

Creating a Diverse Honors Faculty through Collaborative Relationships within the Community and the University

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Abstract: This essay documents approaches to growing honors affiliate faculties through community and university partnerships. The need for new strategies to prepare non-traditional faculties is shown by evidence that the student population is changing and by the critical responsibility honors programs have in the mentorship of diverse students. Professionals, local experts, student affairs administrators, and international scholars can make valuable contributions to honors programs and colleges, given their practical insights and hands-on experiences. Methods for selecting, recruiting, and integrating affiliate faculty into honors education are also shared. The authors cite examples of successful collaborations with community leaders, officers in multicultural affairs offices, and staff members from study abroad programs. The authors underscore the need for faculty development programs, flexible and attractive honors teaching assignments, and meaningful support by campus leadership to improve affiliate faculty scholarship and teaching.

Keywords: belonging; demographic change; diversity; faculty learning communities; professional development

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Diversity in higher education is at a crossroads. With states and campuses across the nation challenging the idea of diversity and its goals, the path forward for many campuses and programs may not meet the needs of changing demographics. In October 2022, the Pew Research Center's Lauren Mora reported that Hispanic/Latino enrollment at postsecondary

institutions grew from 1.5 million in 2000 to 3.8 million in 2019. This increase reflects the growth of this population across the United States (Mora). The U.S. Department of Education, in response to the Supreme Court decision on Affirmative Action, released a report called “Strategies for Increasing Diversity and Opportunity in Higher Education.” The changing demographics of the nation demand that higher education address how to educate a growing first-generation, multi-ethnic student body. For practitioners of diversity, equity, and inclusion, grasping how this might be possible when states and institutions of higher education are changing laws, limiting resources, and prohibiting certain research areas can be frustrating.

Colleges and universities have long known the importance of creating a diverse honors faculty. Over 20 years ago, then-provost James Maher of the University of Pittsburgh explained how faculty diversity enhances the reputation of institutions of higher learning and contributes to a more inclusive, inviting, and enriching educational environment:

[S]tudents are attracted to an institution of higher learning that offers opportunities to learn from a diverse faculty; key funders, especially governmental agencies, place a high value on diversity; and employers increasingly demand graduates who have studied, confronted, and appreciated diverse points of views [sic]. Only by aggressively recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty can the University meet the demands of these important constituencies. (qtd. in Moody 174)

Honors programs and colleges may be a microcosm of their larger campuses and face the same complex issues regarding demographic change and educating in a climate that challenges meeting the needs of diverse populations. One solution to these complicated challenges is understanding that faculty expertise, demographic makeup, and experience can enhance an honors program or college.

A well-structured and diverse faculty is crucial for the success of an honors program, as it fosters academic excellence, a lively and experiential learning environment, and broad-based and inclusive university conversations. Our argument here aligns with the National Collegiate Honors Council’s diversity and inclusion statement, which describes “the hiring of diverse faculty and staff” (“Definition”). It also elevates the role of affiliate faculty dedicated to inclusive pedagogies that “acknowledge the varied experiences, identities, backgrounds, and learning differences of students” (“NCHC Shared Principles”). This article argues that such an

acknowledgement may be accomplished through the hiring of affiliate faculty who represent varied backgrounds, experiences, and career pathways.

Honors colleges and programs may have difficulty making proactive roadmaps and creating sustainable strategies where there is limited faculty continuity, an insufficient range and representation of viewpoints, and too many distractions from the core mission of delivering exceptional educational experiences. Here, we argue for more fulsome support of affiliate and adjunct faculty, recognizing their pivotal role in addressing the diversity, inclusivity, and integrative needs of honors programs and colleges.

Scholars such as David M. Jones have highlighted ways to move from equity to excellence. Jones's chapter, "From Good Intentions to Educational Equity in an Honors Program: Occupying Honors through Inclusive Excellence" in *Occupy Honors Education*, highlights "equity-mindedness" as a method of focusing on student success and being responsive to "systematic social inequalities" and "inclusive excellence" rather than just focusing on "numerical diversity" (39–40). All student communities can become more involved in honors programs. Jones argues that more important than the numbers is focusing on supporting students to "reach their academic potential (excellence)" (40). "If inclusive excellence is sought and obtained in honors," contends Jones, "the broader campus is more likely to conclude that inclusion and excellence can be simultaneously and successfully attained in other programs" (41). Jones shares four strategies that can be taken to move from equity-mindedness to inclusive excellence. Perhaps the most practical in terms of cultivating academic excellence, interdisciplinarity, and student-centered faculty is strategy #2: "Review curricula and implement faculty development strategies in honors to meet ongoing needs to develop student talent from all communities and to advocate inclusive excellence campus-wide" (43). Jones's focus on this intentional approach to curriculum and faculty development points to the creation of inclusive communities that value their faculty as much as their students.

Other practitioners highlight the importance of weaving equity throughout honors programs or colleges, including but not limited to recruitment, faculty, and planning. Brian A. Hoey notes that the initial historical focus on plans for equitable and inclusive practice in honors education rested on a rather basic and somewhat "deficit minded approach to structural diversity in [the context of] admissions" (25). However, achieving support for a holistic and genuine commitment to diversity that goes beyond superficiality in honors programs and colleges requires a "fundamental rethinking of

existing practices,” new kinds of relationships and partnerships, and a profound shift in institutional perspectives (25). Andrew J. Cognard-Black and Art L. Spisak note the importance of faculty diversity in honors programs, particularly within the context of diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. Ideally, they write, this goal should appear in the strategic plans of honors programs that seek to increase diversity among faculty: “Faculty diversity is clearly crucial to creating a culture of inclusion in education” (106). Finnie D. Coleman suggests that fairness and equality in honors education must ultimately be “conscientiously woven into the fabric of our daily operations and interactions” (333). And in his 2021 NCHC presidential address, Suketu Bhavsar emphasized the urgent necessity of nurturing a “sense of belonging” among our students. “In our pursuit of diversity and inclusion,” he said, “we must honor our students for who they are and create programs where they both know and feel that they belong” (4). Given the present moment, our honors institutions must think creatively about how we might authentically embed diversity and social justice into our core values and practices.

Faculty are important to the work of diversity in honors. They establish new approaches to courses, curriculum, advising, and mentoring. For colleges and programs without full-time faculty, affiliate faculty may be thought of as non-permanent instructional staff who contribute their expertise to academic programs, often bringing real-world perspectives and professional experience to the educational environment without holding a traditional, full-time faculty position. Non-tenure-line college faculty are more gender diverse than full-time faculty. In fall 2021, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, 40% of full-time faculty were white males, and 33% were white females. In contrast, white male faculty members constituted only 34% of the non-tenure-track faculty, and 39% were white females (“Characteristics”). They may be non-PhDs, community experts, industry professionals, student affairs administrators, international visiting scholars, or adjunct instructors with specialized knowledge. We employ the term “affiliate faculty” to convey our uniquely inclusive and integrative strategy for engaging experts who contribute their skills to the James Madison University (JMU) Honors College. We recognize that our affiliate faculty are something more than a conventional pool of adjunct instructors.

Several benefits can accrue to honors colleges and programs that create welcoming settings for non-PhDs, adjuncts, or affiliate faculty. First, these people may be experienced professionals or practitioners who are able to bring their valuable real-world knowledge and experiences into the classroom. Second, they may have occupied unique positions as leaders

and agents of change in the world beyond the campus, thereby enriching our academic programs with unique kinds of expertise. Third, they provide administrators with flexibility in course scheduling. Finally, their background experiences often align well with the emphases—whether they be creativity, entrepreneurship, or critical reflection—found in many honors programs.

In return for sharing their skills and competencies, affiliate faculty who live nearby or who are regularly non-teaching administrative, professional, or technical university employees can gain interdisciplinary teaching experience, professional development opportunities, or new research and scholarship agendas. They may also contribute to the core mission of the honors program in other ways, perhaps as designers and developers of new learning pathways or as uncommon and diverse mentors for underserved students. Every honors faculty member benefits by being immersed in an environment focused on teaching excellence, service to others, professionalism, and the freedom to pursue unique topics of local and global significance.

Many honors scholars highlight the importance of collaboration across the campus and in the community. David M. Jones has written that high-impact honors experiences often emerge from sustained cooperation among “diverse organizations and people in the broader communities that surround their campuses and maintain effective working relationships with campus colleagues, including faculty and staff, whose teaching, research, and administrative interests are in the area of diversity” (74). Nancy M. West suggests that non-conventional faculty represent an underutilized and valuable resource within honors programs and colleges. Their wealth of experiences and diverse perspectives can contribute significantly to the enrichment of the honors community. West writes, “Having retirees and non-regular faculty, rather than feeling marginalized as they often do, assume a leadership role in honors colleges in which they welcomed and mentored new faculty to bring them into the honors community as regulars would be wonderful” (211).

At the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), administrators have been able to connect with their campus community through utilizing local leaders and PhD students. Hui-Ching Chang et al. delineate specific efforts to transform the honors curriculum of UIC by taking advantage of their honors college’s location in a major city to incorporate a variety of guest lectures and courses from industry experts and accomplished regional leaders. These experts and leaders contribute directly to the diversity and social identity objectives of the curricula, the instructional methods, and overall student

experience (12). In 2011, UIC initiated a postdoctoral program, offering recent PhD graduates the chance to teach and advise students within their honors college. This program provides valuable teaching and advising experiences to new scholars while simultaneously improving diversity within the honors instructional pool (18).

Though they caution against overreliance on contingent faculty, Erin E. Edgington and Linda Frost tout the advantages of hiring qualified community members as adjunct instructors. Among these advantages, they suggest, are progress towards the goals of cross-disciplinary engagement and diversity in honors: “[B]ecause honors curricula typically embrace both interdisciplinarity and inclusivity of diverse populations, engaging local artists or community and business leaders to deliver courses tailored to honors students’ unique interests enables the program or college to provide a boutique experience and expose its students to a more diverse faculty group at a minimal cost” (220–21).

Affiliate honors faculty must be not only actively recruited but also provided with ongoing support for their onboarding, training, and development. Recruitment at the JMU Honors College has been based on creating collaborative relationships across campus, networking with honors alumni, and connecting with working professionals whose academic credentials are forged in interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary spaces. Reviewing the curriculum and course offerings regularly to identify the gaps in honors programs is important. For example, if the honors course offerings are heavily in the humanities, one might work with faculty in the sciences to develop courses. If there is funding for experiential education, the honors program administration might collaborate with area school district personnel or community colleges to design courses that highlight the local community. One common way of achieving this goal is to view affiliates as members of the same learning communities where all faculty in honors design and refine their own methods and courses. Rebecca Hayes suggests that professional development should be grounded in lifelong learning theory (andragogy), instructional best practices, and various time-management strategies. David M. Jones suggests introducing faculty development strategies into honors programs, especially those that nurture student talent from diverse communities and promote “inclusive excellence” throughout the campus (43).

Much of this recruitment of talent is dependent on the support of honors college deans or program directors. Malin Pereira et al. remind us that systemic changes in organizational ethos evolve gradually, requiring

equal amounts of sustained effort and pressure. The presence of a diversity champion or advocacy group committed to inclusive practices may also play a role in fostering collaborative and supportive environments within honors programs and colleges. “Since systemic structure matters for overcoming historical inequalities, then college deans clearly play a key role in promoting cultural change,” Pereira et al. write; honors deans “can identify a pool of talent, see that development opportunities are accessible, and build empowered and supportive workplaces that not only recognize bias but also call it out” (195).

Support from administration is key, especially when there are objections from full-time faculty to integrating affiliate faculty. Some concerns may lie with institutions not wanting to hire full-time faculty in honors and affiliate faculty being a stop-gap tactic and not a permanent solution. Affiliate faculty may not have access to funds for professional development, and their temporary status may also produce fewer mentorship opportunities for students. The honors dean or director must understand the situation on the ground, be realistic about administrative commitments to honors, engage in ongoing conversation, and take advantage of resources when available. In recruiting and supporting affiliate faculty, transparency with the affiliates regarding the limitations of the college or program is important. Establishing consistent policies and timelines regarding course scheduling, contracts, and pay helps affiliate faculty understand how best to communicate with the institution and its units. Affiliates can see that while these positions are sometimes voluntary, their commitment is potentially renewable, and their passion for interdisciplinary and experiential education is welcome. Their efforts can directly enhance the culture of the honors program.

Establishing an inclusive and supportive environment for affiliate faculty of diverse ranks, interests, and backgrounds also serves as a valuable remedy or corrective to address some of the greatest challenges faced by higher education today. These include obstacles that pull our collective focus away from academics, such as administrative responsibilities that devour time and resources and agendas that constrain faculty freedom. We celebrate honors programs and colleges that nurture faculty who wish to explore student-centered, hands-on approaches to teaching and scholarship. Thus, it is important to create spaces and build relationships that support novel interactions, stretch the boundaries of the teaching paradigm, and reinvigorate the diversity that makes honors colleges and programs unique.

One of the authors of this article, Amelia Underwood, is a faculty affiliate in the JMU Honors College. Underwood graduated from the U.S.

Military Academy (USMA) at West Point in 1987 as part of the eighth class of women to graduate from this institution. While a cadet at West Point, she served as a participant in Rice et al.'s 1984 quantitative study examining gender and leadership success during Cadet Field Training. Underwood served on active duty in the U.S. Army as a Field Artillery Officer assigned to nuclear-capable Lance Missile battalions. After leaving active-duty military service, Underwood worked as an engineer for the industrial lubricant division of Mobil Oil Corporation.

The JMU Honors College provided Underwood with a unique opportunity to develop teaching, training, mentoring, and research competencies at the collegiate level. Access to course development and faculty instruction experiences in the honors college contributed to her professional growth and commitment to pursuing a career in higher education. As an adjunct professor for the JMU Honors College, she incorporated her managerial experience in corporate, military, and academic organizations, broadening leadership pedagogy with real-life perspectives in organizational settings.

Underwood designed the upper-division seminar entitled "American Women at War" to provide students with an opportunity to examine the experiences and contributions of women in the United States during times of war: the American Revolution, the U.S. Civil War, World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf War. Included in the scope of this course is an examination of how women in military service represent an instrument for societal change in America, specifically in promoting the cause of women's rights and racial equality. The course offers hands-on experience that is not often afforded to college students. By working in the Army Women's Museum located in Ft. Lee, Virginia, students learn archival procedures of cataloging, sorting, preserving, and handling primary source materials pertaining to women's military service in World War I and World War II. Class members then create multimedia museum exhibits that bring to life the previously unheard stories of American women who have served during the world wars of the 20th century.

For Underwood, the honors classroom has been a place where she has also been able to refine courses on honors leadership and gender and leadership. In May 2023, she earned her doctoral degree in organizational leadership at Regent University's School of Business and Leadership in Virginia Beach, VA. The honors classroom provided her with an avenue to pursue a career in higher education, given her strengths in military and industrial leadership.

Another longtime honors affiliate faculty member is transgressing the boundaries of traditional disciplinary scholarship by following a drop of water from its headwaters in the Shenandoah Valley to the vast expanse of the Chesapeake Bay and beyond. In the process, students learn about the flora and fauna of the watershed; visit key locations impacted by farming and suburban development; and debate regional land use, water management policies, and conservation initiatives. Students come away with a deeper and broader understanding of the interplay among ecological processes, basic and field science, and political and economic realities. The instructor, Eric Fitzgerald, now a retiree from the local county school district, utilizes his training in career and technical education to illustrate to students the importance of experiential education.

Similar to many honors programs and colleges, the JMU Honors College struggles to provide adequate funding for the kind of course enhancements necessary for affiliate faculty members. In addition, affiliates often cope with excessive workloads as they balance a full-time job along with other teaching responsibilities. Providing financial support for annual faculty workshops is necessary to demonstrate universities' appreciation of their efforts. By hiring administrators supportive of this model, while remaining aware of the time commitments of affiliate faculty and showcasing the work of these classes, honors colleges and programs develop long-term relationships across campus and create additional opportunities for partnerships in the community.

Although competitive compensation for affiliate faculty must usually come from the personnel budget of honors programs or colleges, some essential resources may come from other university units. Research and scholarship offices have budgets for faculty and student-led research initiatives and encourage hands-on learning experiences. Centers for teaching and learning host faculty workshops, training, and conferences to support professional growth and pedagogical excellence (Kezar). Often, these same centers for teaching excellence provide events or awards that recognize the contributions of affiliate and adjunct faculty members. At our institution, the Center for Faculty Innovation offers an adjunct faculty professional development fund with deadlines in the fall, spring, and summer. Opportunities for various forms of professional development—including teaching, scholarship, career planning, and leadership—are available to qualified adjunct professors (JMU Center).

In addressing ways to work with affiliate faculty, some campuses utilize the expertise of student affairs professionals to enhance academic programs such as honors. We recognize that the varying individual needs of affiliate faculty obtained from this area may require unique sources of support. Tara M. Tuttle et al. explain how integrating principles of diversity and inclusive excellence, as well as nurturing institutional change within the routine, day-to-day operations of honors programs, depends on fostering strong relationships with other campus professionals. Multicultural affairs offices usually have as part of their mission the promotion of relevant programming in the form of cultural events, workshops, and seminars for students, faculty, and staff. Tuttle et al. show how the University of Kentucky and Westminster University have engaged in an array of collaborations. These institutions have separately developed partnerships with a wide variety of campus organizations and programs, including social justice centers, LGBTQ+ resource centers, cultural heritage and regional studies centers, gender equality advocacy groups, cultural understanding and integration programs, and diversity in STEM clubs. These collaborations, the authors argue, can underwrite the feasibility of honors program initiatives aimed at diverse honors faculty representation (Tuttle et al. 260).

Utilizing study abroad to create inclusive spaces is one of the most effective strategies for attracting or developing a diverse honors faculty. *Internationalizing Honors*, edited by Kim Klein and Mary Kay Mulvaney, provides several chapters on expanding internationalization in honors education and, ultimately, in higher education. Erin E. Edgington and Daniel C. Villanueva, in their chapter “Making the Global Familiar: Building an International Focus into the Honors Curriculum,” highlight how the University of Nevada at Reno (UNR) expanded their first-year seminar (FYS) to incorporate a common read focused on a global theme and tied to service learning. UNR also engages in post-study abroad reflection coursework to make the experiences meaningful. Students share their study abroad experiences in FYS, using presentation methods. In addition, honors students host a formal presentation series, Discover the World, during International Education Week. UNR’s model highlights how internationalization can be placed at the core of honors programming. In this way, honors can internationalize the curriculum and diversify the experience for both faculty and students.

At our university, the honors associate dean recruited Felix Wang, an administrator from the Center for Global Engagement (CGE), to teach a two-part honors course at the junior level that is grounded in global

leadership. The course incorporates a study abroad component that involves travel to the Dominican Republic. Wang improves awareness among honors students about a wide variety of campus-wide international learning opportunities. He connects individually with students to explain and demystify semester-long study abroad programs. Wang's experience in working with first-generation students and his deep understanding of global engagement harmonize well with the goals of our honors college.

Honors students can now apply for Wang's leadership course directly through the CGE office. Students are exempt from additional tuition charges because the Dominican Republic trip occurs within the bounds of the spring semester. This arrangement effectively lowers the financial burden on the students who take the class. The JMU Honors College has also set aside the resources necessary to subsidize the trip for participants, using operating budget and university foundation accounts (501c3). Wang's course not only gives faculty co-leaders the freedom to channel their expertise but also fosters a strong connection between the honors college and CGE (Aram).

Additionally, by providing a study abroad experience at a more affordable cost, the course becomes an access point for first-generation students and those in greater need of financial aid. Creating a course where staff members integrate their expertise and incorporate experiential education into the honors classroom has increased the honors college's capacity to meet strategic goals for increasing faculty diversity. Moreover, it has broadened students' access to study abroad opportunities. Wang's profound understanding of global education enriches the college curriculum and gives first-generation and Pell-eligible students unparalleled access to study abroad experiences. While JMU's study abroad opportunities are not as embedded in the honors experience as they are at the University of Nevada at Reno, the focus on first-generation students expands offerings to students who may not have felt that study abroad was affordable.

Opening the door to professionals from non-academic departments can create opportunities for colleagues with expertise in leadership, global studies, and multicultural perspectives to contribute to honors education through teaching. As these faculty represent offices across the campus, honors students are introduced to areas outside their academic homes; this collaboration expands the honors co-curricular support structures for students. Correspondingly, connecting with students within the classroom offers university staff occasions to broaden their understanding of academic affairs and the complexities of honors coursework.

Creating faculty development opportunities in honors enhances both the classroom teaching experience and creates more conversations on campus. *Breaking Barriers in Teaching and Learning*, edited by James Ford and John Zubizarreta, offers methods for retooling how curriculum is created and taught and rethinking what is assumed about learning (xi–xv). One of this book’s relevant chapters is Milton D. Cox’s “Building and Enhancing Honors Programs through Faculty Learning Communities.” Cox argues for learning communities where faculty can engage in yearlong dialogue with their peers. These may be cohort or topic-based. In 2001–2002, Miami University’s “Ethics across the Honors Curriculum” offered tenured and tenure-track faculty an opportunity to collaborate in a yearlong program supported by the Faculty Learning Center. Cox illustrates that faculty learning communities can be an opportunity to align faculty and staff with the themes and goals of their respective programs either by training or by creating a space for like-minded faculty. For Cox, the most critical component of these programs is “building community across the college and university” (93).

At JMU, this approach expands beyond academic affairs and identifies student affairs staff as potential affiliate faculty members. At our institution, the honors college collaborates with staff of the Student Leadership Center to jointly sponsor co-curricular programming. This partnership has made it possible to also extend collaborations into the classroom, particularly in courses on multicultural leadership. The course description is broad enough to include the administrative staff of this center as faculty, and the syllabus can be altered to incorporate different teaching perspectives and expertise. The most recent faculty member, Antonio Gabriel Driver, teaches a course focused on diverse populations. His master’s degree in college student personnel administration and his experience in higher education have made him a uniquely qualified honors faculty member.

Driver sees the course as an important opportunity for professional development. As he has explained to us:

When I think about how this helped me develop as a professional, I often think about how much more accessible I became for students. For me, my professional make-up is integrated with my personal make-up. Due to my own experiences (in and out of college), I have a personal inclination to be a resource for college students.

He also has recognized that his position in student affairs has made it possible to practice the connection between theory and application in the classroom: “A lot of our scholarship and education is communicated through programming outside the classroom.” Driver emphasizes that when he teaches the multicultural leadership course, students see more clearly what he calls “the ‘whys’ behind the ‘whats’ as we walk through research and frameworks that guide my work.” Driver’s ability to articulate the theory behind his approach to student leadership allows him to see himself as a scholar and a practitioner.

Honors programs and colleges nationwide nurture inclusive pedagogies that involve course enhancements, co-curricular engagement, and higher-order learning objectives. Honors affiliate faculty members should be offered an attractive teaching assignment and meaningful support, which creates opportunities for instructors to reflect on various aspects of their professional experiences and explore areas for future professional growth. We must continue to find unique ways to identify diverse instructors who will teach in exemplary academic programs. We believe that the approach outlined here can enhance diversity, provide students with unique role models, and facilitate opportunities for affiliate faculty seeking meaningful experiences in honors. Collaborating with offices like student affairs and university study abroad can unlock valuable resources and partnership opportunities. Finally, adopting strategies that invite collaborations with diverse partners in other parts of the university and beyond can contribute to more inclusive and elevating honors experiences for everyone.

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