUTER STUDENT GROUPS

The five cases we have selected for analysis (see Table 2 in Appendix) do not have the same characteristics equally reflected in them, which is a reminder of the complexity of seeking and sustaining community within the context of commuter student populations in honors programs.

The first characteristic of an honors community is its network of frequent contacts among students. Sometimes teachers and professionals also belong to the community and play an encouraging role, but the students are the main owners. A good example of a network with such characteristics is the Utrecht Law College and its student association, Sirius, which reflects the strong identity of this community.

A second characteristic is that the students are usually highly motivated, have a passion for challenge and excellence, and share the same interests. In the case of the Professional School of Arts, however, a variance in interests is reflected in the dual mission of the program: profession-oriented and research-oriented. PSAU students scored only 2.8 on a five-point scale of “shared passions” among students. PSAU, therefore, cannot be considered a full-blown honors community. Passions may also differ according to class levels or interests, as in the Honors Program in Biology, where a group of students harbored the ambition to publish a book that was written as a group assignment and to implement it as educational material in first-year biology programs of different universities, but this goal was not shared by all honors students.

A third characteristic is the sense of community and shared ownership. Working together on a real-world assignment is a strong factor in creating this feeling within the Honors Program in Biology. In the Top Class Healthcare, students develop leadership skills at the start of the program during a kick-off weekend. Students in the Utrecht Law College also described their sense of community as crucial to the success of the program.

A fourth characteristic is an atmosphere or culture of excellence in which students are ambitious and strongly motivated. Students from the Interdisciplinary Honors Program of Leiden were praised for their “high potential” during a recent international seminar in Brussels. A culture of excellence is also reflected in the student association Sirius, which organizes every year what they call Sirius Playground, an opportunity for legal offices, businesses, and governmental institutions to meet the ambitious students of the Utrecht Law College.

A fifth characteristic is the way students interact with each other; this so-called “common interaction repertoire” is clearly evident in each honors

community we examined, as demonstrated in student association meetings, the organization of events, or websites and social media.

In our study, all characteristics are scored to indicate how strongly they are present. Most characteristics are present in each of the cases. Lower scores on the characteristic of “network with frequent contact” and the “common interaction repertoire” occur in the PSAU program and Top Class Healthcare; if a program has only a few set meetings, the intensity of community contact receives a low score. The “culture of excellence” is typically not present at the start of a program; e.g., in the Leiden program it began after the intervention of the international seminar. The “sense of community” was generally not strong in the PSAU group, but it was strong in the project group where students worked with other students outside the program.

The additional characteristics reflect the pluriformity of honors communities. A core group, for instance, was found in four out of the five cases. In the fifth case (PSAU), however, it turned out that nearly all students were involved in a so-called “significant network” working with four other students. Among the other cases the core group of the ULC was remarkable for its honors student union, which organized a series of co-curricular activities during the three years of the bachelor study in law. In the other three cases, committees of honors students were active.

Other specific characteristics of honors programs such as disciplinarity or interdisciplinarity, duration (one year or several years), and the starting point of the program differ between the cases. Students from a broad range of disciplines are involved in the interdisciplinary honors program at Leiden while, in the ULC case of Utrecht, students concentrate on one discipline.

The characteristic of a “safe environment” is less clear. In most cases students report being enthusiastic about working with other motivated students, but sometimes competition and domination create an environment where less assertive students feel insecure and find it hard to prosper.

We addressed the issue of a location for honors students to meet within the university buildings: four out of five programs have rooms for their activities. Having a designated space is important because commuter students typically do not live together.

FUNCTIONS OF HONORS COMMUNITIES

Honors communities fulfill three main functions: (1) they stimulate learning and development; (2) they enhance social and emotional wellbeing; and (3) they stimulate the organization of activities at the university (see Table 3). Based on our interviews with American and Dutch honors teachers and students, we identified cognitive development and personal growth as the key functions of an honors community.

Depending on the mission of the program, cognitive development might occur through a focus on various academic and communication skills. For example, the ULC focuses on developing organizational and debating skills while the PSAU champions the development of more professional, practical, and research skills. In the Honors Program in Biology, the development of writing skills is an important goal.

The second important function is the development within the community of social and emotional values. All the honors communities in these case studies strongly encouraged students to help each other; they stimulate networking with professionals and teamwork to fulfill real-world assignments. In the case of the ULC, the formation of a student association served the function of socialization.

SEVEN STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITIES

From our study, seven strategies can be distinguished for the development and maintenance of communities within the special population of commuter students in honors programs. Both teachers and students can use these strategies; the teachers are often in the best position to initiate them even though the ultimate goal is that students own their community and take the initiative themselves. The seven strategies are listed in Table 1.

First, the matching of students is important because students need to be informed beforehand about the content and intentions of the program. The

Table 1. Strategies to Stimulate Honors Communities for Commuter Students in Honors Programs

1. Matching students based on willingness and capabilities to cooperate
2. Programming challenging teamwork activities that are student-regulated
3. Facilitating students' initiatives without taking the lead
4. Creating an intense period of interaction to deepen and enhance bonding
5. Organizing a series of interactive activities during the program to stimulate the community
6. Highlighting the performance of a teacher as a role model for development of talent and as a coach for community building
7. Involving community activities in feedback procedures and student evaluations

selection procedure should focus on the extent to which students would like to work actively with other students or interact with teachers and professionals. For example, at the ULC the following criterion played an important role: “students need to contribute to the program, instead of passively follow the program.” At the start of the program, arranging the students into groups is important. Depending on the type of assignment, teachers need to encourage interdependence among students by matching students’ complementary passions or disciplines in order to fulfill a particular goal. At PSAU, for example, students can design games for real clients only by combining their expertise as game designers, graphic designers, and programmers.

Second, the programming of challenging teamwork activities that are student-regulated focal events, as in the case of PSAU, can enhance collaboration among students. Furthermore, the interaction among students and between students and faculty mentors can be improved by facilitating a personal project space, providing a budget, and supporting the use of social media and communications platforms. Interdependence in producing an actual product is another strategy that promotes teamwork among students, as demonstrated in the Honors Program in Biology, and mutual interaction can be further enhanced by the use of peer feedback. Interviews with American teachers and students showed that “common ground” is an important prerequisite for stimulating student interaction, but the study of the interaction patterns among students of PSAU showed us that not every student is equally active in a group and that this pattern may change during the year.

Third, facilitating student initiatives that fit into the aims of the honors program and its culture can be a powerful way to strengthen student ownership of an honors community, as demonstrated in the cases of ULC and Top Class Healthcare. The staff can encourage such initiatives through contacts with industry, project budgets, or appropriate facilities (including physical spaces) for the honors students.

Fourth, implementing an intense period of interaction in the initial phase of a program is important for creating a sense of community. Some programs start with a workshop or an orientation weekend, as in Top Class Healthcare with its course on leadership skills. The Interdisciplinary Honors Program in Leiden is another example where interaction among students was strengthened after an international seminar in Brussels.

Fifth, organizing a series of interactive activities with formal and informal meetings during the program stimulates community building in honors programs. At ULC, for example, Sirius organizes many activities for the honors students. ULC and PSAU also provide important stimuli to an active community life through fixed groups and regular meetings within the program. A site visitor to an American honors program described this point as follows:

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“shared experiences are the key issue.” Ideally, a strong sense of community leads to continued mutual contacts after the termination of the program, as in the PSAU program where students continue meeting with each other on a monthly basis.

Sixth, the performance of the teacher as a role model is indispensable. In honors programs, contacts between students and teachers are extremely important. A site visitor highlighted the following: “the interchange between faculty and students is one of the hallmarks of honors.” The teacher is expected to give individual attention to the learning process, provide students with the opportunity to posit questions, and challenge students to find new paths. The teacher must involve students in decisions about the content of the program, give students responsibility for specific tasks, emphasize cooperation instead of competition, stimulate presentations to a relevant public, and take initiative in providing feedback to community members. Thus, the teacher functions not only as a regulator but as a catalyst to promote and coach the community. An American honors student described this dimension of a faculty member’s role in helping to build community as follows: “The faculty should help to shape the ideas, but not originate the ideas.”

Seventh, community activities can be considered as part of the honors diploma. Some programs use honors portfolios and meetings with tutors or coaches to review the involvement of individual students in the program and in community activities.

Finally, these strategies to build a vibrant community should be more than separate interventions; the combination of these strategies is what produces a well-functioning honors community.

CONCLUSION

This study has illustrated the characteristics, functions, and initial design principles of honors communities within the context of the special challenges faced in establishing and sustaining a community for commuter students. Honors communities vary in structure, duration, and program scope, but they share a culture of excellence and passion for challenge. The intensity of interaction, group identity, and discipline are nevertheless different for each community, and such diversity increases in the unique situation of honors programs with commuter students.

Our research and the experiences of many others in the field of honors education underscore that honors communities enhance learning and interaction. Furthermore, they fulfill multiple social and emotional functions for participants, encouraging them to support each other and undertake new initiatives while providing a platform for discussion and collaboration on both academic and social fronts. Depending on the stage of the community’s

development, three main factors improve honors education for a given group of students: the honors program itself, the staff, and the resources. This study suggests seven strategies for developing and stimulating an honors community among commuter students (see Table 1). These strategies are formulated on the basis of interviews and experiences in a selection of case studies, and they are supported by a theoretical framework, but empirical research is needed to determine conclusively if they provide the intended results.

We conclude with a discussion of six issues related to developing honors communities.

First, selecting an unambiguous definition of an “honors community” has proved to be difficult. This concept is still being explored in educational literature, and there are minor differences in opinions between the American and European interviewees, making it difficult to provide accurate definitions for characteristics of an honors community. Eventually, we decided to make a distinction between key and additional characteristics.

A second issue is the difficulty in choosing the moment to observe the activities of a community. This study uses general impressions over time rather than quantitative measures at a certain moment. “Community” is such a qualitative, ever-changing, evolving phenomenon that capturing it is a challenge. However, the value of our research study is that it offers some theory, guidelines, objectives, and strategies for replicating good practices and ensuring success.

A third issue concerns the comparability of the Dutch cases. The disciplines, nature, and extent of the communities are different for each case study. The levels of activity and interaction also differ for each group.

A fourth issue relates to the seven strategies for creating a favorable environment. Students, teachers, and instructional designers concerned with the particular needs and expectations of commuter students involved in honors programs should understand that the absence of honors housing means that it is not always possible to organize events, facilitate communication, and provide intensive interactions for honors students. “Pizzas and Profs” or other similar activities that bring students together and form bridges between students and faculty are difficult to arrange for a commuter population because, after finishing their course responsibilities, students usually return home or, as in the prevalent examples of Dutch commuting students, to their rooms in different buildings all over the city and beyond. Some commuter students have lunch at the university, but many of them eat at different establishments.

A fifth point is that the creation of communities in interdisciplinary programs presents an additional challenge because, on most Dutch and European campuses (and in many American institutions, too), students in such programs come from different buildings and faculties and sometimes even

different campuses. Therefore, the shaping of a community for commuter students in honors programs requires exceptional attention and imagination.

The final issue is whether the key characteristics of honors communities can also be found in communities of students in non-honors programs. What makes a learning community of students in honors different or more powerful than communities formed elsewhere across our various institutions? Do honors students have a different propensity for developing strong communities focused on learning because of their presumed higher levels of motivation and talent? Do they subscribe in more dedicated ways to the “culture of excellence” that is a special characteristic of a successful honors community? Can viable models of learning communities be sustained with appropriate modifications to enrich the educational, social, and personal experiences of commuter students? As we see more honors programs explore the benefits of learning community strategies, what else do we need to know about the rewards and challenges of building an honors community to help us serve the diverse populations that compose our honors programs? These and other questions deserve our attention as we continue to explore the value of honors education worldwide.

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The authors may be contacted at

stan.vanginkel@wur.nl.

APPENDICES

Table 2. Characteristics of Honors Communities of Commuter Students in Dutch Honors Programs

Key Characteristics	Utrecht Law College (UU)	Professional School of Arts (UU/HKU)	Top Class Healthcare (HU)	Honors Program Biology (UU)	Interdisciplinary Honors Program (LU)
Network with Frequent Contact	+ Network enhanced by association of honors students	+ Network, usually in 'significant networks' with four students	+/- Network strong in first period with joint activities, less intensive later with individual projects	+ Network, especially in challenging assignment of book writing in first honors year	+ Intense contacts formed in the first months, later in small group projects
Share a Passion for Challenge and Excellence	+ Highly motivated students, content of their passions varying	+ Passions for profession or research, content of passions varying	+ Passions with different foci in relation to mission of the program	+ Present, strongly influenced by authentic assignment	+ Motivated students cooperating in interdisciplinary groups
Sense of Community and Shared Ownership	+ Indicated as crucial for the program. Students organize many extracurricular activities and their association	+/- Some students have a strong connection with their project groups. Ownership of the community is not clear	+ Especially within group, developed in 'kick-off' weekend and the first common course in leadership skills	+ The authentic group assignment reinforces the interdependence and has strong influence	+ Built in first series of meetings about community building

Explanation of the contents of the table: Qualification: +, fully present; +/-, partly present; -, not achieved / not present
 Description: in key concepts

Table 2. Continued

Key Characteristics	Utrecht Law College (UU)	Professional School of Arts (UU/HKU)	Top Class Healthcare (HU)	Honors Program Biology (UU)	Interdisciplinary Honors Program (LU)
Culture of Excellence	+ Students regard their culture of excellence as crucial	+ Students share an ambition to develop their talents	+ Students work on challenging activities and perform to a high level	+ Observable especially in assignment	+ An international seminar they joined sparked their position as 'high potentials'
Common Interaction Repertoire	+ In class meetings, group assignments and student association	+/- Common repertoire in first semester, different in second semester with individual projects	+ Meetings of project group and classes, many informal contacts in social media	+ Interaction repertoire is strongly influenced by type and intensity of activity	+ Own internal organization structure with physical location
Core Group of Active Members	+ Core group as student council and committees with many active members	+/- Not a core group, but significant networks of four students	- Not evident	+ Core group of editorial committee	+ Core group of active students, especially the 'communication committee'

Explanation of the contents of the table: Qualification: +, fully present; +/-, partly present; -, not achieved / not present
Description: in key concepts

Table 2. Continued

Key Characteristics	Utrecht Law College (UU)	Professional School of Arts (UU/HKU)	Top Class Healthcare (HU)	Honors Program Biology (UU)	Interdisciplinary Honors Program (LU)
Duration, Discipline and Number of Students	Start in first year and active in the whole bachelor program. Alumni association	Whole master program, alumni participating in the program	Start in the second year, until the end. Students from different disciplines within health care	Start in second bachelor year, until end of third bachelor year	Start in second year, until fourth year of bachelor program
Safe Environment for Encouraging the Development of Talent	+ Safe environment, some competition	+ Students work with personal learning plans, own initiative is crucial	+ Focus on developing leadership skills and safe environment for talent development	+ Safe environment for initiatives of students	+ In the first meetings, attention for building a safe community
Physical Location of Honors Students	+ Study rooms for students available	+ Project rooms available	- Not present	+ Meeting rooms available within the building	+ Physical location available, intensely used
Living Together	- Not present	- Not present	- Not present	- Not present	- Not present

Explanation of the contents of the table: Qualification: +, fully present; +/-, partly present; -, not achieved / not present
 Description: in key concepts

Table 3. Functions of Honors Communities of Commuter Students in Dutch Honors Programs for Students and Faculty

Functions	Utrecht Law College (UU)	Professional School of Arts (UU/HKU)	Top Class Healthcare (HU)	Honors Program Biology (UU)	Interdisciplinary Honors Program (LU)
Learning and Development Function	+ Formal learning takes place mostly in class, but outside class informal learning and extra curricular activities	+ Practical assignments, research courses	+ Professional assignments and leadership course, where students cooperate intensively and learn to initiate and design	+ Professional and writing assignments, intensive communication, reflection by interaction	+ Practical assignments, organizational courses and initiating activities
Social and Emotional Functions	+ They quickly get to know each other, support each other and join in common activities	+ Working in a professional team on an authentic task	+ Working together on personal leadership skills and supporting each other	+ Working in a team on a group task, intensively supporting each other	+ Close cooperation in a team
Functions of the Honors Community for Teachers and Faculty	+ Organization of activities, strengthening of connections with professional organizations	+ Student groups providing the faculty with new contacts and clients	+ Strengthening connection with professions, stimulated by students	+ Providing the faculty a new product (for example a book or a course module)	+ Strengthening connection with professions

Explanation of the contents of the table: Qualification: +, fully present; +/-, partly present; -, not achieved / not present
 Description: in key concepts

Table 4. Strategies to Build Honors Communities of Commuter Students in Dutch Honors Programs

Strategies	Utrecht Law College (UU)	Professional School of Arts (UU/HKU)	Top Class Healthcare (HU)	Honors Program Biology (UU)	Interdisciplinary Honors Program (LU)
Matching of Students	+ Based on shared ambitions and previous performances	+/- Based on performance, not necessary sharing the same passion	+/- Mainly based on motivation and performance in the freshman year	+/- Based on willingness and capabilities to cooperate	+/- Based on projects after the "kick-off"
Programming of Challenging Activities with Team Work and Student-Generated Activities	+ Series of class seminars, co-curricular activities and professional activities	+/- First semester with challenging activities	+ Start with challenging project, 'kick-off' weekend and leadership course	+ Challenging project and series of monthly discussion meetings	+ Series of meetings to build a learning community. Later on students work in project groups
Facilitating Students' Initiatives	+ Co-curricular activities mainly initiated by students	+ Students initiate seminars	+ Many activities initiated by students and facilitated by staff	+ Initiatives encouraged by staff	+ Choice of projects is students' initiative supported by staff
Realizing an Intense Period of Interaction	+ International excursion	- 'Kick-off', but no intense period of interaction	+ 'Kick-off' weekend and course in leadership skills	+ International group excursion	+ Group excursion and international seminar

See for explanation of the contents tables 2 and 3.

Table 4. Continued

Strategies	Utrecht Law College (UU)	Professional School of Arts (UU/HKU)	Top Class Healthcare (HU)	Honors Program Biology (UU)	Interdisciplinary Honors Program (LU)
Organizing a Series of Interactive Activities During the Program	+ Series of meetings and co-curricular activities	+/- Class meetings in first semester	+/- Series of meetings within the leadership course, later on small group meetings in projects	+ Interactive activities depend on the type of authentic group task	+ Both initiated and led by teaching staff and students
The Performance of the Teacher as a Role Model	+ Interactive pedagogy, coaching and guiding co-curricular activities	+ Coaching of students and guest teachers	+ Active role of the teacher staff in the first period, later on coaching role	+ Teaching staff plays important role in facilitating activities	+ Coordinator and teachers enhance community learning and coaching
Community Activities in Feedback Procedures and Evaluation	+ Portfolio includes community activities	+ Feedback on activities by personal learning plans and coaches	+/- Focus on developing leadership skills. Portfolios discussed with the staff	+ Self-reflection is included in program, initiated by staff	+/- Experiment started with personal learning plans

See for explanation of the contents tables 2 and 3.