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Toward a Science of Honors Education
Busta M. Jones

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The next issue of JNCHC (deadline: September 1, 2016) invites research essays on any topic of interest to the honors community.

The issue will also include a Forum focused on the theme “AP and Dual Enrollment Credit in Honors.” We invite essays of roughly 1000-2000 words that consider this theme in a practical and/or theoretical context.

The lead essay for the Forum, which has been distributed on the NCHC listserv and posted on the NCHC website <http://nchchonors.org/jnchc-lead-essay-ap-dual-enrollment-and-the-survival-of-honors-education>, is by Annmarie Guzy of the University of South Alabama. In her essay, “AP, Dual Enrollment, and the Survival of Honors Education,” Guzy sounds the alarm about a new crisis emerging in honors. Most honors programs and colleges require lower-division courses that substitute rigorous and innovative honors courses for general education requirements. More and more students are now enrolling in college with general education credits through AP and dual enrollment, so the incentive to save time and money by foregoing honors is substantial, threatening the traditional core of honors education. With legislatures mandating that public colleges and universities accept AP and dual enrollment credits, the cultural focus has shifted away from getting a well-rounded education to getting a degree as quickly and cheaply as possible. Guzy discusses this trend and suggests provocative solutions for the honors community.

Contributions to the Forum may—but need not—respond to Guzy’s essay.

Questions that Forum contributors might consider include: Is the increase in AP and dual enrollment credit a crisis for honors? What are the best ways for the NCHC and for individual honors programs and colleges to react to the increases in AP and dual enrollment credits? Should honors programs/colleges hold the line and insist on the value of their traditional offerings? Should community-building opportunities replace a traditional curriculum as the core of honors? Should honors opportunities like study abroad, experiential learning, and service projects replace liberal arts courses as a way to lure students into honors? Should honors education shift its focus away from lower-division requirements toward upper-level seminars, projects, and theses? Should honors reduce requirements or eliminate them altogether? Should the NCHC launch a lobbying effort to stop states from mandating accepting AP/dual enrollment credits? Should the honors community accept the tide of AP/dual enrollment and welcome the opportunity to downsize, focusing on those students for whom time and money are less important than the best education?

Forum essays should focus on ideas, concepts, and/or opinions related to “AP and Dual Enrollment Credit in Honors.”

Please send all submissions to Ada Long at <adalong@uab.edu>.
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 and colleges, 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)

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We accept material by email attachment in Word (not pdf). 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.
Rarely are stateliness, intellect, and an antic disposition blended as delightfully in a scholar / teacher / administrator as they are in Richard Badenhausen. The NCHC has been the beneficiary of his gifts and hard work for almost fifteen years, during which he has delivered more than three dozen conference presentations, co-chaired the Publications Board and the Student Interdisciplinary Research Panel conference sessions, and served as an NCHC Recommended Site Visitor, editorial board member for Honors in Practice, and member of the Board of Directors. In 2011 he was named an NCHC Fellow.

Meanwhile, back on his home campus of Westminster College, Richard is Professor and Kim T. Adamson Chair of Honors, one of the rare endowed honors chairs in the country. His career at Westminster, which began in 2001, followed a PhD from the University of Michigan in 1989 and then eleven years at Marshall University, where he rose through the ranks to full professor. At Westminster, he teaches classes ranging from Humanities to Trauma Studies, focusing his teaching almost exclusively on first-year students so that he gets to know all members of the honors program personally from the outset of their studies.
While NCHC members have enjoyed the fruits of Richard’s labors in the field of honors, he has all the while maintained an exceptionally active life in literary scholarship, including a major book—*T. S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration* (Cambridge University Press, 2004/2009)—and seven book chapters, nine journal articles, two review essays, twelve book reviews, and over thirty conference presentations. He is currently at work on two book projects: *T. S. Eliot’s Traumatic Texts* and *Reading and Writing Place* (a college-level reader).

Richard’s services to his campus, community, and academic discipline parallel the generosity of his contributions to NCHC, and still he makes time for his wife, Katherine, two children, frequent ski trips, late-night wine bibtngs, and adventures with his kick-buddy, a golden retriever named Scout. Sam Schuman would no doubt go Chaucerian in praising Richard Badenhausen, perhaps combining passages from the Clerk, the Knight, and the Parson, but we will simply say thank you, Richard, and keep it up!
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

Ada Long

University of Alabama at Birmingham

During the sixteen years since *JNCHC* came into being, research in honors has steadily shifted its focus and approach. In the early days, essays represented a wide variety of disciplines and, in order to qualify as research, needed only to root themselves in previous literature on a topic. As honors, along with the culture in which it is practiced, moved into the era of accountability and assessment, “research in honors” has increasingly come to mean quantitative studies rooted in the formats, methods, and terminology of the social sciences. The purpose of research in honors has also shifted, more subtly, from advancing an internal discourse that took the value of honors for granted to proving the value of honors through quantitative analysis. In the current climate, previous research in honors often ceases to seem like research at all as essays in this issue call for real or serious research on topics that have long been discussed in the honors literature.

A look at the previous issue of *JNCHC* devoted to “Research in Honors” in the spring/summer of 2004 reveals a stark contrast with common assumptions about today’s scholarship in honors but also contains clear signs of the emerging change. The first three essays in that issue were republished from the *Forum for Honors*, the predecessor of *JNCHC*, and were written twenty years earlier, in 1984, by Sam Schuman, Ted Estess, and Robert Roemer. All three write from the perspective of the humanities and argue for quality of thought and writing as essential to honors scholarship along with a theoretical context that extends beyond an individual program. Schuman argues for what he calls “abstraction”: “the necessity that the content be ‘generalized and generalizable’ beyond a specific time and place.” Estess argues that an “other-connecting” intellectual appeal is the ideal for any publication in an honors journal. Roemer summarizes these ideas in the importance of what he calls “the theoretical moment.”

This two-decades-old perspective from the humanities already showed signs in 2004 of being on its way out. While roughly half of the other authors in the issue echoed the ideas of Schuman, Estess, and Roemer, the other half either argued for or demonstrated a social-sciences approach. In the “Introduction,” I wrote back then,

[T]he majority of contributors to *JNCHC* during my four years as editor probably hail from the social sciences rather than the humanities.
Or perhaps Honors administrators, whatever their disciplinary background, have moved into a culture where data, statistics, objectivity, and impersonality are hegemonic values. . . . Reading the twenty-year-old essays in conjunction with the brand new [2004] ones may alert readers to a significant change in the discourse of Honors.

That change—in short, an evolution from anecdotes to ideas to measurements—has clearly come to fruition, as revealed in this issue of *JNCHC* sixteen years on down the road.

George Mariz leads off the Forum on “Research in Honors” with his essay “An Agenda for the Future of Research in Honors.” A Call for Papers went out on the NCHC website and listserv and in the NCHC E-Newsletter, inviting members to contribute to the Forum. The Call included a list of questions that Forum contributors might consider:

What are the major research questions that need to be addressed in future studies of honors? As NCHC publications have moved away from local and anecdotal accounts of success in honors, has the evolution been entirely salutary, or has anything been lost? While the research that seems increasingly to dominate in honors has become primarily data-driven, what do the humanities have to offer? Is honors a real discipline, like history or chemistry or engineering, or is it special in a way that requires a different concept of a field of research? Does research and publication in honors count toward tenure and promotion, and should it? What specific changes should be made in NCHC journals to accommodate the future needs of honors administrators and faculty for relevant research?

The Forum includes three responses to the Call in addition to Mariz’s lead essay.

Mariz calls for a scholarly and professional approach to honors research. In advocating a scope beyond individual institutions, he echoes the humanities-oriented arguments of Schuman, Estess, and Roemer twelve years ago, but he takes a social-sciences approach in arguing for measurably verifiable claims about the success of honors at the national and international level. He calls for a body of scholarship analogous to that of the academic disciplines and credible as criteria for tenure and promotion. Above all, he calls for a clear agenda of topics and methodologies that are most relevant to honors research, arguing the particular need for comparative and longitudinal studies.
Answering Mariz’s call to create a substantive body of scholarship in honors, Annmarie Guzy of the University of South Alabama offers a compendium of quantitative and qualitative publications on programmatic issues in her essay “Research on Honors Composition, 2004–2015.” Guzy, who published two essays in the 2004 issue of JNCHC on “Research in Honors” and has been a prolific contributor to NCHC scholarship ever since, provides a bibliography, with discussion, of articles in JNCHC, Honors in Practice (HIP), and The Journal of First-Year Honors Composition (FYHC); chapters in the NCHC Monograph Series; and conference sessions at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Guzy argues that honors composition needs “interdisciplinary exploration and development by an increasing number of scholars in multiple venues,” especially in the face of challenges from AP and dual enrollment credits, a topic on which she has written the lead essay for the next JNCHC Forum (see the Call for Papers on page v).

While Guzy encourages research about honors composition, H. Kay Banks makes a special case for research on the honors thesis in “A Tradition unlike Any Other: Research on the Value of an Honors Senior Thesis.” She writes, “Data about the thesis should be informative about more than best practices, also correlating with data on honors completion, retention, and student persistence as well as identifying the distinction and meaning of ‘graduating with honors’ at member institutions.” She speculates “how further research, quantitative or mixed-methods, might offer insight into a tradition that many of us have on our campuses,” and she offers the mixed-method approach at the University of South Carolina as a model for other honors programs and colleges. She also proposes research questions and methodologies to guide future research on the honors thesis. Meanwhile, research essays in this issue provide answers to some of Banks’s questions.

In “Research In, On, or About Honors,” Marygold Walsh-Dilley takes issue with the pronoun “in,” suggesting that Mariz’s criticism of inadequate research in honors is really a complaint about research on honors. She argues that “Research in Honors”—the work we do as practitioners of honors in our home programs and colleges—is “full of power and potential” and should not get overshadowed by research on or about honors. She points to “something unique about the interdisciplinary research of the type we expect from our students that requires its own methodological training.” Drawing on her experience at the University of New Mexico, she suggests the “following special characteristics of honors research: our scholarship is inclusive of students; we
integrate research and teaching; we are often highly engaged in and with the broader communities where we are housed; and our work is both interdisciplinary and able to address non-specialist audiences.”

A fine example of the “power and potential” of the research practiced in honors programs and colleges is an essay that won a 2015 Portz Prize, awarded to highlight excellence in undergraduate honors research. In “‘Flee from the Worship of Idols’: Becoming Christian in Roman Corinth,” Dorvan Byler of Kent State University at Stark presents a shortened version of his honors thesis, an analysis of “the population in one location during a specific time frame [that] allows clear comparisons among Christians, Jews, and worshipers of Roman, Greek, and Egyptian cults instead of general statements about how most Christians related to most Jews or polytheists throughout the Empire.” Based on architectural evidence as well as numerous works by such authors as Plutarch, Strabo, and the Apostle Paul, Dorvan describes “one model for how Christianity might have developed throughout the Roman Empire and what it meant for Jews or Gentiles to become a part of early Christian communities.” Providing a theoretical context that is “generalizable’ beyond a specific time and place,” Dorvan exemplifies the intellectual substance and appeal that Schuman, Estess, and Roemer called for in research about as well as in honors.

Many authors in this issue of JNCHC call, as Mariz does, for “archives, bodies of scientific knowledge, established procedures, or information-rich data sets” in a national context, and the first four research essays in this issue provide exactly that. In “Demography of Honors: The National Landscape of Honors Education,” Richard I. Scott and Patricia J. Smith of the University of Central Arkansas “analyze the population of institutions delivering traditional undergraduate education in the United States to determine the size, structure, and distribution of honors education across institutional types.” After first documenting the growth of honors in the United States from 1957 to 2012, the authors report on their examination of 4,664 institutions, among which they identified 2,550 institutions delivering traditional undergraduate education, with 1,503 offering university-wide honors programs or colleges. From there, the authors break down the data in numerous ways to determine the honors presence and availability at all types of institutions—i.e., public and private; two- and four-year (baccalaureate, masters, doctoral)—and examine the nature of the honors presence. They focus especially on the distribution of honors colleges and honors programs, considered separately, across institutional types and among NCHC members and non-members. Among

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their interesting findings is that a “far higher percentage of public-doctoral institutions offer honors education than private-doctoral institutions, with honors colleges almost universally available in public-doctoral institutions.” They also found that NCHC membership is much higher among four-year than two-year institutions. Conclusions such as these could help guide the NCHC’s future self-analysis and decision making.

Another research study drew on a survey of NCHC members conducted on the listserv. Anton Vander Zee, Trisha Folds-Bennett, Elizabeth Meyer-Bernstein, and Brendan Reardon of the College of Charleston report on this study in “From Orientation Needs to Developmental Realities: The Honors First-Year Seminar in a National Context.” Based on 313 survey responses from the 831 institutions contacted, the authors constructed a comparative overview of honors and institution-wide first-year seminars, examining numerous factors that include resource sharing, class size, curricular structure, staffing, and objectives. Among their many findings is that honors first-year seminars, in comparison to their institution-wide counterparts, are likely to be smaller, to be staffed by fewer adjunct faculty, and to “have a more substantive emphasis on encouraging students to be fully networked and to assume control of their own academic and extracurricular trajectory.” In general, the authors conclude from the survey results that a first-year seminar in honors differs from an equivalent institution-wide seminar in that it “does not simply enhance but fundamentally directs and grounds the academic and social transition processes faced by first-year honors students.”

In what is likely to be the beginning of a sequence of essays derived from survey information collected by the NCHC in 2012–13, “Variability and Similarity in Honors Curricula across Institution Size and Type” examines specific curricular features of honors programs and honors colleges across institutional types. Andrew J. Cognard-Black (St. Mary’s College, the Maryland Public Honors College) and Hallie Savage (Executive Director of the NCHC) examine enrollment size and institutional type in relation to curricular and co-curricular offerings in honors programs and colleges. Their study focuses on a thesis and/or capstone requirement, a service requirement, service learning courses, study abroad courses, experiential courses, research-intensive courses, and internships. The authors are particularly interested in determining the extent of variability in honors. Their interesting findings include the similarity across institutional types in thesis and capstone requirements as well as research-intensive courses but greater variability in experiential and service offerings, internships, and study abroad, suggesting
that the NCHC might need to be more active in encouraging service and experiential learning among all its member institutions.

Based on a list of 841 NCHC member institutions and using a snowball sample approach, Rocky Dailey of South Dakota University received 269 survey responses that became the basis for his study described in “Honors Teachers and Academic Identity: What to Look For When Recruiting Honors Faculty.” With the goal of helping honors administrators “create an identity for their honors faculty,” the survey addressed “the broad areas of individual self-understanding, professional role and expectations, and the influence of situational factors, both internal and external, within these areas, coordinating descriptive statistical information and qualitative and quantitative (years of experience) variables.” Analysis of the data includes “summary statistics of the overall results as well as contingency tables for evaluating the relationship between data on rank, role, and experience, on the one hand, and individual self-understanding, role expectations, and the influence of external factors on the other.” Among his findings, Dailey identifies common attributes of teaching in honors: job satisfaction, ability to implement change, confidence and self-efficacy, and meaningful work. Common concerns are faculty governance, inclusion of lower ranks, and compensation. The two most common traits of honors faculty that Dailey found are high motivation and outstanding teaching ability.

The next two essays are institutional studies of student engagement. The essay “Honors and Non-Honors Student Engagement: A Model of Student, Curricular, and Institutional Characteristics” describes a comparative and longitudinal study conducted by seven researchers: Ellen Buckner of the University of South Alabama; Melanie Shores, Michael Sloane, and John Dantzler of the University of Alabama at Birmingham; Catherine Shields of the Jefferson County Board of Education; Karen Shader of the University of Tennessee Health Science Center; and Bradley Newcomer of James Madison University. Although the authors represent several institutions, they describe research conducted at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). They offer a complex comparative study, conducted over a nine-month period, of numerous characteristics in honors and non-honors students; included in the study’s focus are goal orientation, student engagement, and self-handicapping. Among its multiplicity of results, the study revealed higher engagement among honors students and higher self-handicapping among non-honors students. While many of the results might have been predictable, others were more provocative: for instance, “honors students described more
challenging experiences, but non-honors students described more collaborative experiences.”

While the research by Buckner et al. focused on student engagement by comparing upper-division honors and non-honors students at UAB, Jessica A. Kampfe, Christine L. Chasek, and John Falconer report on a comparative study of upper- and lower-division honors students at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK). In “An Examination of Student Engagement and Retention in an Honors Program,” the authors present the results of a survey designed to show “how student engagement in an honors program evolves as students progress from freshmen to seniors” and to understand “the differences between lower- and upper-division students in order to design programming specifically targeted for each group to enhance satisfaction and retention of students in the honors program.” They distributed the survey to all 538 honors students at UNK and received 62 complete responses. The researchers found that students enrolled in the program to gain “a competitive edge”; lower-division students identified class size, quality of faculty, and community as the most important attractions of honors; and upper-division students remained in the program for priority registration and prestige. The results of the study demonstrated that the honors program needed to “generate new initiatives in order to increase the involvement of upper-division honors students in the honors community.”

In “Assessing Growth of Student Reasoning Skills in Honors,” Jeanneane Wood-Nartker, Shelly Hinck, and Ren Hullender adapt Wolcott and Lynch’s model from Steps for Better Thinking Skills to assess “growth in critical thinking skills and areas of intellectual risk” among honors students at Central Michigan University. In their qualitative study, the authors used four graduated goals of complex thinking—each with its own attributes of success and attendant markers for weakness—to assess progress toward complex thinking of sixteen honors students in an honors service learning course. The study focused not on content but on how students arrived at conclusions in their reflective writing as the course progressed. The authors give examples of their ranking process in samples of student writing, and they conclude that “the complex thinking assessment instrument was able to identify gradual assimilation of understanding or shifts in thinking or changes in perspective.” The authors argue for the benefits of this assessment model for students and faculty as well as for an honors program’s self-analysis and improvement.

Also focusing on progress in critical thinking, Edward J. Caropreso of the University of North Carolina Wilmington and Mark Haggerty and Melissa
Ladenheim of the University of Maine Orono (UMaine) set out to measure what they call “critical-thinking writing” in “Writing Instruction and Assignments in an Honors Curriculum: Perceptions of Effectiveness.” The authors surveyed 368 students, with a 47% completion rate, about their “perceptions of writing competencies before and after taking a writing-intensive, four-course honors curriculum sequence” at UMaine, and they also surveyed 28 faculty, with a 71% completion rate, about their before-and-after perceptions of the same competencies. The results indicated, for instance, that the students had a higher opinion of their own abilities at the beginning of the course than faculty did and that faculty had a higher opinion of their own impact on improvement in student thinking and writing. Although students had a higher opinion of their critical thinking abilities than faculty did both before and after the course, the two groups agreed that the course had a positive impact and that the most effective teaching strategies were “written feedback, the act of writing, oral feedback, and revising papers[,] . . .] strategies that can be described as active, extended, and elaborated.”

Another teaching strategy at UMaine is blogging. Sarah Harlan-Haughey, Taylor Cunningham, Katherine Lees, and Andrew Estrup describe the benefits and challenges of blogging as an integral part of an honors course in “Blogging to Develop Honors Students’ Writing.” The benefits include peer interaction, collaboration, inherent student interest, a “launching pad for bigger projects,” and “a means for amplifying, developing, and complicating in-class conversation.” The challenge is motivating students to be conscientious, substantive, and reflective in their blog posts, so the authors provide pedagogical advice about how to accomplish these goals. They also provide technical advice and practical guidance, including suggestions for scoring rubrics, to help newcomers get started and to help cynics feel motivated to give blogging a try or to try it again. They conclude by writing, “The creativity and enthusiasm of a well-engineered blog has no limit. One need only establish a logical blog structure, create a repeating evaluative mechanism, and stay out of the way.”

In “How Gender Differences Shape Student Success in Honors,” Susan E. Dinan of Pace University describes the gender inequity that favors men in college admission and then, despite poorer performance and lower graduation rates in college, continues to favor men in earning potential. To remedy this inequity, which is harmful to both men and women, “Honors programs and colleges can implement best practices that include advisement, mentoring, curriculum structure, and housing that bolster the success of both men
and women students.” Dinan points out that NCHC’s 2012–2013 survey of 890 member institutions (referenced earlier in “Variability and Similarity”) “found that the percentage of undergraduate females in institutions as a whole averaged 56.6% compared to 64.7% for honors programs and colleges,” so honors administrators need especially to be aware, for instance, of “how young women interpret the feedback they receive at their universities.” Through the personal advice and encouragement that are the hallmark of honors education, Dinan writes, “Honors programs can instill in young women the confidence possessed by their male peers.” Honors administrators also need to “expect more of young men in our programs, providing the academic support and nurturing environment that they need to improve their academic skills but also making sure that they understand the consequences of their choices about studying and playing,” and Dinan describes a “clustering” strategy that has worked well in helping male students stay focused on their studies. By working to counteract boredom in men and stress in women, honors educators can best serve all their students.

The final essay in this volume—“Toward a Science of Honors Education” by Beata M. Jones of Texas Christian University—provides a bibliographical framework for the future of honors research. Responding to Mariz’s call for an agenda of topics and methodologies relevant to future research in honors, Jones writes, “Constructing a comprehensive research framework to guide our pursuits and taking stock of what we already know about teaching academically talented students can allow us to prioritize items on the vast horizon left to explore and to develop a more systematic study of honors.” Jones offers an archival overview of what has been published in *JNCHC* and the monographs, with some inclusion of works published in *Honors in Practice* and non-NCHC publications. She identifies four levels of honors for analysis—stakeholders, courses, programs/colleges, and external environments—along with the attributes related to them and the publications relevant to these attributes. She concludes: “With the help of NCHC publications, NCHC conferences, and orchestrated honors community work, we might be able to write a comprehensive, evidence-based *Field Guide to Honors Education* in the next five years.”
Research in honors has become a priority for the National Collegiate Honors Council, and the phrase presents the honors community with an interesting ambiguity about the appropriate focus for future studies. Potential topics might include the progress of honors students in comparison to their non-honors cohorts; the criteria for selecting honors faculty; and the relationship between honors and its institutional context. The best methodologies might include statistical studies, qualitative analyses, or both. Future research in honors might reflect past practices or set a new trend in both topics and methodologies. As the NCHC launches its next fifty years, the time is right to take a careful look at where research in honors should be heading and to note that the horizon contains much that is promising.

A humanist by training who specializes in European history, I know that my research program colors my ideas about research more generally. In my discipline and at my institution, what counts as research in tenure and promotion decisions involves publication in professionally recognized outlets, e.g., refereed journals, books, and proceedings. Scholarly publications include specific elements: establishing the historiography of a topic, i.e., “reading it
up,” laboring in archives, and analyzing texts. To research competently in my field may also require specialized training in disciplines such as paleography, diplomatcs, languages, and any number of other fields. What counts as research among my colleagues is specific to their fields: for those in the natural sciences, research and publication might require experience on a rock face, in a lab, or in a rainforest. Social scientists might work with field surveys and data sets. Research in any field, including mine, requires convincing specialists in other fields, as well as one’s own, to recognize the work as worthy of tenure and/or promotion.

Research in honors is another species altogether: it has more nebulous standards of worthiness, and there are no archives, bodies of scientific knowledge, established procedures, or information-rich data sets. Publications in honors abound nevertheless, and the JNCHC consolidated bibliography suggests that virtually any topic that appears in that journal might qualify, in one way or another, as research in honors. Pieces range from what constitutes an honors student to the effects of the digital revolution on honors education, from the campus-wide benefits of honors programs to global perspectives on what constitutes honors. Much of the work published in JNCHC is excellent and points the way to future research; three examples are Richard England’s preliminary survey of honors programs in the Northeast, which may lead to a national inventory of honors curricula, recruitment practices, and student characteristics; Marsha Driscoll’s work on assessment protocols, which is national in scope; and Margaret Lamb’s comparative work on honors in the United States and Great Britain. Yet JNCHC is only half the story.

Ours is a data-driven age, and in keeping with its spirit NCHC has begun aggressively to collect data on honors programs and colleges nationwide. More than fifty percent of the 890 member institutions responded to NCHC’s recent request for information, an impressive figure. Data are now easily available on many aspects of honors education, including gender distribution, program size, number of staff, and information on deans and directors such as longevity and percentage of appointment in honors. In the near future NCHC will extend the reach of its surveys, and more information will become available on, for instance, standardized test scores and grade point averages for entering students. Data will also be available on first-generation and non-traditional students as well as class, race, and ethnicity. For the present, data are available regarding the characteristics of honors faculty and administrators, and we can annually update the kind of survey information, based on much smaller samples, collected by Gordon and Gary Shepherd in 1991, showing
that 79% of honors administrators were in the humanities and social sciences (307), or by Ada Long in 1992, showing that 51% were from the traditional humanities, including 29% in English (92).

Now, with the availability of broad ranges of data based on large survey populations, honors administrators will be able to argue with hard evidence for statistically demonstrable advantages of honors: alumni contribute with greater frequency and in greater amounts than non-honors alumni; honors students are retained in their institutions at a higher rate than their non-honors counterparts; and their four-year graduation rate is better, often much better, than that of non-honors students. These data will support arguments for more sections, additional faculty, enhanced facilities, and support for student activities. For the longer term, accessing and studying much more detailed information on honors curricula nationwide will be possible, producing the kind of research that has seldom been undertaken in honors and that is potentially of enormous importance, i.e., comparisons across programs and institutions.

Research in honors is rich with promise, but as Cyril Connolly once observed, “whom the gods wish to destroy, they first call promising” (109).

Although to a casual observer, it may appear that the world of honors is swimming in research, reality may be otherwise. Both narrative and statistical accounts of honors are so far inadequate to yield useful conclusions. In the early days of the honors journals, the scope of research on and in honors was often narrow, chronicling a particular program’s practices at a particular university. These singular examples may have been illustrative and useful in themselves but were often unique to an institution or program and not necessarily replicable in other settings, or they might have been so exceptional to a particular moment that they were destined to retain the status of anecdote. Such articles are now routinely rejected for publication, and JNCHC has primarily published research essays based on statistical analysis in the past several years, but the focus of the studies often remains local and narrow.

Then, too, statistical analyses present their own kinds of problems. Honors education provides many advantages to its students in gaining admission to medical school and graduate programs, competing for highly prestigious fellowships, and attaining desirable employment. The figures NCHC is collecting, which allow for documentation of this information and much more, are invaluable in validating the claims programs make about their achievements and their value to their students and institutions. These numbers are relevant and useful, but as Michel de Montaigne reminds us in “On the
Education of Children,” they are limited, and the true measure of any education is “not of the lad’s memory but of his life” (qtd. by Ketcham 32). Data do not reveal much about the deeper effects that honors education may have on students involved in the process or the quality of life it confers on those who pass through it. Quantification here is either difficult or meaningless. For instance, rating an education or an achievement, much less a life, as a 7 rather than 7.5 is beyond meaningless. As the late Samuel Schuman reminded the honors community in If Honors Students Were People: Holistic Honors Education, the experience of honors students requires not only figures but consideration of their fundamental humanity.

Data analysis is thus not adequate per se in the move toward research that is deeper, better, and more revealing about honors, its students, the processes of honors education, and the faculty involved in it. If data are to serve as one of the sources for future honors research, they must meet at least two criteria: they must be longitudinal, i.e., they must be collected over a period of time sufficient to look at lives beyond the years in which a student is in formal schooling, and they must be comparative to a degree not envisioned by current NCHC data collection initiatives. Research would need to address how honors students compare to their fellows not merely in terms of gaining admission to graduate programs and medical school but in the quality of their learning and the quality of their lives. Designing survey instruments to measure these qualities, determining how to collect the data, and identifying representative survey subjects would be beyond challenging.

 Undertaking a narrative and descriptive approach to honors programs is even more problematic as it attempts to go beyond local phenomena and suggest widespread or global characteristics of honors. As an historian, I might suggest national or international archives of honors, but even if such archives were necessary or feasible, physically or digitally, one can hardly imagine them as an equivalent of the Folger Shakespeare Library or the Beinecke Library at Yale. Other problems with this kind of portfolio approach to honors research would be where records would be physically or digitally housed, what they would contain, and how they would be funded; these are not trivial matters.

Another important issue that would seem to call more for a qualitative than a statistical approach is the effect of honors teaching on faculty, which remains virtually unexplored territory even though any honors director or dean knows that faculty compete vigorously for the privilege of teaching in honors because it benefits them both personally and professionally.
means for documenting the benefits of honors teaching should exist, but I have trouble envisioning what that means is.

Another difficult issue is whether or how honors counts in tenure and promotion. The editors now receive regular requests for the acceptance rates of both *JNCHC* and *Honors in Practice (HIP)*, which in both cases is about 60%. The editors also receive regular requests for letters of recommendation for promotion and tenure. No documentation exists, however, for how much honors research counts in promotion and tenure cases. Common sense would indicate that it might count more heavily in honors colleges and programs that grant tenure in honors; it might also count more heavily in institutions where teaching is a preeminent criterion for promotion and tenure; and it is likely to count less in doctoral-level research institutions. No data exist to support common sense on these matters, however. Perhaps honors can and should aspire to more and better research conducted according to high standards and carrying appropriate weight in tenure and promotion. Some proof would have to be offered of the high level of these standards, however. Inclusion of the journals and monographs in indexes such as ERIC, EBSCO, and CENGAGE, as well as the UNL Digital Commons, offers some evidence in that direction, as does the fact that, in 2014, NCHC publications had 43,483 downloads, with 20% of these coming from outside the United States. NCHC publications are nevertheless relatively new and unknown compared to the kinds of journals that command respect in tenure and promotion cases at research universities.

While many questions remain about research in honors, some immediate actions would be beneficial. More critical questioning and analytical bite would improve the quality of honors publication, as would research that is less self-referential, less caught inside a closed loop. Book reviews might be one strategy for widening the range of *JNCHC*, which has called for book reviews in the past but received almost none. Essays on such current works as Stephen Greenblatt’s *The Swerve*, John Brockman’s *What Should We Be Worried About*, and, Alexa Clay’s *The Misfit Economy* would be particularly appropriate. In both notable and paradoxical ways, especially in their willingness to confront major contemporary issues and to stay current with the latest developments in the world of academia, honors curricula all over the country are far ahead of research in honors in respect to dealing with the latest books relevant to honors education.

In a brilliant analysis of the nineteenth century in Britain, Lytton Strachey noted that “the history of the Victorian Age will never be written: we
know too much about it” (vii). Research in honors has yet to reach that stage, but there is promise that it will. Of course, promise brings its own dangers, but devoting some serious attention to setting an agenda for honors research might guide it toward usefulness, accuracy, relevance, and depth.

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The spring/summer 2004 issue of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* (*JNCHC*) was devoted exclusively to research in honors education. The issue was divided into three sections: the introductory Forum on Research in Honors, which revisited three essays published in *Forum for Honors* in 1984 and included two 2004 responses; Research in Honors; and Research about Honors. After I had revised my dissertation for the 2003 NCHC monograph *Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices*, I incorporated some of my unused dissertation material for two pieces in the issue, one being a response essay in the Forum, “Research in Honors and Composition,” and the other an article in the Research in Honors section, “Faculty Compensation and Course Assessment in Honors Composition,” using material that my dissertation director thought was too political to survive the dissertation defense.

A little over a decade later, as NCHC celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, *JNCHC* is contemplating the future of research in, on, and about honors. In his lead essay, “An Agenda for the Future of Research,” George Mariz compares the disciplinary research he conducts in European history to research in
honors, which he argues “is another species altogether: it has more nebulous standards of worthiness, and there are no archives, bodies of scientific knowledge, established procedures, or information-rich data sets.” To that end, I wish to create an *ad hoc* bibliography for the purposes of archiving qualitative and quantitative research on honors composition to date, providing a context for interdisciplinary work in honors composition with sources from both honors education and composition studies, and initiating directions for future research using multiple methodologies in each field.

The three main areas of inquiry for honors composition during the past decade have been programmatic issues, pedagogical approaches, and student performance. I focus on programmatic issues, advocating for the vital role that honors composition plays within honors programs and colleges by aiding students with the transition from high school writing to college-level research, which in turn increases program retention rates, particularly with the expanding CUR-based emphasis on honors theses and capstone projects. Other researchers have explored pedagogy and performance, such as Jaime Lynn Longo’s 2008 dissertation, *Forging Connections: Development of Academic Argument in First Year Honors Students’ Writing*. As a doctoral candidate in English at Temple University, Longo conducted “ethnographic observation, case study interviews, and a code-driven analysis of student writing” to determine whether honors students were “constructing effective academic arguments after a year spent in the program”:

This study demonstrates that, by the end of their first year, most Honors students in this program have begun to construct effective, and sometimes even exceptional, academic arguments. . . . Moreover, my research findings suggest that Honors students are not fundamentally more capable of creating academic arguments than general university students; rather, programmatic and professorial writing expectations, as demonstrated through in-class instruction, type and scope of assignments given, feedback given in conferences and on papers, and learning community participation, challenge Honors students and spur their development as writers in ways that the general university population does not experience. (v)

Longo has codified what honors compositionists have long reported anecdotally: honors students are not necessarily better writers than general students but improve as writers at a faster pace through challenging instruction in honors composition courses. The complete study is available through
dissertation databases, but Longo took an administrative position as Director of Academic Support Programs at LaSalle University and therefore did not pursue publication of the dissertation, nor did she continue research on honors composition. Nevertheless, honors educators looking to argue the value of requiring honors students to take first-year honors composition courses in the face of increasing AP and dual enrollment credits should seek out and include Longo’s findings in their literature reviews. The fact that Longo’s work has not been formally published, however, points to the two-fold problem that (1) research on honors composition may not find its way to publication in an appropriate venue and (2) studies that have achieved publication are few and far between.

In the bibliography below, I have compiled for future honors composition researchers a comprehensive list of honors composition publications and disciplinary presentations to date. Recently, I had the opportunity to read a paper in which the author claimed that he could find “scant research” on honors composition and subsequently failed to list any of the existing works from either composition studies or honors education. My intent here, therefore, is to provide a starting place for future researchers to begin their literature reviews and to decide which research agenda to pursue. Because I focused on postsecondary education, I have not included works on K–12 gifted and honors students. To facilitate readability, I have categorized items by publication type, listed them in chronological order, and provided commentary on each venue rather than annotations on individual entries. Any unintentional omissions or oversights are mine alone. Complete MLA bibliographic citations are provided at the end of the article.

**JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL**

*JNCHC* is the premier scholarly research journal for postsecondary honors education. According to its editorial policy, “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.” *JNCHC* is an important venue for publications on honors composition because developing students’ skills in critical thinking, argumentation, and written research affects student performance not just in the English classroom but throughout major coursework and in key components of honors education such as CUR-based projects, experiential learning programs, and thesis and capstone requirements.

5.1 (2004): Annmarie Guzy, “Faculty Compensation and Course Assessment in Honors Composition.”


**HONORS IN PRACTICE**

*HIP* is the annual “nuts and bolts” publication for innovative practices in postsecondary honors educators and is an appropriate venue for essays about hands-on practices in the honors composition classroom. Such articles are of interest not only to honors compositionists but also to honors professionals in other disciplines who are engaged in writing across the honors curriculum and to honors administrators who would like to measure how honors writing instruction can increase student publications, presentations, and retention/graduation rates.


**NCHC MONOGRAPH CHAPTERS**

The NCHC Monograph Series includes foundational book-length works and anthologies on various topics in postsecondary honors education. In addition to the *Honors Composition* monograph, chapters on honors composition have been included in other entries.

Setting the Table for Diversity (2010): Lisa Coleman, “Psyche as Text: Diversity Issues and First-Year Honors Composition.”

CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION (CCCC)

No major scholarly journal in composition studies, including College Composition and Communication, Journal of Advanced Composition, and Research in the Teaching of English, has published an article on honors composition. One overriding reason is the Marxist foundation of the discipline’s inescapable “English teacher as savior” narrative, beginning with the English language publication of Paolo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed in 1970: the English teacher will fight the oppressive banking method of education by teaching underserved students how to think, speak, and write critically and thus how to question authority and overcome traditional socioeconomic barriers. Canonical works on basic and remedial writing that reinforce this narrative include Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing by Mina Shaughnessy, after whom the MLA named its Mina P. Shaughnessy Prize for “an outstanding scholarly book in the fields of language, culture, literacy, and literature that has a strong application to the teaching of English” (mla.org), and Lives on the Boundary: A Moving Account of the Struggles and Achievements of America’s Educationally Underprepared by Mike Rose, who earned the 1991 CCCC Outstanding Book Award and the 2012 CCCC Exemplar Award.

The myth that the English teacher will sacrifice any semblance of a personal life to save at-risk students from both intellectual and socioeconomic impoverishment has also been popularized in such successful film adaptations as Dangerous Minds and Freedom Writers. Even the real-life subjects of these stories, however, cannot live up to the glamorized cinematic versions of themselves and their efforts; I attended graduate school during the 1993–94 academic year with LouAnne Johnson, played by Michelle Pfeiffer in Dangerous Minds, and I remember her writing a twelve-page letter to Disney about how much they distorted her original book, My Posse Don’t Do Homework. Under the umbrella of this driving narrative, though, is very little space for honors education, which is (mis)perceived as serving a privileged population of the intellectual and socioeconomic elite who do not need to be saved through the martyrdom of English faculty.
Honors has been slightly more visible at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication. The theme for the 2004 CCCC conference was “Making Composition Matter: Students, Citizens, Institutions, Advocacy,” so, fresh from the publication of the Honors Composition monograph, I submitted a proposal entitled “Composition Matters in Honors Education.” The proposal was accepted and assigned to a panel on differently-abled students, which I was also asked to chair. The other two papers for the session, however, focused on physical aspects of differently-abled: “Disability (Difference) Matters: Disability Studies in Two Composition Classrooms” and “Designing for Differently-Abled Bodies: Single-Sourcing Access to Information.” That this grouping of presentations seems odd probably reflects the uncertainty of how to categorize honors students. A review of the CCCC conference programs from 2004–2015, including my presentation, produced five additional items, including three honors-specific panels and two honors papers that were included in general panels.

2004 Session: (Re)Constructing Academic Spaces for Differently-Abled Students
Speaker 3 of 3: Annmarie Guzy, “Composition Matters in Honors Education”

2006 Session: Research in Composition: Are We on the Right Track?
Speaker 3 of 3: Jaime Longo, “Tracking Writing: Honors Writers, Basic Writers, and the Development of Argument”

2007 Session: First-Year Honors Composition: The Other Margin of College Composition
Speakers: C. McKenzie, Lisa Coleman, and Kimberly Helmer

2010 Session: First-Year Honors Composition (FYHC): A Quantitative and Case Study
Speakers: C. McKenzie (chair), Kim Helmer, and Karen Peirce

2012 Session: Constructing Student Identity: Honor [sic] Placement, Peer Review, and Student Affairs Practices
Speaker 1 of 3: CB McKenzie, “First-Year Honors Composition: Data from the Other Margin of College First-Year Composition”
2013  Session: *Characterizing the Honors Research Writing Course: Student Identity, Digital Literacy, and an Interrogative Approach to Research*

Heidi Naylor, “Conceptions and Misconceptions of the Honors Composition Student: A Quantitative-Qualitative Study”

Christi Nogle, “Digital Promises in Honors Composition”


In the early 2000’s, Charles McKenzie (known variously as C. McKenzie, CB McKenzie, or simply McKenzie) was a doctoral candidate in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English at the University of Arizona. While completing his dissertation on postidentification rhetoric, he was also sufficiently motivated by the lack of publications on honors composition to create the online journal *FYHC: The Journal of First-Year Honors Composition (and related matters)*, which published issues in 2006 and 2011. As editor of *FYHC*, he pursued an agenda for *FYHC* as well for the subdiscipline of composition studies that would encompass not only composition courses designed for programmatic support of honors programs and colleges but also departmental composition courses, separate from honors programs, serving general students who had earned high ACT or SAT English scores. The journal’s advisory board included notable disciplinary experts such as Theresa Enos (McKenzie’s dissertation director), Stuart Brown, Jan Swearingen, Marvin Diogenes, Sondra Perl, Victor Villanueva, and honors-based composition voices from Lisa Coleman and myself. Each issue contained the following sections: Lead Article, Pedagogy, History, Student Work(s), WPA [Writing Program Administration] Views, Review, Editorial(s), and End Note. The journal’s brief lifespan might be attributed to its being a personal project that became difficult to sustain without either the institutional support of an organization or a sufficient base of researchers looking to publish their findings on honors composition.
2006 Contents

- Lead Article: Victor Villaneuva, “The Rhetorics of the New Racism or The Master’s Four Tropes”
- Pedagogy: Marvin Diogenes, “Too-Muchness in (First-Year Honors) Composition: An Essay”
- History: Annmarie Guzy, “A History and Context for the Scholarly Study of First-Year Honors Composition”
- Student Work(s): Mathew Knight, Pamela Pierce, Jeremy Norden-Paul, Katelyn Sadler, and Emily Schoen, “Student Work(s) in FYHC”
- WPA Views: Anne-Marie Hall, “The Evolution of an Honors FYC,” and Thomas P. Miller, “Cutting from the Bottom, or the Top?”
- Review: Lisa L. Coleman, “Teaching Conductivity in FYHC: How to Improve the World: A Review and Application of Gregory L. Ulmer’s Internet Invention: from Literacy to Electracy”
- Editorial: C. McKenzie, “First-Year Honors Composition as an ‘Issue’”
- End Note: C. McKenzie, “End Note”

2011 Contents

- Lead Article: Carol Poster, “Professional Writing at York University: Honours Writing in Canadian Context”
- Pedagogy: Lauren Camille Mason, “Backseat Teaching: Reflections on the Instructor’s Role in a Student-Driven Project”
- Student Work(s): Alise Hofacre, “If Uncle Vanya Were a Photograph . . .”
- End Note: David Reamer, “Moving First-Year Honors Composition beyond Lore and Anecdotes”

[Note: the Coleman, Guzy, Hall, and Miller pieces from the 2006 issue were republished in the 2011 issue.]
THE FUTURE OF RESEARCH IN HONORS COMPOSITION, 2016 AND BEYOND

In the face of exponential increases in AP and dual enrollment credits and the threatened extinction of the liberal general education coursework that forms the foundations of honors, honors composition specialists must definitively establish the crucial role that writing instruction plays in helping honors students move from high school writing to university-level, discipline-specific essays, reports, and research projects. Heather Camp argues in “Generative Intersections: Supporting Honors through College Composition”:

While the pressure to accelerate progress to graduation threatens to erase composition from the honors program map, activity in writing studies is building a new case for its presence in the curriculum. A closer look reveals that composition and honors share more interests and commitments than one might initially assume. It behooves both parties to explore these common interests and to discover anew how composition might enrich honors education. (65–66)

Whether this exploration and enrichment come in the form of a fundamentally re-envisioned first-year honors composition course or an evolution to advanced, upper-division writing requirements, such as honors business, technical, or science writing classes, future researchers will help determine the course of action. The most pressing concern for honors composition researchers is to move beyond anecdotal reporting, as Longo did, and demonstrate through qualitative and quantitative methodologies that allowing honors students to use standardized test scores to leapfrog from high school assignments to junior-level university coursework without additional writing instruction not only shortchanges the development of their critical thinking and argumentation skills but also decreases thesis/capstone completion and overall honors program retention rates. Honors composition as a discipline—or, more accurately, as a confluence of the two disciplines of composition studies and honors education—still needs interdisciplinary exploration and development by an increasing number of scholars in multiple venues, and I eagerly await what the next decade will bring.
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A Tradition unlike Any Other: 
Research on the Value of an Honors Senior Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

If you are a fan of golf and, more specifically, the Masters Golf Tournament, then the title of this article should sound familiar. As an avid sports fan and an occasional golf player, when I hear those words I immediately think of green grass, Tiger Woods’s first green jacket, and the soft-spoken Dr. Condoleezza Rice as the newest member of the Augusta National Golf Club (home of the Masters for non-golf fans). The Masters is the first of four major U.S. golf tournaments played each year, a tradition going back to 1934. What makes this tournament quintessential to the sport and distinguished from other tournaments is its unique course; always held at this particular golf club, the invitational format ensures a small number of players.

Similar to the uniqueness of The Masters, an honors senior thesis introduces students into a world of scholarship and professional activity in a way that no single course, either semester- or year-long, can do (Anderson, Lyons,
and Weiner). Many honors educators consider honors thesis work to be the defining honors experience. For graduate schools, employers, and the students themselves, nothing demonstrates the value of an honors education quite like the senior thesis.

The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) understands the value and tradition of the honors senior thesis, listing it in the Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College and recently publishing a thesis handbook in the latest addition to the monograph series (Anderson, Lyons, and Weiner). That said, as the association begins to focus on research in honors, prioritizing initiatives and defining the terms of such research, I would like to make a case for research on the honors senior thesis. Data about the thesis should be informative about more than best practices, also correlating with data on honors completion, retention, and student persistence as well as identifying the distinction and meaning of “graduating with honors” at member institutions. We should be tracking students who drop out of an honors college or program to avoid completing a senior thesis but still persist to graduate, just not with honors. We need to know how many institutions regularly assess their senior thesis requirement through surveys administered to students, faculty, and thesis advisors/directors. We should know how many NCHC institutions require an honors senior thesis to “graduate with honors” and how many do not require it but still give their students the distinction of “graduating with honors.” As the thesis coordinator for the University of South Carolina Honors College (SCHC), I am trying to track these data on our campus and can present the data that has been collected. I can also speculate how further research, quantitative or mixed-methods, might offer insight into a tradition that many of us have on our campuses. Further, I can offer an example of using a mixed-methods approach based on our initiatives at SCHC while offering recommendations for future research.

**RESEARCH ON THE HONORS SENIOR THESIS**

In the lead essay for this series, George Mariz says that “research in honors is another species altogether [than disciplinary research;] . . . there are no archives, bodies of scientific knowledge, established procedures, or information-rich data sets.” Peter Sederberg details the struggles of surveying honors colleges in the NCHC monograph *The Honors College Phenomenon*. In the summer of 2004, the NCHC Ad Hoc Task Force on Honors Colleges distributed a survey to 68 self-identified honors colleges affiliated with the association. The response rate was low; only 38 responded while three
indicated that they were incorrectly identified as an honors college. Other survey issues involved honors colleges that were left off the list and still others that may have been misidentified as honors colleges. Based on these problems, the task force committee considered the results a subset of a subset of a subset (Sederberg 27). Nevertheless, the results currently provide the only national data that indicate the value and importance of the honors senior thesis, which was the most common requirement for earning honors distinction (65.7%).

In search of quantitative data on the number of institutions that have an honors senior thesis, we used NCHC’s *Official Online NCHC Guide to Honors Colleges and Programs*. Out of the 176 institutions listed in the table of contents, 72 mention having an honors senior thesis as part of their honors requirements. Notable differences occur in the wording about an honors senior thesis, specifying “required” or “optional,” for instance, with the latter referring to various ways of graduating with or without having to complete a thesis. Without further information provided in the guide, our initial research stopped here; it could be continued, however, by taking an in-depth look at each institution online or making verbal contact.

Other research related to the honors senior thesis fits into the category of best practices, not so much on data collection. A review of articles published in *Honors in Practice* and *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* yield themes such as mentoring honors students in the thesis process, use of pre-thesis workshops, re-visioning the senior thesis, and preparing honors work for publication (Buckner; Vila; Briggs; Coey & Haynes). While this information is beneficial in revealing recent trends on the honors senior thesis, it provides only a snapshot of the way an honors senior thesis functions at an institution and does not contribute to a national conversation on theses.

Research on the senior thesis process involves the difficult task of defining a valid research question for such study. Joseph Maxwell states that a research question must explain what a study will attempt to learn or understand. The dangers of developing research questions too focused or broad exist in any study, but in the case of the honors senior thesis, convolution is an imminent threat given the different types of honors colleges and programs and different meanings of “graduation with honors.” In the choice of a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approach, I propose a mixed-methods approach based on the data collected in the South Carolina Honors College. While I agree with Mariz that data used for honors research must be sufficiently longitudinal and far more comparative than it is currently, mixed-methods
research provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell and Clark). Quantitative research can limit understanding of the setting in which people talk and, by definition, does not include the voices of participants (Banks). While qualitative research compensates for this weakness, its observations and interpretations are typically subjective. Combining the strengths of both approaches counteracts their respective weaknesses and provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell and Clark).

Survey implementation was once acceptable as the primary quantitative measure of student data; however, focus groups, document analysis, interviews, and personal observations can also provide information for an enhanced data-analysis process (Brannen). The quantitative data collected can provide numbers, e.g., number of institutions with an honors thesis requirement or percentage rates of honors completion, but qualitative research helps us understand the meaning of the data and influences on participants’ actions, e.g., what effect an honors senior thesis has on postgraduate careers and whether we are using best practices in the thesis process. A mixed-methods approach suggests the following research questions that can be useful to the NCHC as the organization establishes its research agenda:

- Are honors completion and graduation related to completing an honors senior thesis?

- What effect does an honors senior thesis and the process of completing it have on students’ ability to persist to degree completion?

- What is the role of assessing an honors senior thesis in determining the significance of an honors education in the twenty-first century?

**SOUTH CAROLINA HONORS COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY**

The South Carolina Honors College (SCHC) holds to the tradition of an honors senior thesis, dating back to its founding in 1970. The senior thesis process allows a student to complete a creative project or traditional thesis, applying the knowledge gained in the major(s) and demonstrating a practical command of research techniques and writing while proving the student’s ability to work independently. We encourage our students to be creative with their projects; we avoid constraining them to topics only within their discipline as they work with the best faculty on campus to produce a thesis that exemplifies the value of an honors education. While our students write and
create interesting and original senior theses, their work is rooted in writing and researching a topic.

When I arrived at the SCHC in the fall of 2013, the department was in the midst of a staff transition, and a newly hired associate dean was fulfilling the role of thesis coordinator. When I became thesis coordinator, I reviewed the results from the May 2013 senior survey that, among other questions, asked students to comment on the senior thesis process. In a ranking scale of negative, neutral, and positive, the majority were neutral. The students provided valuable critiques and feedback, the common themes being a lack of communication and organization, a need for flexibility, and a lack of clarity in the process.

To address some of these issues, I used a qualitative approach to answer questions that the data could not tell me. I asked questions not just of our staff but also of students currently writing a thesis. I contacted faculty who were or had served as thesis directors and a few colleagues on campus who worked with our department. My primary question was “Why complete an honors senior thesis?” I believed that the responses would not only help students and thesis directors deal with the challenges of an honors senior thesis but also inspire and encourage those who would continue the SCHC tradition of writing a thesis. The sample was small, but the responses indicated that this tradition leads to tangible benefits for the student and university, serving as the capstone of an SCHC education. For instance, a quarter of our students’ senior theses result in articles published in national journals; others are related to innovative research conducted with a faculty member leading in his/her field; some students explore their creative side in writing anthologies, novels, or poems for future publication; and still others develop thesis topics that may transition to entrepreneurial opportunities.

Since 2013, the number of students in an entering class who have completed the required SCHC curriculum, including a senior thesis, and graduated with honors has increased from approximately 70% to an expected 80% by August 2016. The numbers tell a story, give us hope, and allow us to say “job well done.” Nevertheless, challenges exist at the institutional level that reflect issues for research in honors on the national level. We need to address the following questions:

- What counts as research when students can choose between a traditional thesis or creative project such as writing a play or book?
- How can honors support students who choose a topic outside of their discipline?
• How can thesis guidelines be written to ensure quality and consistency for every type of thesis?
• How can honors induce faculty to work with students on a thesis when the work and the kind of research involved do not count in the tenure/promotion process?
• Is requiring that the thesis be connected to the student’s academic major the best strategy to produce high-quality research?

The assessment and research methods employed on our campus to answer these questions will be different from those of our peer institutions depending on the academic disciplines of the researchers, the purposes and uses of research, and the definitions of what constitutes research.

CONCLUSION

Our present and future assessment at SCHC is only one example within the national landscape of the honors senior thesis. A mixed-methods approach in a survey of honors colleges and programs across the country could illustrate the value of an honors senior thesis numerically and perhaps also answer why the thesis is valuable. We depend on our intuition and experiences to handle the challenges of an honors senior thesis, which can include lack of enthusiasm among thesis writers, unavailability of faculty to serve as advisors, and inadequate course preparation for the thesis. However, we need strong research to supplement our intuition and experience in order to assure the tradition of the honors senior thesis as an essential component of honors education. Research on this topic would be a beneficial contribution to the body of literature on the value of honors education.

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Research In, On, or About Honors

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In his thought provoking essay in this issue, George Mariz makes a call for “devoting some serious attention to setting an agenda for honors research.” He tells us that research in honors is a lot less common than it would appear to a casual observer, writing that “Both narrative and statistical accounts of honors are so far inadequate to yield useful conclusions.” Honors administrators, he contends, need this sort of analysis in order to “be able to argue with hard evidence for the . . . demonstrable advantages of honors.” As a result of these concerns, he writes, “Research in honors has become a priority for the National Collegiate Honors Council.”

I wholeheartedly agree both that it is surprising that more data haven’t been gathered or analyzed and that such analyses will help administrators demonstrate the significant benefits of honors education for both honors students and the larger colleges and universities we serve. I also support a renewed focus on research within the broader honors community. I am struck, though, by what I think is a misplaced preposition in both Mariz’s essay and in the broader discussions at the NCHC. While usually tagged with the phrase “research in honors,” these conversations are usually about
research on honors. We need to clarify that there is—and should be—a great deal of research in honors that is not on honors. Like Ted Estess before me, I am unsatisfied with the view that “‘Honors scholarship’ [means] scholarship about Honors programs, their students, curricula, and institutional settings” (26). To suggest that what qualifies as research in honors is strictly research about what happens in honors is to ignore some of the most creative, innovative, unique, and honors-like research that we and our students do. If we tell ourselves, and the broader communities we serve, that the only—or the privileged—research in honors is research on honors, we do ourselves and our students a grave disservice.

Mariz begins his essay by outlining how disciplinary norms for what counts as research are generally clear, yet in honors no such standards are specified. He uses this comparison to pursue further the question of how research about honors should be conducted, suggesting an inclusive approach that employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches since neither is adequate on its own. Mariz makes a few concrete suggestions: research on honors should be both longitudinal and comparative, and we need to examine the effect of honors not just on students but on faculty as well. I agree that his suggestions will improve our ability—and particularly the ability of our administrators—to defend honors and justify our role in the broader university.

I want to claim, however, that we already do unique research in honors. Rather than settle for better justifications of honors programs, we also need collectively to articulate what counts for research within the honors framework and what makes research in honors so full of power and potential. (For the record, I think we should encourage research on and about honors from outside of honors as well, as a way of being less self-referential and “caught inside a closed loop,” as Mariz describes it.) Those of us who work in honors often do so out of a vision of scholarship that incorporates and builds upon disciplinary expertise that we have previously developed while also explicitly connecting to the goals of well-rounded and grounded liberal arts education (see Estess). Calling for greater, more rigorous research in honors when we really mean research on or about honors ignores precisely much of the exciting, rigorous, and important scholarship that happens within the purview of honors education. The emergent focus on research in honors should, I suggest, invigorate our commitment to put into practice precisely the style of scholarship to which we are committed: interdisciplinary, integrative, and community-engaged as well as inclusive of and empowering to students.
These thoughts are prompted by an effort just beginning at the University of New Mexico Honors College, where I am an assistant professor. We have created a task force with the aim of discussing and making recommendations about how to better integrate methodological instruction into the honors curriculum. In our inaugural discussions, the question has arisen whether we want to replicate the offerings of math or other departments but with an honors twist or if honors students are better served by unique methodological training not available elsewhere on campus. The question, in other words, is whether research in honors does or should rely on disciplinary methods, or if there is something unique about the interdisciplinary research of the type we expect from our students that requires its own methodological training.

Similarly, at the UNM Honors College we ask ourselves regularly what it means to teach students how to synthesize multiple disciplines and truly engage in an interdisciplinary way. I am of the mind that honors-level interdisciplinary research is tough work, work that we cannot expect of our students by relying only on disciplinary methodological training. So, what does it mean to conduct effective interdisciplinary honors research? I suggest that this type of question is what we need to be asking about research in honors, both for faculty scholarship and for research conducted by or including students.

Our task force has therefore begun to ask how we should train students for honors-level work. Our discussions focus on questions about (1) what courses we can offer that will prepare students for a senior capstone experience and for lifelong critical, interdisciplinary engagement and (2) what elements are crucial to interdisciplinary, community-engaged research. These questions are deeply related to the broader question we should be asking ourselves as honors faculty: how can we better engage in research that embodies the honors framework and mission?

These questions may be particularly salient for honors programs and colleges located at research universities, where the research imperative for tenure and promotion is likely more pressing. At the UNM Honors College, faculty members have a somewhat privileged position relative to those in other universities: we are tenure-stream faculty with significant research requirements for tenure and promotion, yet we are housed a hundred percent in honors without being shared with other departments and disciplines. Tenure recommendations come from within our college although faculty members representing disciplinary expertise outside of honors also sit on our tenure committees, reflecting the broader expectation that faculty in honors straddle
and negotiate both disciplinary and interdisciplinary goals of scholarship. That the primary evaluation of the quality of our work comes from within honors, though, gives us a unique freedom to examine what it means to conduct honors-style research and how to best serve our personal and professional goals, our college, and our students—a great opportunity for pursuing the type of research we want to encourage within the honors tradition. Our collective task, however, is to be more explicit about precisely what form this research should take.

Consequently, in addition to calling for more research about the practices and benefits of honors programs and colleges, I propose that we begin collectively to imagine what makes research within honors unique. As a place to start, I suggest the following special characteristics of honors research: our scholarship is inclusive of students; we integrate research and teaching; we are often highly engaged in and with the broader communities where we are housed; and our work is both interdisciplinary and able to address non-specialist audiences. We need to develop among ourselves ideas for best-practices and standards for honors research, both as criteria for tenure and promotion and as a way of improving the services we provide to students. We must think deeply—beyond research on honors—about what makes research in honors unique and powerful.

REFERENCE


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PORTZ-PRIZE-WINNING ESSAY, 2015
"Flee from the Worship of Idols": Becoming Christian in Roman Corinth

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INTRODUCTION

The religious contexts in which early Christian communities grew were important factors in the first-century development of Christianity, affecting what it meant to become a Christian either as a convert from a background in Judaism or as a convert from a background in Greek, Roman, or Egyptian cults. Surrounding religions and cultural norms strongly influenced the first Christian communities in urban environments throughout the Roman Empire because the first generation of Christian converts came directly from other religious constructs. As the early Christians distinguished themselves from the Diaspora Jewish communities in which they originated and actively pursued Gentile converts, the fusion of believers with differing religious backgrounds caused uncertainty and conflict over acceptable beliefs and practices within Christian communities.
Much of the historiography of early Christianity dwells on Christianity’s relationship to Judaism. The tendency to highlight the Christian-Jewish relationship is natural since Christianity originated in Israel as a Jewish sect. The conflict throughout the New Testament between the “Judaizers” and Paul lends itself to questions about Christianity’s relationship to the Jewish religion and culture: how members of Christian communities were different from those remaining in Jewish communities, when the differentiation occurred, and the extent to which Judaism was monolithic. Answering these questions has occupied volumes upon volumes, and writers such as Judith Lieu continue to address them, especially in Neither Jew nor Greek?, her collection of essays.

The discussion of group interactions between the Jewish and Christian communities, however, often does not include the surrounding polytheists or henotheists as a third partner despite Christianity’s rapid expansion into the Roman world, and, even when such discussions do occur, they are often deficient. Historians such as William H. C. Frend have treated this topic by discussing only the role of emperors and governors in persecution of the Christians, leaving out an account of ordinary people in the polytheistic population. Treatments of interactions between Christians and members of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian cults generally center on encounters between elite members of the two societies. Yet the Roman emperors did not represent the beliefs or practices of all of Greco-Roman society, nor did the Apostle Paul embody the entirety of Christian thought.

Left unanswered by this elite-centered approach are questions about the interactions and differences between the general population of Christians and polytheists/henotheists. Writings from non-elite citizens of this time period are rarely extant, leading most historians to focus on leaders such as the Apostle Paul. Several historians, though, have made efforts to fill this hole. Wayne Meeks, in The First Urban Christians, attempted to read between the lines of Paul’s letters to understand the Christian communities. Meeks admirably endeavored to reconstruct early urban Christian society but did not discuss the Christians in parallel with their neighbors who followed other cults; he focused on Paul’s conception of an ideal Christian instead of trying to discover the lives of non-elite Christians. In Pagans and Christians, Robin Lane Fox did discuss both groups, attempting to describe the transition of the European world from polytheism to Christianity, but he rarely explained how the two groups coincided at the same time and in the same place, which is the focus of my essay.
Given the difficulty of providing evidence for broad statements about religious communities throughout the Roman Empire, I have chosen to narrow my focus to one particular setting: Roman Corinth in the first century. Analyzing the population in one location during a specific time frame allows clear comparisons among Christians, Jews, and worshipers of Roman, Greek, and Egyptian cults instead of general statements about how most Christians related to most Jews or polytheists throughout the Empire. Corinth is a compelling choice for this type of study because its population contained significant numbers of Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Christians. Its role as a seaport in the center of the Roman Empire ensured a constant interchange of individuals from throughout the Empire. The Apostle Paul, Strabo, Appian, Apuleis, Plutarch, Pausanius, and other ancient writers who reference Corinth provide ample primary source material. These sources, as well as architectural evidence, suggest an interpretation of the Christian, Jewish, Roman, and Greek populations in Corinth and provide a platform for discussing the effects of the local religious environment on the development of early Christianity.

In first-century Corinth, the influx of Gentile converts with backgrounds in various polytheistic cults influenced the Christian community and motivated Paul to write letters to the Christians urging them to leave behind parts of their cultic backgrounds he saw as sinful. Paul’s efforts to correct the Christians’ behavior imply that at least some of them were involved in the activities that Paul warned them to stop. Paul’s commands should not be read as a synopsis of what the entire Christian community believed or how they behaved but rather as an insight into those members of the Christian community who opposed Paul, thus motivating him to argue his case against them on various points. An analysis of Paul’s warnings and advice for the Christians, combined with a discussion of the Corinthian Jewish and polytheistic cults based on information gathered from other ancient literary sources and archeological studies of Corinth, provides a way to understand the difficulties and social pressures that converts with backgrounds in Judaism or polytheistic cults faced in making the transition to Christianity. Converts struggled to leave the religious constructs of their pasts as they joined the Christian community, showing that Christianity in Corinth was not formed in a vacuum but in constant interaction with the religious constructs that surrounded it.

The individuals who converted to Paul’s Christianity brought with them beliefs and behaviors rooted in their past religious experiences. Whether they

\[\text{For a similar methodology, see Bruce W. Winter, After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change.}\]
were originally a part of the Diaspora Jewish community or one of many polytheistic or henotheistic cults, all members of the early Christian community converted from another religious construct, and the integration of people from different religious backgrounds raised questions about what was proper practice for Christians. Paul’s letters to the Corinthians offered his answers to these questions, but his arguments show that his thoughts were only a part of the conversation; he was in dialogue with groups within the Corinthian church who had already formed other opinions. These groups were strongly influenced by their religious backgrounds, of which there were many when Paul arrived in the diverse city of Corinth to tell of Jesus of Nazareth.

“TITIUS JUSTUS, A GENTILE WHO WORSHIPED GOD.”

According to the narrative of Acts 18, set in the 50s CE, the Apostle Paul was run out of the Jewish synagogue in Corinth after successfully converting its leader, Crispus, to his message of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. As was his custom throughout his missionary journeys, Paul responded to the Jewish rejection by turning to the non-Jews of the city (Acts 11:6; all references to and quotations of the Bible are from the New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, New Revised Standard Version edited by Michael D. Coogan). He moved his ministry to the house of a Gentile convert named Titius Justus. Having relocated down the street from the synagogue, Paul continued his evangelism in Corinth for eighteen more months, establishing a community of Jesus followers that has endured since. Though Titius Justus is a Roman name, Acts described him as one who feared the Jewish God. First century Corinth, with its layers of ethnic and religious complexity, is well represented by Titius Justus, the Roman worshiper of the Jewish God turned Christian.

The diversity of Corinth demonstrated by Titius Justus was rooted in its dynamic political history that transformed the city from independent Greek πόλις (polis—city-state) to Roman colony. Once a flourishing center of Greek culture and commerce, Corinth led a league of city-states in rebellion against the expansion of Roman dominance over the Aegean Peninsula in 146 BCE. The Romans overwhelmed the Greek resistance and chose to make an example of Corinth by razing the city, killing the male population, and selling the women and children into slavery. The city was left desolate, and the Greek period of Corinth’s history ended. From 146–44 BCE, Corinth remained almost completely deserted, with only a small number of Corinthian descendants lingering among the ruins. Not all of the buildings were
destroyed during the Roman sack of the city, but they suffered from years of neglect. During this period, Corinth was a political non-entity.

Recognizing the strategic location Corinth once held, Julius Caesar ordered the colonization of Corinth in 44 BCE, a hundred years after its destruction. The new colony was populated by Romans and quickly began to regain its former prominence among the cities of the region, firmly under Roman control. By the time of Claudius in 44 CE, Corinth had become the capital city of the province of Achaea, and during Claudius’s reign Paul arrived in the city, nearly a hundred years after its refounding as a Roman colony (Engels 14–19; J. Walters 400–403; Polybius 38.9.2–18.12; Strabo 8.6.23). Because of Corinth's history, the city was both Greek and Roman: appearing Roman and functioning as a Roman city but maintaining strong Greek roots. The Roman colonists, though mostly ethnic Greek freedmen, brought with them the Roman form of government. Moreover, many of the original colonists were Roman citizens with full Latin names, as found on inscriptions and coins (Engels 68). According to Pausanias, the new Corinth was “no longer inhabited by any of the old Corinthians” (2.1.2), yet Corinth's location was still the same, surrounded by countryside filled with Greeks who made their way to the new city. The private language within the colony was chiefly Greek as witnessed by graffiti markings, but Latin was used for all public monuments and government business. The layout of the forum and much of the new architecture was Roman in style, but the old Greek temples that remained were still used, as well as the old Corinth's theater and water fountains. Corinth in many ways gained a strongly Roman civic identity given its colonial charter and Roman population, but as the city grew and added Greek residents, elements of Corinth's past entered the civic identity once again (Walters 408–410; Engels 95–113). Though Corinth became more Greek, the Greek elites had to become more Roman to navigate the political world of the Empire. The citizens of newly founded Roman Corinth learned how to navigate both cultures, maintaining Corinth's Greek heritage while presenting a Roman appearance to the world (Millis 30–35).

By the end of the first century, the urban center of Corinth had a population of about 80,000, with an additional 20,000 in the surrounding rural areas (Engels 33, 79–84, Appendix 2).2 Corinth became once again the commercial center of the Aegean Peninsula as merchants sailing from one end of the

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2Engels notes that Aresteides wrote of Corinth as the largest city in Roman Greece, but Engel’s guesses at the size of Corinth’s population are done without census data, making them tentative at best (Appendix 2).
Empire to the other chose to ferry their goods across the Isthmus of Corinth rather than risk the dangerous seas south of the Cape of Malea. Tourists flocked to Corinth bi-annually for the Isthmian Games, a festival of athletic competition more renowned than the Olympic Games to the west. In addition to the games, religious cults devoted to Greek, Roman, and Egyptian gods attracted visitors with impressive temples and regular festivals. Corinth’s heritage as an ancient Greek city included special prominence in several Greek cults, especially those of Aphrodite and Poseidon, whom Corinthian coins often displayed as advertisements of religious services in their honor. Roman religion was also well represented in Corinth, which became the center of the federal imperial cult of Achaea, serving as the focal point of emperor worship in the province. The Egyptian deities Isis and Serapis had a strong presence in Corinth as well, with multiple temples around the city. Finally, Jews who came to the city for commerce or to live had several synagogues within Corinth, and the local courts granted them official recognition. The arrival of Paul and his message of Jesus was only a small addition to the already complex religious scene in first-century Corinth (Engels 92–100).

The popularity of Corinth as a destination for citizens of the Empire, whether for business, pleasure, or religion, ensured that the city fostered diverse interactions among people of various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Titius Justus exemplifies these layers of interaction as a Roman who spoke Greek, worshiped with the Jews, and converted to Christianity. The early Corinthian Christian community was composed of individuals converted from Jewish, Greek, or Roman ethnic backgrounds who had previously worshiped the Jewish God or Greek, Roman, and Egyptian gods or any combination of them. As these converts joined the Christian community, they brought beliefs and practices from their former religious experiences with them. The blending of differing religious backgrounds caused behavioral conflicts between members of the Christian community, especially between converts from a polytheistic background and those from a Jewish background.

“IT IS VEILED TO THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING”

Upon his arrival in Corinth, Paul encountered a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla. Natives of the Roman province of Pontus, they had recently arrived from Rome after the emperor Claudius had expelled Jews from the capital city (Acts 18:2; Suetonius 25.4). Aquila and Priscilla illustrate the scattered nature of first-century Judaism, which was found not only in Judaea but throughout the Roman Empire. Known as Jews of the Diaspora, or dispersion,
“it was not easy to find a place in the inhabited world which this tribe has not penetrated and which has not been occupied by it” (Strabo qtd. in Josephus 14.7.2). A Diaspora community was clearly present in Roman Corinth, with at least one synagogue and most likely several more (Acts 18; Levinskaya 166). Unlike the Jews of Jerusalem, most Diaspora Jews assimilated to some degree into the surrounding culture, speaking in Greek and engaging in trade with their Gentile neighbors. Interactions with Gentiles were frequent enough in Corinth to inspire some of the non-Jews who surrounded them, such as Titius Justus the God-fearer, to join them in worshiping the Jewish God. Despite some level of integration, the Jews of Corinth managed to maintain their identity and separation from the Gentiles through weekly meetings at local synagogues, cultural differences such as dietary restrictions and circumcision, and continued interaction with the homeland of Jerusalem evidenced by the annual Jewish tax for the temple in Jerusalem (Ferguson 427–430; Levinskaya 145–148).

Early Christianity was entirely Jewish in background, originating within the Jewish religious construct and gradually creating points of separation from Judaism until it became clearly separated from it. Recent work on Jewish-Christian relations, especially in the Jewish Diaspora, has tended to emphasize a much less pronounced distinction between the two groups. Several recent scholars have described early Christianity as a sect of Judaism, decades from becoming a separate religion (Lieu, Neither Jew nor Greek? 11–29). An important element of this movement is the discrediting of Luke, the writer of Luke and Acts, as a theologically motivated historian whose main purpose is to highlight Jewish antagonism to Christianity (Jack T. Sanders 1–4; Fitzmeyer 124–128). Other writers such as Irina Levinskaya have upheld the use of Luke-Acts as historical documents, not by claiming that they are free from theological motivation but by arguing that they are as relevant as Paul’s epistles or the works of ancient historians (viii, 2, 11). Luke’s bias as a Christian author who saw the Jews as the main source of opposition to Christianity should not eliminate his voice from the conversation. Rather, his writings should be read in concert with other source material to ascertain the historical reality, just as the writings of other ancient authors should be paired with one another. In Corinth, evidence from Paul’s letters at least partially confirmed the Jewish-Christian antagonism noted in Acts, lending credibility to Luke’s account.

According to Luke, Paul’s mission to Corinth started in the Jewish synagogue, where he attempted to persuade the Diaspora community to join the
movement of Jesus’ followers. The amount of time he spent there is unclear, but Luke claimed he spoke “every Sabbath,” suggesting an extended period of time, and that he addressed both the Jews and Greeks found at the synagogue, referring to the Gentile God-fearers who were present. Though Paul’s time at the synagogue came to an abrupt end when he was run out and forced to move his ministry to Titius Justus’s house, his strategy in targeting an audience already familiar with Jewish principles aligns with the many similarities of first-century Christianity in belief and practice to the Jews of the Diaspora.

The concept of heritage—fitting into a historical story as Israel, the People of God—marks one of the key similarities between Diaspora Jews and Corinthian Christians. Further similarities can be seen in the Jewish and Christian weekly services as they both involved praying, reading and interpreting scripture, and eating communal meals. Christian rituals of baptism, communion, and foot washing, though given their own peculiar flavor, were analogous to Jewish practices. Both Jews and Christians maintained the need to resolve judicial disputes among their own members internally (Meeks 80; 1 Cor. 6:1–8). Christians adopted the Jewish stance toward Greek and Roman idol worship, claiming a sharp division between those who served one God and the rest who worshiped many gods, who were effectively non-gods (Meeks 166). Neither Christian nor Diaspora Jewish worship involved sacrifice, the Christians because they believed Jesus was the final sacrifice and the Jews because all sacrifice occurred at the temple in Jerusalem. “Most important, the Pauline Christians took over the scripture, large and basic parts of the belief system, and a great many norms and traditions, either whole or with some modifications, from the Greek-speaking synagogues” (Meeks 81). These common belief systems and practices were reinforced in the Corinthian Christian community by the presence of Jewish and God-fearing converts who arrived in the Christian world with backgrounds in Jewish thought, such as Titius Justus and the president of the synagogue in Corinth, Crispus (1 Cor. 18:8; Acts 18:8).

Although the Christians shared beliefs and practices with the Diaspora Jewish community, important distinctions started to evolve. According to historian Shaye J. D. Cohen,

The separation of Christianity from Judaism was a process, not an event. The essential part of this process was that the church was becoming more and more Gentile, and less and less Jewish, but the separation manifested itself in different ways in each local community where Jews and Christians dwelt together. In some places, the
Jews expelled the Christians; in others, the Christians left of their own accord (228).

The separation in Corinth was clear to Paul: faith (πίστις—pistis) in Jesus was the dividing line, and the Jews who failed to believe in Jesus were deceived and destined to perish. He longed for the Jews of Corinth to join him in having faith in Jesus but considered those who refused to be not true followers of God. Some of the Corinthian Christians from a Jewish background, however, were primarily hesitant about leaving strongly held Jewish practices behind, especially dietary restrictions and circumcision, and Paul had to convince them to continue the process of separation.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul offered a harsh critique of the Jews and confirmed a separation between the two groups:

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. [The background of Paul’s reference to Moses can be found in Exodus 34:29–35.] But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. (2 Cor. 3:12–16)

Paul’s words marked a bold distinction between his gospel of Jesus Christ as Messiah and the Jewish message of the Mosaic covenant. Although both audiences were listening to the reading (ἀναγινώσκεται, anagignoskeitai) of Moses, Paul argued that only those who turned to the Lord could properly understand the true meaning. Further, as he continued to make distinctions, Paul labeled the “old” covenant of Moses the ministry of condemnation and the “new” covenant of Jesus the ministry of justification. Though he maintained that there was glory in the first ministry, he claimed that its glory was now lost in comparison to the second ministry’s τῆς υπερβαλλούσης δόξης (teis huperballouseis doxeis—surpassing glory). This second ministry, the ministry of Christ, was not only more glorious but also was permanent according to Paul. Joining the covenant of Christ granted freedom and transformation through the Lord, who was the Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα, to pneuma).

In a final condemnation of the Jews, Paul stated that “even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are ἀπολλυμένοις [apollumenoi—perishing, or being destroyed]. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds
of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). Notice that natural blindness was not the cause of the Jews’ lack of sight, but a physical κάλυμμα (kalumma—veil or covering), suggesting that those blinded would have been naturally able to see the “light of the gospel,” just as the Christians could, but for the presence of a veil placed over their minds by the “god of this world,” or Satan. The Jews who did not believe could not see the truth of the gospel because Satan had deceived them so that they were unable to see through the blinding veil to the gospel of the glory of Christ and were ultimately destined to perish. Clearly, Paul saw and articulated a major distinction between the Christian and Jewish communities in Corinth.

Welcoming the new covenant of Jesus at the expense of the Jewish covenant of Moses was not merely a spiritual distinction but had practical implications. The most important way the Christians enabled the Gentiles who surrounded them to join their group was by eliminating the significant Jewish barrier of male circumcision. A council of Christian leaders in Jerusalem before Paul’s arrival in Corinth partially influenced the Corinthian Christians’ understanding of the role of male circumcision within Christianity. The council occurred after some men from Judea came to Paul’s home church in Antioch preaching that “unless you are circumcised according to the Law of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). Paul and his companion Barnabas disagreed strongly, and after a debate the matter was taken to Jerusalem for the apostles and elders there to adjudicate. The Acts account noted the importance of religious background in determining who advocated circumcision, setting “some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees” and argued the necessity of circumcision against Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:5). Peter joined Paul and Barnabas, claiming that the church should not place the burden of circumcision on the Gentile converts since “we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they are” (Acts 15:5). James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, gave the final word, outlining a compromise that allowed Gentiles to remain uncircumcised but called on them to avoid eating meat that was offered to idols or strangled, touching blood, and engaging in sexual immorality. This compromise was sent via letter to the church at Antioch and most likely to the other churches as well. Paul departed on his next missionary journey soon afterwards and would have arrived in Corinth with the Jerusalem council’s decision in hand.

Though Paul undoubtedly taught the Christian community his view of circumcision when he was there, some Christians were still uncertain what
they should do about the Jewish practice several years later. In 1 Corinthians 7:17–20, Paul gave his “rule in all the churches,” urging people to remain as they are: if uncircumcised, not to seek circumcision; if circumcised, not to attempt to remove the marks of circumcision. “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called.” By Paul’s reasoning, following that of the Jerusalem council, God no longer commanded circumcision, and this represented a strong shift from the Jewish use of circumcision as a boundary between themselves and everyone else. As noted in the passage in Acts, at least some of those from a Jewish background would have found this shift difficult to accept. That Paul felt obliged to address the subject shows that differing opinions about circumcision were present within the Corinthian Christian community, with some Gentile converts considering becoming circumcised and some Jewish converts considering hiding their circumcision.

The removal of the circumcision requirement enabled the Christian community to aggressively proselytize Gentiles. When Paul was pushed out of the synagogue, he made the move to Titius Justus’s house and continued his preaching, intent on spreading his gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles outside synagogue. Diaspora Jewish communities did not engage in aggressive evangelism of Gentiles although though some Gentiles were attracted to the synagogues, as evidenced by Paul’s ability to witness at the Jewish synagogue in Corinth to “both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4). In strong contrast to Jewish attitudes toward missions, Christians held evangelism as a key component of their faith. Paul, whose presence in Corinth was evangelical in nature to begin with, clearly had no problem with continuing his mission among the Gentiles after being run out of the Jewish synagogue. He wanted the Christians in Corinth to flee from idols and avoid immorality, but at the same time he wanted them to interact with people outside of the Christian community. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul finished his denunciation of the man living with his stepmother by recalling how he told the Corinthians not to associate with “the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need

3 Authors who argue convincingly that first-century Judaism was not actively missional include: A. T. Kraabel, ‘The Roman Diaspora: Six Questionable Assumptions’; S. J. D. Cohen, “Was Judaism in Antiquity a Missionary Religion?”; M. Goodman, “Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century.” The most significant evidence against missional Judaism is the silence of Josephus and Philo on the matter; they both knew of the presence of proselytes but never mentioned any push by Jews to actively pursue Gentile converts. For a summary of both sides of the argument, see Levinskaya, The Book of Acts.
to go out of the world” (1 Cor. 6:9–10). Though the community was to have boundaries, its members were at the same time to evangelize the Corinthians outside of those boundaries, a prospect made much more palatable by the removal of circumcision.

Corinth's Christian community accepted and pursued all who were willing to become believers. By opening the door to all, no matter their religious background and without strenuous requirements such as circumcision, the Christians gained converts the Jews would not. However, the influx of Corinthians who did not share a background in Jewish moral law caused the boundaries of the Christian community to be stretched and strained, compelling Paul to write letters full of reprimands and corrections. Those within the Christian community who did not see a need to uphold the Jewish moral law stated “all things are lawful for me” (1 Cor. 6:12), denoting an openness to behavior outside of Jewish norms. In the context of in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20, Paul’s response to this slogan indicates that it was being used to justify sexual interactions with prostitutes. This mindset can also be seen in 1 Corinthians 5, where some of the Christians respond to a man living with his stepmother with φυσιόω (fusioō—arrogance or conceit) rather than shame. The Corinthian Christian community was thus becoming more diverse in its understanding of moral norms by evangelizing Corinthians with religious backgrounds outside of Judaism.

As Christians decided against dietary laws and circumcision and for aggressive evangelism, those with Jewish backgrounds had to struggle with leaving behind their religious norms. Further, as more Greeks and Romans with backgrounds in polytheistic cults began to convert, the Christian community had to debate what the moral code of Corinthian Christianity should be: whether it should throw out the moral law of Judaism along with the ceremonial law or require that new converts learn to change their ways and leave behind the religious constructs of their past.

“FLEE FROM THE WORSHIP OF IDOLS”

The mission to the Gentiles was successful enough that Paul addressed the Christians as ἔθνη (ethnei—Gentiles or non-Jews) in 1 Corinthians 12:2: “you know that when you were ἔθνη, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak” (author’s translation, 1 Cor. 12:2). Throughout the letters, Paul’s discussions of idols alluded to individuals in the Christian community

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4Literally, “of the nations.” The NRSV has “pagans.”
who had interacted with idols regularly. Luke claimed as well that Paul was highly effective in gaining converts from the non-Jews of Corinth who had backgrounds in Greek, Roman, and Egyptian idol-worshiping cults (Acts 18:10). All of the idol-based cults in Corinth and throughout the Roman Empire embraced polytheism, allowing for the integration of multiple deities in one supplicant’s religious experience; converts joining the Christian community would have brought this model with them. Paul was fighting against this concept through his epistles, attempting to persuade his audience not to add following Jesus to their other religious practices but to cease from all religious activity outside of Christianity.

For the Gentile Corinthian converts who were not God-fearers or proselytes, viewing their new faith as exclusive would have been a shift in religious practice. Although the Jews had a long history of exclusivity, the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian cults in Corinth did not; they welcomed the worship of multiple deities. The Greco-Roman cults worshiped gods who fulfilled one or several aspects of life, such as Poseidon, the god of the sea and earthquakes. Though the Egyptian goddess Isis was perhaps an exception who fulfilled multiple roles (McCabe 56–66), the Isis cult most worshiped in Corinth specifically focused on Isis Pelagia, or Marine Isis, inventor of the sail and guardian of the seas (Smith 228–229). In contrast, the Christian God fulfilled all needs and encompassed all facets of life. Worshiping Him alone was enough to ensure divine protection from any kind of disaster and the provision of any service necessary. Therefore, worship of gods other than Him was blasphemous. Paul, quoting an early Christian confession, said “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:6).

Another shift in religious structure for converts from polytheistic cults would have been the Christian acceptance of the authority of the Scriptures found in the Septuagint and also the ongoing authority of the apostles to speak or write commands from the Lord. The authority of the apostles is seen in the Jerusalem conference about circumcision recorded in Acts 15, when the judgment about circumcision was treated as binding to all the churches. Paul defended his apostolic authority throughout his letters as he argued against other leaders who tried to supplant him in Corinth (1 Cor. 11). In 1 Corinthians 14, he wrote, “Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual

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5Notice that the Lord’s word that “there are many in this city who are my people” comes after Paul has left the synagogue, implying that these people were Gentiles.
powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized” (1 Cor. 14:37–38). In 2 Corinthians 13, Paul referred to the “authority the Lord has given me” (2 Cor. 13:10) in a warning that he might need to be severe in using that authority if the Corinthian Christians in question did not amend their faulty ways. New Corinthian Christians who came from a background of religious fusion that honored multiple gods would not have been accustomed to such a leader claiming authority from God to instruct them, as this structure was not typical in other cults (Rothaus 135–40).

Some of Paul’s commands—notably his views on circumcision and dietary laws—were efforts to create a more inclusive atmosphere for converts from polytheistic backgrounds. By disregarding circumcision and allowing the purchase of meat in the marketplace without question, Paul and the Christians who followed him eliminated two of the biggest obstacles that had previously faced converts to Judaism. However, although Paul argued for inclusivity on these fronts, he took a strong stand against Gentile Christians interacting with their past religious practices, specifically the worship of idols:

Therefore, my dear friends (ἀγαπητοί, agapetoi) flee from the worship of idols. I speak as to sensitive people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:14–22)

Paul urged the Christians to “flee from the worship of idols,” indicating that some of the Christians were engaging in cult practices involving idol worship. Paul declared participating in sacrifices to idols to be incompatible with worship of the Christian God. He claimed that though the idols themselves were without power, they represented demonic powers that were not God.
Since offering sacrifices implied fellowship with the one being worshiped, the Christians continuing their involvement in idol worship were fellowshipping with the demons, a practice that provoked the Lord to jealousy.

Fleeing from the idols of Corinth would not have been an easy task for the non-Jewish people of Corinth who joined the Christian community. Public life was integrated with honoring the gods and the emperor and his family through festivals, games, and sacrifices. Emperor worship was a significant part of creating a Roman identity throughout the empire, and neglecting to participate in giving honor to the ruler and his family would have placed Corinthian Christians outside of the civic community in some respects (Winter 269–86). Additionally, each of the gods represented a means by which to navigate various parts of life: how to deal with sickness, ensure safe travel, gain fertility, or even create a historical identity (Engels 92–120). A new Christian attempting to cut off these lingering connections would have had to find a new structure to manage these aspects of life. Some of the new Christians of non-Jewish background failed to separate from the religious customs of their past, and others who succeeded in completely “fleeing from idols” in obedience to Paul’s directive surely arrived in the new Christian community influenced by the religious experiences of their past.

Methods of healing are one example of the shift in religious practices from polytheism to Christianity. One of the first cultic sites that had been renovated after the founding of the colony at Corinth was the sanctuary of Asklepios, the god of healing, who was worshiped throughout Greece at dedicated healing sanctuaries, including one at Epidauros, forty miles to the south of Corinth, that attracted visitors from all over the world. These sanctuaries became sites for training doctors, and Asklepios himself functioned as the ultimate doctor. Though Asklepios’s mythical father, Apollo, also was known as a god of healing, only Asklepios fulfilled the role of healer exclusively (Wikkiser 46). Asklepios was credited with curing ailments of all kinds such as infertility, paralysis, gout, headaches, insomnia, and even baldness. Worshipers in need of healing brought terracotta votive offerings of a body part, such as an eye, leg, or arm, and offered them as a request for healing or in thanks for a healing that had already occurred. Hundreds of these offerings have been found in the remains of the Corinthian Asklepeion (Fotopoulos 54). Supplicants came to the sanctuary to spend the night, reporting in the morning how Asklepios had healed them. At Epidauros, those in need of healing sometimes stayed for weeks or months until their ailment was healed. Corinth’s Asklepeion was not equipped for long-term visits, however, and so most likely functioned as
a local healing sanctuary only. For the Corinthian public, the Asklepeion was the hospital of the city and the most likely space in which miraculous healing could occur.

In contrast to seeking healing at the Asklepeion, Christians in Corinth may have turned to one of their own with “gifts of healing according to the one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:9) that Paul refers to in his listing of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians. Examples of healing among the followers of Jesus are found in Acts: Peter and John healing a lame man, Peter’s shadow falling upon the sick and causing healing in Jerusalem, and Paul himself raising a young man from the dead who died from a two-story fall out of a window after falling asleep when one of Paul’s messages became long-winded (Acts 3:1–10; 5:12–16; 20:7–12). Paul’s inclusion of the gift of healing in his list of potential gifts from the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12 implies that the gift of healing was not exclusive to Christian leaders such as Peter or Paul, meaning others in the community were able to use power from the Holy Spirit in this way. Additionally, Paul’s lengthy discussion of how the Corinthian church was exceptionally gifted by the Spirit and the inclusion of “gifts of healing” in his list indicates that the community in Corinth likely had one or more individuals with this gift. Corinthians who became Christ-followers maintained an understanding of healing as a supernatural gift but from a different source than those who turned to Asklepios for remedies. Rather than bringing offerings to a sanctuary in exchange for a cure, Christians needed to find someone with the gift of healing from the Holy Spirit and have faith in the Holy Spirit’s ability to work through that individual. Finding healing within their own community was necessary because, if the Christians were to heed Paul and “flee from the worship of idols,” approaching Asklepios with votive offerings was not an option.

Though Corinth’s Asklepeion was overshadowed in fame by the nearby sanctuary to Asklepios at Epidauros, the same is not true for the Corinthian shrine to the goddess Aphrodite. As Athens was considered the city of Athena, Corinth was called the city of Aphrodite. The small Corinthian temple to Aphrodite of the first century was situated on the Acrocorinth, which is the highest point in the city, indicating importance. The Aphrodite worshiped on the Acrocorinth was Aphrodite Hoplismene (Armed), the defender of the city. Images on coins, a wall fresco, and statuary remains depict Aphrodite looking at her reflection in the shield of Ares, affirming her image as the military protector of the city. Other manifestations include Aphrodite Anadyomene (Rising from the Sea), referring to the story of Aphrodite’s birth as a grown
woman from the sea and connecting her with Poseidon and the sea in mercantile Corinth (Williams, “Corinth” 98). Several other representations of Aphrodite around the Corinthian theater show her naked to the waist, often in a bath (Williams, “Roman” 245), as the goddess of love and beauty whose worshipers would have honored her not for protection through her military prowess but for the fulfillment of their domestic needs, including those of a sexual nature. The historian Strabo’s remarks about the temple of Aphrodite gained for Corinth a reputation of lasciviousness:

It owned more than a thousand temple-slaves (ἱερδούλους, hierdoulos), courtesans (ἑταίρας, hetairas), whom both men and women had dedicated to the goddess. And thereafter it was also on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich; for instance, the ship-captains freely squandered their money, and hence the proverb, “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth.” (Strabo, Geography 8.6.20)

This excerpt has led many commentators to decry the immorality of Corinth and marvel at the Apostle Paul’s ability to plant a church in such a wicked city. Such a judgment is faulty, however, as Strabo’s statement was clearly about how the temple used to be, using past tenses to describe the practice (was: aorist; had dedicated: pluperfect; squandered: imperfect). Later in the same chapter, he referred to the temple of Aphrodite in the present tense and described it as a small temple, without any mention of riches or a thousand temple-slaves (Budin 165–167; Lanci 213). Additionally, Charles K. Williams II argued that the cult of Aphrodite Hoplismene must have been a state-sponsored cult since its images appeared on Corinthian coins and that it is highly unlikely that a Roman-sponsored cult would have promoted institutionalized prostitution since there is no evidence of such practices occurring elsewhere in the Empire (Williams, “Roman” 245). Lastly, there is no architectural evidence of a facility able to house Strabo’s one thousand prostitutes (Fotopoulos 173). If there were in fact contrary to these evidences temple prostitutes for Aphrodite, Strabo’s information must have been greatly exaggerated. The existence of sacred prostitution in first century Corinth cannot be established, and is unlikely.

Fotopoulos is one of the few authors who finds sacred prostitution in Roman Corinth somewhat plausible, though he admits that it is not provable. He cites Williams as raising a possible scenario in “Corinth and the Cult of Aphrodite” (21).
Though Aphrodite’s temple prostitutes did not surround Paul upon his arrival, the sexual norms of Corinth still contrasted strongly with his prescribed sexual practices for the Christian community, and new Christians joining the community in Corinth would have had to adjust to new expectations of sexual behavior. Evidence of Corinth’s reputation as a place sanctioning prostitution and open sexuality can be found beyond the supposed temple prostitution in the worship of Aphrodite. Lais, a renowned courtesan (ἕταϊρας, *hetairas*), was considered the standard for beauty throughout Greece during the Peloponnesian War era in the fifth century BCE. Tourists continued to visit her tomb outside of Corinth in Roman times, indicating some level of acceptance of her occupation (Pausanias 1.2.4–5). The Greek poet Aristophanes, who lived around the same time as Lais, coined the term κορινθιάζομαι (*corinthianize*), meaning to practice fornication (Henderson fragment 370). In the Roman era, Greco-Roman formal dining often involved sexual relations as a form of entertainment, especially during and after the evening meal, when a guest might expect sexual encounters and could even bring his own harp-girl or lover with him to facilitate sexual pleasures for himself (Fotopoulos 169–71; Plutarch 644C–D). Acceptance of bi-sexuality was widespread, and the Roman historian Seneca refers to the poor state of the wine server, who had to appease both his master’s drunkenness and his lust (Seneca, Epistle 95). Quintillian, a Roman orator, decried that children could see “our female lovers and our male concubines; every dinner party is loud with foul songs and things are presented to their eyes about which we should blush to speak” (1.2.6–8).

Paul’s letters to the Corinthians offer some confirmation of immorality at dinner parties. After reminding the Christian community in Corinth, in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, of who they used to be—fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners (μαλακοί—*malakoi*), active homosexual partners (ἄρσενοκόιτης—*arsenokoiteis*), and thieves—he referenced his ongoing argument against eating food offered to idols and urged them to flee fornication with prostitutes (Winter 110–20). In 1 Corinthians 10, again in the context of his opposition to Christian involvement in eating meat offered to idols, he commands them to both “flee from the worship of idols” (1 Cor. 10:14) and “not indulge in sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 10:8), indicating that the actions of idol worship and sexual immorality were linked in some way. John Fotopoulos has argued that the food offered to idols would have been eaten at formal meals where prostitutes would have been present (178). Sexual norms present a locus of contrast between the accepted practices of those worshiping the Greek and Roman deities of Corinth and the ideal behavior of the Christian community.
The Greco-Roman world had limitations on sexual behavior, however. Roman law declared some forms of homosexuality a crime, though its enforcement is questionable. Also, the Christian community was not free of sexual misconduct. Clearly, Paul would not have had needed to protest against sexual immorality if it had not been happening in the Christian community. Some of the Christians had apparently interacted with prostitutes since Paul felt compelled to reason with them against the practice, telling them that their bodies were members of Christ and asking, “Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” (1 Cor. 6:15). A more extreme violation of sexual norms is found in 1 Corinthians 5, where Paul expressed disgust at the Christians’ acceptance of a kind of sexual immorality “not found even among the nations (τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, tois ethnesin); for a man is living with his father’s wife” (author’s translation 1 Cor. 5:1). He was astounded that the Christians could be embracing such vice and even becoming arrogant (φυσιόω, fusioō) about it. Paul ordered that the man be removed from the fellowship (1 Cor. 5:4–5). These episodes of sexual activity within the Christian community are examples of converts from Corinth’s polytheistic cults bringing their behavioral norms with them as they joined the Christians.

Sharing special prominence in Corinth with Aphrodite was Poseidon, god of the sea and earthquakes. Corinth’s close relationship with the sea made Poseidon an important deity to honor, and a survey of all the coin types found in Corinth found that Poseidon was represented even more often than Aphrodite (Engels 96). He was considered the special sponsor of the biennial Isthmian Games, which were held at a special sanctuary to him at Isthmia, the southern harbor; his coins may have served as advertisements for the event. In this sanctuary complex at Isthmia was a large temple to Poseidon alongside a smaller one to Melikertes. Poseidon had a temple at each of Corinth’s harbors as well as numerous statues, altars, and a fountain dedicated to him in Corinth itself. Reliance on Poseidon to grant calm seas was important for

7Roman law used a double standard, allowing homosexuality as long as the passive male sexual partner was not a Roman citizen. Slaves and non-citizens were free to play the role of passive homosexual partner, but it was illegal for anyone to penetrate a Roman citizen as this violated the sanctity of a Roman citizen’s body. Enforcing this prohibition would have proved difficult, and most literary references to the Roman law have to do with rumors and scandals rather than actual prosecutions of the crime. In contrast to the Roman standard, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 quoted above, prohibited both passive and active homosexuality with the terms μαλακοί and ἀρσενοκοίτης. Understanding the complexity of the Roman rule concerning homosexuality explains why Paul felt the need to use two different words to condemn homosexuality. See Winter, After Paul Left Corinth, 110–120.
merchants who depended on safe sailing journeys to make a profit. Corinth, especially the Isthmus, was also subject to periodic earthquakes, which gave Corinthians another reason to grant Poseidon special consideration.

In contrast, the ideal Christian response to unpredictable seas and earthquakes was to trust in their God. Paul’s unfortunate journey around Cape Malea resulted in his ship’s being carried in the middle of a storm for days until food supplies ran out. Yet Paul did not despair, for he saw an angel “of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, do not be afraid, Paul . . . God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you” (Acts 27:23–25).

In the same sanctuary as Poseidon’s temple was a small shrine to a young boy named Melikertes, who had died and turned into the marine god Palaimon. Though Aphrodite and Poseidon were special to Corinth, much as Athena was special to Athens, their status as major deities ensured that they were worshiped throughout the Empire in some fashion. Melikertes/Palaimon, however, was worshiped specifically in Corinth because his myth originated there during the Hellenic period. This local myth gave Corinth an origin story for the Isthmian Games. Origin stories such as that of Melikertes/Palaimon and of Bellerophon and Pegasus helped to provide Corinth with a civic identity, which obedience to Paul’s command “flee from the worship of idols” would have disrupted.

According to the Melikertes myth, Hera, the wife of Zeus, became angry with the young boy Melikertes’s father, Athamas, because of his kindness to her enemy Dionysos. She drove him into madness so that he turned on his wife Ino and two sons, murdering Melikertes’s older brother, Learchus. Ino and Melikertes fled until they were cornered on a cliff where Ino chose to jump into the sea with Melikertes. The result of the sad death of the mother and child was that they both became immortal, Ino as the goddess Leukothea and Melikertes as Palaimon, a marine deity closely associated with Poseidon. As the deity Palaimon arose, a dolphin carried Melikertes’s dead body to the Isthmus, where the ruler of Corinth, Sisyphus, granted him a noble burial and honored him with the first Isthmian Games (Gebhard 168).

Worship of Melikertes-turned-Palaimon occurred especially at the celebration of the biennial Games. Though this cult was started long before the Roman conquest in 146 BCE, the Roman colonists quickly resumed its practice and wasted no time in reclaiming the Isthmian Games for Corinth upon their arrival. Most likely, the first Isthmian Games in the new colony would have occurred in 40 BCE (Gebhard 182). A ritual ceremony would be
performed at the Games, most likely at night, with two young Corinthian men carrying a bed of pine branches with a statue of Melikertes on it, reenacting his funeral while singing a traditional funeral dirge (θρήνος, threnos). At least the main features of this Greek celebration of Melikertes/Palaimon appear to have carried over into the Roman period, as multiple literary sources indicate (Gebhard 180). The first shrine to Melikertes/Palaimon built in the sanctuary of Poseidon was constructed in the mid-first century CE, contemporary to Paul’s arrival in Corinth. Corinthian Christians would have been surrounded by celebrations of the Melikertes/Palaimon myth, certainly every two years during the Isthmian Games, if not more frequently.

Whereas the story of Melikertes/Palaimon was specifically tied to the Isthmian Games, the myth of Bellerophon and Pegasus explained the origin of Corinth’s chief water supply, the Peirene fountain. Called holy (σέμνος, semnos) in Euripides’ Medea (8), the fountain gained its reputation as a special place through myths involving the winged horse, Pegasus. According to Strabo, the Peirene was connected via underground tunnels to a smaller fountain on the Acrocorinth, and Pegasus’s hoof striking the ground on the Acrocorinth started the flow of both (Strabo, Geography 8.6.21). In another story, Bellerophon, grandson of the famous Corinthian king Sisyphus, sought to kill the Chimera, a fire-breathing monster. A seer instructed him that this feat would only be possible if he captured Pegasus, and he did so with Athena’s assistance by throwing a golden bridle over his head after finding Pegasus drinking at the Peirene fountain. Bellerophon then rode off on the winged horse to successfully accomplish the task. Bellerophon and Pegasus were portrayed on statues in the city, on coinage, and in processions through the city (Engels 99–100; Apuleis 11.8). As one of the two main fountains in Roman Corinth (Robinson 129–38), at least some Corinthian Christians would have used the Peirene and been aware of its mythical background. Visitors from throughout the Empire who came to the spring on the Acrocorinth, believing it to be connected to the Peirene, treated it as a holy place by inscribing dedications on its walls (Engels 100).

Both Melikertes/Palaimon and Bellerophon and Pegasus at the Peirene Fountain constituted part of Corinth’s mythical history, which functioned to help shape the Corinthians’ civic identity. Commemoration of these mythical stories through religious ceremonies and festivals was a part of history-keeping in Corinth. To participate in the celebration of Corinth’s history, however, would have involved interaction with idol worship and, in Paul’s mind, with demons (δαιμονίων, daimonion). He offered an alternative historical basis to
the Christian community as descendants of Israel, joined to the Israelites through common faith in the same God. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul addressed the Corinthians as siblings (ἀδελφοί, adelphoi) and referred to the Israelites as “our fathers.” He then described the activities of the Israelites, who in unity—Paul repeated the word all (πάντες, pantes) five times—followed the spiritual rock of Christ until a section of them became idolaters and indulged in sexual immorality, causing God to strike many of them down. Paul provided the example of the Israelites as an encouragement and admonition to the Corinthians in his effort to convince them to “flee from the worship of idols,” arguing that just as in “Israel according to the flesh” those who eat the sacrifices are partners in the altar, so do the Corinthians become partners in a demonic altar when they eat the food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 10:18–20). Paul’s effort in convincing the Corinthians to avoid idol worship of any kind hinged on the community of believers sharing in the heritage of the Jewish people. Since commemoration of Corinthian history involved festivals such as that of Melikertes and idol worship, Paul effectively replaced the history of those in the Christian community who were not of Jewish background with his own and that of Israel. For Christians of Greek or Roman background, becoming a full part of the Christian community meant leaving a part of their civic identity behind.

Another aspect of “fleeing from idols” that would have removed Corinthian converts from the civic community was the avoidance of emperor worship. The role of idolatrous religion in maintaining civic and imperial identity was most apparent in the imperial cult, which included emperor worship. The Senate’s apotheosis of Julius Caesar marked the beginning of a new Roman trend: adding dead rulers to the number of the gods. Under Augustus, worship of the living emperor began, although much less pronounced in Rome than in the provinces. Around 12 BCE, Augustus began to take such bold steps as instituting the municipal group, the Augustales, as an official way for wealthy freedmen or freeborn outsiders to enter municipal life through the imperial cult (Laird 72–75). He made efforts to include common people in the cult as a way to encourage devotion to the state. After he died, an official act of the Senate granted him divine status, establishing for him a temple and priests in Rome itself in addition to those already present throughout the Empire. Subsequent emperors continued the cult of the dead emperor with varying degrees of urgency, and the practice soon extended to include

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8For a complete discussion of the background of Corinthian Christian identity formation, see Cavan W. Concannon, “When You Were Gentiles.”
worship of their families as well. In Corinth, ready evidence of the imperial cult can be seen in the ancient forum. The base of a statue used by the imperial cult is still visible today. A likely reconstruction of the inscription on the base is “DIVO-AVGVSTO-SACRVM,” meaning the statue that once stood upon the base was that of divine Augustus (Laird 67–116). The temple of Octavia, the sister of Augustus, functioned as the center of the federal imperial cult of Achaea in Corinth. The temple overlooked the forum from an elevated position higher than all the other temples not on the Acrocorinth, indicating its importance. Corinth’s role as the host of the federal, or provincial, cult meant that emperor worship in Corinth extended to the entire province of Achaea, not just an individual city, and enabled Corinth to require funds from surrounding cities for the annual celebration (Winter 269). Festivities honoring the emperor occurred annually on the emperor’s birthday, at which Corinthians wore crowns and offered sacrifices in front of the emperor’s statue and at the temple of Octavia. Additionally, every four years, the Isthmian Games were called the “greater games” and conducted under the aegis of the imperial cult, combining with the nearby Caesarean Games and Imperial Contests (Winter 271). Worship of the emperor included offering sacrifices at the temple of Octavia or in front of statues of the emperor, and doing so was an important component of civic and imperial identity in Corinth. By honoring the emperor, citizens in Roman cities could show fidelity to the empire since worshiping the emperor was the same as proclaiming loyalty to Rome.

Paul argued that Christians striving to “flee from the worship of idols” could not continue to honor the emperor through worship because Jesus was now κύριος (kurios—Lord) and σωτήρ (soter—Savior), both titles the imperial cult used to describe the emperor. In 54 CE, however, shortly after Paul completed his time in Corinth, the city became the center of the federal imperial cult of Achaea, combined with the onset of the “greater games” (Spawforth 161–163). Epigraphical evidence suggests that the president of the Games often invited all Roman citizens to come dine at Isthmia before the Games, which would have affected the elite among the Christians if any were Roman citizens like Paul. These meals would have been a chance to associate with dignitaries from throughout the province and the Empire. New Christians who wished to abstain from taking part in the Games or in emperor worship were allowed to do so in the first century, most likely as a result of Gallio’s ruling that granted Christians the same exemptions as Jews (Winter 276–80), but the social pressure to attend would have been formidable for any Christians who were Roman citizens. New Corinthian Christians who
chose to refrain from celebrations on the emperor’s birthday or attendance at the Isthmian Games had to remove themselves from a significant part of the local Corinthian civic community and lose a way to engage in the Roman imperial community.

A third layer of religious influence in Corinth besides those of Greek and Roman origin came from Egypt, specifically in the henotheistic cult of Isis and Serapis (Smith 201–31). The date of the Egyptian deities’ arrival in Corinth is unknown, but a time during the Hellenistic period seems likely as evidence records the presence of the Egyptian cults in neighboring Athens and Delos at that time (Smith 228). Beyond the rather scarce archeological record, Pausanius and Lucius Apuleis described the presence of Isis and Serapis; Apuleis recorded a vision of Isis and his later initiation into the cult in great detail in *The Golden Ass*. Isis and Serapis were worshiped together as they were siblings as well as husband and wife. In the origin myth, Serapis’s evil brother Set killed and dismembered him. Isis, Serapis’s sister and wife, travelled throughout Egypt to collect all of his body parts and, upon succeeding, resurrected him through her mourning over his body. Serapis then became the god of the underworld and helped his son Horus destroy his brother and nemesis, Set. The resurrection theme in the origin myth was an important component of the Isis cult and provides the closest parallel among the religions of Corinth to the Christian concept of resurrection.9

The expectation in Eastern cults of a blessed afterlife in exchange for adherence to the cult paralleled Paul’s teaching in his letters to Corinthian Christians. His instructions in 2 Corinthians reveal that some Christians did not believe they would have an afterlife. Paul declared that “we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence” (2 Cor. 4:14). Continuing, he described the current body as an earthly tent groaning for the future when “what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.” In 1 Corinthians, he placed the entirety of faith on the fact of Christ’s resurrection, saying that “if Christ has not been raised, your faith has been futile and you are still dead in your sins. Then those also who have died have perished” (1 Cor. 15:17, 18). He argued that if there is no resurrection, there is no reason to worry about living this life well, quoting a proverb from one of the Greek playwright Menander’s plays: “if the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’” (1 Cor. 15:32). Paul placed the entire value of a Christian’s faith upon resurrection, and converts

9Everett Ferguson does not view the resurrection of Serapis as a true resurrection as in the Christian version but simply as a restoration to live in Hades (270).
to Christianity from followers of Isis would have seen continuity between the two religious constructs.

The new Christian cult shared the Isis cult’s doctrine of resurrection, yet a contrast was readily apparent to Corinthians familiar with both. Though the Isis cult was welcoming and “appealed to the depressed classes of the Roman empire” (Takacs 4), the cost of undergoing initiation as Lucius Apuleis did was formidable. Since only those who were initiated could access Isis’ resurrection, eternal life was only available to those wealthy enough to pay for it (Koester 191). Though there may have been many worshipers in the Isis cult in Corinth, only the small inner circle was initiated, and the initiatory rights themselves were kept a secret (Ferguson 299). In contrast, the Christian community, though it also required baptism as an initiation process, did not require any monetary gifts from converts. The Christians welcomed any who would join their community, no matter their background or financial status. However, Paul and those who followed him restricted the openness of the Corinthian Christian community by requiring converts to leave their old religious structures behind and to grant the worship of Jesus exclusive prominence.

Since Paul’s Christianity was an exclusive religion incapable of fusing with surrounding cults, he used his apostolic authority to discipline and correct those who had failed to separate themselves from the other Corinthian religions. To abandon idol or emperor worship required the new Christians from various cultic backgrounds to separate themselves in many ways from the civic community of Corinth and, on a broader scale, from the imperial identity of Rome since cultic practices were intertwined in nearly every aspect of Corinthian life, including loyalty to Rome. The difficulty of this separation kept some Christian converts from successfully obeying Paul’s command to “flee from the worship of idols,” creating strain within the Christian community and some confusion about which practices from diverse religious backgrounds were allowable within the Christian community.

CONCLUSION

The religious backgrounds of converts to Christianity strongly influenced the development of the local Christian community in Roman Corinth, especially Gentile converts who had previously been engaged in polytheistic cultic activity. An analysis of the problems that the Apostle Paul was attempting to deal with in his letters demonstrates that not all members of the Christian community at Corinth saw their new religion the same way Paul did, giving
him reasons to offer criticism and advice. The combination of Corinthians who had followed Judaism with those who had worshiped in polytheistic cults caused conflict and uncertainty about whether Christians needed to be circumcised, whether they could eat meat from the market or attend the Isthmian Games, whether they could or should attend evening meals in temples, what constituted acceptable sexual behavior, and what they needed to do to be considered a member of the Christian community.

For Paul and the Corinthian Christians who followed his lead, the definition of a Christian was one who had faith in Jesus Christ as Messiah. Paul’s focus on belief as the dividing line can be seen in 2 Corinthians 6, where he used “believer” to refer to those within the Christian community and “unbeliever” to refer to those outside the community: “Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). Though belief was Paul’s only requirement for admission into the community and assurance of salvation, he thought that belief in Jesus would produce a change in behavior. Paul told the Corinthians that “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor. 5:17). Here was Paul’s answer to both converts of Jewish background and those who came from the idol-worshiping cults: there is no reason to retain the religious practices of the past because in Christ everything is supplied. Christ granted liberty from the law and circumcision, requiring only a “circumcision of the heart” and creating a religion not bound by ethnicity. At the same time, following Christ was exclusive, and it was impossible to “drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons” together because to do so would surely provoke the Lord to jealousy (1 Cor. 10:14–22). The power of true belief in Jesus would compel new Gentile converts to pursue moral lives even without the strict rules of the Jews. Paul’s trust in faith (πίστις, pistis) was his answer to the difficulties created by a community that merged people from distinctly different religious backgrounds.

For some Corinthian Christians, most likely former God-fearers, proselytes, or Jews, it seemed natural that distinctions they were accustomed to, such as circumcision or refraining from meat offered to idols, would be the boundaries of the Christian community, and their reluctance to leave behind the ceremonial law would have led to consternation at other Christians continuing to eat meals in idolatrous temples. For others, with backgrounds in the polytheistic cults of Corinth, placing boundaries between different cults was an alien concept; they argued that freedom in Christ allowed them to continue their old interactions with the polytheistic cults of Corinth, including eating in
temples and attending the Isthmian games. Perhaps some of these Christians simply added Jesus to their pantheon, continuing to perform cult activities in honor of other gods. Clearly at least some Christians were willing to allow a man living with his step-mother to continue as a member of the community, a loose sexual boundary that Paul found reprehensible (1 Cor. 5).

Consideration of these different viewpoints on the boundaries of the Christian community, focusing on non-elites and what an average convert to Christianity would have believed, helps to fill in a historiographical hole created by a tendency among historians to treat the beliefs and rhetoric of Paul as indicative of the entire Christian community and to ignore the effects of the local religious context. For example, Wayne A. Meeks does discuss the problem of boundaries in his analysis of early Christian communities, but he attributes the boundaries to a supposed class distinction without any reference to converts’ previous religious experiences and the effects of their backgrounds on their interactions in the Christian community (84–110). Focusing on one location and one set of Pauline texts, in the manner of Bruce W. Winter, reveals the connection between the local religious setting and the information found in the texts. Also, whereas many historical studies have focused only on Jewish-Christian relations, a direct comparison of Christianity with polytheistic cults as well as with Judaism is important to understanding the boundaries of the Christian community. The religious backgrounds of all the converts to early Corinthian Christianity were vital in determining the nature of the early Christianity and its diversity of thought.

Several questions about Corinth’s Christians arise as important subjects for future research: whether it is accurate to place all the polytheistic cult worshipers in one group of Christians, for instance, and whether a significant distinction existed between the worshipers of Isis, Aphrodite, and Poseidon that affected Christian community. The focus on salvation and resurrection found in the Isis cult may have changed how Christian converts from that cult conceived of the Christian concepts of salvation and resurrection whereas the greater Greco-Roman pantheon did not emphasize an afterlife. A parallel question is if all the Corinthian Jews can be lumped together or if significant differences characterized multiple Diaspora communities or at least multiple Jewish groups within the Corinthian Diaspora community. With the question of resurrection as again an example, the presence of Sadducees among the Corinthian Jews would help to explain why there was resistance to Paul’s concept of resurrection since the Sadducee sect of the Jews did not believe in the possibility of resurrection (Matt. 22:23–33). These questions of further
diversity among the groups surrounding the Christians seem likely to yield affirmative answers, but additional study is needed on the topic.

Also in question is how representative the Corinthian Christian community was of early Christian communities throughout the Roman Empire. If multiple conceptions of Christianity’s boundaries existed in other cities as well, perhaps they also arose from the diverse backgrounds of Christian converts who faced the struggle to “flee from the worship of idols.” Perhaps in Rome, for instance, it meant something different for a polytheistic cult worshiper to become a Christian than it did in Corinth. Especially helpful would be a comparison of the religious backgrounds found in multiple cities along with a comparison of these cities’ Christian communities. Finding differences among the Christian communities that correlate to variances in the local religious backgrounds would show how strong an effect the local environments had on early Christian development throughout the Empire.

Other questions might address the trans-local nature of Christianity. Though Christianity likely developed in different ways in different locations, the connections between early Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean region appear to have been strong, as evidenced by Paul’s request of the Corinthians to send monetary aid to other Christian communities in need (2 Cor. 9) and the extensive travel by missionaries such as Paul and Apollos between communities throughout the region. Corinthian Christians “were made aware that they belonged to a larger movement, ‘with all who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place’” (Meeks 107; Lieu Neither Jew nor Greek? 173), raising questions about how the universal nature of Christianity interacted with local influences on Christian communities. If there were different groups of Christians in Corinth, perhaps there were even bigger distinctions between Christians in Corinth and Christians in another city like Antioch, and these distinctions might have had a major influence on trans-local Christian identity.

Many of these questions could be answered through further studies of Christians in their local contexts. Meanwhile, the example of Corinth provides one model for how Christianity might have developed throughout the Roman Empire and what it meant for Jews or Gentiles to become a part of early Christian communities. The struggle to maintain a traditional cultural identity while joining a new religious community surely transcends time and place, occurring among converts today as well as two thousand years ago, but the struggle also has unique features that arise from a particular context as it did among the Christian converts in Corinth during the time of Paul.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Demography of Honors: The National Landscape of Honors Education

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INTRODUCTION

As the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) celebrates its fiftieth year, the organization has an excellent opportunity to reflect on how honors education has spread during its history. Tracking growth in the number of institutions delivering honors education outside of its membership has not been a priority for NCHC or for researchers in honors education. Most information has been anecdotal, and when researchers have mounted surveys, the results are frequently non-comprehensive, based on convenience sampling. We propose a demography of honors to fill the lacuna with systemic, reliable information.

Demographic studies describe the size, structure, and distribution of human populations, general or targeted. While the purposes of demography can be far-ranging, effective public policy requires sound data that come from demographic methodologies. Now, honors researchers would face a
monumental task if they were to identify, count, and describe the structure and distribution of all faculty members and students involved in honors education. That information would be useful, but too many honors administrators are stretched so thin that keeping tabs on the number of honors students at their own institutions is not taking place, owing in no small part to the fact that half of honors administrators have served less than three years in the position (Scott). Consequently, we are not likely to soon see a systemic demography of the people in honors education. Instead, our study focuses on the population of institutions. Specifically, we analyze the population of institutions delivering traditional undergraduate education in the United States to determine the size, structure, and distribution of honors education across institutional types.

**GROWTH PHASES IN HONORS EDUCATION**

Data collected by NCHC’s predecessor, the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), shows that a growth spurt occurred between 1957 and 1962, when the number of institutions offering honors programs more than doubled from 90 to 241 (Chaszar). This growth resulted in large part from the ICSS’s efforts to raise awareness of the benefits of such programs. The data also showed that more honors programs were at private than public institutions at that time. By 1965, when ICSS disbanded, 338 institutions had been identified (Asbury; Rinehart).

Few researchers studied the spread of honors programs through the 1970s–80s, most likely for two reasons. First, financial constraints led honors directors to focus on sustaining their operations, leaving little time to research issues in the broader honors community. Second, a re-emphasis in higher education on open enrollments posed challenges to academic programs with selective admission. NCHC during this period promulgated operational and financial strategies to help barely surviving programs maintain their existence. Review of publications from the 1970s shows a case being made to justify the existence of programs aimed at high-ability students in an era of egalitarian focus in higher education. In addition, Yarrison noted that most honors educators were researching their own fields of training and not honors education, stating that “too little reward [exists] within most institutions for academic work outside one’s discipline to motivate even so enthusiastic a group of scholars as the NCHC membership” (5).

The only information available about growth in honors education on an annual basis comes from NCHC membership statistics, revealing a 150%
increase from 1980 to 1989 as the membership grew from 214 to 535 members (correspondence with NCHC office). The 1990s growth rate slowed to 38%, with membership growing from 490 to 677. From there, growth slowed even more, and over the next fourteen years, membership grew by only 31% to a total of 893 institutions with NCHC memberships in 2013.

Despite the slowing growth of NCHC institutional memberships in the past twenty years, we can see a different form of growth in the increased number of honors colleges. Madden identified 23 honors colleges in the early 1990s, and when Peter Sederberg surveyed honors colleges ten years later for NCHC, he had information on 68. Scott and Frana found 92 honors colleges in 2008, and NCHC’s survey of institutional members in 2012 identified 140 honors colleges, representing a six-fold increase in just over two decades.

Characteristics of honors colleges differ markedly from those of honors programs according to the NCHC survey results published on the NCHC website:

Honors colleges compared to honors programs are more likely to have a full-time administrator with a twelve-month appointment who has served longer in the position; dedicated staff carrying out a variety of functions; dedicated faculty teaching honors courses, and more of those faculty; honors housing, living/learning programming and scholarships; a strategic plan, an annual report, an assessment plan, external reviews, and university-based financial audits; and academic space for honors on campus. Institutions are also more likely to expect colleges to conduct alumni affairs, raise funds, and form advisory councils for advancement. Comparing curriculum delivery, colleges are more likely to have departmental honors courses, a service requirement, internships for honors students, and honors courses with an online component. (Scott)

The NCHC survey also found differences between four-year and two-year programs: programs at four-year institutions are more likely to require a thesis while those at two-year institutions are more likely to require a service project. Additionally, interdisciplinary studies and an institution-wide delivery of honors education are more common in four-year institutions.

Empirical results from the NCHC survey seem to counter one of the most frequently occurring narratives in the honors community, that “honors is unique to each institution.” One might suspect that each instance of honors education differs from every other, but data from the institution-level, at least
within the NCHC membership, instead reveal categorical patterns. Consider, for example, how honors education is organized. Regardless of location, honors programs display similar characteristics and practices, but they differ from honors colleges, which in turn share their own characteristics and practices. Also, consider institutional types. The NCHC membership survey made plain that honors education at two-year institutions, regardless of location, had similar features and that honors education at four-year institutions, no matter where they were, had similar features; however, these features differed systematically between two- and four-year institutions.

The value of a demography of honors lies in identifying inter-institutional relationships that help us understand systemic variation in honors education. As macro-organizational data sets become populated with more variables, especially descriptors of administrative and budgetary structures, curriculum delivery, and methods of operation, the empirical results could provide reliable benchmarks that help honors directors and deans gauge, and perhaps justify to their central administrations, the kinds of characteristics and operations they want and need for their local settings. Moreover, these systemic differences can and should inform professional development as well as training for honors program reviewers. Such data could supplement and provide broader context to the lived experience of longtime honors educators and the case studies they cite that have been the primary sources of information used to mentor newly appointed honors directors or train prospective program reviewers.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

As NCHC has begun to focus on researching the characteristics, resources, and practices of its member programs and colleges, we need to understand to what extent NCHC membership represents the entirety of honors education within the United States. The 2012 NCHC membership survey demonstrated differences in the delivery of honors education based on two-year and four-year institutional classifications, but there is no current knowledge of the extent to which honors education is being delivered at four-year versus two-year institutions nationwide in the United States, nor do we know, for four-year institutions, what differences might exist among baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral colleges and universities. During the spread of honors education in the early 1960s under the leadership of ICSS, many more honors programs were at private rather than public institutions, but we do not know whether this trend has persisted over the past half-century.
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To establish the size, structure, and distribution of honors education, we must investigate to what extent honors education is available in U.S. institutions of higher education, what types of institutions are more likely to be delivering honors education, and the degree to which NCHC membership represents the total offerings of honors education. Following are the research questions to be answered by this study:

1. How many institutions of higher education in the United States make honors education available in a centrally administered, institution-wide operation?

2. To what extent is honors education being offered at each institutional classification, including the variation between two-year and four-year institutions?

3. To what extent are public and private institutions offering honors education?

4. What types of institutions are more likely to offer honors colleges than honors programs?

5. How does honors education vary between NCHC members and non-members?

METHODOLOGY

To answer these questions, we examined the current list of 4,664 institutions in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) (Carnegie, 2016). Our goal was to specifically focus on not-for-profit institutions delivering a traditional undergraduate education. Consequently, we eliminated from consideration the following categories of institutions: for-profit (n=1,290), graduate-only institutions (n=261), institutions classified as offering special-focus curricula (n=479), tribal institutions (n=35), and all institutions located outside of the 50 states of the United States (n=49), leaving 2,550 institutions. From the IPEDS classifications, we used (1) the 2015 Carnegie Basic Classification variable that categorizes institutions as associates colleges (two-year institutions) and—among four-year institutions—baccalaureate colleges, masters universities and doctoral universities; and (2) the Control of Institution variable that categorizes institutions as
private or public. IPEDS includes branch campuses of multi-campus systems only when the branch campus has its own governance unit.

To determine whether an institution offers honors education, we followed the methodology of Richard England, who proposed a nominalist approach that “defined an honors program as any program so-named online and providing information to off-campus website visitors” (73). He was only interested in honors programs that offered an experience to many different majors rather than what could be termed departmental honors programs, and we adopted the same practice in our study.

We used the Google search engine to locate website information on honors education at each of the 2,550 institutions in our population. Once we entered an institution’s website, we used its internal search functions to see whether each institution offered honors education. In the few cases where its internal search engine was poorly configured, we relied on Google to identify if the institution delivered honors education. For institutions with honors education, we next took note of whether it was called an honors program or an honors college. Finally, we read each description of the method of delivery of honors education to make sure that it was an institution-wide and centrally administered honors program or honors college, sometimes downloading pdfs or other internal documents as England did. We defined “institution-wide” as honors education being made available to all majors, eliminating institutions that restrict honors to specific departments. We defined “centrally administered” as having leadership of honors education located at the institution’s campus. As a result, we did not include eight not-for-profit institutions that affiliate with the for-profit honors education company American Honors; these eight institutions are among the total of 2,550 examined but not counted as having honors education. Finally, we consulted the 2013–14 NCHC list of institutional members, excluding for-profit companies; nonresidential colleges such as organizations that provide study abroad or internships; honors societies; and individual members. We expect to explore institutions offering honors education not covered in this article in a follow-up study.

**RESULTS**

Honors education is offered at 1,503 institutions (59%) in an institution-wide, centrally administered manner, leaving 1,047 institutions that do not. Of those with honors, 182 are colleges and 1,321 are programs (12% compared to 88%). Table 1 displays information for all 2,550 institutions studied, depicting whether an institution has an honors program (column 1)
or college (column 2) or either (column 3) or neither (column 4). Among the 919 two-year institutions, 389 have either an honors program or college (42%). For the 1,631 four-year colleges and universities, 1,114 (68%) offer honors education.

Next we examined how honors programs and colleges are distributed across institutional classifications, as categorized by Carnegie classification profiles (see Table 2 and Figure 1). Of the associate (two-year) institutions with honors education, nearly all have honors programs rather than honors colleges: 378 of 389 (97%). Of the 669 baccalaureate institutions, 348 offer honors education (52%), nearly always through programs (n=329, 95%) rather than colleges (n=19, 5%). Of the 654 masters universities, more than three-quarters (n=506, 77%) have an honors program or college, with 440 (87%) having honors programs and 66 (13%) having honors colleges. Among the 308 doctoral universities, honors education is widespread, with over 84% offering honors institution-wide (n=260). The highest percentage of honors colleges can be found at doctoral universities, where honors colleges make up a third of all honors offerings (n=86, 33%).

To identify the differences between public and private institutions offering honors education, we examined institutional control (Table 3). We learned that honors education is available in nearly 60% of institutions, regardless of institutional control. Honors programs are slightly more prevalent at private (563/1009=56%) than public colleges and universities (758/1541=49%); however, the majority of honors programs are present at public institutions overall (758/1321=57%). This finding is a contrast to five decades ago, when more honors programs were located in private institutions than in public ones. Honors colleges are more likely to be at public than private institutions (151/1541=10% to 31/1009=3%), with 83% (151/182) of all honors colleges found at public institutions.

To determine what types of institutions are more likely to have honors colleges than honors programs, we looked at both institutional control and institutional classification of places offering honors education. Figure 2 illustrates how the 1,321 honors programs are distributed across institutional classification. The highest proportion is in masters institutions (33%), followed by associates (29%), baccalaureate (25%) and doctoral institutions (13%). Figure 3 displays a pie chart of the 182 honors colleges by institutional classification. Institutions with honors colleges are far more likely to be at doctoral universities (47%), followed by masters universities (36%), then baccalaureate (11%), and associates colleges (6%).
### Table 1. Honors Presence and Type by Collapsed Institutional Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Classification</th>
<th>(1) Honors Program</th>
<th>(2) Honors College</th>
<th>(3) Total Honors Program or College (1+2)</th>
<th>(4) No Honors Program or College</th>
<th>Total Institutions (n=2550)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-year</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>389</td>
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<td>919</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four-year</td>
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<td>1114</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>1631</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Presence</td>
<td>1321</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>1503</td>
<td>1047</td>
<td>2550</td>
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Note: Two-year institutions are all institutions whose Carnegie classification is labeled as Associates College. Four-year institutions are the total of all institutions whose Carnegie classification is labeled as Baccalaureate College, Masters University, or Doctoral University.

### Table 2. Honors Presence and Type by Institutional Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Classification</th>
<th>(1) Honors Program</th>
<th>(2) Honors College</th>
<th>(3) Total Honors Program or College (1+2)</th>
<th>(4) No Honors Program or College</th>
<th>Total Institutions (n=2550)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>919</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>669</td>
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<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>654</td>
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<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>308</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Presence</td>
<td>1321</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>1503</td>
<td>1047</td>
<td>2550</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional Control</td>
<td>(1) Honors Program</td>
<td>(2) Honors College</td>
<td>(3) Honors Program or College (1+2)</td>
<td>(4) No Honors Program or College</td>
<td>Total Institutions (n=2550)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>594 (59%)</td>
<td>415 (41%)</td>
<td>1009</td>
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<td>Public</td>
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<td>151</td>
<td>909 (59%)</td>
<td>632 (41%)</td>
<td>1541</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Presence</td>
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<td>182</td>
<td>1503 (59%)</td>
<td>1048 (41%)</td>
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</table>
Figure 4 displays honors programs and colleges by categories of institutional control for all 1,503 institutions with honors education. Half are public institutions with honors programs, and nearly four in ten are private institutions with honors programs. One in ten is a public institution with an honors college, and just 2% are private institutions with honors colleges.

To determine differences between NCHC members and non-members, we looked at Carnegie classification and institutional control compared to type of honors delivery at the 1,503 institutions with campus-wide, centrally administered honors education in the study, and we compared these variables with their NCHC membership status. The findings, displayed in Table 4, demonstrate that NCHC members make up nearly six in ten (57%) of U.S. colleges and universities with institution-wide honors education (860 of 1,503). Four-year institutions are more likely than two-year institutions to have a membership in NCHC (61% to 46%). Among four-year colleges and universities, the highest rates of NCHC membership occur at institutions with honors colleges compared to those with honors programs (76% to 55%).

**Figure 1. Percentage of Honors Programs and Colleges by Institutional Classification (n=2550)**

![Percentage of Honors Programs and Colleges by Institutional Classification](image)

- **Classifications:**
  - Associates
  - Baccalaureate
  - Masters
  - Doctoral

- **Has Program or College**
  - Associates: 58%
  - Baccalaureate: 48%
  - Masters: 23%
  - Doctoral: 16%

- **Has No Program or College**
  - Associates: 42%
  - Baccalaureate: 52%
  - Masters: 77%
  - Doctoral: 84%
percentages of NCHC membership among institutions with either a program or college are at doctoral institutions (81%), followed by masters institutions (65%), and then by baccalaureate institutions (43%). Within each of the

**Figure 2. Honors Programs by Institutional Classification (n=1321)**

**Figure 3. Honors College by Institutional Classification (n=182)**
institutional classification categories of baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral, institutions with honors colleges have higher rates of NCHC membership than those with honors programs; more than three-quarters of institutions with honors colleges are affiliated with NCHC (138 of 182, 76%) compared to just over half of those with honors programs (722 of 1,321, 55%).

The interrelation of honors delivery type, Carnegie classification, and institutional control is depicted in Table 5. Among baccalaureate institutions, a higher percentage offer honors education at public than at private colleges and universities (63% to 48%), and honors education is also more readily available at public-masters than private-masters institutions but by a smaller differential (84% to 73%). Honors colleges are far more likely to be found at public-masters than private-masters institutions (19% to 4%), with the extent of honors program availability being roughly the same (69% for privates to 65% for publics). Over 62% of doctoral institutions are public, and they are much more likely to offer honors education than private-doctoral universities (95% to 67%). Honors colleges are far more likely to be in public than private doctoral institutions (41% to 6%) while the reverse is true to a lesser extent for honors programs (61% at privates versus 54% at publics).

To further demonstrate differences between NCHC members and non-members, Table 6 shows how institutional control affects distribution of honors programs and colleges by institutional classification. Overall, judging

**Figure 4. Honors Programs/Colleges by Institutional Control (n=1503)**
from the total private and public sub-totals, member institutions with honors programs are evenly divided between private and public control while those with honors colleges are more likely to be public. Among non-members with honors programs, a higher percentage are at private than public institutions (45% to 36%); there is no difference by institutional control for non-members with honors colleges, each type having 3%.

**CONCLUSION**

This demography of honors has described the population of institutions delivering traditional undergraduate education in the United States.

**Table 4. Honors Membership by Honors Type and Institutional Classification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions with Honors Presence</th>
<th>NCHC Members</th>
<th>Non-Members</th>
<th>Total (n=1503)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honors Programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year Subtotal</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honors Program Total</strong></td>
<td>722</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>1321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honors Colleges</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year Subtotal</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honors College Total</strong></td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honors Programs/Colleges</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year Subtotal</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>1114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Honors Presence</strong></td>
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<td>1503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Classification &amp; Control</td>
<td>(1) Honors Program</td>
<td>(2) Honors College</td>
<td>(3) Honors Program or College (1+2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates/Two-Year Subtotal</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>Baccalaureate Subtotal</td>
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<td>Private</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Subtotal</td>
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<td>66</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
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<td>Private</td>
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<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Subtotal</td>
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<tr>
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<td>79</td>
<td>182</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four-Year Subtotal</td>
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<td>1114</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Total Private</td>
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<td>594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Public</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>909</td>
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</table>
### Table 6. Honors Membership by Institutional Classification and Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions with Honors Presence</th>
<th>NCHC Members</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Members</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total (n=1503)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honors Programs</td>
<td>Honors Colleges</td>
<td>Honors Programs</td>
<td>Honors Colleges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates/Two-Year Subtotal</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>202</td>
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<td>384</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate Subtotal</td>
<td>138</td>
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<td>348</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Subtotal</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doctoral Subtotal</td>
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<td>70</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
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<td>Public</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four-Year Subtotal</td>
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<td>392</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>722</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>1503</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Private</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>271</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Public</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>904</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To determine the size, structure, and distribution of honors education, we examined the location of honors programs and colleges across institutional classification and control categories. Central findings are that 2,550 institutions providing traditional undergraduate education operate in the 50 states of the U.S., and of these 1,503 (59%) offer honors education. For those with honors, 1,321 (88%) have programs, and 182 (12%) have colleges. Honors education has become widely available as it approaches its hundredth year of existence, and the recent growth trend in honors colleges continues. Tracking change over time in an ongoing manner will help honors administrators as well as regional and national honors councils remain aware of important trends in honors education.

We learned that the extent of honors availability varies by type of educational institution. Far more four-year institutions have honors than two-year institutions, and among four-year colleges and universities honors is most available at doctoral institutions, then masters, and then baccalaureate. While no difference exists in honors presence between private and public institutions overall, within institutional classifications a greater proportion of public-baccalaureate and public-masters institutions offer honors education than their private counterparts. Honors colleges can be found in higher concentrations at public-masters than private-masters institutions while honors programs are evenly distributed. A far higher percentage of public-doctoral institutions offer honors education than private-doctoral institutions, with honors colleges almost universally available in public-doctoral institutions.

These results point to success in efforts begun by ICSS in the late 1950s to expand honors education from its initial home in private colleges to the public sector of higher education. Administrations of state-funded colleges and universities have been eager to attract a larger share of high-ability students, and a key draw has been the benefit of a liberal arts experience, akin to that of private institutions, which is made available through an honors program at a lower cost than attendance at a private institution.

Continuing research would help identify differences in honors practices and characteristics among institutional classifications and between private and public institutions. One presumes that institutions in each category have important operational knowledge to share within their classification grouping, pointing to a need for future research to infuse data sets like the one used in this study with greater detail about the workings of honors education at every institution.
NCHC is in a position to carry out ongoing efforts to map the landscape of honors education, surveying not only its members but also those not affiliated. Differences have clearly emerged between the two groups. While a majority of institutions with honors are NCHC members, membership is not representative of the distribution of honors education across institutional types. For example, the membership proportion is higher for four-year than two-year institutions. The highest percentages of membership can be seen in doctoral institutions, followed by masters institutions and finally by baccalaureate institutions, regardless of honors program type. Institutions offering honors colleges are more likely than those offering honors programs to hold memberships in NCHC, regardless of institutional classification, but those with honors colleges at public institutions are more likely to be NCHC members than those at private institutions. This same variation was not present for institutions with honors programs. In fact, there is very little variation in NCHC membership rates for institutions offering honors programs, regardless of whether they are private or public.

If NCHC is to grow its presence in the national honors landscape, it will need to learn why four in ten of honors-offering institutions are unaffiliated. Given that two-year colleges are the most underrepresented, we could ask whether annual membership dues are a deterrent. We might also attempt to determine whether non-affiliates have a clear understanding of the benefits of membership. If marketing research of this sort is to take place, we will need data sets like the one in this analysis to identify the non-affiliates.

The web-crawl technique used in this research can have limitations. Like Richard England, we assumed that an institution did not deliver honors education when we could not detect any reference to it on the website or through an internal or external search engine. Such assumptions can produce false negatives that could only be detected by a physical visit to a campus or by telephoning representatives of academic affairs to confirm the absence of honors education. However, since institutions use honors education to attract high-ability students, they are unlikely to omit or exclude the existence of honors from their website. Thus, limitations of this methodology are almost certainly negligible.

The demography of honors represents the first effort to document size, structure, and distribution of the entirety of honors education within the United States since the inception of NCHC fifty years ago. We next need operational information for all these institutions in order to deepen our structural
understanding of honors education and allow us to be a better advocate for its advancement. As a first step, our study sets a path for future explorations that can transform the context in which honors practitioners view their work, giving them a vantage point of the national landscape of honors education.

REFERENCES


The authors may be contacted at ricks@uca.edu.
As Samuel Schuman argues in his seminal introduction to honors administration, “The single most important feature of any honors program is its people: the students who learn there and the faculty who teach them” (33). Next, argues Schuman, comes the curriculum; the context of the learning that takes place when honors faculty and honors students come together is framed by the curriculum. Honors curricula provide opportunities for honors students to endeavor challenges beyond what traditional undergraduate curricula provide. For faculty, honors is a unique opportunity to blend research and teaching and to provide a curricular laboratory for experimenting with varied topics and pedagogical approaches.

The National Collegiate Honors Council provides guidelines for such curricula in its “Definition of Honors Education,” including the following:
1. “Curricula are characterized largely by core-curriculum honors courses, often with seminars that provide greater depth (not necessarily disciplinary depth)”;

2. “Programs confront students with alternative modes of inquiry, exploration, discovery, tolerance of ambiguity, and enduring questions. Coursework often requires integrative learning: both local and global learning with connections across time, genre, and disciplines, not always in classroom situations”; and

3. “The products often involve creative integrations of evidence from several disciplines with an aggressive emphasis on interdisciplinarity. Assessment of the products emphasizes process rather than product, focusing on metacognitive questions such as ‘how do you know?’”

Honors programs and colleges thus offer various forms of unique curricular and extracurricular experiences. Typically, the honors curriculum is designed to incorporate the following developmental scaffolding:

1. A required course emphasizing basic skills in communication and critical reasoning;
2. A sequence of general education and/or special topics courses;
3. A research seminar that prepares students for senior-level research;
4. A thesis or capstone experience of individual research or creative work.

The honors thesis or capstone experience is often recognized as the most rewarding experience in an undergraduate program of study (Anderson, Lyons, and Weiner).

When a well-developed honors curriculum is paired with co-curricular opportunities, it serves to distinguish an institution’s honors education. Together, these curricular and co-curricular experiences are described as best practices in the NCHC’s “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program.” The fourth characteristic specifies that honors curricula feature “special courses, seminars, colloquia, experiential learning opportunities, undergraduate research opportunities, and other independent-study options,” and the fifteenth characteristic specifies that honors programs emphasize active, participatory learning through provision of, among other features, “international programs, community service, internships, undergraduate research, and other types of experiential education.” The NCHC’s
“Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College” goes still further in emphasizing undergraduate research: “The honors college requires an honors thesis or honors capstone project” (Characteristic 9).

In order to incorporate these best practices within an undergraduate program, honors administrators need to consider the interface of honors requirements with the general education curriculum and the major field of study, the type of thesis or capstone experience, and the relative emphasis on, for instance, communication skills, inquiry, and critical analysis (Taylor). Curricular enhancement is also accomplished by designing co-curricular opportunities such as credit-bearing service learning, internships, and other experiential education offerings. Required service learning, internship experiences, study abroad, and other experiential education provide unique learning contexts and often are resonant with the institution’s mission.

Although literature is available to describe honors curricula (Braid), and while the NCHC “Basic Characteristics” documents provide some guidelines for best practices in honors education, data are needed to support these guidelines and to determine what curricular models effectively frame and incorporate best practices. Furthermore, research is needed to discover whether curricular structure is dependent on institution type or size. Rick Scott has presented some work in this direction in his NCHC presidential report appearing in the special edition of the NCHC newsletter in June 2013. Scott’s presentation focuses primarily on variation across honors organizational structures, e.g., honors colleges vis-à-vis honors programs, and among honors programs Scott further explores variation between two-year and four-year degree institutions. Questions remain, however, about variation across other structural characteristics that often interest educational researchers, such as size and institutional control by private or public interests.

Thus, important questions to address include whether enrollment size and institutional type (e.g., public, private) influence the types of curricular offerings; whether curricular and co-curricular experiences (e.g., internships, service learning) tend to occur more frequently in particular types of institution; and whether such experiences differ across institutions of varying size.

**METHODS**

**Sample**

We used data from the 2012–2013 NCHC Membership Survey. This survey of several hundred items was initiated on April 25, 2012, but with only limited
success. Forty-five of 890 institutions (5% response) responded between April and August 2012. In the interests of improving response rate, the survey was streamlined to 50 questions, and the leaner version was launched August 28, 2012. Periodic reminder email messages were sent on ten separate occasions by NCHC office staff at an average of about every three to four weeks between September 2012 and February 2013. In a final drive in the last half of February, four weekly reminders were sent, and the survey was closed in March 2013.

After duplicate responses were removed, the survey had 446 unique responses—an overall response rate of 50.1%. Comparison of response rates within the categories of honors college members, honors program members, and, further, honors programs at four-year and two-year degree institutions indicates that, with the exception of two-year institutions, the response was similar across these organizational forms: responses included 52.1% of honors colleges, 49.7% of honors programs, and, more specifically, 53.1% of honors programs at four-year institutions, all within just 3 percentage points of the overall response rate. Honors programs at two-year institutions were less likely to participate in the survey, with only 39% responding.

**Measures**

We focus on eight measures from survey items that tap into nine curricular characteristics of honors programs: (1) thesis requirement, (2) capstone course, (3) a combined measure of the first two indicating the presence of either a thesis requirement or a capstone course, (4) service requirement, (5) service learning courses, (6) study abroad courses, (7) experiential education courses, (8) research-intensive courses, and (9) internships. Each of these variables is a binary, i.e., yes or no, nominal-level measure of the presence of a particular curricular attribute derived from responses to survey questions. For instance, the survey item tapping into the presence of a thesis requirement asks, “Do you have a thesis requirement in honors?”

Table 1 is an extract of Scott’s 2013 summary table, which can be found online at the NCHC web site. This table presents the question wording for survey items used to construct eight of our nine measures, and the first column in the body of the table also presents percentages that indicate how common each characteristic is in honors as a whole. For instance, only 25.3% of responding institutions reported having internships for honors students while 72.6% reported having research-intensive honors courses. In addition to the eight items presented in Table 1, we also constructed a ninth measure that combines the thesis and capstone questions to identify which schools
### Table 1. NCHC Institutional Database and 2012 Member Institution Survey Summary Table: Percent Responding Yes to Selected Curricular Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Total Member Institutions</th>
<th>Honors College Members&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Honors Program Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total Program Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Member Institutions</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Responding Institutions</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Rate</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Do you have a thesis requirement in honors?</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>50.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Do you have a service requirement in honors?</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Do you have a capstone course in honors?</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Do you have service learning courses in honors?</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Do you have study abroad courses in honors?</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Do you have experiential education courses in honors?</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Do you have honors courses that are research-intensive?</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Do you have internships for honors students?</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> All but three of the Honors College members that responded are four-year institutions.

Source: This is an extract reproduced from a table included in Scott’s (2013) NCHC Newsletter special edition report summarizing the 2012–2013 NCHC Membership Survey (used with permission from the author).
have either a thesis requirement or a capstone course, i.e., coded “yes” if either one is present, “no” otherwise.

Measures of institutional characteristics come from either the 2012–2013 Membership Survey or from membership data already a part of the NCHC institutional member database. Our measure of honors organizational structure is derived from a 2012–2013 survey question asking respondents to identify “Honors Organization Type” from a choice of either “Honors Program” or “Honors College.” Three additional measures of institutional characteristics come directly from the NCHC membership database: (1) a ratio-level measure of size of the undergraduate student body (full-time equivalent students); (2) a nominal-level measure distinguishing “private” from “public” institutional control; and (3) a nominal-level measure distinguishing two-year associate’s degree-granting institutions from four-year institutions granting degrees at the baccalaureate level or higher. While it would have been useful to include a more elaborated measure of institutional mission, i.e., Carnegie classification, that distinguished baccalaureate colleges, master’s universities, and doctoral/research universities among the four-year schools, no such measure is currently available in the NCHC membership database or the 2012–2013 Membership Survey data.

**Analytic Strategy**

In the analysis that we present here, we seek to examine the nine curricular and co-curricular measures identified above, and we attempt to explore the supposition that circulates in many NCHC conversations that there is great variability among NCHC institutional members in honors structure, curriculum, and other institutional characteristics. Specifically, we wanted to explore variation across not only honors organizational structure and broad degree classification (associate’s degree institutions vs. those that offer baccalaureate and advanced degrees), but also across institutional control, i.e., private vs. public institutions, and institution size (total undergraduate full-time equivalent [FTE] enrollment).¹

We calculated proportions of those institutions saying “yes” to each of the nine curricular measures within each of the sub-samples defined by each of the four dimensions identified above: broad degree classification grouping, honors organizational structure, institutional control, and size. We explored size, presented in Figure 1, first by operationalizing as an ordinal measure and collapsing institutions into categories with roughly evenly sized small, medium, and large institution groupings, where small was 0–2,999, medium
was 3,000–9,999, and large was 10,000+ in size. We discovered few differences across size measured in three categories, so we then measured size as an ordinal measure with two roughly evenly sized small (n = 222) and large (n = 218) institution groups, where small was defined as 0–3,999 and large was defined as those larger than 4,000 (note that 6 of the 446 survey respondents have missing size data).

To explore variation, we conducted z-tests of difference between proportions (analogous to t-tests of differences between means) and also examined patterns of consistency within similar dimensions (e.g., private institutions with honors colleges and private institutions with honors programs). Since our study was exploratory, we used two-tailed tests, and since some sample sizes for specific measures were small, we used an alpha level of .10 to guide us in identifying potential differences. While we used somewhat liberal thresholds, most of the differences that we present are significant at the $p \leq .05$ level, including a number that are significant at the $p \leq .01$ level. Because of the number of comparisons, we have chosen not to distinguish between levels of significance in the tabular presentation of data, but in the description of findings we do note $p$ values for some contrasts when those values are especially compelling.

**Figure 1. NCHC Member Institution Total Undergraduate Enrollment (FTE)**

Source: NCHC 2012–2013 Membership Survey
FINDINGS

General Finding of Note: Size Doesn’t Seem to Matter Much

One of the most general findings that we discovered is that there is very little statistically distinguishable variation in the curricular characteristics across size of institution (as measured by total undergraduate FTE). We did not see many differences when using ANOVA to detect difference across the three-category measure of size, nor did we see many differences when using z-tests to examine differences between large and small institutions in the two-category operationalization of institution size. As a supplementary analysis, we also calculated bivariate correlations for size (in its original ratio-level measurement) and binary measures (coded 1 when present, 0 otherwise) of each of the curricular characteristics of interest, and correlations were typically quite small, ranging from $r = .01$ to $.24$.

Because of this general finding, most of our presentation will focus on an analysis that elides size as a dimension. In Table 2, however, we show one example of the approach that we used in the early exploration that included size, in this case for internships, one of the curricular measures for which we observed the most differences across size. The top row restricts sub-samples to small institutions, the middle row restricts to large institutions, and the bottom row contrasts degree type, honors structure, and institutional control regardless of size.

In the case of internships, we found 16 significant contrasts that are visible in this table. In an examination of the significant contrasts across categories of size (indicated by footnote h), it appears that internships are more likely found among honors colleges at larger schools than among honors colleges at smaller schools as well as more likely among honors programs at large privates than among those at small privates. However, two of these three contrasts are significant only at the $p \leq .10$ level, and all three involve small sample sizes ($n = 3, 7, \text{ and } 17$). While there is a significant difference at the $p \leq .01$ level between large and small four-year degree institutions regardless of honors structure or institutional control (33.5% vs. 19.6%), and while it does make some (post hoc) sense that larger institutions and programs would be more likely to have honors internships by virtue of their greater resources and economies of scale, even in this instance the bivariate correlation between a ratio measure of size and the binary measure of internships was quite small ($r = .14$; not shown).
Shrewd readers will note that the number of comparisons implied by Table 2 are many, thus increasing the probability of committing a Type I error in which we would incorrectly conclude that there is a significant difference where no real difference exists. In other words, because of the workings of chance and the disproportionate impact of chance occurrences for small samples, there may be a few comparisons where we would think we see a difference between two percentages when that difference is really too small to say confidently that the two are anything other than equal. Thus, we might find a significant difference for a few comparisons just by chance. Given some of the small sub-sample sizes and the probability of finding a significant difference by chance, we have tried to be cautious when drawing conclusions. Since our analysis is exploratory rather than a formal testing of hypotheses, we use significance as a guide to draw attention to contrasts where there may be differences, and among those possible differences we try to focus on whether any differences in percentages are not only statistically significant but also meaningful.

We did notice a few other significant contrasts by size using the strategy illustrated above—for thesis requirement and for experiential education, study abroad, and service learning courses—but for the sake of simplicity, because size had few visible effects on the presence of curricular characteristics, we have condensed our primary presentation to focus on percentages comparable to those at the bottom of Table 2, i.e., regardless of size. The results of these analyses for all nine curricular measures of interest are presented in Table 3.

**Other General Finding of Note**

As a final point of interest before proceeding to the primary analysis, one of the first results that we notice when including size as a measure is that there are very few honors colleges at large private institutions among the NCHC institutions that responded. There are only four honors colleges at private institutions of 4,000+, and among the 92 schools over 10,000 in size there are no (zero) private schools with an honors college (not shown). Nor, for that matter, are there that many honors colleges at private schools of any size (only 1.8% of the total sample) or honors programs at larger private institutions (n = 17). This data set includes only the half of member institutions that responded to the survey, but it seems safe to conclude that membership of large private schools in NCHC was rare in 2012.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Size</th>
<th>Four-Year Degree Institutions</th>
<th>Two-Year Degree Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honors College</td>
<td>Honors Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small (0–3,999)</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (4,000+)</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCHC 2012 Membership Survey.

Note: Tests of difference between means reveal significant differences between colleges and programs ($t = 3.57, p \leq .01$), between smaller and larger institutions ($t = -2.81, p \leq .01$), and between four- and two-year institutions ($t = -2.46, p \leq .05$). We have converted the proportions to percentages, but readers should note that standard errors are those for the proportions on which those percentages are based.

*aAll of the two-year degree institutions are public, and all but three are classified as honors programs.
\(^{b}\)Significant difference between private and public institutions within honors organization type.
\(^{c}\)Significant difference between colleges and programs within institutional control grouping.
\(^{d}\)Significant difference between colleges and programs.
\(^{e}\)Significant difference between two-year degree institutions and four-year institutions.
\(^{f}\)Significant difference between two-year degree institutions and four-year honors colleges.
\(^{g}\)Significant difference between two-year degree institutions and four-year honors programs.
\(^{h}\)Significant difference between small and large institutions within degree-honors-control grouping.
### Table 3. Percent of Members with Selected Curricular Characteristics by Degree Classification, Honors Organization, and Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular Item</th>
<th>Four-Year Degree Institutions</th>
<th>Two-Year Degree Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honors College</td>
<td>Honors Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Requirement</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capstone Course</td>
<td>85.7%b,c</td>
<td>46.8%b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis or Capstone</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>72.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Requirement</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning Courses</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>58.1%c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Abroad Courses</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>66.7%c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential Ed. Courses</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>52.5%c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research-intensive Courses</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships</td>
<td>0.0%b</td>
<td>50.0%b,c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Total Sample</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCHC 2012 Membership Survey (n = 439).

Note: Significance was tested at the \( p \leq .10 \) level, but most of the differences reported are significant at \( p \leq .05 \).

a All of the two-year degree institutions are public, and all but three are classified as honors programs.

b Significant difference between private and public institutions within honors organization type.

c Significant difference between colleges and programs within institutional control grouping.
Significant difference between colleges and programs.
Significant difference between two-year degree institutions and four-year institutions.
Significant difference between two-year degree institutions and four-year honors colleges.
Significant difference between two-year degree institutions and four-year honors programs.
Thesis Requirement

A significant and sizeable difference exists between two- and four-year institutions whereby four-year institutions are much more likely to have a thesis requirement (57.9% vs. 11.4%). Some greater likelihood of a thesis requirement may occur at honors programs versus honors colleges at smaller institutions (not shown), but the difference is only marginally significant ($p \leq .10$). Essentially, little variation exists among four-year institutions around the overall average of 57.9% with a thesis requirement.

Capstone Course

A significant and sizeable difference exists between two- and four-year institutions whereby four-year institutions are more likely to have a capstone course (47.3% vs. 29.6%). Honors colleges at private institutions are significantly ($p = .052$) more likely to have a capstone course than those at public institutions (85.7% vs. 46.8%) or than honors programs at private institutions (85.7% vs. 44.0%; $p \leq .05$). With the exception of private honors colleges, which we have already noted is a rare institutional form with a small sub-sample of $n = 7$ (while there are eight private honors colleges in the sample, one has missing data on capstone courses), there is little variation among four-year institutions around the overall average of 47.3% with a capstone course.

Thesis or Capstone

When looking at a newly computed variable measuring the presence of either a thesis requirement or a capstone course at member institutions, few will be surprised to see a significant and sizeable difference between two- and four-year institutions whereby four-year institutions are more likely to have either a thesis requirement or a capstone course ($p \leq .001$); three-fourths of four-year institutions have at least one of these curricular components whereas only one-third of two-year institutions do, and most of the latter have capstone courses, given the findings for the previous two measures. Among small four-year institutions, private schools do appear to be more likely than public ones to have either a thesis requirement or capstone course (not shown; $p \leq .05$). Other than that possible exception, four-year institutions display little variation around the 75.6% that have either a thesis requirement or a capstone course.
Service Requirement

For both two- and four-year institutions, not much variation occurs around the overall average of 39.3% with a service requirement (not shown, though one can readily see in Table 3 that the percentages for two- and four-year institutions both hover right around 40%). However, one possible size effect for this curricular element is that larger four-year private institutions appear to be a possible deviation from the overall pattern, with only 18.2%, whether programs or colleges, having a service requirement. A significant difference exists between larger four-year public (n = 161) and private institutions (n = 21) in the likelihood of having a service requirement (not shown; \( p \leq .05 \)) whereby large private institutions are less likely to have a service requirement than large public institutions (18.2% vs. 44.7%, not shown).

Service Learning Courses

Significant differences exist in the provision of service learning courses between four-year institutions’ honors programs and both four-year honors colleges and two-year institutions’ honors programs, particularly true, perhaps, at institutions of larger size (not shown; \( p \leq .05 \)). Four-year honors colleges and two-year programs are about 30% more likely to have service learning courses than four-year honors programs: only about 42.4% of four-year honors programs have service learning courses whereas about 57.1% of four-year honors colleges and 53.5% of community college honors programs have such service courses (weighted average of 55.3 / 42.4 = 1.30, or 30% more likely).

Study Abroad Courses

A significant and sizeable difference exists between two- and four-year institutions whereby four-year institutions are much more likely to have study abroad courses (48.2% vs. 21.1%; \( p \leq .01 \)); this is especially true for honors colleges (64.7%; \( p \leq .01 \)), and among four-year institutions honors colleges are 46% more likely (64.7 / 44.4 = 1.46) than honors programs to have study abroad courses (\( p \leq .01 \)). Among four-year institutions, public institutions seem on the face to be more likely than private institutions to have study abroad courses, but this difference is only marginally significant (\( p \leq .10 \)). The presence of study abroad courses was the curricular element for which we noticed the most compelling size effects: large four-year institutions are 50% more likely to have honors-specific study abroad courses (58.0% vs. 38.6%,
not shown; \( p \leq .01 \), though this size effect seems to be most pronounced among honors programs, and large two-year institutions are seven times more likely than small ones to have study abroad courses (38.2% vs. 5.4%, not shown; \( p \leq .01 \)).

### Experiential Education Courses

As with most of the other measures that do not involve a senior-level experience, there is no statistically detectable difference between two-year and four-year institutions in the provision of experiential education courses. Thus, little variation appears among honors programs (at either two-year or four-year institutions) around the overall 39.0% (142 of 364 reporting) that have an experiential education course. There may be some greater likelihood of experiential education courses at honors colleges (50.7%) versus honors programs (38.8%), but the difference is only marginally significant \( (p \leq .10) \), and any such difference seems to apply only among larger public four-year institutions (not shown). Unlike most of the measures of honors curricular characteristics, a significant difference exists between larger and smaller four-year institutions (not shown) whereby larger institutions are about 30% more likely (46.9% vs. 35.3%) to offer experiential education courses \( (p \leq .05) \).

### Research-Intensive Courses

For both two-year and four-year institutions, not much variation occurs around the overall rate of 72.6% with research-intensive courses; the difference between the 73.2% and 68.6% for four-year and two-year institutions is not significant, and the weighted average of the two is 72.6%. Honors colleges may be slightly more likely than honors programs to have research-intensive courses (81.4% vs. 71.2%), but this difference is only marginally significant \( (p \leq .10) \). The high numbers across all levels of institutional character—e.g., two/four-year, honors program/college, and public/private control—indicate high levels of consensus about the importance of providing research-intensive courses for honors students.

### Internships

Among four-year institutions, honors colleges are twice as likely as honors programs to have internships (44.3% vs. 22.3%; \( p \leq .01 \)), and honors colleges at four-year institutions are almost three times more likely to have internships than honors at two-year institutions (44.3% vs. 15.5%; \( p \leq .01 \)). Large four-
year institutions are 71% more likely (33.5 / 19.6 = 1.71) to have internships than smaller four-year institutions, regardless of institutional control or honors structure; this contrast can be seen in the “Total Four-Year” column of Table 2 (p ≤ .01). Also, among four-year schools, public institutions, regardless of honors organization as college or program, are significantly more likely than private ones to have an internship in honors by a factor of almost two (34.0% vs. 17.5%, not shown in tables; p ≤ .01).

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

One general finding that we have not highlighted above is worth emphasizing: despite the common belief that honors is widely variable, we witnessed few statistically significant differences between private and public institutions in these data. We noted only a few exceptions to this general conclusion. First, service requirements are slightly more common among public (44.0%) than private (33.3%) institutions (not shown), though probably only among larger schools. Second, internships also are more common among public (34.0%) than private (17.5%) institutions. The relative likelihood regarding provision of internships can be seen in the main results presented in Table 3 by comparing private and public columns for colleges and programs.

We also found few statistically distinguishable, meaningful differences across size of institution, again with some exceptions to this generalization: specific incarnations of honors courses—including service, study abroad, experiential, and research courses—are more likely at honors colleges than honors programs at four-year schools, presumably because of their greater resources, greater control over resources and curriculum, and/or economies of scale that come with larger honors student populations. Otherwise, the variability that we witness across size of institution tends to exist within fairly narrow parameters.

The consistency in offerings is clearest when examining undergraduate research opportunities in honors. One of the features that distinguishes honors education is the opportunity for undergraduate students to take on greater independence in pursuing their own research and intellectual projects. As Schuman argues in his *Beginning in Honors: A Handbook*, “A final project or thesis is probably the most pervasive characteristics of honors curricula” (34); the results from this survey bear this out. Three-fourths (75.6%) of four-year member institutions have either a thesis requirement or a capstone course as a prominent part of their honors curriculum. While not as common, a significant minority (34.3%) of two-year member institutions also have at least one
of these options (usually a capstone course) requiring increasing intellectual independence as students approach completion of their program and degree requirements. In particular, honors colleges at private institutions seem universally to have established this experience for honors students (though the small sample size of $n = 8$ limits our ability to generalize). The numbers for a thesis requirement are somewhat less for colleges than the 94.3% with a thesis/creative project reported by Sederberg (131) from the 2004 NCHC survey of honors colleges, but Sederberg’s number was based on a question that asked whether the thesis was available as an opportunity rather than a program requirement. Despite the apparent consensus favoring a thesis or capstone experience, still about 25% of four-year honors units did not have a senior-level thesis or capstone experience by 2012.

Honors units also appear to be making significant efforts to prepare their students for increasing intellectual independence in their upper-class courses. Even more than the opportunity to prepare a thesis or capstone project, the opportunity to take research-intensive courses is a pervasive characteristic of U.S. honors curricula. Research-intensive courses are common at two-year institutions, where approximately 70% of honors programs have research-intensive courses, and at four-year honors colleges the percentage is only about 10 percentage points higher than that (81.4%).

Service is one of the hallmarks of liberal education, and the larger category of service and experiential learning is one of the primary emphases of honors as articulated in the NCHC “Basic Characteristics” documents and the more recent “Definition of Honors Education.” The findings presented here indicate a fair degree of consistency across institutions of varying character in providing service and experiential education courses as well as in requiring some service as part of the honors program, but these opportunities are far less common than are undergraduate research training and guided research opportunities. Roughly 40–60% of honors units have these curricular options, depending on the specific institutional location, and large privates, especially, are even less likely than larger publics (by a factor of more than two) to have a service requirement in honors. Given the wording of the question, it is possible that students at the 40–60% of institutions that do not have these curricular elements specifically in honors do nonetheless have them available as part of their larger collegiate experience, but these numbers would seem to leave considerable room for growth and improvement across honors in the United States.
As a specific incarnation of experiential education, honors internships are the rarest of the curricular elements we examined, with only about 25.3% of honors units providing internships specifically in honors, and internships are an even greater rarity at two-year institutions although, understandably, not quite as rare as thesis requirements. Similar to experiential, service, and research-intensive honors courses, honors colleges are much more likely than honors programs to have honors internships, by a factor of almost two, and public institutions are more likely to have them than private ones. As with service and experiential learning options, students are likely to have internships available to them as part of the general collegiate experience when they are not available specifically in honors. However, as the NCHC community continues to reflect on the ways in which honors distinguishes itself—particularly in an era when higher education is increasingly called to account for how it prepares students for the world of work they will face after graduation—we should be considering whether honors has a unique contribution to make in the area of internships or whether we should leave such experiences to be defined in the general curricula for all students in an era of massification (Altbach 1998, 2013; Slaughter 2001; Wilkins and Burke 2015; Clark 1996).

All our findings point to two central conclusions. First, honors units at member institutions seem to value undergraduate research and senior-level experiences involving increased intellectual independence, as reflected in the widespread presence of thesis requirements, capstone courses, and research-intensive courses. Second, the service and experiential learning components (including honors internships and study abroad courses) that are highlighted in NCHC best practices documents have much less consensus and implementation across U.S. honors. Only about two-fifths of member institutions have experiential and service learning courses and service requirements, and even fewer offer honors internships. Considering the prominence that experiential education enjoys in the NCHC best practices documents, these numbers seem low, and they take on even greater weight given the moral significance of service. In a time and place when much of the culture encourages individual success, values accumulation of personal wealth and prestige, and surrounds us with the technological means to satisfy our own particular whims and fancies on demand, we would argue for the increasing importance of encouraging students to think about service to something greater than themselves. Moreover, we would argue for building these opportunities and requirements into the context of honors curricula in which honors educators have more
control and can actively encourage students to reflect more deliberately not only on the rights, privileges, and prestige of honors but also on its duties and responsibilities.

END NOTES

1. One could also look at honors program size as an indicator of institutional size. Either makes sense. While we did not formally explore the degree to which conclusions would vary using program size as a measure, we find it unlikely. The correlation between institution size and honors program size is fairly strong ($r = .66$), and the eight correlations between the measure of honors program size and each of the binary measures of curriculum were in the same order of magnitude as those observed using overall institution size.

2. Correlations between undergraduate FTE and each of the curricular measures are: (1) thesis, $r = .01$; (2) service requirement, $r = -.06$; (3) capstone, $r = .05$; (4) service learning courses, $r = .15$; (5) study abroad courses, $r = .24$; (6) experiential education courses, $r = .14$; (7) research-intensive courses, $r = .10$; and (8) internships, $r = .14$.

REFERENCES


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From Orientation Needs to Developmental Realities: The Honors First-Year Seminar in a National Context

Anton Vander Zee, Trisha Folds-Bennett, Elizabeth Meyer-Bernstein, and Brendan Reardon

College of Charleston

INTRODUCTION

The transition into college remains one of the most formative and complex phases in an individual’s life. Institutions of higher learning have responded to the challenges facing first-year students in myriad ways, most often by offering summer orientation programs, dynamic living-learning environments, tailored academic and psychological support services, and dedicated first-year seminars (FYSs) that seek to engage students in a range of curricular and co-curricular experiences. FYSs—courses intended to enhance the academic skills and/or social development of first-year college students—have become the curricular anchors grounding this broad array of programming. While addressing the developmental needs of first-year
students is the key driver of such seminars, they can also enhance student connection to the institution and have positive effects on retention, especially persistence to the sophomore year.

A deep body of research exists on campus-wide FYS programs, and evidence suggests that the FYS is a recurring interest in honors communities as well. However, the honors community lacks a comprehensive analytical framework that might provide an informed approach to the honors FYS. Important topics related to honors FYSs include how prevalent they are on campuses across the U.S.; what distinguishes them from other FYS offerings on campus; what kinds of resources they share with broader-campus programs; what curricular structures and learning outcomes characterize them; and what types of considerations motivate the creation of distinct seminars for first-year honors students. The overview of the honors FYS that follows, based on a national survey of honors programs and colleges conducted in 2014, addresses these topics.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Although research has focused intently on the developmental needs of college-age students, new frameworks for understanding the transition to college have emerged in tandem with the recognition of what psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett has termed “Emerging Adulthood,” a developmental category that for many has attained disciplinary status as a new life stage. Emerging adulthood, according to Arnett, is a time of instability, intensive identity exploration, and self-focus, a time that can seem at once daunting and full of promise. Neuroscience research has provided some physiological evidence for this new life stage with studies showing that the brain continues to develop through age twenty and beyond (Giedd et al.; Sowell et al.). Accompanying this conversation are debates in both popular media and scientific literature about the effects that certain prominent parenting styles—the self-esteem-boosting, the helicoptering, the cell-phone-tethering—are having on first-year college students. The current college generation seems both overprotected and underprepared, both coddled and anxious, as they seek to supplant the external motivations that have been placed on them by family and other social groups with more sustaining internal motivations. In honors colleges and programs across the country, this conversation has taken on a new urgency as both anecdotal and research-based evidence emerges concerning the mental health issues increasingly faced by high-achieving students (Center for Collegiate Mental Health; Scelfo).
Given these new realities—psychological, physiological, and cultural—efforts to address transitional issues in the college context have increasingly focused on first-year programming in general and the FYS in particular. The past three decades have witnessed a marked increase in the presence of FYSs on campuses across the U.S. (Young & Hopp): one recent study found that 96.5% of four-year institutions reported the presence of some type of FYS on campus (Barefoot, Griffin & Koch), and Young and Hopp found that nearly 70% of respondents indicated a FYS for the majority of enrolled students, suggesting that these seminars have taken on a deep institutional presence nationally.

With regard to honors communities, one might assume that less attention would be focused on students’ basic orientation needs: the “who,” “what,” “when,” and “where” addressed by a more remedial University 101 curriculum that took hold across campuses in the 70s and 80s. Research suggests, however, that honors programs and colleges, perhaps wary of overlooking or underestimating the core developmental realities students continue to face, are offering dedicated FYSs with increasing prevalence. The 2012–13 National Survey of First-Year Seminars, a triennially published report currently in its ninth iteration, indicates that 24.1% of responding schools offer a distinct FYS for honors students, representing a marked increase over the 14% offering distinct honors FYSs cited in 2000 (Young & Hopp). According to Young and Hopp, special sections of FYSs intended for honors students occurred at a higher rate than those intended for any other unique student subpopulation despite the fact that honors units were only present, extrapolating data from Scott and Smith's demographic study, at approximately 60% of the campuses they surveyed. These numbers suggest that even as campus-wide, institutionalized FYSs have increased consistently over time, so too has the recognition within honors communities that their students would benefit from a distinct FYS tailored to their unique needs and goals.

The growth in broader-campus FYSs has been propelled and sustained by a well-established body of research on the first-year experience led by The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (NCR). Founded in 1986, the NRC has emerged as the central clearinghouse for scholarship as well as best practices related to all aspects of the first-year experience. Their in-house journal—The Journal for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition—and their monograph series, recurring research reports, online courses, and a major annual conference have offered myriad venues for those seeking practical guidance or theoretical reflection on the FYS in particular. Unfortunately, this broader body of literature has
rarely focused on the honors FYS, and the honors community itself has yet to develop a comprehensive analytical framework that can both account for what is happening in the honors FYS in the present and lay a foundation for future developments.

Although a comprehensive framework is lacking, a robust conversation related to the FYS has begun to develop in the honors community over the last decade. An overview of annual conference proceedings of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) going back ten years suggests that the conversation in the honors community, though persistent, is largely anecdotal or focused on a single institution and not often tied to the broader field of FYS research. This narrow focus is reflected as well in the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)* and *Honors in Practice (HIP)*, where conversations about the honors FYS only occasionally emerge.

Since 2005, a handful of articles directly addressing the place of the FYS in an honors context have appeared in *JNCHC* and *HIP*. These articles tend to offer qualitative descriptions of unique models that fit the needs of a particular program. An article by Goldberger published in *Honors in Practice* in 2012, for example, lays out the rationale for a first-year seminar course at Mount Ida College that takes a “whole mind approach” (in reference to Daniel Pink’s book *A Whole New Mind: Why Right Brainers Will Rule the Future*). Although Goldberger’s model is not necessarily generalizable to other programs, the basic structure of the seminar reflects the critical characteristics of the FYS that are central to honors courses: the promotion of “critical thinking, interdisciplinary study, and close mentoring relationships with faculty” (79).

In line with this focus on complexity and deep intellectual engagement, an article exploring the FYS at Ithaca College focuses on the development of metacognitive awareness and intentionality and also on independence in the learning process (Bleicher).

The most frequently occurring topic with regard to the honors FYS is the role of peer mentors in helping to achieve learning goals. Leichliter, for example, discusses the impact of peer-leadership models in honors education, specifically describing the role of peer “co-mentors” in the first-year seminar. She argues that peer mentors serve as role models who guide students toward the mature engagement of a successful college student. Describing a similar model, Wang and colleagues focus on the impact of peer mentors on persistence in honors. They argue that these team leaders support the academic and social identity development that is critical to an honors student’s success.

This emphasis on peer education, along with the tendency toward enriched academic seminars, is also evident in campus-wide offerings,
especially as FYs have increasingly come under the purview of academic affairs (Young & Hopp). Indeed, much of the expansive research done on broader-campus FYs can be extended to honors communities. Studies have shown that FYs can improve outcomes such as higher grade point averages, more meaningful interaction with faculty and peers, and increased use of campus services and resources (Greenfield et al.). Soria and Stubblefield, focusing on the reflective engagement that many FYs employ, find that students whose strengths and interests are identified and employed in the first year have higher academic self-efficacy and more positive engagement in the learning process. As broader-campus FYs have begun looking beyond the “University 101” model that was so foundational for the FY in its early years, there has been an increasing emphasis on peer educators (Latino & Ashcraft), integration of curricular and co-curricular experiences (Keup & Petschauer), and incorporation of high-impact practices (Kuh, “Student Engagement” and High-Impact Educational Practices). Furthermore, although the social and academic development of students is at the forefront in conversations about FYs, institutions have begun to understand the importance of the first-year experience in promoting retention (Ishler & Upcraft). It follows that a dedicated honors FY might similarly be a driver of retention in honors. For all of these reasons, then, the honors community would do well to attend more fully to, and to participate more regularly in, this growing field of research.

The FY has emerged as a remarkably flexible tool that can accommodate general education requirements, partake in broader linked curricula, encourage student connection to the institution, and be strategically scaled to suit specific institutional contexts and student needs. Though the research literature in honors lacks quantitative reflections on how the FY has encouraged resource awareness, sponsored student success, and impacted honors retention at individual institutions, one need not make a giant leap of logic to conclude that an honors FY might offer clear benefits for the intellectual culture of an honors community.

**CURRENT STUDY**

During the fall of 2014, we conducted the first national survey of the honors first-year seminar (hereafter called the 2014 Honors FY Survey). The 2014 Honors FY Survey sought to collect information that would lead to a comprehensive overview of the honors FY and how it differs from broader-campus offerings in key areas. We sought comparative data on seminar type, staffing structures, grading protocol, credit load, program longevity, seminar
type, and staffing structure. We also sought information that would help us gauge the prevalence of honors FYSs on campuses across the country as well as information on the curricular and pedagogical structures of honors FYSs, the resources they most commonly introduce, and the student development emphases or program objectives that define the honors FYS. Finally, the survey sought qualitative data on what motivated the creation of a distinct honors FYS at surveyed institutions. The descriptive analysis in this paper is intended to help honors programs and colleges as they develop, adapt, and assess honors FYSs. We also anticipate that our results will help those who oversee broader-campus FYS programs better understand how their offerings might effectively engage high-achieving students.

Materials and Methods

The 2014 Honors FYS Survey was administered from September through October of 2014 via an email link to a web-based survey. Though the primary focus was the honors FYS, the survey asked respondents for information about both the honors FYS and campus-wide offerings, when relevant, in order to compare the two. Although all comparisons are drawn from our data set, the picture that emerged of the FYS in our data was largely consistent with the 2012–13 National Survey of First-Year Seminars (NSFYS) conducted by Young and Hopp.

Our survey instrument was designed and administered using Qualtrics survey software, and the survey design itself was developed using the 2012–13 NSFYS as a model with permission of the lead author Dallin Young. Some of the survey questions were either lightly adapted or taken directly from the 2012–13 NSFYS (see Appendix for a copy of our survey instrument, which notes those questions adapted from the 2012–13 NSFYS). Most of the questions were choice-based, including some that were forced-choice and others that allowed for multiple responses. A few questions at the end of the survey were open-ended, thus providing an opportunity for respondents to share qualitative information unique to their institutions or to qualify and clarify selections made in the choice-based questions.

For an early iteration of the National Survey of the First-Year Seminar, Barefoot first reviewed course descriptions for approximately 200 courses and then developed a basic typology for FYSs, which was later modified to include the “hybrid” seminar (Tobolowski & Associates). The 2014 National Honors FYS Survey used this typology as well:
1. **Extended orientation seminar.** Often called “Freshman Orientation,” “College Survival,” “College Transition,” or “Student Success,” these courses include an introduction to campus resources, time management, academic and career planning, learning strategies, and student-development concerns.

2. **Academic seminar with generally uniform content across sections.** This type may be an interdisciplinary or theme-oriented course, sometimes part of a general education requirement. The primary focus is on academic theme/discipline but often includes academic skills components such as critical thinking and expository writing.

3. **Academic seminars on various topics.** This seminar’s content may be similar to #2 except that specific topics vary from section to section.

4. **Basic study skills seminar.** Offered for academically underprepared students, the seminar focuses on basic academic skills such as grammar, note taking, and reading texts.

5. **Hybrid.** This type has elements from two or more types of seminars.

**Description of Sample**

A total of 831 institutions were invited to participate via the point-of-contact for each institution, a list provided by the NCHC. We also announced the survey and invited participants via the NCHC listserv. The 831 institutions invited to participate represent approximately 55% of all honors colleges and programs nationwide, an estimate based on information provided by Richard I. Scott and Patricia Smith. Of the 831 campuses contacted, 37.7% completed the survey (N=313), a response rate in line with reported responses for web-based surveys in organizational research (Holton).

In terms of the composition of our survey respondents, Table 1 shows a comparison of institutional characteristics for all responding institutions broken down by the institutional structure of the honors division, i.e., program or college, on campus. In the broader context of honors, Scott and Smith found that honors programs comprise 87.9% of all honors communities and honors colleges 12.1%. They also found that the ratio of four-year to two-year
honors communities is 65.1% to 34.9%. As our data show in relation to these percentages, our sample includes a proportionally higher representation of honors colleges and four-year institutions.

Because honors programs are more common than honors colleges and are well represented in our sample, data regarding programs are likely more reliable. Because we had a low response-rate from two-year institutions, we did not engage in any analysis related to this group.

Results

Seminar Presence and Resource Sharing

Using responses to questions related to the presence of honors and broader-campus FYS offerings at any given institution, we were able to establish a comprehensive overview of the honors FYS in its institutional context. Of the 313 schools who responded to this survey, 71% offer a campus-wide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Comparison of Institutional Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Characteristics</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FYS Survey Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Type (N=313)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private, non-profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution Type (N = 312)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Year Students, Campus-Wide (N = 311)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501–1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,001–2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,001–4,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Year Students, Honors (N = 200)</td>
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<td>Fewer than 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101–300</td>
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<tr>
<td>301–500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater than 500</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
FYS intended for the general student population. Figure 1 indicates where the honors FYS is distinct from the campus-wide FYS offerings; where the honors FYS is housed within the campus-wide FYS curriculum as a special section intended for honors students; where honors and campus-wide FYS offerings exist in the absence of one another; and where no FYS exists in either the honors or the campus-wide context.

These data show that 66% of honors divisions surveyed indicated some type of honors FYS, whether it exists separately from campus-wide offerings (45%), as a subsection of the campus-wide FYS (4%), or in the absence of a campus-wide FYS (17%). The responses indicated, in relation to a question asking whether such courses are typically required, that in 78% of the cases where a distinct honors FYS is offered, the course is mandatory. These data suggest that the honors programs and colleges represented in this sample consider some type of FYS to be an important foundational experience for honors students. Furthermore, as the significant overlap of distinct broader-campus and honors FYSs indicates, it is not simply the absence of an institutionalized FYS program that spurs the development of an honors FYS; rather, there seems to be something about the nature and objective of honors education itself that gives rise to this distinction.

Although the honors FYS exists most often as distinct from campus-wide offerings, resource sharing between these two entities in the area of curriculum,

**Figure 1. Presence of Honors FYS in Relation to Campus-Wide FYS (n = 313)**
faculty, and administrative support occurs with some frequency, especially for honors programs. Most interesting, though, is that of the institutions reporting inclusion of honors students in some type of distinct FYS, 90% of honors colleges are offering FYSs without financial support from the broader-campus program as compared with 75% of honors programs ($\chi^2 (1) = 7.46, p<.0063$). Honors colleges and programs also differ in terms of sharing of curriculum ($\chi^2 (1) = 5.88, p<.015$) and faculty ($\chi^2 (1) = 28.88, p<.00001$) with the broader-campus FYS. In fact, honors colleges were significantly more likely to report no significant resource sharing ($\chi^2 (1) = 26.01, p<.00001$).

**Seminar Type**

Using the established FYS typology discussed in the methods section, the 2014 Honors FYS Survey asked respondents to indicate the seminar type for their campus-wide and honors offerings, respectively. Of the respondents, 39.5% indicated that the extended orientation is the most common campus-wide and honors offerings, respectively.
wide FYS at their institution, a number consistent with the 2012–13 NSFYS. As Figure 3 indicates, however, campus-wide and honors offerings differ ($\chi^2 (5) = 41.5, p<.0001$). Specifically, extended orientation seminars are significantly less likely to be the model used for the honors FYSs ($\chi^2 (1) = 16.04, p<.0001$). Instead, honors FYSs are more likely to be academic seminars on either uniform or various content, which, when combined, form a distinct majority (61%) of the FYSs offered in honors whereas in campus-wide FYS offerings academic seminars make up less than half (40%) ($\chi^2 (1) = 8.0, p<.005$).

Though extended orientation seminars (which relate more closely to the familiar “University 101” model) are one of the least commonly offered standalone types in the honors context, the hybrid seminar types—as reflected in the optional qualitative responses related to this question—often include an extended-orientation element even if this orientation focus is tailored specifically to the honors audience, e.g., early introductions to research opportunities, opportunities for community engagement, and networking with faculty and peers.

**Figure 3. Comparison of Seminar Type, Campus-Wide (N = 223) and Honors (N = 202)**

EO = Extended Orientation; AS-U = Academic Seminar, Uniform; AS-V = Academic Seminar, Various; BSS = Basic Study Skills; H = Hybrid; O = Other
Class Size, Credit Load, Grading, and Staffing

Beyond identifying the prevalence of honors FYSs nation-wide and determining distinct tendencies in seminar type and crucial areas of resource sharing, the 2014 Honors FYS Survey sought information on other non-curricular features of the FYSs in both honors and campus-wide contexts. Our data indicate no significant variance between honors and campus-wide FYSs when it comes to credit load \( (\chi^2 (S) = 7.1, p<0.2) \) and grading procedures \( (\chi^2 (S) = 1.4, p<0.5) \). The vast majority of FYSs are offered as either three- or one-credit options, with such sections evenly split and comprising roughly two-thirds of all sections offered. Very little difference was found in terms of grading processes, with over 80% of both honors and broader-campus FYSs offering a letter grade for the course.

Although certain metrics such as grading protocol and credit load are generally similar across honors and campus-wide FYSs, honors seminars are more likely to be smaller, with 39.3% of respondents noting average class size under 20 students for honors FYSs compared to just 23% for campus-wide

**Figure 4. Comparison of Class Size, Campus-Wide (N = 214) and Honors (N = 202)**
FYSs, $\chi^2 (5) = 38.8$, $p< .0001$ (note: “unsure” responses in the case of broader-campus responses were excluded from analysis).

Staffing structures also show a marked difference between honors and campus-wide FYSs, with honors sections using tenure-track faculty most frequently followed by other full-time instructors. Although the honors and campus-wide FYSs do not differ significantly in the use of tenure-track faculty, honors is less likely to use adjuncts ($\chi^2 (1) = 24.38$, $p<.0001$), non-tenure track faculty, ($\chi^2 (1) = 19.24$, $p<.0001$), and student affairs professionals, ($\chi^2 (1) = 29.77$, $p<.0001$).

**Curricular and Pedagogical Structures, Resource Focus, and Student Development Emphases or Program Objectives**

The FYS is a remarkably flexible curricular entity, serving a vast array of student learning and institutional objectives. The 2014 Honors FYS Survey

**Figure 5. Comparison of Staffing Structure, Campus-Wide (N = 223) and Honors (N = 201)**

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**Staffing Structure**

- **Campus-Wide**
- **Honors**
asked respondents to identify important seminar traits in three distinct categories: curricular and pedagogical structures, resource exposure, and student development emphases or program objectives. After being asked to identify all relevant items in each category, respondents were asked to select the three most important items in each category in relation to their FYS.

Tables 2–4 capture the various emphases that the honors FYS attempts to achieve in the categories noted above. Following each table is an explanation addressing the three most important items selected from those noted in the table data.

Of the survey respondents, 198 provided responses to this question about curricular and pedagogical structure. Both in frequency (as reflected in Table 2) and ranking, respondents indicated that discussion-based elements (78% ranked in the top three) and assignments that encourage student collaboration (52% ranked in the top three) are the most important. Advising and mentoring (39% ranked in top three) and experiential learning (31.3% ranked in the top three) were also nominated fairly frequently. The remaining types of curricular and pedagogical structures were mentioned by some programs, but their importance was less clear overall. The qualitative responses offered a few additional insights, with several respondents mentioning the importance of writing, particularly reflective writing, and the importance of introductions to faculty and the disciplines.

Of the respondents, 191 answered the question about resources (as reflected in Table 3). Again, both the frequency and ranking of the selected offices and resources reflected the same pattern, with library resources (52.51% ranked in top three) and the undergraduate research office (50.28% ranked in top three) nominated as the most important. Respondents also indicated the office related to student learning and tutoring and the international study office as of critical importance. Although the community engagement and career services offices were mentioned by a majority of respondents, these resources were not cited in the top three as often (26.2% and 19.4%, respectively).

Of the 198 respondents who answered the question about student development outcomes (as reflected in Table 4), most affirmed the importance of critical thinking (64% ranked in the top three), followed by academic skills at 42%, reflective engagement at 34%, and student-faculty interaction at 30%. Although honors and college retention were noted with some frequency as relevant program objectives, respondents chose honors retention as a priority item only 23% of the time and institution-wide retention even less at 5%. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion-based elements</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>91.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments that encourage student collaboration</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>73.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual advising and mentoring</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>63.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on experiential learning</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture-based elements</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>41.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link to honors living-learning community</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>39.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-educator involvement</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>38.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement with campus common reading</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>36.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team teaching</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>28.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular link with another course</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library resources</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>83.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office or resource related to promoting undergraduate research opportunities</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>68.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office or resource overseeing study abroad and international education opportunities</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>63.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office or resource overseeing community engagement opportunities</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>56.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office or resource overseeing career counseling and professional development</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>54.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office or resource promoting student learning (tutoring, academic skills development)</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>53.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office or resource offering psychological services counseling</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>46.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office or resource related to applications to nationally competitive awards and fellowships</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>44.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office or resource related to diversity training and awareness and multicultural student programs</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>34.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office or resource overseeing sexual misconduct issues and victim services</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>29.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student activities board</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office or resource related to campus safety</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student government association</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>88.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-faculty interaction</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>83.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic skills</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>82.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective engagement and self-exploration</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>77.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors retention</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>77.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating college transition</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>58.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College retention</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>52.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of the liberal arts</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>52.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for campus involvement</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>51.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information literacy</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>49.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement / public service</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>48.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic academic and extracurricular planning</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>42.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career exploration</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>34.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary exposure</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity training</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>21.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health, wellness, and safety</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-portfolio creation</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio creation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motivations for Creating a Distinct Honors FYS

One of the final questions on the 2014 Honors FYS Survey was a qualitative question that asked respondents what motivated the creation of a distinct honors FYS course at their institution. We received 171 responses to this question that both confirmed the quantitative data and brought up a few new and important concerns that are not as clearly reflected in those data. By asking about motivations, this question evoked responses regarding student learning objectives, curricular structures, and institutional goals as well as less concrete reflections on what distinguishes honors FYSs from campus-wide offerings. We categorized these qualitative data according to specific keywords, as reflected in Figure 6.

Because the category labels were based on the qualitative data, the motivations often represent both divergent and redundant indicators of specificity, which can complicate conclusions drawn. For example, High-Impact Learning Practices, abbreviated as HIP in Figure 6, includes undergraduate research and intercultural awareness even though these two motivations are represented by separate keywords on the graph. Nevertheless, we felt it important to reflect closely what respondents indicated rather than to group distinct learning practices under one umbrella category. Notably, the top two motivations in Figure 6 are only indirectly represented in responses to earlier questions related to the various emphases, curricular structures, and objectives of honors FYSs and therefore deserve individual attention.

The overriding core motivation was community/cohort building, which is not directly related to the pedagogical structure of the course or to student learning outcomes. This result echoes a campus-wide concern, evident in the 2012–13 NSFYS, with cultivating connection to the institution, though this occurs on a much smaller and more intimate scale in the honors setting. If campus-wide FYSs encourage students simply to plug in or to have some anchor to ground them, honors FYSs have a more substantive emphasis on encouraging students to be fully networked and to assume control of their own academic and extracurricular trajectory. Furthermore, the concern with community in honors often involves a connection to a living-learning environment. Honors communities are integral; they are formed around the idea that students can push and challenge one another, often more effectively than their professors or the institution itself can. The sense of community, then, goes beyond a mere need for connection to the institution and becomes a critical factor in any given student’s experience, a factor felt personally, academically, and professionally.
Figure 6. Motivations for Creating a Distinct Honors FYS (N = 171)

- Community Building
- Curricular Relevance to Honors Students
- Academic Skills
- Living-Learning
- Retention
- Undergraduate Research
- Intercultural Awareness
- HIP
- Critical Thinking
- Interdisciplinarity
- Faculty Interaction
- Reflection
- Resources
- Curricular Consistency
- Public Service
- Flexibility
- Recruitment
- Professional Development
- Leadership
- Peer Education
- National Awards
- Advising
- Campus Involvement

Percentage
Another common area of concern that is perhaps implicit throughout the survey but much more explicit in the context of the question about motivations is the sense that high-achieving students require a relevant and challenging first-year curriculum that speaks to their unique goals and capabilities. The overall sense, here, is that honors students expect a certain level of rigor and that the expectations of campus-wide FYSs tend to be too low, possibly suggesting elitism—a perception with which honors colleges and programs often struggle. “We felt like the general first year seminar did not push Honors students academically and risked making college an unsatisfying experience,” one respondent writes. “We wanted to make sure that we were pushing the best students to do their very best work in the very first semester.” Another respondent is blunter in arguing that an honors FYS needs to be relevant to the honors student population:

Honors students do not need the scavenger hunts to campus offices and some of the other silly FYS experiences. Students were disenchanted with a college requirement taught by non-faculty that emphasized study skills and post-orientation familiarity with the university’s resources. They were eager for more serious dialogue on a range of topics related to the various disciplines and the liberal arts.

This respondent also expresses a common theme throughout the qualitative reflections, with another comment: “Offering an alternative general education experience for high achieving students is important so that they would not be bored in standard general education first year courses.” While some state the case rather critically, the broader sentiment reflects an eagerness to challenge high-achieving students with a rigorous, tailored approach to the FYS. The expectations of honors students are high, and it follows that honors educators should have high expectations for their students. The goal, one respondent writes, is “to build a distinct academic and social culture for honors students to understand the expectations of the high level of work expected of them and to begin to engage them with the honors community and the larger community.”

Though community building, relevance to the specific needs of honors students, and exposure to high-impact practices are more frequently noted motivating factors, several ideas that received less emphasis merit some attention as well. Professional development opportunities received little attention in the qualitative responses, for example, as did leadership. Perhaps these are areas that receive more attention elsewhere in the curriculum and seem less
pressing for first-year students, or the lower mention of these items might reflect the shift in honors contexts away from extended orientation seminars where campus resources, such as career centers, are explored.

Finally, some ideas emerged in this list that we did not anticipate. Retention is a key institutional driver for campus-wide FYSs, and retention—whether at the institution or within honors—is an abiding motivation for honors divisions as well. Interestingly, however, recruitment came up as a recurring theme as well. Given how anxious high school seniors are about their momentous college transition, a well-defined and exciting FYS might ease some of their concerns about college and serve as a draw in some cases. The emphasis on curricular relevance and a sense of community also serve as recruitment tools as they embody the honors experience: a tailored and rigorous education in a supportive community of scholar-citizens.

**CONCLUSION**

The established body of research about FYSs in a broad-campus context has defined FYSs as courses designed to enhance the academic skills and/or social development of first-year college students. Whereas our survey data suggest that this conceptual framework is relevant to the honors community, we believe that the nature of the honors FYS is different in some fundamental ways. An honors FYS is a course that does not simply enhance but fundamentally directs and grounds the academic and social transition processes faced by first-year honors students. Given the high academic expectations for honors students, the honors FYS is an opportunity to orient them within the networks, the resources, and the scholarly habits that will be critical to their success. Honors FYSs can take place in the context of an extended orientation, with specific exposure to undergraduate research, professional development, nationally competitive opportunities, deep community engagement, and reflective practice, to name a few key focus areas; or honors FYSs can take place as a more tailored and intentional academic experience keyed to first-year writing, general education, or honors-specific requirements. Either framework—or some combination thereof—is suitable as long as it is in tune with the evolving needs and capacities of honors first-year students at any given institution. The key is to create space for curricular experiences that expose honors students to the critical thinking skills and integrative learning opportunities that will power their unique academic and professional development.
Clearly, the honors FYS exists in a space of curricular variation and innovation that emerges alongside a host of institutional, curricular, and pedagogical variables. The list of motivating factors in Figure 6 suggests something of this dynamic range. Although the present research cannot recommend specific strategies for working within those distinct contexts, we hope it suggests some broader national patterns that can help individual honors programs as they develop, refine, or assess their own FYSs.

We also hope that this initial attempt at understanding the honors FYS in a national context will inspire further research. Key areas remain to be addressed, including the role of the honors FYS in both honors and broader-campus retention, uses of the honors FYS as a recruitment tool, and the extent of cooperation and sharing between those who run or teach in campus-wide FYSs and those who lead honors divisions. Even more important, an understanding of how the honors FYS serves the specific developmental needs of highly talented students warrants more attention. Another critical area for consideration that our data did not expose is the role of peer mentors in helping new honors students acclimate to honors expectations. Exploring these and other areas more fully will bring us closer to understanding what constitutes success in an honors FYS in relation to student goals, faculty experience, and the broader imperatives that inform honors communities across the country. Even in research not focused directly on the FYS, we would also encourage an awareness that the FYS often exists at the intersection of multiple programmatic and institutional imperatives, and it should therefore be a prominent part of more general conversations as well.

In the interest of extending this line of research, we are currently designing a follow-up survey instrument that will address areas that remain unclear or ambiguous in the present survey while also presenting a diverse array of best-practice profiles and assessments that honors divisions might look to when revising or initiating their own FYS offerings.

REFERENCES


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APPENDIX

Honors First-Year Seminar Survey 2014

Thanks for taking part in this survey. The first part of the survey asks for basic information about your institution and, if relevant, its first-year seminar offerings. The second part of the survey asks for more detailed information about your honors program and, if relevant, its dedicated first-year seminar. The majority of the questions require check-box responses, though you will have an opportunity to offer qualitative feedback near the end of the survey.

Please respond by Friday, October 24. Some of the survey questions are adapted from 2012–2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Exploring High-Impact Practices in the First College Year, by D. G. Young and J. M. Hopp, 2014, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Copyright 2014 by the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina. Specifically questions 8, 9, 12, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, and 24 from the NSFYS have been reprinted or adapted here with permission. All rights reserved.

Q1 To ensure that we do not receive duplicate entries, please provide your full institution name: ________________________________

Section 1: Institution-Wide Questions

Q2 Please select the category that best describes your institution’s type:
   □ Two-year institution (1)
   □ Four-year institution (2)

Q3 Please select the category that best describes your institution’s funding structure:
   □ Public (1)
   □ Private, not-for-profit (2)
   □ Private, for-profit (3)

Q4 Approximately how many first-year students did your institution enroll in the 2013–2014 academic year?
   □ less than 500 (1)
   □ 501–1,000 (2)
   □ 1,001–2,000 (3)
Q5 Approximately how many first-year students did your honors program enroll in the 2013-2014 academic year?
- Fewer than 50 (1)
- 50–100 (2)
- 101–150 (3)
- 151–200 (4)
- 201–300 (5)
- 301–400 (6)
- 401–500 (7)
- Greater than 500 (8)

Q6 Please select the category that best describes the institutional presence of honors on your campus:
- Honors College (2)
- Honors Program (1)
- Other (3)

First-year seminars are courses designed to enhance the academic skills and/or social development of first-year college students.

Q7 Does your institution offer a broader-campus first-year seminar intended for the majority of the general student population?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

*If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Q15

Q8 Is this broader campus first-year seminar mandatory for most students?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Unsure (3)

Q9 Which of the following best describes the broader-campus first-year seminar offered at your institution? Note: the category selected should relate to the first-year seminar with the highest enrollment on your campus
- Extended orientation seminar—Sometimes called freshman orientation, college survival, college transition, or student success course. Content often includes introduction to campus resources, time management, academic and career planning, learning strategies, and an introduction to student development issues. (1)
☐ Academic seminar with generally uniform academic content across sections—May be an interdisciplinary or theme-oriented course, sometimes part of a general education requirement. Primary focus is on academic theme or discipline, but will often include academic skills components, such as critical thinking and expository writing. (2)

☐ Academic seminar on various topics—Similar to previously mentioned academic seminar except that specific topics vary from section to section. (3)

☐ Basic study skills seminar—Offered for academically under-prepared students. The focus is on basic academic skills, such as grammar, note taking, and reading texts. (4)

☐ Hybrid—Has elements from two or more type of seminars (please specify) (5) ________________________________

☐ Other (6) ________________________________

Q10 How many credits do students enrolled in the campus-wide first-year seminar earn?

☐ 1 (1)

☐ 2 (2)

☐ 3 (3)

☐ Greater than 3 (6)

☐ Non-credit (4)

☐ Varies depending on type (5)

Q11 How is the campus-wide first-year seminar on your campus graded?

☐ Letter grade (1)

☐ Pass / Fail (2)

☐ Other (3) ________________________________

Q12 What is the average class size of the campus-wide first-year seminar?

☐ fewer than 10 (1)

☐ 10–14 (2)

☐ 15–19 (3)

☐ 20–24 (4)

☐ 25–29 (5)

☐ 30 or greater (6)

☐ Unsure (7)
Q13 Who teaches the campus-wide first-year seminar? Note: multiple selections allowed
☐ Adjuncts (2)
☐ Full-time non-tenure-track faculty (3)
☐ Graduate students (5)
☐ Peer educators (undergraduate students) (4)
☐ Student affairs professionals or other staff (6)
☐ Tenure-track faculty (1)

Q14 For approximately how many years has a first-year seminar of any kind been offered on your campus?
☐ 0–5 Years (1)
☐ 6–10 Years (2)
☐ 11–15 Years (3)
☐ 16–20 Years (4)
☐ 20+ Years (5)
☐ Unsure (6)

Q15 Based on your current knowledge of first-year seminar programming on your campus, please indicate distinct student populations for whom first-year seminars are offered. Note: multiple selections allowed
☐ General student population (broader-campus offering required for the majority of enrolled students) (1)
☐ Honors students (5)
☐ Academically under-prepared students (2)
☐ First-generation students (4)
☐ International students (6)
☐ Learning community participants (7)
☐ Pre-professional students (e.g., pre-law, pre-med) (8)
☐ Provisionally admitted students (9)
☐ Student athletes (10)
☐ Students enrolled in developmental / remedial courses (11)
☐ Students participating in dual-enrollment programs (12)
☐ Students residing within a particular residence hall (13)
☐ Students with specific majors or in specific schools (14)
☐ Transfer students (15)
☐ TRIO participants (16)
☐ Undeclared students (17)
☐ Other (please specify) (18) ____________________
Section 2: Honors Program Questions

Q16 Does your honors program offer its own first-year seminar course?
☐ Yes (1)
☐ No (2)
☐ No, but we plan to implement an honors first-year seminar course (3)

Q17 Is the honors first-year seminar course mandatory?
☐ Yes (1)
☐ No (2)

Q18 Which of the following best describes the honors first-year seminar?
☐ Extended orientation seminar—Sometimes called freshman orientation, college survival, college transition, or student success course. Content often includes introduction to campus resources, time management, academic and career planning, learning strategies, and an introduction to student development issues. (1)
☐ Academic seminar with generally uniform academic content across sections—May be an interdisciplinary or theme-oriented course, sometimes part of a general education requirement. Primary focus is on academic theme or discipline, but will often include academic skills components, such as critical thinking and expository writing. (2)
☐ Academic seminar on various topics—Similar to previously mentioned academic seminar except that specific topics vary from section to section. (3)
☐ Basic study skills seminar—Offered for academically under-prepared students. The focus is on basic academic skills, such as grammar, note taking, and reading texts. (4)
☐ Hybrid—Has elements from two or more type of seminars (please describe the hybrid first-year seminar). (5) _________________
☐ Other (6) _________________

Q19 What is the average size of the individual honors first-year seminar at your institution?
☐ fewer than 10 (1)
☐ 10–14 (2)
☐ 15–19 (3)
☐ 20–25 (4)
☐ 25–29 (5)
☐ 30 or greater (6)

Q20 How many credits do students enrolled in the honors first-year seminar earn?
☐ 1 (1)
☐ 2 (2)
☐ 3 (3)
☐ Greater than 3 (6)
☐ Non-credit (4)
☐ Varies depending on type (5)

Q21 How is the honors first-year seminar graded?
☐ Letter grade (1)
☐ Pass / Fail (2)
☐ Other (3) _____________________________________

Q22 Who teaches the honors first-year seminar? note: multiple selections are allowed
☐ Adjuncts (2)
☐ Full-time non-tenure-track faculty (3)
☐ Graduate students (5)
☐ Peer educators (undergraduate students) (4)
☐ Student affairs professionals or other staff (6)
☐ Tenure-track faculty (1)

Q23 Approximately how many years has a first-year seminar been offered through the honors program?
☐ 0–5 Years (1)
☐ 6–10 Years (2)
☐ 11–15 Years (3)
☐ 16–20 Years (4)
☐ 20+ Years (5)

Q24 What resources does the honors program first-year seminar share with the broader-campus first-year seminar and, if relevant, its institutional home (e.g. an office of the first year or academic experience)? Note: multiple selections are allowed
☐ Administrative support (4)
☐ Curricular (2)
☐ Faculty (3)
☐ Faculty training (9)
☐ Financial (1)
☐ Peer educator training (5)
☐ No significant sharing exists between the two seminars (6)
☐ Other (8) _____________________________________

Q25 Please select items from the list below that reflect important aspects of the honors first-year seminar’s broader curricular and pedagogical structures. *Note: multiple selections are allowed*
☐ Assignments that encourage student collaboration
☐ Curricular link with another course
☐ Discussion-based elements
☐ Emphasis on experiential learning
☐ Engagement with campus common reading experience
☐ Individual advising and mentoring
☐ Lecture-based elements
☐ Link to honors living-learning community
☐ Peer-educator involvement
☐ Team teaching
☐ Other _______________________________________

Q26 The list below contains the curricular and pedagogical structures you selected in the previous question. Please select the three items that you consider most fundamental to the honors first-year seminar.

*Selections made from Q25 included here*

Q27 Please select items from the list below that reflect important campus resources and offices to which students enrolled in the honors first-year seminar are exposed. *Note: multiple selections are allowed*
☐ Library resources
☐ Office or resource offering psychological services counseling
☐ Office or resource overseeing career counseling and professional development
☐ Office or resource overseeing community engagement opportunities
☐ Office or resource overseeing sexual misconduct issues and victim services
☐ Office or resource overseeing study abroad and international education opportunities
☐ Office or resource promoting student learning (tutoring, academic skills development)
☐ Office or resource related to applications to nationally competitive awards and fellowships
☐ Office or resource related to campus safety
☐ Office or resource related to diversity training and awareness and multicultural student programs
☐ Office or resource related to promoting undergraduate research opportunities
☐ Student activities board
☐ Student government association
☐ Other _______________________________________

Q28 The list below contains the campus resources and offices you selected in the previous question. Please select the three items that you consider most fundamental to the honors first-year seminar.

* Selections made from Q27 included here

Q29 Please select items from the list below that reflect important student-development emphases or program objectives for the first-year seminar: Note: multiple selections are allowed
☐ Academic skills
☐ Career exploration
☐ College retention
☐ Community engagement / public service
☐ Critical thinking
☐ Disciplinary exposure
☐ Diversity training
☐ E-portfolio creation
☐ Health, wellness, and safety
☐ Honors retention
☐ Information literacy
☐ Leadership
☐ Reflective engagement and self-exploration
☐ Negotiating college transition
☐ Opportunities for campus involvement
☐ Portfolio creation (collection of professional documents such as resume, personal essay, academic artifacts, etc.).
☐ Student-faculty interaction
☐ Strategic academic and extracurricular planning  
☐ Understanding of the liberal arts  
☐ Other ________________________________________

Q30 The list below contains the student development emphases or program objectives you selected in the previous question. Please select the three items that you consider most fundamental to the honors first-year seminar.

Q31 What motivated the creation of a distinct honors first-year seminar course at your Institution? You might note, among other considerations, course-load concerns, issues of flexibility, a focus on resources or high-impact learning experiences of particular relevance to honors students, a lack of a campus-wide first-year seminar, or the importance of the honors first-year seminar to the honors cohort or living-learning experience.

Q32 If available, please include a link to relevant information on the web about your program’s first-year seminar course:

Q33 If you would like the honors first-year seminar at your institution to be profiled in more detail as a best practice, please include your contact name and email below so we can follow up to ask a few additional questions and collect relevant supplementary materials (syllabus, course objectives, etc.).
Honors Teachers and Academic Identity: What to Look For When Recruiting Honors Faculty

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The word “honors” naturally carries distinction. To be a collegiate honors student implies a higher level of academic achievement than other students as well as the more challenging academic experience that comes with smaller class sizes. Collegiate honors teachers have a distinction of their own. Being an honors teacher implies a high level of teaching achievement, and it requires special traits that honors directors need to look for in recruiting faculty. Guidance in determining what traits best characterize excellence in honors teaching is a useful tool for honors administrators who are trying to create an identity for their honors faculty.

Creating a productive balance between work and personal life for all college faculty—much less honors faculty—can be challenging, especially given the variety of institutional types and structures that constitute academic culture (Tolbert; Varia), but discovering a way to get teaching, professional, and personal identities to work together produces benefits not only for individuals
but also for the professional organization in which they work, as Beauregard
and Henry and also Rice, Frone, and McFarlin argue in their respective stud-
ies on “work-life balance” and “work-nonwork conflict.” Academic identity
can combine teaching and non-teaching activities into one identity, and
honors teaching is a special subset where this combined identity is perhaps
especially important in attracting the right students. Commonalities that exist
among honors teachers are thus of special interest to honors administrators in
recruiting faculty. The purpose of this study is to help honors administrators
recruit faculty by identifying traits they should look for.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching Identity

The bulk of existing research on teaching identity is focused on K–12
teachers and on development through education and experience (Cooper
& Olson; Johnson; Lortie; Miller). Day, Sammons, and Gu identify three
components of teaching identity: life outside of school (personal), social
and policy expectations of what a good educator is (professional), and direct
working environment (situational); their research suggests that effective
teachers are those who can balance these three components. Specific traits
that other researchers describe as important to teacher behavior are job sat-
isfaction, occupational commitment, self-efficacy, and level of motivation
(Ashton & Webb; Firestone; Schwarzer & Jerusalem; Toh, Ho, Riley, & Hoh;
Watt & Richardson).

Identity and the Academic

The basic identity of an academic typically includes at least the traditional
triumvirate of teaching, research, and service. According to research by Freese,
teachers develop their identity through (1) reflection on their professional
role, mission, and self, (2) reflection on past experiences, and (3) reflection
on how changes in work behavior and habits might affect future outcomes.
Agency, or the power to implement change, is a part of identity affected by the
specific role an academic has within an institutional structure. Kelchtermans’s
work on the role of self-understanding, self-image, self-esteem, job motiva-
tion, task perception, and future prospects supports Freese’s work on the role
of reflection in identity formation.

Research on teacher identities by the British education scholar Skelton
identifies three main roles of the academic: “teaching specialists,” “blended
professionals,” and “researchers who teach.” Teaching specialists typically do not take part in any professional activities outside of teaching. Blended professionals are the more typical academics, with responsibilities in teaching, advising, and scholarly work; these individuals spend the bulk of their time teaching and advising students, with scholarly research or creative activities making up 20–30% of their time. Researchers who teach have a reversed role, with scholarly activities taking up the highest percentage of their time and teaching limited to one or two classes a semester or academic year. One might add administrators to this group, who typically hold terminal degrees, possess experience in one or more academic areas, and spend the majority, if not all, of their service time within the academic unit. Research by MacFarlane identifies traits of academics who are intellectual leaders: role model, mentor, advocate, guardian, acquisitor, and ambassador. Academic leaders are typically department heads, tenured faculty, and/or nationally recognized experts in their field.

Most academics operate with a high degree of autonomy yet may collaborate with other faculty in the areas of research, departmental service, and team-teaching. The level of collaboration is at the discretion of the faculty member and is not a constant, suggesting that external forces have less impact on the development of academic identity than on professional identities in other fields.

**Collegiate Honors and Academic Identity**

Honors curricula are typically structured in smaller sections of existing courses taught by outstanding teachers. As a result, honors programs often enjoy not only the best and brightest students but the best and brightest faculty who have significant experience and demonstrated excellence in teaching. Dealing with high student quality and limited class enrollment should make the role easier, but there may be challenges unique to academics in honors that have yet to be explored, and these challenges may arise from differences between academic disciplines. Research by Coldron and Smith, for instance, suggests that the professional identity of teachers can reflect the teaching landscape within their particular discipline. At the same time, while teachers within a certain discipline may share some common elements of a teaching identity, differing academic roles (Sugrue) and institutional structures (Becher) may prevent them from sharing an overall common academic identity. Two key components of identity development found throughout the research literature, however, are reflection and fluidity, and since identity is always evolving, our understanding of it will always be only provisional.
METHODOLOGY

Participants

A convenience sample of honors teachers was gathered using contact data (phone and email) provided by the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). The NCHC provided contact information for 738 honors directors and faculty from 841 institutions belonging to the NCHC. A snowball sample approach was also taken, as participants were contacted via email and asked to pass the survey link along to other current honors faculty within their institution. The number of completed surveys was 269.

PROCEDURE

An online survey was created using the QuestionPro; it consisted of general demographic information plus Likert-scaled and open-ended questions asking participants to rate aspects of their academic identity. The survey questions addressed the broad areas of individual self-understanding, professional role and expectations, and the influence of situational factors, both internal and external, within these areas, coordinating descriptive statistical information and qualitative and quantitative (years of experience) variables. Participant identity was kept anonymous, and responses were not linkable to any identifiable information. The survey was open from February 10 until February 23, 2015.

The first part of the survey focused primarily on the collection of data on both the assigned and perceived academic role, specific discipline, and teaching experience, with questions based on the research of Skelton and of MacFarlane and using categorical and numeric (years of experience) questions.

The second part included verbal frequency and rank-order questions relating to job satisfaction, occupational commitment, and level of motivation, which were common identity themes found in the literature reviewed.

The third part of the survey asked verbal frequency questions relating to self-efficacy, task perception, and prospective (and perceived level of) influence within faculty roles and institutions informed by the research of Kelchtermans and the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem, which has been used for over twenty years with proven reliability and validity.
The fourth part of the survey asked categorical and numeric questions specific to the participants’ experience teaching within honors programs along with open-ended questions asking for qualitative information on their honors teaching experiences and teaching philosophies.

Data analysis included summary statistics of the overall results as well as contingency tables for evaluating the relationship between data on rank, role, and experience, on the one hand, and individual self-understanding, role expectations, and the influence of external factors on the other.

**RESULTS**

**Participant Details**

From 327 starts, 269 individuals completed the survey, creating an 82% completion rate. No geographic, race, gender, or institutional data were collected. The largest portion of participants indicated the rank of full professor at 29%, with department or academic head at 28% (Figure 1). Sixty percent of participants indicated 15 years or more of teaching experience at the college level, with the largest portion of participants (39%) having completed 1–5 years teaching in an honors program (Figure 2). Thirty-seven percent of participants indicated a blended professional role (primarily teaching, with 25–30% research/scholarship/creative activity), and 28% indicated a 100%
teaching role (teaching specialist category). Of the 32% indicating they held a role other than the choices listed, 72% indicated teaching as part of that role.

As expected, participants with a higher academic rank possessed more overall collegiate teaching experience than those of lesser rank, whereas a larger percentage of experience among the lower ranks comes from honors programs (Figure 2). How participants came to teach in an honors program was more varied, with the largest portions either volunteering (37%) or being specifically requested for honors involvement (36%).

**Individual Self-Understanding**

Questions relating to understanding one’s role and how this understanding connects to the understanding of self and personal motivation were asked using a Likert-scaled ranking of agreement.

**Meaningful Work**

Sixty percent of all respondents indicated they that found their work extremely meaningful, with no respondents indicating that they found no meaning in their work (Figure 3). When asked to indicate the frequency which they found their work meaningful and difference-making, the majority of respondents indicated either often (50%) or always (39%).

The largest percentage of respondents (44%) reported that their opinions mattered to faculty peers, with 5% feeling their opinions did not matter at all (Figure 4). Sixty percent of respondents stated they often felt easy about expressing their opinions to other faculty and administrators. The majority indicated that they were either very motivated (46%) or extremely motivated (43%) in their work. Fifty-two percent of respondents stated that they often felt appreciated and valued (Figure 5), and the majority also indicated that their immediate supervisor understood their strengths and made sure they used them on a regular basis (Figure 6).

**Job Satisfaction**

The majority of participants stated they were either satisfied or very satisfied (46% each) with their job (Figure 7). The majority of participants also agreed they were a good fit in their academic unit (Figure 8). Almost all (over 99%) participants stated they found joy in helping a struggling student do well.
In terms of realistic expectations, 37% indicated that the expectations associated with their position were very realistic, with 35% indicating a moderate level and 6% stating not at all realistic (Figure 9).

Over half of respondents stated they found their job very challenging, with none indicating no challenge (Figure 10).

The majority (63%) indicated that their challenges were often positive, with 24% stating that the challenges were always positive. In terms of stress, 34% indicated feeling moderately stressed about their work in a typical week, with 29% indicating feeling stressed very often (Figure 11).

In terms of compensation, 41% of respondents stated that they were moderately satisfied with their pay, with 25% being very satisfied and 8% extremely satisfied. Seven percent indicated being not at all satisfied with their pay, and 19% were only slightly satisfied (Figure 12).

Participants were pleased overall with their current situation, with 58% reporting that they were not at all likely to look for an academic position outside of their institution and 82% that they would not consider leaving academia.

**Self-Efficacy**

This study included 10 questions (Figure 13) based on the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem. The instrument uses a four-point scale, with 4 indicating that the statement is ‘Exactly true’ and 1 indicating ‘Not at all true,’ creating a range from 10 to 40, with a higher score indicating a higher level of self-efficacy. The mean, median, and mode among participants were 32, indicating a high level of self-efficacy (Figure 14). The majority of participants believed they could always manage to solve difficult problems (98%) by finding several solutions and could deal positively with opposition (79%), with just less than 1% indicating a lack of confidence in dealing with unexpected events or situations.

**Work-Life Balance**

When asked about balancing personal and professional roles, the results were more diverse. While the largest portion (41%) agreed that they have a good balance between roles, approximately 22% indicated a lack of good balance (Figure 15). The majority of participants either agreed (47%) or strongly agreed (38%) that they could easily incorporate their own beliefs into their role as educator (Figure 16).
Figure 2. Collegiate and Honors Teaching Experience
Honors Teachers and Academic Identity

Associate Professor
Potential: 23%
Interest: 21%
Full Professor
Potential: 16%
Interest: 20%
Department/Unit Head
Potential: 20%
Interest: 17%
Overall
Potential: 15%
Interest: 14%

1S or more 10-1S 5-10 1-5
Figure 3. Level of Meaning Found in Work

- **Adjunct**: 67% Always, 17% Often, 17% Sometimes
- **Instructor**: 33% Always, 67% Often, 17% Sometimes
- **Lecturer**: 50% Always, 33% Often, 17% Sometimes
- **Assistant Professor**: 36% Always, 44% Often, 20% Sometimes
- **Associate Professor**: 23% Always, 60% Often, 15% Sometimes
- **Full Professor**: 36% Always, 56% Often, 8% Sometimes
- **Department/Academic Unit Head**: 48% Always, 45% Often, 6% Sometimes
- **Overall**: 39% Always, 50% Often, 10% Sometimes

Legend:
- ■ Always
- □ Often
- ■ Sometimes
- □ Rarely
- □ Never
Figure 4. Felt that Opinions Mattered

- Adjunct
  - A great deal: 17%
  - A lot: 50%
  - A moderate amount: 17%
  - A little: 17%
  - None at all: 0%

- Instructor
  - A great deal: 22%
  - A lot: 22%
  - A moderate amount: 44%
  - A little: 11%
  - None at all: 0%

- Lecturer
  - A great deal: 67%
  - A lot: 17%
  - A moderate amount: 17%
  - A little: 0%
  - None at all: 0%

- Assistant Professor
  - A great deal: 16%
  - A lot: 44%
  - A moderate amount: 32%
  - A little: 8%
  - None at all: 0%

- Associate Professor
  - A great deal: 17%
  - A lot: 48%
  - A moderate amount: 23%
  - A little: 5%
  - None at all: 0%

- Full Professor
  - A great deal: 29%
  - A lot: 43%
  - A moderate amount: 23%
  - A little: 5%
  - None at all: 0%

- Department/Academic Unit Head
  - A great deal: 36%
  - A lot: 45%
  - A moderate amount: 16%
  - A little: 3%
  - None at all: 0%

- Overall
  - A great deal: 26%
  - A lot: 44%
  - A moderate amount: 24%
  - A little: 5%
  - None at all: 0%
Figure 5. Felt Appreciated & Valued
Figure 6. Supervisor Understanding of Individual Strengths

- **Adjunct**: Always - 17%, Often - 33%, Sometimes - 50%, Rarely - 22%
- **Instructor**: Always - 11%, Often - 67%, Sometimes - 22%
- **Lecturer**: Always - 17%, Often - 33%, Sometimes - 50%
- **Assistant Professor**: Always - 25%, Often - 54%, Sometimes - 21%
- **Associate Professor**: Always - 21%, Often - 50%, Sometimes - 19%, Rarely - 6%
- **Full Professor**: Always - 31%, Often - 40%, Sometimes - 19%, Rarely - 8%
- **Department/Academic Unit Head**: Always - 41%, Often - 39%, Sometimes - 9%, Rarely - 5%
- **Overall**: Always - 30%, Often - 44%, Sometimes - 18%, Rarely - 5%, Never - 3%

Legend: Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never
Figure 7. Overall Job Satisfaction

- Adjunct: 33% Extremely, 67% Slightly
- Instructor: 33% Extremely, 56% Slightly
- Lecturer: 33% Extremely, 67% Slightly
- Assistant Professor: 44% Extremely, 48% Slightly
- Associate Professor: 42% Extremely, 50% Slightly
- Full Professor: 44% Extremely, 49% Slightly
- Department/Academic Unit Head: 52% Extremely, 40% Slightly
- Overall: 46% Extremely, 46% Slightly

Legend: Extremely, Very, Moderately, Slightly, Not at all
Figure 8. Good Fit with Academic Department

- Adjunct: 17% Strongly Agree, 67% Agree, 17% Neither agree nor disagree
- Instructor: 44% Strongly Agree, 44% Agree, 12% Neither agree nor disagree
- Lecturer: 33% Strongly Agree, 50% Agree, 17% Neither agree nor disagree
- Assistant Professor: 36% Strongly Agree, 48% Agree, 4% Neither agree nor disagree
- Associate Professor: 33% Strongly Agree, 52% Agree, 4% Neither agree nor disagree
- Full Professor: 49% Strongly Agree, 39% Agree, 6% Neither agree nor disagree
- Department/Academic Unit Head: 65% Strongly Agree, 21% Agree, 6% Neither agree nor disagree
- Overall: 47% Strongly Agree, 38% Agree, 7% Neither agree nor disagree
Figure 9. Realistic Expectation of Role
Figure 10. Level of Challenge

- **Adjunct:**
  - Extremely: 17%
  - Very: 50%
  - Moderately: 33%
- **Instructor:**
  - Extremely: 11%
  - Very: 44%
  - Moderately: 33%
  - Alightly: 11%
- **Lecturer:**
  - Extremely: 67%
  - Very: 17%
  - Moderately: 17%
- **Assistant Professor:**
  - Extremely: 8%
  - Very: 68%
  - Alightly: 24%
- **Associate Professor:**
  - Extremely: 25%
  - Very: 58%
  - Alightly: 17%
- **Full Professor:**
  - Extremely: 17%
  - Very: 51%
  - Alightly: 32%
- **Department/Academic Unit Head:**
  - Extremely: 41%
  - Very: 47%
  - Alightly: 12%
- **Overall:**
  - Extremely: 26%
  - Very: 52%
  - Alightly: 21%
  - Not at all: 1%
**Figure 11. Level of Stress in a Typical Week**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjunct</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Professor</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department/Academic Unit Head</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 12. Satisfaction with Pay

- **Adjunct**: 17% Extremely, 50% Very, 33% Moderately, 33% Slightly, 8% Not at all
- **Instructor**: 11% Extremely, 33% Very, 22% Moderately, 33% Slightly, 8% Not at all
- **Lecturer**: 17% Extremely, 66% Very, 17% Moderately, 8% Slightly, 8% Not at all
- **Assistant Professor**: 8% Extremely, 24% Very, 48% Moderately, 8% Slightly, 12% Not at all
- **Associate Professor**: 2% Extremely, 23% Very, 36% Moderately, 30% Slightly, 9% Not at all
- **Full Professor**: 8% Extremely, 22% Very, 45% Moderately, 18% Slightly, 6% Not at all
- **Department/Academic Unit Head**: 8% Extremely, 35% Very, 40% Moderately, 14% Slightly, 3% Not at all
- **Overall**: 8% Extremely, 25% Very, 41% Moderately, 19% Slightly, 7% Not at all
The open-ended question responses indicated that participants’ favorite part of teaching in an honors program was working with the students and creating interesting experiences in the classroom. Personal teaching philosophies cited student learning as the core concern, in particular thought-provoking instruction and critical thinking skills. Students were also the main challenge to participants, with their focus on grades and the demands they make of honors courses.

Professional Role and Expectations

Intellectual Leadership

Sixty-four percent of full professors indicated the role of mentor as the best representation of how they see themselves in their current academic position, with those in administrative roles indicating a mentor (40%) or advocate (36%) role. All other ranks (associate professor, assistant professor, lecturer, instructor, adjunct) also indicated seeing their primary intellectual leadership role as that of mentor.

Involvement

The majority of participants indicated that they had either a moderate amount (33%) or a lot (31%) of ability to implement change in their position (Figure 17) and the potential to advance into a leadership role.

Honors teachers indicated a great deal of autonomy in teaching (57%), with 1% indicating only a little autonomy and no respondents indicating a complete lack of autonomy (Figure 18).

The largest portion of respondents indicated a desire for more influence over policy, with significant percentages wanting more influence over faculty collaboration and work environment (Figure 19).

Professional Development and Advancement

Forty percent of participants indicated that they are given opportunities for professional development very often, with 37% indicating a moderate level of opportunities (Figure 20). In terms of personal initiative for improvement, the majority of all participants strongly agreed that they make a conscious effort to improve their teaching skills (Figure 21).

As for promotion potential, those with the higher academic ranks indicated higher levels of potential than lower ranks. Among current administrators,
32% indicated a great deal of promotional potential with 27% indicating a lot of potential (Figure 22). The highest level of interest in promotion existed among lecturers.

**DISCUSSION**

**Shared Aspects of Academic Identity**

While some variation occurred based on academic rank, collegiate honors teachers in this study appeared overall to share common aspects of an academic identity.

**Job Satisfaction**

Participants in this study were not only satisfied with their work but truly enjoyed their jobs. Working with honors students presented both the greatest challenge and reward. They often felt stressed and challenged in their work, but in a positive way. They felt that the expectations associated with their position were realistic, and they experienced opportunities for professional development and promotion. Participants were very content in their

**Figure 13. The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I can usually handle whatever comes my way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 14. Self-efficacy among collegiate honors teachers
Figure 15. Good Work/Personal Life Balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjunct</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Professor</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department/Academic Unit Head</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
Figure 16. Ability to Incorporate Beliefs into Role as Educator
Figure 17. Ability to Implement Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>A moderate amount</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjunct</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>36%</td>
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<td>24%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Professor</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department/Academic Unit Head</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A great deal | A lot | A moderate amount | A little | Not at all
Figure 18. Level of Autonomy

- Adjunct: 67% A great deal, 17% A lot, 17% A moderate amount, 17% A little
- Instructor: 33% A great deal, 44% A lot, 22% A moderate amount, 2% A little
- Lecturer: 50% A great deal, 50% A lot, 6% A moderate amount, 2% A little
- Assistant Professor: 36% A great deal, 52% A lot, 12% A moderate amount, 2% A little
- Associate Professor: 50% A great deal, 42% A lot, 6% A moderate amount, 2% A little
- Full Professor: 66% A great deal, 31% A lot, 3% A moderate amount, 2% A little
- Department/Academic Unit Head: 61% A great deal, 32% A lot, 4% A moderate amount, 2% A little
- Overall: 57% A great deal, 36% A lot, 6% A moderate amount, 1% A little
Figure 19. Areas where influence could be improved.

The diagram illustrates areas where influence could be improved among different academic ranks, including:
- Adjunct
- Instructor
- Lecturer
- Assistant Professor
- Associate Professor
- Full Professor
- Department/Academic Unit Head
- Overall

The categories are policy expectations, direct work environment, faculty collaboration, and student interaction.
Figure 21. Conscious Efforts to Improve Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjunct</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Professor</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department/Academic Unit Head</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 22. Promotion Interest related to Potential
positions within their institutions with no real desire to move on or out of academia.

**Ability to Implement Change (Agency)**

The ability to implement change correlated with academic rank as those with higher rank indicated more ability than those at the instructor or lecturer position (Figure 17), probably the reality of assigned rank rather than specific to honors teachers. Assigned rank also affected how often opinions mattered (Figure 4). The majority of honors teachers in this study saw their role primarily as mentor.

**Confidence and Self-Efficacy**

Honors faculty in this study indicated a high level of self-confidence and efficacy (Figure 14). They were frequent participators in faculty meetings and active problem solvers. They believed that they had the support of their administrative leaders and felt a good fit to their role. Autonomy was high at all levels, with slightly less indicated for those with higher ranks; this may simply be the effect of higher expectations and administrative responsibilities that come with an advanced position.

**Meaningful Work**

The majority of honors teachers in this study often or always found meaning in their work (Figure 3) and indicated balance between their work and personal lives (Figure 15). The majority also felt they could incorporate their own beliefs into their role as educator (Figure 16).

**Potential Areas of Concern among Current Honors Teachers**

The overall results of this study indicated some shared aspects of academic identity, but when the data were analyzed based on assigned rank, areas of particular interest to honors administrators appeared.

**Faculty Governance**

The main area in which honors faculty wished for more influence involved policy expectations, with direct work environment coming in second (Figure 19). As highly involved and motivated faculty, they reported a desire for more of a voice in such matters. These results would suggest that honors program
directors should give honors faculty opportunities to get involved in the administrative process, possibly through honors-only faculty meetings and creating task forces or subcommittees related to specific policy areas.

**Inclusion of Lower Academic Ranks**

While the results across ranks were positive, those holding lower academic ranks indicated that they felt less appreciated and valued (Figure 4) and that their opinions mattered less (Figure 5). They also indicated feeling less understanding of their individual strengths by their supervisor (Figure 6). With this in mind, honors directors should explore and implement strategies that demonstrate appreciation of lower-ranking faculty. The results were similar for role expectation among the lower academic ranks (Figure 9), though job satisfaction was strong for this group (Figure 7).

**Compensation**

Most faculty in this survey indicated only moderate satisfaction with financial compensation (Figure 12). While still positive, such a response may indicate a need for improvement. Perhaps one option to consider would be increasing the cost of honors courses to cover higher faculty compensation.

**Traits of Potential Honors Faculty**

**Highly Motivated**

The cream seems to rise to the top as all faculty in this study were highly motivated to seek out and participate in professional development activities. The majority of participants stated that they made a conscious effort to improve their teaching.

One area on which honors directors should focus when recruiting teachers is faculty development, specifically in efforts to improve teaching (Figure 21). Faculty Members who make a strong effort to become better teachers should make ideal honors teachers. Honors teachers in this study had a high level of self-efficacy with little variation based on rank (Figure 14). They were confident in their abilities and felt that they could manage difficult problems effectively.

In terms of honors involvement, the majority either were invited to teach in honors (36%) or volunteered (37%). The act of volunteering would indicate a high level of motivation although it may not reflect any other traits
found in honors teachers. Honors directors might consider looking at other factors such as participation within academic departments and job satisfaction. Volunteering to teach honors courses might be a way to eliminate other duties, and faculty might assume that smaller classes and smarter students are easier to teach and manage.

**Outstanding Teachers**

One interesting result of this study was that the overall collegiate teaching experience was varied but that those with less overall experience had a larger percentage of that experience in honors (Figure 2), indicating that teaching quality is valued over quantity and that an experienced educator might not be a good fit for an honors program. Honors directors should continue to seek out outstanding teachers first and foremost, with overall experience as a consideration but definitely not a deal-breaker.

**LIMITATIONS**

A total of 738 honors faculty and directors were contacted via email and asked to share the survey link with their current faculty, yet just under a third (n=269) completed the survey. While there was a good mix of roles among participants, ideally the number of participants would be higher than the number of those contacted through snowball sampling. Honors faculty and administrators in programs that are not members of the NCHC were not invited to participate in this study.

As this survey was voluntary and participants were solicited indirectly via honors directors, self-selection bias may be evident within the results. The two-week time period of the study may also have contributed to the response rate. In order to maintain participant anonymity, I did not include demographic items on geographic location, gender, or race, so it is not possible to determine if the majority of participants were from one particular area, gender, or race. While there is a degree of verisimilitude in this project, there is no way to determine the total number (population) of honors faculty within higher education in the United States, making it challenging to project the results from the sample to the overall population and to make statistical comparisons from the data collected.

Because no such similar research currently exists on academic identity among collegiate teachers, comparisons between that population and the subpopulation of collegiate honors teachers cannot be made. As the literature
review indicates that identity development is a constant process, the identity of those in this study may change over time.

FUTURE STUDIES

A more qualitative study focusing on in-depth interviews with honors teachers would be a logical next step for research on academic identity among collegiate honors teachers. Explorations into the perceptions and expectations honors students have of their faculty could further illuminate the issues of stress and challenges (both good and bad) honors teachers face. Research on how honors programs are structured and administered could help explore the issues brought up in this study of how little influence honors faculty feel they have on policy. A qualitative study focusing on honors program directors and their process of recruiting teachers could serve well to test the validity of this study. A comparison of academic identities between honors and non-honors faculty would be of interest. The quality of honors faculty and their development is an area worth exploring to determine if honors programs attract highly qualified and motivated faculty or produce them. Finally, the evolving nature of identity development would suggest a longitudinal study on changes in academic identity and the factors that influence it.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, some shared aspects of an academic identity appear to characterize collegiate honors faculty, including overall job satisfaction, high self-efficacy, a good work and life balance, and dedication to professional development of teaching. The relationship between teacher and student appears to be at the heart of academic identity among honors teachers; they have a strong connection to their discipline, believe teaching is more than just an occupation, and welcome the challenge of working with the best and brightest students. Honors teachers have spent their careers improving their craft through reflection and self-development. They care less about pay, benefits, and rank, either because they are comfortable with their current employment situation or because they accept it in order to work in an honors environment. Those who work in honors will not be surprised to learn that honors teachers share many positive aspects of identity: one would expect those who teach the best and brightest to be the best and brightest as well and to play an aspirational role.
While honors teachers are mostly satisfied with their work, three possible areas of concern for honors directors appear to be faculty governance, involvement of lower-ranking honors teachers, and compensation. While participants in this study stated that they were unlikely to look for employment outside of their current position, satisfaction with pay was an issue—a common complaint among college educators but nonetheless important to retaining current honors teachers and recruiting new ones.

Another area honors program directors should carefully evaluate in potential honors educators is motivation, especially among those who volunteer. Some teachers may be looking for an easier job and believe that working in honors provides that. “Easy” is not a term often associated with honors since honors students present challenges as well as rewards. While classes may be smaller, the demand from the students may be significantly larger, so honors teachers need to create in-depth experiences that require time and work. Honors students get restless and bored if they are not challenged, so teachers who are looking for an easier workload may not be successful in an honors program. Administrators also need to make sure that the motivation of those seeking to teach honors classes is not simply to leave an undesirable situation.

Teaching quality should be a more important factor than total years of experience when recruiting new honors faculty. While teaching ability is something that can develop over time, a good teacher with limited total experience should not be dismissed simply for that fact. Research participants in this study who had less overall experience had most of that experience in an honors program.

Providing a unique and challenging experience for honors students can only happen with teachers who are up to the task. While honors faculty are diverse in their disciplines and background, they do seem to share a passion for their students and appear to be more than up for the challenges they face.

REFERENCES


The author may be contacted at rocky.dailey@sdstate.edu.
Honors and Non-Honors Student Engagement: A Model of Student, Curricular, and Institutional Characteristics

ELLEN BUCKNER
University of South Alabama

MELANIE SHORES, MICHAEL SLOANE, AND JOHN DANTZLER
University of Alabama at Birmingham

CATHERINE SHIELDS
Jefferson County Board of Education

KAREN SHADER
University of Tennessee Health Science Center

BRADLEY NEWCOMER
James Madison University

Honors administrators may ask whether honors experiences facilitate student growth and whether honors students are inherently smarter than non-honors students and hence more able to seize these opportunities for growth. Although these questions will never fully be answered, we designed
the current study to address the underlying topics of student characteristics and engagement in honors within the larger university.

Students’ motivation, their willingness to extend beyond the minimal level, significantly influences engagement. Honors students are engaged in experiences, curricular and extracurricular, that promote development, and the types of additional opportunities available to honors students and the feedback they receive affect participation. The interaction between honors students and their instructional environment may encourage them to engage with available resources more fully than non-honors students do.

Some tendencies, though, are an impediment to engagement. Self-handicapping, for instance, is a characteristic that can interfere with learning by actively encouraging students to withdraw from engaging activities or to fail in preparing for challenging opportunities. Self-handicapping and motivation can be viewed as a continuum affecting both engagement and achievement. Our study compares these characteristics in honors and non-honors cohorts as they relate to the process of engagement.

The purpose of this study was to apply several measures of learning and engagement to a comparable cohort of honors and non-honors students in order to generate a preliminary model of student engagement. Specific purposes were the following:

1. To determine the feasibility for use of several measures of student characteristics that may affect their engagement in the learning process.

2. To compare honors and non-honors students in measures that affect goal orientation and student engagement.

3. To create a model of student engagement that relates to the characteristics of student learning within the context of the teaching-learning environment.

The primary variables included mastery and performance goal constructs, self-handicapping, and student perceptions of engagement. Comparisons between honors and non-honors students in the context of these variables provides implications for teaching-learning strategies in both honors and non-honors educational contexts.

**BACKGROUND**

Honors education has a tradition of providing learning environments that support active student engagement. Honors students participate in intensive,
mented experiences and classes heavily invested in discussion and critical analysis. Students who qualify and choose honors may be predisposed to high levels of engagement since they are already a high-achieving group whose willingness to take risks and extend themselves makes them likely to engage actively in learning experiences beyond the curriculum.

**Previous Studies of Honors and Non-Honors Students’ Learning Characteristics**

Research studies comparing honors to non-honors students are rare, and more work is needed to identify the importance and strategic significance of honors programs. In 2004, Carnicom and Clump reported on a study of learning styles that compared honors and non-honors cohorts of entering freshmen. As expected, honors students had higher entering GPAs. The study—done with 45 students (17 honors and 28 non-honors) in a small, urban, Catholic university—describes learning styles, specifically in higher-order thinking skills. The authors used the Inventory of Learning Processes (ILP) and found a significant difference in Deep Processing but not in Methodological Study subscales. Both groups demonstrated strong study skills, but honors students entered at a higher level in organizing and critically evaluating information. The authors suggested that a longitudinal study could be done using the ILP.

Also in 2004, Cosgrove described a secondary analysis of graduation data for honors completers, partial honors, and comparison high-ability students. His study found differences among the groups, with honors completers having higher GPAs and higher graduation rates. Participants in the groups were predominantly white and female. This study was done in a large, public, state-wide system and involved review of more than two hundred academic records.

A recent quantitative study of over a thousand honors students at Utrecht University, Netherlands, used a combined questionnaire of valid and reliable tools. Results showed that the honors students differed significantly from the non-honors students, with the strongest distinguishing factors being the desire to learn, the drive to excel, and creativity (Scager et al.).

These studies explored entering characteristics and graduation rates, but none examined upper-division departmental honors students or change over time. The current study has attempted both, albeit with mixed results.
Self-Handicapping as a Learning Characteristic

At the negative end of the spectrum of student learning characteristics is the tendency for self-handicapping educational behavior, a defense mechanism designed to protect self-esteem. Individuals who self-handicap may intentionally or unintentionally introduce obstacles to success as an excuse for possible failure. Evidence of the negative impact of self-handicapping behaviors on outcomes has been reported for secondary school students and university students (Martin et al.; Dorman, Adams, & Ferguson; Ommundsen, Haugen, & Lund; Prapavessis, Grove, & Eklund; Rhodewalt & Vohs). A recent meta-analysis found a significant inverse association between self-handicapping and academic achievement ($r = -.23, p<.001$) (Schwinger et al.). These authors noted that correlations varied with student characteristics and goal-orientation levels. They concluded that educational interventions should include a focus on preventing self-handicapping.

Institutional measures of student engagement have been a focus of research since the development of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE was supported by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts and was originally tested by approximately 275 colleges and universities in 2000; it is currently in use worldwide. The NSSE documents active educational experiences reported by students and their effect on learning outcomes. Benchmarks are available nationally in five areas: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) participated in the NSSE at the institutional level. The current study used a targeted sample for the NSSE from honors students and non-honors students at UAB.

METHODS

Population & Setting

Eighty-seven ($n = 87$) students participated from honors and non-honors classes and groups. Students were recruited in departmental honors classes, and the Time 1 (T1) surveys were done during or after class. Incentives for student participation were pizza, soft drinks, and gift cards. In anticipation of a Time 2 (T2) follow-up test of students 6–9 months after initial testing, we obtained permission from the NSSE provider to administer the test to a targeted cohort. For the second administration of data collection, some groups
were invited to participate in a face-to-face meeting similar to the initial testing; other groups were unavailable, and so the survey was mailed and/or made available via an online link to SurveyMonkey®.

**Instrumentation**

Specific instruments used in the study are listed below in Table 1. Tools 1–5 were given at first administration (T1) of the survey, and 1–6 were given at the second administration six to nine months later (T2). Self-regulated learning and motivation were measured from subscales of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire and the Self-Regulated Learning Interview Schedule, with student written responses identifying learning contexts and learning/study strategies. Attribution was measured using an adaptation of the Attribution Survey that included causes of success and failure such as ability, effort, luck, rapport with the teacher, and task difficulty. Goal achievement orientation types were identified using Elliot and McGregor’s 2 X 2 scale: (a) Performance Approach, (b) Performance Avoidance, (c) Mastery Approach, and (d) Mastery Avoidance. Engagement was measured using a targeted sample administration of the NSSE.

**Ethical Protection**

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of UAB, which is an Academic Health Sciences Center and Public University, and two co-investigators completed FERPA training and were granted access to records as Authorized Requestors. Consent included written permission to access student transcripts through BANNER or STARS. Written consent was obtained at Time 1. When applicable, provision was made to have the instructor leave the room for testing in order to assure that student participation was voluntary.

**Table 1. Instrumentation**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Midgley et al.; Pintrich &amp; De Groot)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The Attribution Survey (Schoenfeld; Shores).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The Self-Regulated Learning Strategies Schedule (Zimmerman &amp; Martinez-Pons).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The Self-Handicapping Scale (Rhodewalt and Vohs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The Achievement Goals Questionnaire (Elliott &amp; McGregor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). [Targeted cohort T2 only]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS

Sample Description

The 87 students participating in the T1 part of the survey were recruited from seven schools and/or specialty groups as follows: nursing (30), undergraduate student government (17), multicultural scholars (16), engineering (11), business (9), sociology (3), and education (1). Of the sample, 55% (n = 48) of the sample were enrolled in honors, and 45% (n = 39) were not. A student was categorized as “honors” if s/he was enrolled in a departmental honors program (engineering, nursing, sociology, education, business) or a university honors program (university honors program, global & community leadership honors, science & technology honors). Effort was made to enroll students who were eligible for honors but chose not to enroll, but this distinction was difficult to obtain in most schools with departmental honors programs; lists of honors-eligible students were often not available, and/or, when available, the students did not respond to invitations to participate. The sample selection criteria were broadened to include two additional groups—the student government organization and a select program for multicultural students—to contribute to the non-honors comparison group. Several participants from the student government and multicultural scholars groups were in one of the university honors programs and thus were included as honors. Honors participation and comparisons between honors and non-honors cohorts at T1 are listed in Table 2.

Of the participants, 63% were female and 37% male. The gender and honors cross-tabulation revealed similarities in distribution, with 60% of honors students and 67% of non-honors students being female. The percentage of female students in honors was similar to that of the university as a whole (60%). Gender comparisons of honors and non-honors participation are listed in Table 2. Ethnicity was self-reported on the survey and supplemented with records data as needed. The diversity was good with 18 African American/Black, 9 Asian American/Asian Pacific Islander, 2 Biracial/Multiethnic, 4 Hispanic American, and 54 Caucasian/White. The diversity of the sample was similar to that of the university’s undergraduate population, where the majority is 66% and minority 34%. We specifically recruited from the multicultural scholars program (MSP) to get diverse representation. Students in both the university student government association and MSP exemplify leadership characteristics and have been through a selective process similar to honors interviews. They may or may not have been eligible for honors by GPA or specifically invited into an honors curriculum.
In the comparison between honors and non-honors students, the difference in institutional GPA was significant. Institutional GPA for honors was 3.65 (SD 0.26) and for non-honors was 3.28 (0.42) with p<.001. There was not a significant difference between institutional GPA by ethnicity or gender of students. The honors difference would therefore suggest a selection difference as part of admission to an honors program.

A significant difference was also found in ethnicity, with African-American students representing 10% of the honors participants and 36% of non-honors participants (Table 2). The cross-tabulation with honors and non-honors was found to be significant (Chi-square p< .05). Situated in the southern region of the U.S., UAB has a history of working to increase diversity. Increases in numbers of African American students are a priority, and honors has tried to pursue a teaching-learning environment that includes diverse perspectives. However, the addition of the MSP students in the non-honors cohort significantly affected the demographic breakdown.

There were no differences between groups in age or class designation.

**Time 1 Results**

Descriptive findings from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire, Attribution Survey, and Self-Regulated Learning Strategies Schedule revealed few differences; however, initial T1 differences and later T2 differences were found in the Self-Handicapping Scale and Achievement Goals Orientation Questionnaire.

**Self-Handicapping**

Self-handicapping is a defense mechanism designed to protect self-esteem (Dorman et al.; Martin et al.). Individuals who self-handicap may

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Honors (n = 48)</th>
<th>Non-honors (n = 39)</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% female</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% AA race</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>p &lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean class (4 = Sr)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
intentionally or unintentionally introduce obstacles to success as an excuse for possible failure. Our study employed the self-handicapping scale developed by Rhodewalt and Jones. This 25-item scale evidenced reliability for our sample with a Cronbach’s alpha = .79. Scores are based on a 6-point scale with 0 “disagree very much,” 1 “disagree pretty much,” 2 “disagree a little,” 3 “agree a little,” 4 “agree pretty much,” and 5 “agree very much.” Responses ranged from 0–5, and the higher the score, the more self-handicapping the student reported. Eight items were reverse-scored, and these were recoded for analysis. A summary score was computed as the sum of the 25 items. The highest possible score was 125. The summary score for this sample was 50 (SD 14), indicating a generally low level of self-handicapping reported. There was no significant difference between honors and non-honors in the summary scores for self-handicapping, with means of 49.8 and 50.9 respectively.

**Achievement Goal Orientation**

Four different achievement goal orientations were identified using Elliot and McGregor’s 2 X 2 scale, which includes the following types:

- **Performance Approach**: Competition with expected success
- **Performance Avoidance**: Competition with low expectation of success
- **Mastery Approach**: Competence development with expected success
- **Mastery Avoidance**: Avoidance of demonstration of incompetence

We used this tool to rate mastery and performance orientation and approach and avoidance. Four subscales made up the survey, with 3 items for each scale. Participants responded from 1 to 7, with 1 “Not at all true for me” and 7 “Very true for me.” Subscale means were computed for each construct. For the four subscales, participants scored higher on both the approach constructs than on avoidance goals. Mastery Approach was highest and Mastery Avoidance lowest, indicating mastery goals were more effective in defining motivation than performance goals. There were no statistically significant differences in constructs when contrasting honors vs. non-honors students at Time 1 (Table 3); however, honors students scored higher on Mastery Approach and non-honors students scored higher on Mastery Avoidance and Performance Avoidance (bolded).


Relationship between Achievement Goals and Self-Handicapping

Further analysis was done to correlate achievement goal constructs with self-handicapping. Mastery Avoidance was highly correlated with self-handicapping ($r = .36, p < .01$), with higher self-handicapping associated with higher avoidance. Performance Avoidance was even more significantly correlated with self-handicapping ($r = .40, p < .001$), again with high self-handicapping associated with avoidance. Correlations are listed in Table 4.

Time 2 Results

Follow-up data were obtained between six and nine months after the baseline survey. The response rate for the T2 cohort ($n=50$) was 57% of the T1 sample ($n = 87$).

GPA and Demographics

Honors students at T2 still demonstrated higher institutional GPA compared to non-honors (Table 5). At T2, the proportional percentages of ethnicity held with 34 (68%) Caucasian, 10 (20%) African American, and 6 (12%) Other/Asian/Hispanic, which continued to parallel the university at 68% White and 32% Minority. The T2 cohort also ($n=50$) retained the same demographic ratio of T1 ($n = 87$) in gender, age, and class.

Table 3. Comparison of Honors vs. Non-Honors on Goal Constructs (Time 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Honors</th>
<th>Non-honors</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance Approach</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Avoidance</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Approach</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Avoidance</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Correlation of Self-Handicapping and Goal Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Handicapping vs.</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance Approach</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Avoidance</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>$p &lt; .01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Approach</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Avoidance</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>$p &lt; .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Time 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honors  (n = 48)</td>
<td>Non-honors (n = 39)</td>
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<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean class (4 = Sr)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

The targeted NSSE was administered at Time 2 only. Findings are described in three categories: strategies for student engagement in learning, academic/cognitive activities, and writing activities.

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING (NSSE)

Statistically significant differences were found between honors and non-honors students on the following (in all instances, \( p < .05 \)), with honors students recording higher engagement in challenging activities:

a. Prepared 2 or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in.

b. Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources.

c. Included diverse perspectives (different races, genders, religions, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or assignments.

d. Participated in a community-based project (e.g., service-learning) as part of a regular course.

e. Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor.

ACADEMIC/COGNITIVE ACTIVITIES (NSSE)

In answering the question “During current school year how has coursework emphasized the following mental activities?” honors students reported less “memorizing” than non-honors students. Additionally, in each of the following, honors students reported more activities toward the more complex emphasis (\( p < .05 \)):

a. Analyzing

b. Synthesizing

c. Making judgments

d. Applying theories

WRITING (NSSE)

When asked about how much reading and writing they had done during the school year, honors students reported more involvement in writing.

a. Books read as assignments     n.s.

b. Books read on own       n.s.
c. Written reports 20 pages + p < 0.01

d. Written reports 5–19 pages p < 0.01

e. Written reports <5 pages p < 0.05

Comparisons of Goal Orientation and Self-Handicapping

Eighty-four students completed all goals orientation scales at Time 1, and 42 completed them all at Time 2. Although no differences were statistically significant, differences occurred between honors and non-honors groups from Time 1 to Time 2: honors students’ scores remained the same or increased on Mastery Approach and Performance Approach; non-honors students’ scores increased on both Mastery Approach and Mastery Avoidance; and non-honors students, who scored higher than honors students on self-handicapping at both T1 and T2, increased in self-handicapping. Self-handicapping was higher in non-honors students compared to honors students at the beginning of the study, and this disparity increased at Time 2 (Table 6). However, this finding was not statistically significant; within individuals, the change in self-handicapping from T1 to T2 was minimal and non-significant.

The correlations between self-handicapping and goal orientations are summarized in Table 6. At Time 1, higher self-handicapping was correlated to higher avoidance for mastery and performance, respectively (r = 0.36, p < 0.01; r = 0.40, p < 0.01). At Time 2, a significant negative relationship occurred between self-handicapping and Mastery Approach (r = -0.42, p < 0.01), with higher self-handicapping associated with lower Mastery Approach.

In comparing honors and non-honors students, the strength of these relationships remains high, with greater self-handicapping associated with Mastery Avoidance and Performance Avoidance in both groups (Table 7). At Time 2, the strongest correlation was between lower Mastery Approach and higher self-handicapping in the non-honors group (r = 0.69, p < 0.01).

**Table 6. Correlations Between Self-Handicapping and Goal Orientation (All)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal Constructs</th>
<th>Self-Handicapping T1</th>
<th>Self-Handicapping T2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance Approach</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Avoidance</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Approach</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>-0.42**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Avoidance</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p < 0.01
Regression Results

Four multivariate linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the linear relationship of eight independent variables as predictors of each of the achievement goal orientations: Mastery Approach, Mastery Avoidance, Performance Approach, and Performance Avoidance (Table 8). The predictor variables used were the self-handicapping score, two attribution subscales (success and failure), and five motivated strategies of the learning questionnaire (MSLQ) subscales: self-efficiency, intrinsic value, test anxiety, cognitive strategy use, and self-regulation.

Mastery Approach

The model in the prediction of Mastery Approach was statistically significant: $F(8,75) = 7.059$, $p < .001$. The $R^2$ of .430 (adjusted $R^2 = .369$) indicates that 43% of the variance in the Mastery Approach score can be accounted for by the linear combination of the eight variables. Only one predictor held a significant beta weight in the final model: the MSLQ intrinsic value score had a standardized beta weight of .411 ($t = 3.253$, $p = .002$). The positive value of the beta indicates a positive relationship between intrinsic value and the Mastery Approach.

Mastery Avoidance

The model in the prediction of Mastery Avoidance was statistically significant: $F(8,75) = 2.148$, $p = .041$. The $R^2$ of .186 (adjusted $R^2 = .100$) indicates that 19% of the variance in the Mastery Avoidance score can be accounted for by the linear combination of the eight variables. In the final model, one predictor had a beta weight significant at the .05 alpha level. The attribution-failure score had a standardized beta weight of .256 ($t = 2.104$, $p = .039$). The positive value of the beta indicates a positive relationship between attribution-failure and Mastery Avoidance.

Performance Approach

The model in the prediction of Performance Approach was statistically significant: $F(8,75) = 4.711$, $p < .001$. The $R^2$ of .334 (adjusted $R^2 = .263$) indicates that 33% of the variance in the Performance Approach score can be accounted for by the linear combination of the eight variables. Only one variable in the final model had a statistically significant beta weight. The MSLQ...
Table 7. Self-handicapping in Honors and Non-Honors Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance Approach</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Avoidance</td>
<td>+.30*</td>
<td>+.12</td>
<td>+.45**</td>
<td>+.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Approach</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.69**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Avoidance</td>
<td>+.42**</td>
<td>+.33</td>
<td>+.38*</td>
<td>+.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01

Table 8. Regression Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Variance Explained</th>
<th>Primary Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Approach</td>
<td>$R^2 = .430$</td>
<td>$p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>intrinsic value (MSLQ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Avoidance</td>
<td>$R^2 = .186$</td>
<td>$p &lt; .05$</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>attribution-failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Approach</td>
<td>$R^2 = .334$</td>
<td>$p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>self-efficacy (MSLQ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Avoidance</td>
<td>$R^2 = .256$</td>
<td>$p &lt; .01$</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>cognitive strategy use (MSLQ)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
self-efficacy score had a standardized beta weight of .626 ($t = 4.349, p < .001$). The standardized beta weight of this variable indicates a positive relationship between the self-efficacy score and Performance Approach.

**Performance Avoidance**

The model in the prediction of Performance Avoidance was statistically significant: $F(8,75) = 3.232, p = .003$. The $R^2$ of .256 (adjusted $R^2 = .177$) indicates that 26% of the variance in the Performance Avoidance score can be accounted for by the linear combination of the eight variables. Only one variable in the final model had a statistically significant beta weight. The cognitive strategy use score had a standardized beta weight of .342 ($t = 2.254, p = .027$). The standardized beta weight of this variable indicates a positive relationship between the cognitive strategy use score and Performance Avoidance.

**Characteristics of Engagement**

The NSSE gives institutional data on five subscales: Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment. The scale items are computed on a 0–100 scale (Table 9).

The highest subscale (all participants) was Supportive Campus Environment and the lowest was Enriching Educational Environment. Understanding the reasons behind these scores is an area for future investigation.

**Honors vs. Non-Honors Comparisons on NSSE Subscales**

Honors and non-honors students’ scores on NSSE subscales were compared with results presented in Table 10. Although not statistically significant, honors students reported higher levels for academic challenge, enriching environment, and supportive campus. These differences, if persistent, could

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Academic Challenge</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active &amp; Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Interaction</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriching Educational Environment</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Campus Environment</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
possibly be significant with a larger sample size. Differences in the level of academic challenge approached significance, with honors students reporting a higher level of academic challenge in their overall work.

**DISCUSSION**

**Feasibility Issues**

Several discussion points emerge from the data analysis, including the feasibility of the methods, sensitivity of the measures, and effectiveness in demonstrating comparative outcomes. To obtain good data, surveys must be administered with sufficient time for completion. The battery of tools given in this pilot required 30–45 minutes to complete, creating a need for incentives to participate. Participants received pizza and soda if they took the survey in person and a $10 gift card if they mailed or completed Time 2 surveys online via SurveyMonkey® software. Online administration might have given greater opportunity for detailed and accurate completion, which would be important in using the results for student advising, curricular evaluation, or other educational purposes. Of the scales administered, neither the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) nor the Attribution Survey scales discriminated between honors and non-honors students, and the Self-Regulated Learning Strategies would require more testing to give useful information for planning. The Achievement Goals Questionnaire, however, especially in conjunction with the Self-Handicapping Scale, did show discrimination and gave clues on the processes for learning. The NSSE indicated differences between the honors and non-honors students regarding engagement in challenging activities, academic/cognitive activities, and writing.

The authors entered this project to learn the feasibility and educational implications of conducting such research, and we learned numerous lessons.

**Table 10. NSSE Subscale Difference Between Honors and Non-Honors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Honors Mean (SE)</th>
<th>Non-honors Mean (SE)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Academic Challenge</td>
<td>29.2 (2.00)</td>
<td>23.2 (2.91)</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active and Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>44.1 (3.27)</td>
<td>48.0 (5.46)</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Faculty Interaction</td>
<td>36.5 (3.85)</td>
<td>44.9 (6.82)</td>
<td>-1.15</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriching Educational Environment</td>
<td>16.6 (2.44)</td>
<td>13.3 (3.03)</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Campus Environment</td>
<td>63.6 (2.62)</td>
<td>58.1 (3.69)</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
despite the inconveniences of being from different disciplines and different institutions. Obtaining adequate sample sizes was also a challenge, and modifications we made shifted the conceptual basis of our comparisons during the project. The tools were sensitive and sufficient measures of the significant characteristics of student motivation and learning but were not always sensitive enough to discriminate between groups; they may have been more effective in identifying students at risk for avoidance and lack of engagement. The leadership activities of a majority of the non-honors cohort further complicated the analysis; because these students were actively involved in student government and/or the multicultural scholars program, they may have been part of strong communities with active learning strategies similar to honors programs. The sample reflected a high diversity, which was particularly important in adequately defining the educational processes for multicultural students.

**GPA and Demographic Differences over Time**

The persistence of higher GPAs among honors students is expected since they are recruited and accepted based on their GPA and their orientation toward high academic achievement. The higher GPA among honors students matches findings presented from the same institution that the university honors program students achieved higher GPAs than others from the institution after controlling for ACT (Sloane).

**Relationship between Self-Handicapping and Achievement Goals Orientation**

Data analysis revealed a strong relationship between achievement goals orientation and self-handicapping. Students who indicated high Mastery Avoidance also indicated significant self-handicapping behaviors ($r = .36, p < .01$). Students who reported Performance Avoidance identified even higher self-handicapping ($r = .40, p < .001$). These findings led the authors to deduce a strong relationship between self-handicapping and avoidance orientations, echoing a study of secondary school students in which self-handicapping was found to be negatively associated with approach and positively associated with avoidance goals ($r = .25, p < .05$) (Shields). The stronger findings in the current study may be associated with the increased independence and self-responsibility at the collegiate level and may also show a development of engagement that comes with age, giving insight into emerging-adult educational processes.
Preliminary Model Development

Student motivation, attribution, self-regulated learning, and self-handicapping were subsequently incorporated into the model of student characteristics and engagement (Figure 1). Institutional environment could include both honors programs and non-honors programs. Engagement is a unifying force for successful educational outcomes, including retention and graduation. The quantitative relationships of this diagram should be explored further with adequate samples and statistical modeling.

In this model, student motivation and attribution influence the implementation of self-regulated learning strategies. When students employ techniques of self-handicapping, they may pull away from engagement, mediated through a Mastery Avoidance or Performance Avoidance goal orientation (Figure 1, crosshatched path). Avoidance goal orientation results in disengagement and can lead to low educational outcomes. Institutional factors that may correct and enhance engagement include developing an institutional environment to

**Figure 1. Initial Model of Student Characteristics and Engagement**
foster active and collaborative learning. These factors (Figure 1, gray path) were explored in the Time 2 data using correlations among subscales. Based upon Time 2 data, institutional environment may have had a positive impact on active and collaborative learning. For these students, engagement and/or use of campus enrichment increased.

Over the six to nine months of our study, honors students maintained higher institutional GPAs than non-honors students. The honors students also continued to score higher on Mastery Approach and Performance Approach while the non-honors students continued to score higher on Mastery Avoidance and Performance Avoidance. Non-honors students increased their Mastery Avoidance, Performance Approach, and Mastery Approach, and they decreased their Performance Avoidance. In general, the disparity between honors and non-honors students in self-handicapping increased over time, with non-honors students demonstrating higher self-handicapping at Time 2. This finding may have implications for our educational strategies as we identify and intervene with students over the course of a term and across different teaching-learning environments. We envision an experimental study with intervention directed toward identifying students at risk and finding ways to engage them more effectively.

Success supports future success, and high educational outcomes support continued engagement and development of new, positive goal orientations. One strategy to track goal orientations is related to “goal-as-motive,” which occurs when actions are given meaning, direction, and purpose so that the quality and intensity of behavior change as the goals change; reinforcing some goals (and not others) can differentially change the reasons why students learn, changing their motivation (Covington). The implications of this line of research might include ways to enhance student motivation and engagement at the collegiate level.

**Student Engagement as Measured by NSSE**

Student engagement was measured in subscales of strategies and student engagement in learning; academic/cognitive activities; and writing activities.

**Strategies and Student Engagement in Learning**

Honors students participate in an individualized curricular program with high-intensity experiences. The findings of this study validated the quality of these experiences and the perspectives of honors students participating in
them. The availability of service learning and community-based experiences is becoming widespread across campuses; however, honors students may be participating in these more than non-honors because honors programs expect and encourage them. Students with high achievement orientation also seek out extra participation in university initiatives that would support their development across affective as well as cognitive domains, and these include service, internships, and study abroad. Students who seek entry into honors programs seeking a challenging academic load may also be willing to take on more engagement in service learning and community service. In the T1 results, motivation, which includes intrinsic value, was a significant predictor of the Mastery Approach in regression analysis.

Academic/Cognitive Activities

On the NSSE, honors students reported more of the high-level activities of analyzing, synthesizing, making judgments, and applying theories. Students need educational guidance in order to make the leap into cognitively demanding challenges like writing integrated arguments and referencing multiple perspectives. Honors programs implement complex assignments and rubrics to stimulate creative and integrative thinking in ways that facilitate conceptual thinking. Our findings confirm that students themselves note greater exposure in honors to extensive skill-building in the cognitive domain. Since study participants were mostly juniors and seniors taking upper-level classes, they were all likely to be doing a fair amount of analyzing, synthesizing, and making judgments. The difference in the Applying Theories dimension may come from honors students’ immersion in the theoretical framework of an honors thesis.

Writing Activities

The development of writing skills assists students in the cognitive work of organization, scholarship, and comprehensive understanding. In writing position papers and opinion pieces with well-referenced sources, the student draws on a wide range of literature that prepares the way for community engagement in a range of venues, supporting the larger goals of contributing to society.

In all the study items that addressed writing, honors students reported more active roles in educational activities: more drafts of papers, integration of ideas and diverse perspectives, community-based projects, and career
planning. Honors students reported writing more papers of all lengths requiring more complex and integrated ideas. The small, individually focused teaching-learning environment of honors encourages high levels of experiential learning and interaction with faculty. Our findings provide data confirming these characteristics in honors.

The lack of difference on the “Book” questions may reflect that honors coursework and honors theses rely more on primary literature in professional journals than on books. The production of a lengthy honors thesis may also have contributed to differences in the reports on various lengths of papers, but possibly honors students just tend to write longer papers.

**Goal Orientation and Self-Handicapping**

**Comparisons of Goal Orientation and Self-Handicapping**

An important consideration is that we lost more of the non-honors cohort from T1 to T2: retention to completion of the study for honors was 60% and for non-honors was 37%. Nevertheless, honors students were consistently less likely to engage in avoidance approaches than non-honors students, supporting our model that students in more challenging and personally focused programs may have expectations and support that non-honors students do not. The shift in Mastery Avoidance, which is both a critical observation of our total teaching-learning environment and a strategy for change, seems particularly interesting but might be an effect of differential dropout. Looking at individual change scores might illuminate whether any real shift is going on. If we involve students more actively and develop new, effective methods for supporting student engagement, we believe that the student experience will be more productive. The limitations of our work, though, include a lack of methods to test intervention strategies unless honors itself is considered an intervention.

**Individual Change in Goal Orientation**

When comparing changes within individuals (Paired t-Test), we noted significant changes. Honors students increased their Performance Approach (+.2, p = .18) but also significantly increased their Mastery Avoidance (+.7, p < .05). Non-honors students increased their Mastery Avoidance (+.6, p = .09) but also decreased Performance Avoidance (-.6, p = .22), increased Performance Approach (+.2, p = .3), and significantly increased Mastery Approach (+.5, p < .05). These results could have been associated with the differential
dropout of those who stayed in the cohort through T2, with honors students demonstrating higher approach and lower avoidance behaviors.

The longitudinal progression may correspond to lack of engagement as described in the model. As students become less engaged, self-handicapping behaviors and avoidance become more pronounced. This vicious cycle may continue until students are lost to an achievement orientation or withdraw entirely. The disparity between honors and non-honors students in self-handicapping increased over time, with non-honors students demonstrating higher self-handicapping at T2, which has implications for our educational strategies as we identify and intervene with students over the course of a term and across different teaching-learning environments. We have yet to explore the relationship between intentional experiential learning and goal orientation. We envision an experimental study with intervention directed toward identifying students at risk and finding ways to engage them more effectively.

Our beginning descriptive research has helped us to identify the interactions among measurable variables of student entrance and selection, performance, engagement, goal orientation, and the related influence of self-handicapping. Our research has demonstrated the utility of measuring student perceptions in curricular evaluation and has provided a framework for future studies of curriculum, administration, and student engagement, setting the parameters for effective teaching and learning in our college environment.

**Regression**

In each of the four goal constructs, there was a significant regression between the multiple measures of motivation, attribution, and self-handicapping, and the prediction of all four goal orientations: Mastery Approach, Mastery Avoidance, Performance Approach, and Performance Avoidance. This regression supports the model’s prediction that higher self-handicapping creates avoidance through decreasing engagement. When institutional variables are able to serve as intermediaries, there is the possibility of reengagement toward positive learning outcomes.

**Institutional Characteristics**

The institutional characteristics showed wide variability based on student self-report but functioned to detect student understanding of campus-wide resources and activities. When comparing honors to non-honors students, we found no statistically significant difference in any of the subscales. However,
honors students scored higher levels than the non-honors cohort in three of the five scales: level of academic challenge, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. The non-honors cohort scored higher on active and collaborative learning and student-faculty interactions. The data indicated increased engagement and/or use of campus enrichment in both groups over time. During the period of the study, UAB began numerous initiatives to increase engaged learning on campus.

Limitations

More honors students (60%) completed the T2 surveys than non-honors (37%). The small incentive, a gift card, may not have been enough for some original participants to complete the T2 surveys, which may have caused them to self-select out regardless of the teaching-learning environment. The sample size and time frame may have been insufficient to detect completion differences in honors and non-honors students. The 6–9 months between T1 and T2 data may have led to a lack of differences in the short term without affecting final completion rates.

The actual extent of participation in additional or high-impact experiences is not known. Future research should combine portfolio assessment of activities to determine differential extracurricular experiences. We made some attempt to equalize this factor by recruiting participants from a multicultural leadership organization that was not affiliated with honors.

Engagement of Honors and Non-Honors Students

The purpose of this study was to create a model of student engagement that relates to the characteristics of student learning within a teaching-learning environment. The model of student engagement relates learner characteristics to the processes of educational achievement and suggests ways to promote engagement. The study also shows distinct differences between honors and non-honors cohorts that can give insight into the structure and function of teaching-learning environments. For example, honors students described more challenging experiences, but non-honors students described more collaborative experiences, and this could be the basis for further study.

Due to the sample size and the difficulty involved in such studies, the findings can only be suggestive at this point. Further work is needed to examine student retention and achievement in relation to processes of student engagement. Kuh states that students’ willingness to extend themselves influences
engagement. Honors programs have both excellent students and a creative learning environment to support such extension and engagement. For non-honors students, methods of strengthening engagement such as active learning and collaborative classrooms may facilitate approach orientations and support reengagement even after an initial path of avoidance or self-handicapping. Select groups such as the multicultural leadership organization can provide settings to encourage self-efficacy and offer strategies for overcoming barriers to achievement. Perseverance influences achievement regardless of giftedness or talent (Snyder et al.). The enriching educational environment of a college or university provides many opportunities for learning but only if the student engages with them. Additional assessments of characteristics and processes are needed to strengthen engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary findings demonstrate both the feasibility and applicability of studying the effect of honors on student engagement and learning. While the selection of higher-performing students for honors programs might create bias, the presence of higher self-handicapping in the non-honors group clearly relates to the conceptual model proposed. As institutions seek to create the best environment for learning, attention to student engagement is paramount. Not only do those students who seek the higher academic challenge of honors benefit, but also those who actively participate in enriching experiences and seek collaboration may complete at higher rates than those who do not. As stated in the Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program (NCHC, 1994, 2014):

The [honors] program serves as a laboratory within which faculty feel welcome to experiment with new subjects, approaches, and pedagogies. When proven successful, such efforts in curriculum and pedagogical development can serve as prototypes for initiatives that can become institutionalized across the campus.

The current research was an initial attempt to relate student engagement and institutional characteristics to educational goals in honors and non-honors students. Future research can better ascertain these relationships and the role institutional programs can play in furthering educational development.
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An Examination of Student Engagement and Retention in an Honors Program

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Honors programs at colleges and universities provide academic and developmental opportunities for high-ability students. Learning communities, defined as a group of students who live together, are connected through membership in a common organization, and take classes together, are often a component of honors programs. Learning communities provide an academic and social community that complements curricular requirements. At the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), a higher education institution in the Midwest, ninety percent of the freshman honor students live together and ninety-five percent take an honors class in their first semester on campus. The honors program at UNK is classified as a learning community; however, the term has varying definitions based on the classification of upper- and lower-division students at different institutions. Most research on learning communities focuses just on first-year students and the first-year experience. Very little research focuses on learning communities that include upper-division students.
BACKGROUND

Research has shown many positive effects for students participating in a learning community, including a positive effect on academic performance (Zhao & Kuh) and higher levels of academic effort and academic integration (Zhao & Kuh; Pike, Kuh, & McCormick). Learning communities also increase higher-order thinking and positive diversity experiences (Pike et al.). Students in learning communities tend to have increased interaction with staff and faculty, and they are more likely than students outside of learning communities to view the campus as being supportive (Zhao, & Kuh; Pike et al.). Finally, learning communities have been found to increase student retention and engagement, which is correlated with positive educational gains (Rocconi).

Inclusion of a learning community in honors programs can be complex. Studies have found that planning and programming must be in place for the learning community to benefit students (Frazier & Eighmy; Yao & Wawrzynski), requiring coordination between academic affairs and student affairs, for instance (Shushok & Sriram). The location of the residence hall is also important as well as the design of the interior space (Daffron & Holland). Learning communities can also have negative consequences, creating social environments similar to high school, with cliques, excessive socializing, misconduct, and disruptive behavior. Groupthink can also affect the population, undermining interaction with faculty and chilling the intellectual environment (Jaffee). These issues must be addressed in order to maximize the benefits of the learning community.

Understanding the impacts, both positive and negative, of learning communities is essential, and so is understanding what draws students to an honors program and keeps them involved. Nichols and Chang surveyed the members of the South Dakota State University (SDSU) Honors College to help understand student engagement in the program. They identified the most important factors for students who decided to join the honors college, the reasons the students stayed in the program, their level of satisfaction, and the characteristics of the students who were in the program. They found that the most significant factors influencing decisions to join the SDSU Honors College were competitive advantage for the students, smaller classes, connections with faculty, prestige, and opportunities for deeper learning. The most important factors influencing student decisions to continue in the honors college were the quality of the honors learning environment, connections
to honors college faculty, and priority registration. Their survey showed that peers were not a top reason for students to continue in the honors college as previous research had indicated. A notable example of such research is a study by Astin, who found that the peer group had a large effect on students and their decisions, especially related to academics. This disparity may be the difference between an observed impact and student perception.

The finding in some studies that peers are a top reason to continue in honors programs could be related to the fact that most research on learning communities has focused on first-year students and the first-year experience. The peer influence could be different if upper-division students were included in the research. In 2006, LaVine & Mitchell called for learning community research that includes upper-division students, but little has appeared to date. Nichols and Chang did, however, gather data on upper-division students in 2013 and found that as students advanced, the influence of prestige on persistence in honors gradually decreased. The influence of class size and quality also fell during the sophomore and junior year but then rose up again during the senior year. The students’ satisfaction was highest with their relations to faculty, the dean of the honors college, the living and learning community, and their overall honors experience. The fact that the relationship with faculty had a high rating offers a connection to learning communities. According to Astin, faculty have a large influence on students and their satisfaction. At SDSU, “Seniors ranked satisfaction with their fellow honors students highest; for freshmen, satisfaction with the Honors Living and Learning Community was highest; and juniors gave slightly lower scores than other students to most of the components except honors courses and faculty” (Nichols & Chang 111). This finding seems to show that learning communities are satisfying for students and that, as students get near the end of their time in college, they begin to appreciate their peers more.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

We were particularly interested in how student engagement in an honors program evolves as students progress from freshmen to seniors. We have observed that upperclassman, as they progress through college, tend to identify more with other affiliations, such as Greek organizations, student clubs, and their major departments. To continue the research into the differences between upper- and lower-division students in honors programs started by Nichols & Chang, we investigated the honors program experience at UNK
that includes a learning community in the four-year honors program. Part of the purpose of this research study was to examine student engagement from the perspective of lower- and upper-division students. Determining the community dynamics of students in the honors program and the elements that are most valuable to them is important in planning and designing a successful learning community, as indicated by previous research (Frazier & Eighmy; Yao & Wawrzynski). Also critical is understanding the differences between lower- and upper-division students in order to design programming specifically targeted for each group to enhance satisfaction and retention of students in the honors program. The research questions designed for this study are as follows:

1. What are the key factors that influence a student’s decision to enroll in the honors program?

2. What are the key factors that influence honors students to stay in the honors program, and is there a difference in the factors between upper- and lower-division students?

3. What do students find to be the challenging aspects of the honors program, and is there a difference between upper- and lower-division students?

4. What aspects of the honors program are students most satisfied with, and is there a difference in the satisfaction between upper- and lower-division students?

We hypothesized that there would be significant differences between upper- and lower-division students in their reasons for remaining in the honors program, their challenges, and their satisfaction with the program. We were then interested in how an honors program might better engage upper-division students.

**METHOD**

Because Nichols and Chang’s research aligned with our study interests, we gained permission from the authors to implement their survey at UNK. Their approach was valuable to designing a program that engages upper-division students in an honors program community, both at UNK and across the country, based on student perceptions. Prior to data collection, the Institutional Review Board at UNK approved the study.
Participants

The program had 442 enrolled students at the time of the survey, and all were invited to complete the survey along with 96 recent graduates. The recent graduates were counted as upper-division students. Participants ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-four.

Materials

We used the survey created by Nichols and Chang to gather data, recreating it in Qualtrics with only minimal changes to adapt it to the UNK Honors Program context and terminology. We changed statements to include terminology used at UNK, e.g., “honors program” instead of “honors college,” and we changed the activities that students could select to activities included on the UNK campus. The survey was sent to students in an email that provided a consent form to participate and a link to take the survey.

Procedure

An email notification about the survey was sent to all 442 current honors students and also 96 recent graduates; however, not all students opened the email, as indicated by the Qualtrics program. The email contained information about the survey and its purpose so that students could make an informed decision about whether to complete it. Students had the option of consenting to take the survey or declining without any penalty to them. Students who chose to take the survey were asked to complete it within two weeks through Qualtrics. Completion time was about fifteen to twenty minutes.

RESULTS

We emailed the survey to 538 honors students at UNK; 210 opened the email; and 62 completed it, giving us a 30% completion rate. Of the 62 students, 51 were female and 11 male; 34 were lower-division students and 28 upper-division. Together, the students who completed the survey had a mean high school GPA of 3.95 and a mean ACT score of 29.5. The mean college GPA for the students who completed the survey was 3.83.

Students were asked about their initial decision to enroll in the honors program. The top two responses were “competitive advantage” and “prestige,” with 19 ranking competitive advantage as extremely influential and 26 ranking prestige extremely influential. As shown in Table 1, the other responses were
parents (19), teachers (1), peers (3), small class size (8), connections with faculty (9), supplemental opportunities (9), and opportunities for deeper learning (16). (All tables are included in the Appendix.) The students had the opportunity to list any other significant factors that influenced their decision in becoming part of the honors program. Twenty-four students offered responses to this question, with the highest responses being scholarships, living in Men’s Hall, and registering for classes early.

Students were asked how they first learned about the honors program. Fifty-nine students responded to this question. Students indicated that they heard about the honors program through their high school counselor (10), the UNK Website (10), from siblings (7), from friends (6), through a mailing (6), and by applying for scholarships (4). Students were also asked about activities in which they participated, and they indicated participation in honors social activities (36), living/learning community (24), undergraduate research (23), book club (22), service activities (16), study abroad (9), Honors Fall Convocation (8), and Honors Student Activity Board (6). Students were then asked to share what activities they suggested for the future in an open-ended question format. Responses with the highest frequencies were social gatherings with an emphasis on meeting others (9), professional development opportunities (5), volunteering and making changes to the mentoring program (3), and guest speakers and leadership opportunities (2).

Several statistical analyses were conducted to answer the research questions. Friedman’s one-way repeated measures ANOVA was used to analyze the data due to violations of the assumption of normality (Field). A statistically significant difference was found in the initial reason for enrollment in the honors program at UNK, \( \chi^2(8) = 161.033, p < .001 \). Step-down follow-up analysis revealed that the most influential reason for students to enroll in the honors program was competitive edge (Mean = 7.44) and prestige (Mean = 6.77) as compared to all other reasons listed, \( p = .03 \). In addition, a statistically significant difference emerged in the reasons for enrolling between honors program teachers (Mean = 3.07) and opportunities for deeper learning (Mean = 5.43), \( p = .01 \) (see Table 5).

A statistically significant difference also occurred in reasons why students decided to stay in the honors program at UNK, \( \chi^2(8) = 143.481, p < .001 \). Step-down follow-up analysis revealed that priority registration (Mean = 7.12) and prestige (M = 6.90) were the two key factors in students’ decision to remain in the honors program as compared to all other reasons listed, \( p = .001 \). Peer influence (Mean = 2.82) was the least influential reason for students to remain in the honors program as compared to all other reasons (see Table 5).
Differences between upper- and lower-division students in each of the key factors in retention were tested using the Mann-Whitney U test (Field), and several factors were found to be significantly different. The connection with faculty was significantly more influential to lower-division students \((Mdn = 3.28)\) than upper-division students \((Mdn = 2.62)\) as a reason to stay in the honors program, \(U = 588.500, z = 2.176, p = .03, r = .281\), medium effect size. Small class size was also more important to lower-division students \((Mdn = 3.16)\) than upper-division students \((Mdn = 2.00)\), \(U = 664.000, z = 3.330, p = .001, r = .425\), medium effect size. The quality of classes was more influential to lower-division students \((Mdn = 3.88)\) than upper-division students \((Mdn = 3.54)\), \(U = 672.000, z = 3.452, p = .001, r = .445\). The community with other honors students was more influential to lower-division students \((Mdn = 3.50)\) than to upper-division students \((Mdn = 2.42)\), \(U = 617.000, z = 2.883, p = .004, r = .372\), medium effect size, and supplemental opportunities were significantly more important to lower-division students \((Mdn = 3.81)\) than upper-division students \((Mdn = 2.35)\), \(U = 703.500, z = 3.931, p < .001, r = .507\), large effect size (See Table 2).

Analysis of the most challenging aspect of the honors program revealed a statistically significant difference, \(\chi^2(4) = 68.943, p < .001\). Step-down follow-up analysis revealed that the Senior Thesis (Mean = 3.75) and the Honors H-Options (Mean = 3.52) were significantly more challenging than all other challenges listed, \(p = .01\). No significant differences occurred, however, between upper- and lower-division students in the challenging aspects of the honors program (see Tables 3 and 5).

Examination of student satisfaction with the honors program revealed a statistically significant difference, \(\chi^2(7) = 28.182, p < .001\). Step-down follow-up analysis revealed that honors program faculty (Mean = 5.27) and fellow peers (Mean = 4.84) were significantly more important than the activities and opportunities in the program, \(p = .035\) (see Table 5).

Differences between upper- and lower-division students in each of the areas of satisfaction explored were tested using the Mann-Whitney U test, and only one of several factors was found to be significantly different between the upper- and lower-division students. Lower-division students were significantly more satisfied with the advising and support \((Mdn = 4.50)\) than upper-division students \((Mdn = 3.13)\), \(U = 656.50, z = 2.983, p = .03, r = .382\), medium effect size (see Table 4).
DISCUSSION

This research study was designed to examine the factors that are influential in a student’s decision to enroll in an honors program and the reasons they choose to stay in the program. We found that more students received information about the honors program from high school counselors and on their own through the university’s website than from other sources. Students chose to enroll in the honors program as a result of their perception that they would gain a competitive edge and the perceived prestige that comes from being in an honors program. Our results at UNK echo Nichols and Chang’s finding that competitive advantage and prestige were the most important reasons for joining the SDSU Honors College. From the program’s perspective, prestige and competitive advantage are not the ideal factors for recruiting new students compared to deeper learning opportunities and participation in a community of motivated learners, but perhaps why they join us is less important than the benefits they gain from their experience.

When students at UNK were asked why they remained in the honors program, priority registration and prestige were at the top of the list. Peer influence was found to be the least significant reason for students to stay in the program. Lower-division students were more likely to identify class size and quality along with the student community as priority factors, probably because lower-division students are more likely to live in the honors residence hall and take honors general studies classes than the upper-division students.

This project arose from a concern about the continued engagement of upper-division students in the honors program. We explored the differences between upper- and lower-division students to determine if honors program staff could account for any such differences in attracting and retaining students. While some upper-division students remained actively engaged in social and academic extracurricular activities, the majority shifted their focus toward their academic major, which raised the question of whether programming should be refined to better maintain upper-division student engagement in the honors program or the shift in affiliation is appropriate. We had assumed significant differences between upper- and lower-division students in their reasons for remaining in the honors program, their challenges, and their satisfaction with the program, and we did find differences in reasons for remaining and program satisfaction. The lower-division students, for instance, were more influenced to stay in the program as a result of connections to faculty, small class size, quality of classes, the community of other honors students, and supplemental opportunities. The lower-division students were also more
satisfied with the advising and support in the program than the upper-division students. While we had also expected differences between upper- and lower-division students in what they found challenging, we did not find any significant differences.

The results of this study can be seen as natural outcomes of honors programming at UNK. That upper-division students shift their identification to their major, as our results indicated, is a logical consequence of the increased specialization that characterizes undergraduate education. In a decision whether programming should be designed to keep upper-division students engaged in the honors community, the answer must be rooted in what is best for the students. Program evaluation reports at UNK have indicated that the honors program has a non-completion rate of about 20%, and we need to consider whether that rate is appropriate or not. The honors program staff might be able to focus on new opportunities, beyond what academic departments can offer, to help honors students with their transition into post-graduation positions; these might include study abroad programs and national scholarships.

Continued interaction leads to continued advising, whether formal or casual. Programming that attracts honors students—such as student/alumni social events, formal mentoring programs, group advising sessions, or even free printing—increases the interactions that honors students have with peers and others. Social capital theory suggests that such trusting relationships enable a group to succeed collectively and individually (Putnam).

We conclude from this project that we need to generate new initiatives in order to increase the involvement of upper-division honors students in the honors community. Programming must be of particular value to those students to attract them, and certainly not all will respond, but we need to create opportunities for those who will benefit.

Limitations

One major limitation of the study is the response rate of eligible participants. Eleven percent of the total population completed our survey, and these respondents self-selected. Results, therefore, cannot be considered characteristic of the UNK honors students nor of honors students in general. Secondly, the respondents were disproportionately female: 82%, when the program population is about 70% female. However, the data were consistent with results in a previous study at another institution as well as preliminary qualitative work at UNK.
Direction for Future Research

Research on student engagement in honors programs would benefit from more focus on the difference between lower-division and upper-division students to determine whether honors programs should be targeting their upper-division students more aggressively or concentrating more on lower-division students. Providing the right type of programming at the right time is an important part of program planning. More research is also needed to help resolve different opinions about the importance of peers: Nichols & Chang found that peers were not important in the engagement of honors students while Astin found that peers were an important factor in the quality of undergraduate education in general. Technology may be another factor: it is changing social relationships in general, so it may be affecting learning communities as well. These questions require ongoing attention as the landscape of honors programs and the students who enroll in them change.

REFERENCES


The authors may be contacted at jkampfe@unomaha.edu.
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**Table 1. Key Factors that Influence a Student’s Decision to Enroll in the Honors Program**
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<td>Opportunities for Deeper</td>
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<td>Learning</td>
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*Note: L = lower-division students and U = upper-division students*
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<th>1 (Not Influential)</th>
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<td>Quality of Classes</td>
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Note: \(L = \) lower-division students and \(U = \) upper-division students
**Table 3. Challenging Aspects of the Honors Program**

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*Note: L = lower-division students and U = upper-division students*
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Note: L = lower-division students and U = upper-division students
Table 5. Summary of Friedman's One-Way Repeated Measures ANOVAs for Student Engagement in an Honors Program

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<th>$p$</th>
<th>$M$</th>
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<td>7.44, 6.77</td>
<td>.03*</td>
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<td>Most Influential: Competitive Edge and Prestige</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5.43, 3.07</td>
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<td>Deeper Learning vs. Teachers</td>
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<td><strong>Retention Factors for Honors Students</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Factors in Student Satisfaction</strong></td>
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<td>Most Satisfied with: Honors Program Faculty and Fellow Peers</td>
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Note: *$p$<.05, **$p$<.01, ***$p$<.001
Assessing Growth of Student Reasoning Skills in Honors

Jeanneane Wood-Nartker, Shelly Hinck, and Ren Hullender
Central Michigan University

INTRODUCTION

Assessment and evaluation practices within honors programs have attracted considerable attention within the honors academic community, e.g., the spring/summer 2006 volume of the Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council. Calls for carefully created and constructed assessment activities within honors programs have met with mixed responses by directors who identify the difficulty in assessing decentralized, complex learning environments, noting that standard measures such as tests, surveys, or essays are not always applicable or appropriate in addressing honors assessment needs, especially in areas of social justice, service learning, and community engagement (Corley & Zubizarreta; Lanier). Acknowledging the hesitancy of honors directors about the need for assessment as well as their concern about the development of authentic assessment practices, Lanier nevertheless...
encourages honors directors to embrace quality assessment activities as a way to demonstrate the value and importance of honors and its enhanced student learning. Lanier offers the following comments:

We now need to do the right thing in honors education and develop reliable assessment practices that will generate reliable data and demonstrate convincingly that honors does have the impact on students that we all assert as a matter of faith. “Trust me, honors is important and our students do very well” just doesn’t work anymore no matter how much we may want to fuss or drag our heels. (88–89)

The focus of this paper is to share one effective method for gathering evidence that indicates whether students advanced in their ability to think at a more complex level within a short-term honors service learning course. Grounded in Wolcott and Lynch’s Steps to Better Thinking Skills model, this augmented assessment tool identifies growth in critical thinking skills and areas of intellectual risk.

ASSESSMENT IN HONORS

Assessment has become an important component of program development and continuation in higher education. Legislators, alumni, parents, and students all demand accountability for the learning and skills developed in programs offered at universities and colleges. Honors programs are no exception. Toward that end, honors directors have increasingly been asked to offer evidence supporting the claim that honors programs have value, enhance student learning, and provide opportunities for personal growth and development. Creating assessment practices, however, can be difficult, and developing practices that faculty members can easily integrate into honors courses is even more of a challenge. As a result, many honors programs and colleges have struggled to provide evidence of the value that honors adds to students’ educational and personal development, and this is especially true for the growing number of programs that emphasize “high-impact educational practices” (HIP) such as study abroad and service learning (Kuh). Klos, Eskine, and Pashkevich note that “questions of social justice and civic engagement are an increasing focus of attention in honors education” (53), with honors programs offering more activities such as service learning, immersion experiences, and community-engaged research. Such experiential opportunities play an important role in developing students’ understanding of complex social issues in a global, national, and local setting as well as
developing students’ ability to critically examine their personal assumptions as well as societal structures. However, assessing this kind of personal and academic growth in deep-immersion/high-impact programs is difficult.

In a 2009 survey of the assessment practices of 24 NCHC members and 14 non-members, Driscoll found that just over half of the honors programs conducted some sort of assessment. Reasons for not engaging in assessment practices included “newness of the program, newness of the administrator, insufficient time, philosophical opposition to assessment, and an assessment plan in process but not in place” (94). In those programs that have engaged in assessment, the data collected most often involved student satisfaction with honors courses, student satisfaction with the honors program, attrition rates from honors programs, causes of honors attrition, and attrition rates of the institution. For example, in a longitudinal study of 172 honors students from 2000 to 2004, Shushok found that honors students had a higher GPA than non-honors students at the end of the first year of college, that honors students had higher retention rates progressing into the sophomore year, and that honors students were more likely than non-honors students to meet with a faculty member during office hours, discuss career plans with a faculty member, or discuss political/social issues with a student outside of class. Cosgrove described a similar assessment program, examining the academic performance, retention, and degree completion rates of three groups: 1) honors students who completed the program; 2) honors students who did not complete the program; and 3) non-honors students who had similar pre-college scores, high school GPAs, and ACT scores as the honors college students. Results indicated that the honors students who completed the program earned higher GPAs, had higher graduation rates, and graduated in a shorter time period than honors students who did not complete the program and non-honors students.

While assessment programs that address the value of honors in relation to retention, time to graduation, and enhanced GPA are valuable, less data have been collected connecting program assessment to specific learning outcomes. According to Driscoll, “Course content and critical thinking were reportedly assessed by only 35% of the programs that conduct some assessment (18% of the entire sample)” (100). Driscoll’s findings are consistent with previous literature reported by Seifert et al. indicating that “relatively little research has examined the extent to which honors program participation influences student learning” (58). Clearly, honors programs need assessment practices that address learning outcomes such as critical thinking skills.
EFFECTIVE HONORS STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (SLOS)

According to Lanier, the first question of good assessment is “What do we want our students to learn?” The second is “How do we know they learned it?” (90). Toward that end, Zubizarreta identified learning outcomes, or domains, for honors students on the NCHC listserv in September 2004, which are condensed as follows:

- Read, write, and think critically
- Employ an effective process to produce clear, persuasive writing
- Conduct effective research
- Develop analysis abilities
- Integrate active learning and be willing to take learning risks
- Promote interdisciplinary learning
- Incorporate community and service learning experiences
- Demonstrate aesthetic sensitivity
- Participate actively and effectively in large and small groups
- Assume multiple roles in groups
- Demonstrate responsibility outside the classroom and school
- Demonstrate cultural awareness and gender sensitivity
- Appreciate learning for its own sake
- Appreciate diversity
- Promote effective communication skills
- Demonstrate personal integrity
- Develop professional behavior/skills
- Develop leadership abilities
- Build moral values/integrity
- Promote project management and problem solving skills
- Promote active citizenship roles
• Incorporate international experiences
• Develop foreign language proficiency and
• Develop creative abilities
Lanier agreed with Zubizarreta’s listing and added some additional possible domains that could be useful in honors assessment:

• Content (knowledge specific to a discipline or major as well as knowledge specific to interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary activities)
• Communication (writing skills, oral communication skills, media/computer communication skills, numeric skills, etc.)
• Critical Thinking
• Analysis
• Project management (both group and individual work)
• Moral values/Integrity
• Problem solving
• Citizenship
• Leadership
• Diversity
• Creative ability
• Professional behavior/skills
• International experience
• Foreign language proficiency
• Active learning
• Interdisciplinary learning
• Service learning
• Community service
• Cultural awareness (90–91)
According to Lanier, the first step in the development of an honors assessment plan would be to consider which domains engage honors students in specific learning activities that are also central to the mission of the particular honors program. Lanier focused on the need for, and ability to develop, objective questions for assessing these student learning outcomes (SLOs) that include the following:

1. Do our honors programs and colleges actually provide educational opportunities and curricular structures that enhance our student’s ability to attain these outcomes and goals?

2. What is the evidence that shows that our honors students have actually achieved these outcomes?

Beyond those two fundamental questions are matters of method and practice: How can an honors program consistently measure the outcomes such as “thinks critically” or “achieves strong analytic skills” given the breadth of a typical honors program (which is often quite unlike the sharp focus and coherence of the curriculum in a major)? What exactly do we mean by these outcomes? Where in the honors curriculum do honors students demonstrate these behaviors for faculty to gauge? The answers to these questions can provide evidence of honors students’ academic achievement. The task then is to devise specific SLOs that lead to appropriate methods for gathering measurable data about whether students are actually learning and accomplishing the identified goals. (86)

**CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE**

The goals and values of a particular honors program play a crucial role in the development of its culture (Ford). The Central Michigan University (CMU) Honors Program is an active community of scholars that has been a campus organization since 1961 and has developed some clearly defined goals that include fostering diversity, commitment to academic excellence, intellectual engagement, and social responsibility. The program’s mission statement emphasizes the need to provide high-ability students with unique educational opportunities and experiences; it challenges students to set high standards and to achieve academically, personally, and professionally for the greater good of our disciplines, our society, and our world. The primary values guiding the implementation of this honors program’s mission include critical thought, scholarly inquiry, creative expression, respect and appreciation...
for diverse people and ideas in a global society, high standards for integrity and personal aspirations, and active citizenship and service for the greater good. Students are encouraged to engage with faculty, staff, and fellow students through disciplinary and interdisciplinary coursework, seminars, philanthropic events, community engagements, and social activities (Central Michigan University Honors Webpage).

All of these criteria help to distinguish the honors student from the non-honors student at CMU. Honors is not a curriculum, a specific discipline, or a program of study. Honors courses are cross-disciplinary experiential learning contexts designed to connect academic study to broader, more complex environments such as service learning, study abroad, or similar events with the goal of fostering high-order critical thinking skills and promoting transformative learning.

**COMPLEX THINKING ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT**

Wolcott and Lynch adapted King and Kitchner’s seven developmental stages into five broad patterns of thinking, called “Steps for Better Thinking Skill Patterns,” within which people form understandings and beliefs. *Level 0* represents pre-reflective thinking or unexamined assumptions. In *Level 1*, thinkers acknowledge the existence of multiple perspectives but fail to distinguish between evidence and personal opinion so that reasoning primarily consists of gathering information to support existing beliefs. *Level 2* thinkers can define the problem, identify personal biases, and evaluate multiple perspectives, but they lack clarity in defending a particular solution. *Level 3* people can formulate conclusions by comparing possible alternatives, but solutions generally lack meaningful connections beyond the immediate argument and fail to include implications and limitations. At *level 4*, complex thinkers formulate and contemplate viable solutions with well-grounded arguments and an awareness of implications and limitations over time.

To assist us in charting the levels of complex thinking in student writing, we adapted Wolcott and Lynch’s thinking skill pattern descriptors to identify nuanced qualities of reasoning. As part of this process, we further expanded each level to qualify whether the participant demonstrated (a) weak or inconsistent reasoning skills; (b) pervasive, competent, or proficient thought; or (c) an awareness, readiness, or attempt to reason at a higher level of thinking as shown in Table 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal of thinking</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Improvements over less complex thinking</th>
<th>Weaknesses or delimitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zero</strong></td>
<td>0a</td>
<td>Pre-reflective thinking</td>
<td>Fails to realistically perceive uncertainties/ambiguities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unexamined assumptions</td>
<td>Recasts open-ended problem to one having a single “correct” answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Insists that the experts should provide “correct” answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Expresses futility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Uses blame, excuses, or illogical arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0b</td>
<td>Expresses confusion</td>
<td>Cannot evaluate or appropriately apply evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recognizes need for substantiating evidence</td>
<td>Inappropriately cites textbook, “facts,” or definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>One</strong></td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>Acknowledges existence of enduring uncertainties and multiple perspectives</td>
<td>Jumps to conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Confuses evidence and unsupported personal opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Insists that all opinions are equally valid, but discounts others' opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Views experts as being opinionated or as trying to subject others to their personal beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1b</td>
<td>1c</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reaches own conclusion without relying exclusively on authority</td>
<td>Stacks up evidence quantitatively to support own viewpoint and ignores contrary information, inept at breaking problem down and understanding multiple perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defines problem and builds coherent argument on verifiable evidence</td>
<td>Understands multiple perspectives, but privileges obvious, personally relevant aspects of problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proceeds as if goal is to establish a detached, balanced view of evidence and information from different points of view.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>Presents coherent and balanced description of a problem and the larger context in which it is found</td>
<td>Reluctant to select and defend a single overall solution as most viable, jeopardizes class discussions by getting stuck on issues such as definitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>Identifies issues, assumptions, and biases associated with multiple perspectives</td>
<td>Selects a solution but unable to express adequate support for its superiority over other solutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c</td>
<td>Attempts to control own biases, logically and qualitatively evaluates evidence from different viewpoints</td>
<td>Writes overly long paper in attempt to demonstrate all aspects of analysis (problems with prioritizing)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Proceeds as if goal is to come to a well-rounded conclusion based on objective comparisons of viable alternatives.</td>
<td>Conclusion based on qualitative evaluation of experts’ positions or situational pragmatics, conclusion doesn’t give sufficient attention to strategic issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inadequate arguments for objectively assessing and choosing options</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b</td>
<td>After thorough exploration, consciously prioritizes issues and information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3c</td>
<td>• Articulates well-founded support for choosing one solution while objectively considering other viable options</td>
<td>• Inadequately identifies and addresses solution limitations and “next steps”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Proceeds as if goal is to construct knowledge, to move toward a better conclusion or greater confidence in conclusions as the problem is addressed over time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a</td>
<td>• Prioritizes and addresses limitations effectively • Interprets and reinterprets bodies of information systematically and over time as new information becomes available</td>
<td>• Lacks long-term vision; fails to anticipate future implications and plan for change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b</td>
<td>• Exhibits a practical, long-term vision • Spontaneously considers possible ways to generate new evidence and solutions to a problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our research focused on the nature and evidence of transformative learning, especially critical thinking skills. The complexity of arguments from student writing could easily be placed within the clear affordances and limitations of thinking described in the ascending levels.

IMPLEMENTATION/ASSESSMENT PROCESS

We tested our adapted instrument by examining multiple reflective writings generated over the duration of an honors service learning course. Specifically, the goal was to ascertain shifts in thinking, subtle changes in perspective, a strengthening of process, or a broadening of vision emerging in later reflections as indicators of growth.

Sixteen traditional honors students were enrolled in a service learning course that required them to read and write responses to articles on the dynamics of service and civic engagement; do research and present topics of social concern; participate in daily group reflections; and organize and lead a series of community service events and projects. Students partnered with agencies that addressed issues of environmentalism, cultural preservation, rural and alternative education, and elder care. In addition to service activities, students completed a series of writing assignments, e.g., a pre-course paper, daily journals that connected their assigned readings to their service experiences, and a final reflection paper due approximately two weeks after the conclusion of the experience. As a way to begin the course and to start integrating reflection and knowledge into the service experience, the first writing assignment required students to think about the learning expectations they had for the course as well as their interest in and knowledge of an issue specific to the community. When discussing the issue, students were cautioned to note the complexity of the issue and, if appropriate, various perspectives on it as well as to identify possible courses of action to address it.

Writing assignments required students to reflect on the service experience, readings, interactions with community members, and their classmates. Reflections consisted of two parts: (1) the response that was guided by the question posed by the instructors and (2) the student’s personal thoughts that might or might not be prompted by the instructors. The reflection provided a venue for personal synthesis as students interpreted their experiences through readings and daily discussions about entering and exiting a community, insider/outside perspectives, and leadership development. In addition to the traditional “What?” and “Now What?” and “So What?” questions, the prompts addressed situations such as the following:
Why is it important to enter a community effectively? What steps are we taking to ensure that we are respectful of this community?

How does your insider/outside status impact how you engage in service with the island community?

How does your insider/outsider status affect how you engage in service with this community?

What struggles did you encounter and how did you address them?

A final reflection paper that encouraged students to integrate course readings, service experiences, and future civic engagement activities was due two weeks after the conclusion of the course. In the summative writing assignment, students were asked to respond to the following prompts:

1. Utilize at least 7 of the readings assigned throughout the course, then reflect upon what constitutes effective and meaningful service. What are the assumptions upon which you have constructed your definition of effective service? What elements/ideas need to be incorporated into your definition of effective/meaningful service? Please integrate the articles carefully into the final paper.

2. Choose one issue that our service projects have addressed. Think about what you initially thought about this issue, what you currently think about the issue, and what you have learned about the issue. Integrate the role that the service projects played in your understanding of this issue.

3. Finally, explore what it means personally to be an active citizen and the lessons you've learned about service and yourself as a result of your experiences on the island. Be specific; offer a careful analysis of the ideas you offer. What service role will you play when you return home?

In assessing student reflective writings, we bracketed out common terminology from the course readings and familiar phrases from group discussions. Instead of knowledge of course content, we looked at how students thought about these concepts and experiences as evidenced in opinions, explanations, justifications, and other arguments written during the week. Participant reflective writings identified four aspects of the course as disorienting: student perceptions of community members, the unfamiliar community culture, personal leadership roles, and the meaningfulness of service, which Cress et
al. describe as disequilibria common to service learning experiences. We highlighted unique observations, incongruences, contradictory remarks, and shifts in understanding (Daloz 1999), especially when framed within imaginative, intuitive, or exceptionally emotive responses to their experiences (Cranton; Dirkx; Mezirow). Because we were investigating evidence of growth in critical thinking skills, we examined how students cognitively processed these sites of dissonant experience.

Although we were aware of comprehension of course content as evidence of learning, the research focused instead on how students arrived at their conclusions in their reflections. We found evidence of partial or incremental steps toward transformative understandings in which students reinforced or rethought many of their assumptions during the course. By comparing student responses to experienced disequilibria with descriptions in the complex thinking assessment model, we were able to locate the students’ range of critical thinking within specific parameters—even in brief reflective statements.

**STUDENT EXAMPLES**

Although all students and course instructors actively participated in the service learning project and advanced in their understanding of course content, not everyone was successful in critically assessing new, disquieting experiences in a way that was transformative. Four of the participants were unable to process the different points of view and continued to dismiss, discount, or ignore what they did not understand. Arguments in their reflections offered illogical evidence, expressions of confusion and futility, inappropriate application of information from course readings, and reassertions of personal experience and opinions as evidence, as described in CTAI Level 0.

For example, most of the service projects consisted of working with elderly community members, and misperceptions of the age group dominated the bulk of initial reflective writings. Most participants contended with their misperceptions of the elderly population’s interests, needs, capabilities, and values. In their writings, students rethought their original assumptions, which ranged from the lack of physical acumen, life experience, knowledge, and self-sufficiency to preconceptions about being stubborn, unenthusiastic, lonely, senile, and narrow-minded. Participant II’s initial response, however, quoted a course reading—“The outsider clearly does not have the direct experience with the everyday conditions and oppression faced by the community members” (Staples 28) [inappropriately applied quote from text to express futility of understanding (CTAI 0a)]—and went on to state:
The lack of understanding of personal issues a community faces can sometimes lead to ignorance among outsiders, and this is a massive problem that can lead to ineffective service. Although not always the case, actually going through a problem helps a person to become truly passionate about a specific issue. This is saying, for example, that someone who lived in poverty when he/she was younger is more likely to be very dedicated to fighting and ending poverty than someone who has been well-off their whole life [illogical argument (CTAI 0a)]. . . . Not only do us student volunteers have a good reputation on the island because of past classes and the work they have done, but we were also very organized and dedicated throughout the week. We were respectful volunteers, doing whatever was asked of us, and were very hard workers. We had a solid understanding of the issues we were working with, and didn’t necessarily need to adjust as much as might be needed in other areas [justification of personal behavior; discounting of need to understand elderly (CTAI 0a)]. We all spoke the same language, we were all from the same state, and our cultures weren’t very different from one another. There’s not much we needed to do that we didn’t do [failure to “acknowledge existence of enduring uncertainties and multiple perspectives” (Lynch, Wolcott, & Huber) that would indicate logic at Level CTAI 0a].

Participant II indicated little or no growth in critical thinking here or in subsequent reflections.

Other participants demonstrated a shift or elevation in their thinking as the course proceeded. Most, when confronted with disequilibria in their service-learning experience, were able to identify personal stereotypes or unfounded assumptions and made an effort to control biases and evaluate evidence from a different perspective. We were able to locate their initial writings within the descriptors of CTAI Levels 1 and 2. Writings by Participant I exemplify how the CTAI evidenced a dramatic shift in a student’s critical thinking skills by the end of the course. Reflecting on experiences with the elderly in her final paper, she stated:

Hearing the stories and rich history the elderly told us really changed my original stereotype that almost all elderly adults are senile and have some sort of dementia. In fact, I even got to hear somewhat of the love story regarding how Joe and Lois found each other at low moments in their lives. My previous volunteer work with the elderly
was in a dementia center, so I had assumed that almost all of the elderly would be that way eventually [a previous unexamined assumption; “failure to realistically perceive uncertainties/ambiguities” (CTAI 0a)]. I was practically ashamed of myself for having thought such things because these individuals had such an incredible amount of experience with their lives, and one of the things that I took away from this was to understand that these people had so much to offer [two arguments from personal observation; “reaches own conclusion . . .” (CTAI 1b)]. Therefore, it’s clear that I have learned a great deal about this issue. More specifically, I’ve learned that ageism is just as bad, if not worse, than racism or sexism. It can make people who are elderly feel useless or incompetent, which is the opposite of what they should be feeling since they have attained the accomplishment of making it so far in life [“presents coherent and balanced description of a problem and the larger context in which it is found” (CTAI 2a)]. I’ve also learned the classic lesson of never judging a book by its cover. It’s easy to look at someone and make so many assumptions about them, but this is incredibly unfair because that person is never given the chance to explain their story or show what they are capable of [identifies issue and cause of bias (looks), and qualitatively evaluates the unfairness (CTAI 2c)].

However, most participants experienced moderate shifts in their thinking, and the complex thinking assessment instrument was able to identify gradual assimilation of understanding or shifts in thinking or changes in perspective. Participant XIII is an example of this more subtle growth. At the beginning of the course, her reflective response to interacting with the elderly began with a guarded perspective but articulated why she might not understand:

[B]eing a younger and physically more able person, it is hard for me to not only understand the community’s perspectives, since I have grown up in a different time and not lived nearly as long, but grasp obstacles associated with age, since I have not yet experienced it [“expresses confusion” and “cannot evaluate or appropriately apply evidence” (CTAI 0b)]. I have an advantage in this area, because I have at least some knowledge on most of the issues that we have been working to solve, which include the environment, health, and care for the elderly.
In her final paper, after further work with the elderly during the course and participating in group discussion, Participant XIII rethought these issues in relation to prior experience and how she might engage others in the future:

We also noted that we don’t go and help our grandparents with yard work very often either. This whole experience and reflection as a group taught me how important it is to keep an open mind, because you never know how much someone might need the help. I think this will transfer over into my future service, because I will be more willing to keep an open mind of new activities and listen to whatever the person I’m working with needs done [“reaches own conclusion without relying exclusively on authority;” defines problem and shifts argument based on evidence from “personally relevant aspects of problem” (CTAI 1c)].

These small, evolutionary statements acknowledge the existence of multiple perspectives, identify personal assumptions and control biases, and reach personal conclusions that represent a subtle elevated change in Participant XIII’s critical thinking skills. By changing what she thought and how she arrived at those conclusions, she demonstrated an awareness and willingness to think at a more complex level (CTAI 2a).

By reading for argument rather than content and comparing the quality of thinking to CTAI descriptors, we could identify positive and negative attributes at each level that became clear parameters within which to place patterns of thinking. Pre-assessment practice and discussion clarified the process, and frequent double-checking between raters maintained consistency and inter-rater reliability.

When using this instrument, it is important to notice that few adults reach levels 3 and 4 without college training, that there should be little expectation to witness dramatic transition within the confines of a single course, and that the four ascending levels of reflective thinking develop over an adult’s lifetime (Dirkx; Wolcott & Lynch).

**IMPLICATIONS**

The use of the Complex Thinking Assessment Instrument can allow an honors program to shift the focus of assessment away from solely retention percentages, grade point averages, numbers of individuals participating in service experiences, and graduation rates, to critical thinking skills and
student learning outcomes, thus providing a better mechanism for describing growth in complex thinking as well as understanding in the context of honors. The development of a qualitative assessment instrument that identifies qualities and levels of complex thinking can document that Student Learning Objectives are met within courses and within the honors program as a whole by showing growth in complex thinking skills. Students benefit from this assessment because they are more likely to develop their thinking skills if they understand the goal(s) and receive explicit feedback on their performance (Lynch & Wolcott). The use of this tool has benefits for faculty as well as students. The challenge facing honors faculty members is how to acquire the ability to produce desirable honors educational practices, construct knowledge relative to the distinctive nature of honors education, and use reliable, verifiable assessment practices to enhance honors pedagogy, honors curricular and instructional design, and honors educational experiences to generate reliable data and credibly demonstrate that honors does have an impact on students (88–89). In order to assure that faculty get the training and resources necessary to improve their ability to do this kind of assessment, institutional support and commitment are needed (Molee).

The honors curriculum is an effective place to promote enhanced critical thinking, and faculty members play a crucial role in guiding students toward increasingly complex thinking. The willingness of honors faculty to engage in a dialogue that increases their ways of knowing enhances their understanding of these challenges, informs curriculum development, increases understanding of what makes the honors student unique, and enhances a successful honors experience.

Lanier extended an appeal for help in developing assessment tools that show the gains by honors students (1) as compared to their non-honors counterparts and (2) as a result of their shared educational enrichment practices. Use of this tool can assist in providing evidence that critical thinking skills develop not just in one course but throughout the honors students’ university experience; it can be used to measure the changes in levels of complex thinking from enrollment in college to graduation. Used properly, the tool can (1) demonstrate the development of higher-order thinking skills among honors students over their entire academic experience, 2) indicate gains that honors students make in comparison to their non-honors peers, and 3) document the success of enrichment practices—i.e., cultural trips, international education, campus leadership, citizenship, active learning experiences, service learning, and community service—that characterize successful honors programs.
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Assessing Growth of Student Reasoning Skills in Honors


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Writing Instruction and Assignments in an Honors Curriculum: Perceptions of Effectiveness

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INTRODUCTION

Learning to write well is a significant outcome of higher education, as confirmed and illustrated in the Written Communication VALUE Rubric of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Bennett notes that writing well is a singularly important capability, indicating that virtually all higher education programs intend for students to write better when they graduate than when they enrolled. Moskovitz refers to an AAC&U survey of member institutions in which writing topped the list of learning outcomes for all students.
Scholars agree that writing and thinking are linked. Oatley and Djikic discuss how writing externalizes thinking by using various media in the processes of manipulating symbols, and Kovac suggests that connections between writing and thinking express the metaphorical interactions between language and thought. Menary notes that the creation and manipulation of written texts is a fundamental component of our cognitive processing, such that writing transforms our cognitive abilities.

Thinking about this relationship between writing and thinking in the context of instructional strategies and assignments designed to improve students’ critical thinking, we undertook research that began by surveying perceptions of writing competencies before and after taking a writing-intensive, four-course honors curriculum sequence.

For the purposes of this research, we coined the term “critical-thinking writing,” defined as the ability to construct a thesis, build an argument, support arguments with empirical data, acknowledge alternative positions, synthesize, analyze, and draw conclusions. We distinguished critical-thinking writing from grammatical writing, which includes grammar, spelling, sentence and paragraph structure, and paper organization. We defined “instructional strategies” as the methods used by instructors to foster and critique the written work submitted by students with the goal of bringing about learning outcomes related to critical-thinking writing. The phrase “course assignments” refers to the planned student activities and specific tasks that demonstrate the extent to which students attain the desired learning outcomes intended by the course and instructor.

The research presented here grew out of faculty discussions about the relationship between course-related reading, critical thinking, and writing within the context of a land-grant university’s honors college curriculum. This interdisciplinary “great books” curriculum is organized chronologically, with the first two courses in the four-course sequence meeting the writing-intensive general education requirement. “Writing-intensive” is defined at this institution as providing students the opportunity to revise at least one of their written course assignments and assigning the majority of the course grade based on the assessment of writing assignments. The last two courses in the sequence also meet the objective of writing outside of the major, so all four of the courses have a writing-intensive component.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following four research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Do students perceive a change in their critical-thinking writing abilities as a result of their instructional experiences, and if so, what are those changes?

2. Do instructors perceive a change in their students’ critical-thinking writing over the course of the instruction, and if so, what are those changes?

3. Are student and instructor perceptions about critical-thinking writing consistent?

4. What classroom strategies and assignments are perceived by faculty and students to influence critical-thinking writing?

METHODOLOGY

Driving our research were questions linked to perceptions of student writing competency before and after completing the writing-intensive honors course sequence. Given the context of this research, we used a non-experimental, two-group design involving convenience sampling of students and faculty.

Students were surveyed about their perceptions of their critical-thinking writing before and after completing the four-course sequence. We also asked them about the effectiveness of instructional strategies and assignments that they encountered over the four semesters. We emailed to students an announcement and invitation to participate using their university email addresses and provided them with a short description of the study, its purpose, and a link to the online survey at Qualtrics. We prompted them twice over the following two weeks to participate in the survey.

Similarly, we contacted faculty via their university email addresses and asked them to participate in a survey parallel to the student version. Faculty surveys included items about the extent to which they perceived themselves to be effective in bringing about positive changes in students’ critical-thinking writing by virtue of their instructional strategies and course assignments. We also prompted them twice over the ensuing two weeks to participate in the survey.
Of the 368 honors students enrolled in the college who had completed the four-course sequence, 247 (67%) initiated the survey; of those 173 (47%) completed it. Fifty-nine percent of the student respondents were in their third year of study, 41% in their fourth year, and 1% in their fifth year. Seventy-eight percent of the fourth-year students were engaged in writing their thesis, which also represented 65% of students graduating with honors.

Of the 28 faculty who taught the cohort and whom we invited to take the survey, 20 (71%) completed it. The faculty who responded to the survey were experienced teachers from multiple disciplines. The mean length of time they had been teaching in higher education was 15 years. The least experienced faculty member had been a university instructor for 5 years. Half of the faculty had taught for 10 years or less in honors, and 40% had taught in honors for 21 years or more. While faculty might have taught in either or both years of the four-course-sequence, 70% of the faculty reported themselves as typically teaching in the first year and responded to the survey as such.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents student and faculty perceptions of the competency of student critical-thinking writing. In general, the majority of students, 66%, perceived themselves to have had above average or excellent critical-thinking writing competency prior to beginning the honors sequence while only 3% identified themselves as having had below average or poor skills.

By contrast, faculty perception of student critical-thinking writing at the beginning of the sequence is less positive than student self-perception. Faculty thought only 45% of the students were above average with respect to their critical-thinking writing competency. Faculty also perceived 15% of the students as below average in their critical-thinking writing competency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Competency</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Average</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Average</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Student and Faculty Perception of the Quality of Critical-Thinking Writing
The faculty indicate that their courses had a significant impact on the quality of students’ writing, reporting that 10% of the students were excellent and 80% were above average in critical-thinking writing after completing their course. These survey results were consistent with the students’ perceptions of the quality of their writing after completing the sequence although students’ perceptions tended toward “excellent” while faculty perceptions tended toward “above average.” The students felt that they were better writers both prior to and after the sequence than the faculty did while the faculty felt that their writing instruction had generated a greater improvement in student writing skills than the students perceived.

Faculty typically used several instructional strategies to effect change in critical-thinking writing, including written papers, peer feedback, faculty members’ written and oral feedback, paper revisions, assigned readings, and class discussions. Table 2 presents the students’ ratings of the perceived impact of instructional strategies on their critical-thinking writing. Students perceived all of the strategies to be either very effective or effective at affecting their critical-thinking writing skills. The most significant strategies, with ratings of effective or very effective, were faculty’s written comments (91%), the act of writing itself (89%), and the act of revising (87%).

Table 3 presents faculty perceptions of the effectiveness of instructional strategies for students’ critical-thinking writing. Faculty indicated the strategies that they perceive as having the most significant impact were writing itself (95%), faculty members’ written (100%) and oral (95%) feedback, revising the paper (95%) and class discussion (89%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Very Effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Somewhat Ineffective</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feedback-Written</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act of Writing</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising Paper</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback-Oral</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Discussion</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Reading</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Feedback</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Rank Ordered Student Perceptions of Teaching Strategy Impact on Critical-Thinking Writing

Note: Percentages not necessarily 100% due to rounding.

*Ranked order of student perceptions of effectiveness from combined values of Very Effective plus Effective ratings.
### Table 3. Rank Ordered Faculty Perceptions of Teaching Strategy Impact on Critical-Thinking Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy* (n)</th>
<th>Very Effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Somewhat Ineffective</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Difference in Faculty Student Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feedback-Written (20)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act of Writing (20)</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback-Oral (20)</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revising Paper (20)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Discussion (19)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Reading (17)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Feedback (15)</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages not necessarily 100% due to rounding.

*Ranked order of faculty perceptions of effectiveness from combined values of Very Effective plus Effective ratings.
Faculty and students generally agreed on the effectiveness and ranking of instructional strategies for improving critical-thinking writing, but faculty consistently perceived all the strategies to be more effective than did the students. Both faculty and students perceived written feedback as generating a greater impact on student critical-thinking writing than the practice of writing itself, and both had comparable rankings for the act of writing and revising the paper, but faculty perceived that their oral feedback was as successful as the other strategies while students perceived it to have less impact.

Table 4 presents student perceptions of the impact of assignments on critical-thinking writing. Typical assignments designed by faculty to improve critical-thinking writing include weekly in-class writing prompts, lecture responses, journal writing, reading and lecture syntheses, online discussions, papers, and projects (see Appendix for descriptions). Table 4 indicates less agreement among the students about the positive impact of the writing assignments on their critical-thinking writing than about the instructional strategies. In general, students perceived the specific assignments to have a less positive impact on critical-thinking writing than the instructional strategies. They perceived writing papers as the assignment that had the greatest impact on critical-thinking writing (93% very effective or effective), and the majority perceived the other assignments as also having a positive impact except for journal writing and online discussions.

Table 5 presents faculty perceptions of assignment effectiveness in improving critical-thinking writing. Faculty reported that all of the assignments were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Very Effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Very Ineffective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papers</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Synthesizing</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly In-class</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Lecture Response</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Discussions</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Journal</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages not necessarily 100% due to rounding.

*Ranked order of student perceptions of effectiveness from combined values of Very Effective plus Effective ratings.
### Table 5. Rank Ordered Faculty Perception of Writing Assignment Impact on Critical-Thinking Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment* (n)</th>
<th>Very Effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Very Ineffective</th>
<th>Difference: Faculty/Student Perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papers (20)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects (13)</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Synthesizing (13)</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Journal (5)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly In-class (17)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Lecture Response (18)</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Discussions (8)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages not necessarily 100% due to rounding.

*Ranked order of faculty perceptions of impact from combined values of Very Effective plus Effective ratings.
either effective or very effective at positively affecting critical-thinking writing; however, not all faculty used all of the assignments listed. Faculty perception of assignment effectiveness was consistent with the notion that faculty do not use assignments they perceive to be ineffective, thus contributing to the variability in the number of faculty reporting on their use of different assignments. Paper assignments were perceived as having a very effective impact on critical-thinking writing by 65% of faculty.

Significant differences occurred in the perception by students and faculty of the effectiveness of assignments with respect to critical-thinking writing. A comparison of Tables 4 and 5 indicates that faculty clearly have a more positive perception of the impact of assignments on students’ critical-writing skills than do students. For both groups, however, and particularly for students, written papers stand out from all the other assignments as very effective or effective in changing perceived competencies.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research leads to several general conclusions. Students consistently felt, for instance, that their critical-thinking writing had been positively affected by both instructional strategies and assignments, especially by the former. Faculty perceptions of student critical-thinking writing validated these improvements. However, students perceived that they demonstrated higher levels of critical-thinking writing both initially and at the end of their course-related experiences than did the faculty. Faculty perceived greater improvement in student critical-thinking writing as a result of the four-course sequence than did students, but faculty also perceived students to be less effective critical-thinking writers both at the start of the sequence and at its conclusion. An intriguing implication of this finding is that students may ascribe a significant degree of their critical-thinking writing ability to themselves, attributing their effectiveness to their own critical-thinking writing competency. Walker reports similarly that “students took more credit for their learning than they gave to faculty” (54). Both students and faculty attributed a significant degree of student critical-thinking writing improvement to their personal contributions to and experiences of the instruction and assignments, a result that is consistent with the self-serving bias concept, i.e., the tendency to perceive oneself as responsible for positive outcomes (Roese and Olson). However, students do perceive feedback on their writing to be a crucial tool for improving their critical-thinking writing.
Students who described themselves as being less effective critical-thinking writers at the beginning of the sequence reported the most improvement across all instructional strategies, whereas students initially reporting the most critical-thinking writing competence claimed to have improved the least. By contrast, faculty reported that the students they perceived to be more effective critical-thinking writers at the beginning of the sequence demonstrated the most improvement in critical-thinking writing. Perhaps students, unlike faculty, may perceive a ceiling effect with respect to their potential for improvement in critical-thinking writing; students may implicitly identify a finite goal that limits their critical-thinking writing outcomes while faculty may perceive a potentially unlimited outcome and focus more on process than product.

Another important conclusion reflects the influences of instructional strategies on students’ critical-thinking writing. Students and faculty identified the same four teaching strategies as being most effective: written feedback, the act of writing, oral feedback, and revising papers. Thus, instructional strategies that can be described as active, extended, and elaborated are perceived to be the most effective by both students and faculty.

Faculty perceived all of these strategies to be more effective than students did and significantly more effective at the “very effective” level (Tables 2 and 3). Here, faculty perceived two strategies, the act of writing and instructor oral feedback, to have the most effective impacts on students’ critical-thinking writing. The two strategies that students perceived to be the most effective were written feedback and revision. Thus, students appear to privilege faculty input as an influence on their critical-thinking writing while faculty appear to recognize the students’ role in their own improvement.

Our findings suggest that the most elaborative and complex assignments are perceived to improve critical-thinking writing in contrast to content-oriented assignments that assess completion of reading assignments or monitor lecture attendance. Students and faculty perceived three assignments—papers, projects, and weekly synthesizing writing—to have the most positive impact on critical-thinking writing. Faculty perceived all assignments to be more effective than students did, especially at the “very effective” level (Tables 4 and 5). Faculty appear to assume that all assignments have the potential to improve critical-thinking writing outcomes whereas students appear to distinguish between assignments by clearly identifying a difference in their impact on critical-thinking writing improvement. Significantly, students perceive assignments that include feedback and require revision to be more effective at improving critical-thinking writing.
The results of our study indicate that both students and faculty perceived the four-course sequence to have a positive and significant impact on student critical-thinking writing, even with the relatively unsystematic teaching strategies that result from different instructors and assignments in the sequence. According to Condon and Kelly-Riley’s research, greater improvement in student critical-thinking writing would likely result from intentionally planning and implementing instruction, including assignments designed specifically to accomplish the critical thinking goals and objectives of the sequence. What we have learned from our research is the necessity of paying closer attention to feedback strategies and the revision process as they affect critical-thinking writing.

REFERENCES


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mark.haggerty@maine.edu.
APPENDIX

Assignment Descriptions


2. Weekly lecture responses: Descriptive/analytical essays discussing lectures.

3. Weekly journaling: Reflective writing on readings, class discussions and lectures.


5. Online discussions: Online (email) interactions extending classroom discussions.

6. Papers: Extended reflective/analytical essays (5 to 20 pages); typically at least two papers per semester.

7. Projects: Creative work, such as videos, plays, artwork, poetry, typically supplemented with brief written statements explaining/analyzing the creative product.
After an exciting class discussion, you might want students to write conventional papers directed at you and focused ultimately on a grade, or you might prefer that they bring their further insights to their classmates, continuing and enriching the ongoing class collaboration. Blogging is an excellent way to implement the second option, continuing an exchange of ideas and providing students with another tool to improve their writing skills. Student class blogging offers many benefits—for student and instructor alike—compared to assigning conventional papers directed only at the instructor. The collaborative writing and peer editing inherent in blogging offer challenges as well as benefits, so guidance in facilitating a meaningful exchange as well as navigating the nuts-and-bolts technicalities may be useful to honors faculty who are establishing a class blog. Ideas for class exercises, assignments, and evaluative expectations co-designed by an instructor and a team of honors.
students may also help bring out maximum creativity and collegiality in the honors blog.

**BLOGGING BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS**

Most teachers are inspired by new tools that can potentially enhance classroom pedagogy, but they may have reservations about implementing unfamiliar tools and technologies. Blogs are relatively easy to integrate into the class experience, but one should prepare carefully before integrating it into class assignments. With such preparation, establishing class blogs is easy and affordable, the benefits greatly outweigh the minor drawbacks, and ongoing maintenance is minimal. As composition instructor Joel Bloch makes clear in his helpful book on teaching and technology, “Blogs can be set up either by a teacher or a student, often at no cost, on a blogging service. Blogs can be set up for individual students, for a group of students, or for an entire class . . . [It is] a simple and low cost way of giving students access to publishing and distributing their writing on the Internet” (128). Given the many different ways to blog now, a teacher has nothing to lose by giving it a try.

Bloch also points out that logs are democratic: they allow everyone to publish their unique perspective, “free from traditional gatekeepers” (129). Another advocate claims that the way students learn on a blog is different from how they learn through traditional writing:

> [Students write to each other in] virtually all of their course communications, expanding ideas of audience, purpose, and context each time they contribute to a message board, create a blog entry, or engage in an email-based peer review. The online format—by its very nature—requires students to learn to use writing to interact with others. (Warnock xi)

Blogs can facilitate “constructivist learning strategies such as self-directed, collaborative, and active learning” (Gresham et al. 44) as well as enhance digital literacy. When blogging, students learn to explore topics that interest them. They can share their discoveries with their peers in a communal setting, where everyone’s voice is valued. Blogs are especially effective at

> . . . allowing students increased time and flexibility for student-to-student interaction, as well as student-to-teacher interaction, by expanding the range of resources available. Students also have increased responsibility for their own learning, and an online
component allows for the production of an individualized environment to suit students’ different needs and learning styles.” (Gresham et al. 44)

Finally, the “online environment is an ideal place for reflection, much more than the face-to-face environment where external factors can influence a student’s ability to speak up” (Johnson 91). Blogs thus create a perfect opportunity to expand the conversation outside the class discussion and allow quieter students to have a voice.

Despite all these benefits, many of us have tried adding a blog component to our classes only to be disappointed by the results. Students do the minimum amount of work required to pass the course; their comments on others’ posts are not substantive, or they fail to provide any depth of critical analysis (Johnson 91; Brescia and Miller 50). They groan about another class chore, and they drag their feet about the online discussion, which can feel forced (Camp 166). They find the workload onerous—more blogging, more writing, more reading, just more everything. For instructors, it becomes too much work to police another forum—the online agora—and they revert to handed-in response papers and other more traditional forms of weekly writing. The idea of students writing for someone beyond their teacher, however, remains tempting; no doubt “their sense of perspective and ownership of their writing changes” when the writing activity does not produce a uni-directional, sterile document aimed at one recipient, especially a more powerful recipient who grades them (Konkel and Gammack 151).

Stephen Downes notes another problem with a class blog: “assigned blogging in schools cannot be blogging. It’s contrived. No matter how much we want to spout off about the wonders of an audience and readership, students who are asked to blog are blogging for an audience of one, the teacher” (24). In working on a well-organized blog, though, students can and will write to their colleagues. When run with a light touch, a class blog can help students feel like owners of their own writing. The key is in the, at best, near-invisible mechanisms and strategies built up around the blog.

THE TECHNICALITIES

Many structures can be employed for class blogging. Some instructors ask each student to create her own blog with its own title and url. In James Farmer’s system, each student’s blog is linked to others’ blogs, and all students are asked to visit the blogspaces of their colleagues. As Farmer says,
[The ability of bloggers] to retain ownership of their writing, edit at will, refer to previous items and ideas, and control in its entirety the space and manner in which the weblog is published can significantly augment their control over their expression and hence increase the opportunity for them to project and the motivation for doing so.

My concerns with Farmer’s structure are that it adds to the students’ workload and that less technologically adept students may find themselves at an unfair disadvantage. Other instructors use institutional platforms like Blackboard to protect student privacy and give students easier access. To many, including me, institutional platforms validate students’ suspicion that the blog-space is a cleverly disguised unidirectional writing format. On the other hand, the idea of broadcasting students’ personal writing across the World Wide Web may be undesirable. Though students themselves may not care so much about online privacy, instructors should, and I personally do not wish to create a publicly accessible permanent record of an enthusiastic freshman’s rant about a controversial topic that could someday be accessed by, say, a prospective employer. The solution is to set up a blog to be undiscoverable by search engines and to allow access to the blog only by accepted authors, i.e., the students in the class.

A number of blogging platforms are available online for practically no cost. Two of the most popular are Blogger and WordPress, and both provide the necessary features to implement the strategies I explore in this article. Although other blogging options are available, these two offer a balance between simplicity, style control, and aesthetic freedom for student bloggers (see Johnson, Plattner, and Hundley on these formats, 53). Wordpress comes in two flavors—wordpress.com and wordpress.org—with the former being the more palatable for those willing to trade the highest degree of technological control for a greater degree of simplicity. Both Blogger and Wordpress offer almost infinite stylistic freedom, and students seem to enjoy making design and presentation choices that set their posts apart from those of their peers. As Patricia Worrall has noted, students have been able to learn another kind of digital literacy this way: “as designers, students had to be aware of the visual components of their projects in addition to the content” (Worrall 90; see also Teske and Etheridge 108 and Kress 56). I create one blog for the class, with each student logged in as an individual author, and I require that students create their own passwords for added security and privacy. Having a single blog creates a collaborative format, with the instructor as “blog host” and students as “contributing authors.” With a single blog, instead of individual student
blogs, students do not have to look for others’ blogs: all the current posts are on one webpage, and students can click into the comments section with ease. A single website format makes the complete conversation literally more visible, reduces the total workload for students and instructor alike, and arguably makes participation in the conversation easier for students.

**KEEPING IT INFORMAL**

The less official a class blog feels, the better the posts, in my experience. Excessive formality can be the kiss of death for an otherwise healthy blog. “The more formal the communication, the less likely others are to respond in a timely manner” (Tu and McIsaac 144). Students must feel that their style and tone are their own, that they are writing to friends, and that they are free to experiment with ideas and writing styles that will not be immediately discredited by their peers or, worse, their teacher. Arguably, the blog is another style of expression entirely, neither completely formal like an article or a research paper nor completely informal like texting or Twitter:

> There is a possibility that weblogs encourage significantly more in-depth and extended writing than communication by email or through discussion board environments and yet less extensive than more formal modes of publication, producing in an academic sense a kind of discourse somewhere between the conversational and the article. (Farmer)

Andergassen et al. argue that in student blogging, the most important learning takes place in informal contexts (204). Informality, in this case, is the mother of invention.

In order to provide space for the innovation and creativity that the blog format affords, instructors need to reduce workload elsewhere. Garrison makes a strong cautionary point:

> The issue of reflective and permanent discourse is one to consider when designing for each of the phases of inquiry in an online context. Online learning also creates the need for learners to accept increased responsibility for their learning. In this regard, workload must be seriously considered. If collaboration and discourse are to be at the core of the inquiry process, then students must have the time to engage other students and reflect upon these deliberations. This is not possible if the workload is too heavy. (28)
In my class, the blog post and online commentary make up the entirety of the weekly writing workload. Students use their blog posts as drafts to develop two short papers in a more formal style twice during the semester, and these formal papers build on groundwork laid in the blog; even the revision process is facilitated through peer comments on the blog. I do not load students up with other writing, and I make sure they know how to use the blog posts to study for the final, which in our honors curriculum is a written exam.

The evaluative structure needs to reward collegiality, timeliness, and deep content, the lack of which often makes student blogs seem shallow or irrelevant. After all, honors students love depth and detail, and, as former University of Maine Honors Director and Dean Charlie Slavin pointed out,

Students in honors are willing to take intellectual risks both in their discipline and outside of it; they enjoy the challenge. . . . Their personal economies guide them to get the most out of their undergraduate education. Sure, sometimes they are bored or turned off by topics they view as irrelevant to their education, but they are willing to explore and often find themselves surprised at their interest. They're willing to take the risk. (16)

If risk-taking in the blogspace is rewarded and encouraged, the instructor will be rewarded threefold with unique and innovative posts. I have had students spontaneously create Buzzfeed-style photo essays, digital art with poetic captions, and newspaper-quality editorials in their blog posts. Beyond showing academic risk-taking, inspired student posts generate a ripple effect throughout the class, raising the quality of other commentaries and sparking everyone's resolve to create something new.

AMPLIFYING CLASS DISCUSSIONS IN A POSITIVE FEEDBACK LOOP

A good blog does more than provide a forum for student writing; it provides a means for amplifying, developing, and complicating in-class conversation. As D. R. Garrison notes,

At the heart of a meaningful educational experience are two integrated processes: reflection and discourse. These are the two inseparable elements of inquiry in higher education. In an online learning experience the advantage is given to reflection in a way that
is not possible in the fast and free flowing face-to-face environment. The face-to-face classroom experience requires verbal agility, spontaneity, and confidence to express oneself in a group setting. Reflection and even dialogue are greatly limited in most campus based classrooms . . . [and] there is evidence to suggest that online learning may in fact have an advantage in supporting collaboration and creating a sense of community. (25)

Timing the blog post in the center of each unit seems to allow the most space for reflection, discussion, and new ideas that will then return to the classroom before the class has finished discussing the unit’s material. In class discussion, students can bring up the most provocative points from the blog and include the comments of peers who might otherwise be unlikely to volunteer ideas themselves in a live class discussion setting (Tu and McIsaac 143).

If the evaluative structure requires students to write to and for their peers, not the instructor, students feel more compelled to make their posts relevant. The hallmark of a good honors program is this kind of “shared responsibility for teaching and learning,” as Kathryn Huggett argues while discussing the results of her study of successful honors programs:

Programs that invite students, faculty and staff to be both teachers and learners help to create a culture animated by a shared commitment to individual and collaborative teaching and learning that is essential to enhancing students’ growth and development. . . . Students who worked in collaborative settings enjoyed learning from each other and those who assumed individual responsibilities for teaching were sometimes astonished to find they had so much to contribute. (66)

A good blog asks students to produce fresh content for their learning community, not just to recycle ideas presented to them by their instructor. They produce ideas for themselves and their teacher, sure, but the blog format makes it clear that their writing is really for their peer group (Ratliff). Studies show that students who engage actively with constructive online feedback report feeling more confident in their writing and in their scholarship (Ertmer 87). Blogging encourages spontaneity so that students can judiciously ignore set assignments if they feel particularly inspired to post on a revelation, epiphany, or nascent thesis. Thus the blog becomes more of a workshop, a microenvironment for interactive participation (see Huggett 62).

In order to maintain the spirit of peer-to-peer collaboration and community, teachers should try to be as invisible as possible as presences on the
If a blog is running well, students should be responding to one another and not even thinking of the instructor as an audience member. The teacher should provide evaluative feedback no more often than once a month. I have argued elsewhere that honors education needs to be consciously anti-teleological; no period of history or human experience should be subordinated to any other (Harlan-Haughey 98–99). I now argue that instructors should model a lateral community of learner-scholars, where the instructor dominates discussion and learning neither in nor out of the classroom. As Kathleen B. Yancey writes, “If we believe that writing is social, shouldn’t the system of circulation—the paths that the writing takes—extend beyond and around the single path from student to teacher?” (310–11). Students cannot perceive the many circulative paths of their blog writing if the teacher lurks around the blog-space like Big Brother. “In a student-centered honors course, emphasizing what the teacher should not do is also important” (Wiegant et al. 224). It is important to “encourage student-led decisions in shaping the course and thereby their final product, thus enhancing their sense of ownership and their pride in what they have achieved, so teachers should keep some distance from the students’ decision-making process” (Wiegant et al. 224). (For a cogent rebuttal of this approach, one that suggests teachers should closely direct and guide all blog activity, see Garrison 69.)

Students should create a substantive post no less often than once a week, with no fewer than three timely comments on their colleagues’ posts. Johnson et al.’s rule of thumb is three times a week for check-in and commentary at a minimum (59). In the case of my blog, students produce one substantive post a week (usually around 600 words) and provide in-depth commentary on three other students’ posts. As instructor, I read all content weekly and take notes on my assessment rubric but do not actively take part in online discussion even though I will bring people’s ideas back into the classroom. In such a scenario, honors instructors serve as “coaches or facilitators rather than the sole authorities or experts” (Otero 22), and such a role is ideal for honors educators.

**HARNESSING STUDENT INTEREST**

I make sure that students have a stake in their blogs in several ways. First, I allow students to design class assignments and questions on the blog. Second, I encourage students, whenever possible, to write on subjects of their choosing and to include multimedia illustrations, explore different genres of writing, and directly engage their audience creatively. In this way students are gaining
digital literacy in an unprecedented manner as the blog challenges them to produce more than text: “contemporary technologies of page or text production make it easy to combine different modes of representation—image can be combined with language, sound can be added to image, movement of image is possible” (Kress 56). As Kress says, “one person now has to understand the semiotic potentials of each mode—sound, visual, speech—and orchestrate them to accord with his or her design” (56). This kind of multimedia challenge is a boon for honors students, who must have many digital and creative skills to find careers.

Because they are evaluated and responded to by their peers, students are inherently more invested in the quality of their work. They know they are not just writing for a grade but writing to one another. And because the blog is generational—my honors blog has been running now for five years, and no content is discarded—they know their content will never disappear; they write to posterity, i.e., the next few years of honors students (Konkel and Gammack 151). In this way, students are engaged in the ongoing collaborative project of creating a living artifact of their active learning process that honors their agency. After all, current honors students belong to a “wired generation” that thinks more creatively about online affordances than their older instructors might (Otero 21; see also Hawisher and Selfe 3–4). We should not get in their way; we should live up to the aspirational goal of honors to be “leader[s] in pedagogical innovation, serving as laboratory space[s] for new modes of teaching and learning” (Schuman 66; see also Carnicom et al. 166).

THE GREENING HONORS COLLABORATION

One example of a pedagogical innovation using a class blog was a set of blog prompts and in-class assignments that a group of three students and I, as preceptor, developed at the University of Maine. The three second- and third-year student team members, who had previously taken the first two courses in UMaine’s four-semester Honors Civilizations sequence, took the notion of a scholarly community beyond their own experience of the first year, designing ways for the students currently enrolled in the first-year courses to find a new focus in the diverse set of readings.

A perennial challenge of a typical Great Books honors curriculum like the one at the UMaine involves balancing the tensions among close reading, coverage, thematic relevance to current issues, and the responsibility to replace general education courses. Students can feel disenfranchised when they sense that any of these factors is getting short shrift, yet balancing these
responsibilities is difficult while keeping students engaged within the time constraints of an honors program. In an effort to lend the first two semesters of Honors Civilizations some much-needed thematic cohesion, satisfy the general education replacement values, and explicitly link readings with modern environmental concerns, our group—an interdisciplinary team of thinkers—is developing a multidisciplinary, multi-technology learning platform that emphasizes the environmental issues inherent the first year’s readings.

Our group wanted to build on Marcus O’Donnell’s compelling idea of the blog as a kind of ecology: “In a linked or networked approach to learning the sense of agency and individuality is powerful but it is not isolating or egocentric. Each node in a dynamic network has the ability to both send and receive” (15). Toward this effort we decided to use a class blog to parallel class discussion, which provided space for students to work out ideas before class and thus sparked substantive in-class discussion. Our team developed a series of student-created assignments, readings, images, and links that spoke to the multiple intelligences and majors of our students and that demonstrated the relevance of the past as a means of illuminating modern environmental issues.

Our aim was to get students thinking about humans’ relationship with nature as a fundamental lens when exploring texts in the Honors Civilizations sequence. We hoped to move beyond the classic anthropocentric questions common to Great Books curricula, such as “What does it mean to be human?” and “What is civilization?” One student on the team noted,

[When] speaking with my peers about Honors, I found that in general students often feel that the focus of the curriculum is either unclear or so broad that it appears unwieldy, that discussions in seminars lack depth and [are] often filled with prolonged silences, [and that] we move through dense (often lengthy) texts too quickly without any sort of foundation for interpretations that delve beneath surface narratives. While many students like the relaxed, discussion-oriented atmosphere that Honors provides them and feel that many of the texts are interesting, they feel dissatisfied with their exploration of the texts—they want more from them, but don’t know where to find what they’re looking for. (Each quotation in this section was generated by the three-person undergraduate team of Cunningham, Estrup, and Lees in a collaborative document and will be referred to as “Undergraduate Team”).
In order to get the Honors Civilizations sequence to yield more for students, we hatched the “greening honors” idea. The goal was to give the honors great books sequence a more clearly defined focus. The team was challenged “to incorporate this practice of reading ecologically without overbearing or narrowing the scope of the students’ reading experience” (Undergraduate Team). The team members could not focus specifically on environmental questions to the neglect of other important themes. The group was not asserting that the environmental aspect of a text is the only important focus, but as one team member noted,

By focusing codified texts, which often carry calcified notions with them, through a somewhat more abstract lens it pushes students to look deeper while also opening discussion of texts to possible modern applications. The environmental or ecological context of a text is interesting to analyze because it can be specific (with instances of natural imagery/symbolism). It therefore pushes students to be careful interpreters but also introduces broader questions about what we perceive to be reality and where humanity falls within that perceived reality. This then highlights the key question we revisit in Honors: What does it mean to be human?

The student team members came to the current class sections, posted questions and assignments on the blog, and led informal discussions both in and out of class. This way, students currently in the class saw and commented on the blog that “a team of undergrads from different disciplines and years [were] contributing to the curriculum.” Their presence in the first-year students’ honors experience, both in the classroom and on the blog, seemed to enhance “everyone’s sense of a community of scholarship, and of accountability.” This student team found many innovative ways to “turn established texts ‘inside out’ by juxtaposing them against ‘disorienting’ or de-humanizing phenomena like the environment” (Undergraduate Team).

While using the blog to address specific environmental questions, one group member made the following observation:

[Having students] post their thoughts on the blog and comment on their peers is useful in expanding the volume of discourse around each text. This process allows students to take the time to consider and develop their thoughts as well as the thoughts of others. This process gives a voice to students who may not be as vocal in class, and makes it so that ideas already have some mobility before class.
Another team member wrote about the topical student-prepared blog posts that they

... provide students with a focus prior to their reading, presenting them with ideas for reflection so that they read with purpose and more actively make connections. [They] also provide the opportunity to pull in supplemental articles or other useful resources (links to images, videos, etc.) to enrich the educational experience.

While the student team noted that “establishing the rhythm of these blog prompts” was a work in progress, the team members agreed that

... the vast majority of students commented that they liked the discussions in class because the students [earlier had] the freedom to shape them... It helps that Sarah [the course instructor] is there to participate and aid if the discussion falters or sways but... not there [to] drive the discussions. It is this balance that we want with our blog prompts and discussion questions concerning the environment in these texts.

Our green focus worked on three different levels: it encouraged close reading and in-depth scrutiny of specific textual or philosophical questions; it connected works from the past with present concerns; and it encouraged students to connect these concerns with broader questions regarding the significance of humanity and civilization. One student in our group reread the blog responses week-to-week and noticed some shifts as the class progressed:

Initially, few students seemed to want to pick up a deeper discussion of natural elements in the text and the majority felt more comfortable with summarizing and surface-level connections. Later students seemed more comfortable making connections and expressing ideas that move away from more conventional interpretations. More students are now addressing the natural contexts of honors readings (those responses often seem to have greater depth of thought). Unfortunately, students still seem to be reframing questions to serve as answers, [and] often responses are filled with general impressions rather than more carefully considered interpretations or abstract ideas. Overall the general trend online seems to be toward a more dynamic dialogue, but it’s not quite there.
Our team, in other words, was heartened by the initial results of our experience but believed more fine-tuning was needed.

Using the “blog space as an extension of class, a way for students to construct ideas and to respond to other students’ impressions outside the classroom in an informal but constructive setting” seemed to help students feel less rushed during in-person class discussion (Undergraduate Team). One of our collaborators noted,

Our curriculum faces the constant challenge of time within the classroom and [with regard to] the required reading, and I know I would personally come into class at times having done my best to read but not always having thought about the material extensively enough to really have something potent to say in class. One student commented that “Sometimes it’s hard to get your thoughts into the discussion without time to think it over,” and I see the blogs as a space to organize your thoughts and articulate ideas to capitalize on the time with the other students and [the instructor]. (Undergraduate Team)

In addition to time restrictions, our team experienced another problem:

[We had trouble] getting students to comment on other posts and getting them to do so respectfully but also critically. Many of the comments on others’ posts are enthusiastically affirmative [but merely] paralleled with blog responses that at times regurgitate our prompts. I see these as the largest challenges we’ve faced. We want to spark ideas, not provide them. (Undergraduate Team)

This comment led me to create a more in-depth evaluative rubric for future class blogs, one that focuses especially on invoking high-quality citizenship in the online scholarly community.

**CREATING FORWARD-THINKING EVALUATIVE STRUCTURES**

I use a detailed scoring rubric based on Christopher Long’s innovative model (available at <http://www.personal.psu.edu/cpl2/blogs/cplportfolio/2009/01/blogs-and-assessment.html>), introduced to me by Meghan J. Shen, who uses a similar hands-off strategy in her classroom. In addition to blog content, students gain a range of points for creativity; constructive, detailed, and timely feedback to their peers; support and reference; and follow-up posting. My blogging students get a numbered score based on six
categories: (1) collegiality and constructive comments; (2) timeliness of primary post and three comments; (3) grammar/mechanics/syntax; (4) creative thinking and connection making; (5) critical thinking; and (6) respect for evidence and argumentative support.

The monthly grade sheet I return to students rewards them for excellence and originality of thought as well as collegiality. I write these evaluations by hand, a distinctly non-digital format that further separates my role as teacher and evaluator from the blog space. We meet in individual conferences so that we can discuss the grade sheet and I can address any anxieties or concerns the students have as well as encourage collegiality on the blog and in the classroom. While we may also spend some conference time discussing mechanics or grammar, I work hard to emphasize the bigger picture: how the students are writing; whether they have strong personal styles; whether they are responding to their peers in a constructive, respectful manner, and if not, the importance of tone in informal and formal writing like emails, memos, and other forms of communication they will need to master in their lives. I also use this forum to discuss their performance as citizens in the classroom.

BUILDING UP AND OUT

The class blog often becomes the launching pad for bigger projects. Students are required to revise two or three posts substantively and to build formal writing assignments out of their one- or two-page weekly blog posts. The process of revising and workshopping becomes an end in itself in its visibility on the blog. Blog software offers many options for editing text visibly—from strikethrough to tracking of changes. When students revise, they show their revisions on the blog and thus validate their peers who prompted the revisions and enter into further discussion with them. Students learn that ideas need weeks of incubation and that excellent work does not take place in a vacuum.

The blog, as a handy “online filing cabinet for student work,” also becomes a useful place to study for written exams and finals (Richardson 20), constituting the core of a class as it feeds into class discussion, exams, formal writing assignments, and each student’s sense of self as a citizen-scholar. Some semesters, I have students complete their final projects on the blog. I have had students produce short documentaries on the blog and create video-logs on the themes of the Honors Civilization course as well as extensive skits and dramatizations, and some students incubate ideas on the blog that may become the subject of their senior capstones. The creativity and enthusiasm
of a well-engineered blog has no limit. One need only establish a logical blog structure, create a repeating evaluative mechanism, and stay out of the way.

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How Gender Differences Shape Student Success in Honors

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In 2014, Jonathan Zimmerman published an op-ed in the Christian Science Monitor in which he wrote, “The last time I checked, [men] held most of the important positions of power and influence in American society. And yet, college admissions offices lower the standard for young men—effectively raising it for women—simply to make sure that the men keep coming.” This comment was not surprising as, seven years earlier, the U.S. News & World Report had published “Many Colleges Reject Women at Higher Rates Than For Men,” in which Alex Kingsbury memorably asserted:

Using undergraduate admissions rate data collected from more than 1,400 four-year colleges and universities that participate in the magazine’s rankings, U.S. News has found that over the past 10 years many schools are maintaining their gender balance by admitting men and women at sometimes drastically different rates. The schools that are most competitive—Harvard, Duke, and Rice for example—have so many applicants and so many high achievers that they naturally
maintain balanced student bodies by skimming the cream of the crop. But in the tier of selective colleges just below them, maintaining gender equity on some campuses appears to require a thumb on the scale in favor of boys. It’s at these schools, including Pomona, Boston College, Wesleyan University, Tufts, and the College of William and Mary, that the gap in admit rates is particularly acute.

This reality is entrenched in admissions offices that seek a gender balance on campus, and the academic community should consider the ethical and practical consequences of admitting less-qualified men into U.S. colleges. Two important questions are (1) whether the practice of admitting young men with lower grades either validates or undermines the predictive power of the admissions evaluation criteria and (2) whether young men who are by many measures less qualified are as likely to succeed and graduate as their female peers. Those who direct honors colleges and programs need to consider the implications of the gender imbalance for their communities.

Although admissions criteria are not reliably predictive, they do seem to indicate the strength of a student’s discipline and organizational maturity. David Sadker, Myra Sadker, and Karen Zittleman—in Still Failing at Fairness: How Gender Bias Cheats Girls and Boys in School and What We Can Do About It—argue that young men and women enter college with different expectations that tend to make young men less successful than their female peers, as measured by grades but also by graduation rates. In their words, “College men have fewer intellectual interests and poorer study habits than college women. They enjoy readings books less, take fewer notes, study less, and play more. Despite their lower efforts, lower grades, and lower likelihood of completing a college degree, men evaluate their academic abilities higher than women” (289).

This situation has social outcomes beyond the simple fact that men are less likely to earn a college degree than are their female peers. Young women who go to college in greater numbers, work harder, have stronger transcripts than those of their male peers, and graduate will earn about the same amount as a man with only a high school diploma (Sadker et al. 203). In short, young men who benefitted from an admissions advantage in college are able to parlay that advantage into earning potential that is not justified by the quality of their academic work. The college admissions advantage, then, strengthens long-lived patterns of gender disparity. In this instance, well-intentioned efforts to build diversity at the college level significantly reinforce structural inequalities that disadvantage women. This system is harmful to young men.
and women. Young men know that they will achieve fewer social dividends by working harder and can feel entitled to underachieve academically. Young women, by contrast, are in a position of knowing that they will need to work harder to achieve what young men can obtain more easily—beginning with college entrance and following with professional success.

The task for those who work in academia is to ameliorate the fairness of the system for both men and women. Faculty, administrators, and staff need to provide academic support to young men, who are more likely to be underqualified, as well as provide enriched academic opportunities and career support to women over the course of their college experience. Honors programs and colleges can implement best practices that include advisement, mentoring, curriculum structure, and housing that bolster the success of both men and women students. I believe that honors colleges and programs can better serve their students and improve their retention rates by understanding some of the different experiences young men and women face in high school and college.

THE ROLE OF GENDER IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Women tend to graduate from high school with stronger transcripts, but young women’s academic gains are unevenly distributed across the curriculum. In 1990, the American Association of University Women published its *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America* and made the argument that after elementary school, girls fell behind their male classmates in higher-level mathematics courses and in measures of self-esteem (16). Researchers speculate, “[P]erhaps one reason why female test scores tumble is that from elementary school through higher education, female students receive less active classroom instruction, both in the quantity and the quality of teacher time and attention” (Sadker et al. 24). Although less persuasive in explaining the reasons that female grades are elevated in other areas, Sadker et al. indirectly point to the fact that for women priority is placed on achievement and “being quiet, and conforming to school norms” (24).

The broad declines in male academic achievement have tended to draw greater public attention than women’s mathematical underachievement and declining self-confidence (Arnot and Mac an Ghaill 5), and the nature of research in these fields is telling. Researchers who study boys argue that they do not fit behavioral and developmental expectations in elementary schools.
These researchers argue that the majority of teachers are women and that their expectations favor girls, who typically have more advanced verbal and reading skills, better fine motor coordination, and greater ability to sit still and stay on task than boys. Implicitly, then, these researchers are arguing that women have made elementary and middle school education antagonistic to boy’s needs. In an argument that leans toward essentialist definitions of gender, psychologists Gurian et al. argue that, especially in reading and writing, boys need teachers who allow them access to objects they can manipulate and freedom to move around the classroom and school. Teachers should “encourage and navigate normal Huck Finn male energy toward academic focus and good character” (Gurian et al. 196–97). Despite their problematic assumptions, Gurian et al. have some compelling data: boys are five times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, due in part to unattainable school expectations. Gurian, Henley, and Trueman are part of a broad movement of psychologists and activists who argue that there is a crisis of masculinity in our schools, that resources should be allocated to making schools friendlier to boys, and that methods of teaching should change so that classrooms are better suited to meet the needs of boys. He concludes that teachers should allow boys to be more aggressive at school and should introduce competitive games to keep them engaged in classroom activities. Those who claim a crisis in masculinity often have support from the mainstream media, e.g., the 2006 Newsweek article “The Boy Crisis. At Every Level of Education, They’re Falling Behind. What To Do?”

A more nuanced argument made by Leonard Sax asserts that our recent focus on standardized testing, as well as our rising expectations for schools, results in a tendency for boys to fall behind early in elementary school. Sax’s argument notes that kindergarten’s changing emphasis (from building social skills through play to a focus on reading and more academic work) casts into high relief the developmental advantages that girls seem to have early on over boys. Sax asserts, “[I]t now appears that the language areas of the brain in many five-year-old boys look like the language areas of the brain of the average three-and-a-half-year-old girl” (Boys Adrift 18). He concludes that boys are not ready to sit, read, and focus in the same way that girls are. Although one might perhaps quibble with the remedy, Sax’s proposed solution—that girls and boys be segregated in order that instruction might be tailored to meet their needs—at least acknowledges that men and women confront different learning challenges. Sax suggests that boy’s classrooms be more competitive and stricter in terms of discipline; he claims that teachers who fear harming
the self-esteem of girls avoid yelling at students even though yelling might be a good way to motivate boys (Why Gender Matters 89–90).

The key for educators who are seeking to remediate society-wide educational needs is to avoid subscribing to a model of redistributive justice (taking from one gender to give to the other) and to think about the unique challenges facing each student. Arnot and Mac an Ghaill assert that any argument about a “crisis in masculinity” is deeply problematic and suggest that worries about boys’ underperformance and underachievement have redirected the focus of educators away from girls. Other scholars have also criticized Gurian and others for overstating the “boy crisis.” According to Sara Mead, the “hysteria” about the boy’s crisis is “partly a matter of perspective.” She argues that in an age of greater gender equality, some people worry that women will surpass men. She also states that the claim of a “boy crisis” lacks solid grounding:

The so-called boy crisis also feeds on a lack of solid information. Although there are a host of statistics about how boys and girls perform in school, we actually know very little about why these differences exist or how important they are. There are many things—including biological, developmental, cultural, and educational factors—that affect how boys and girls do in school. But untangling these different influences is incredibly difficult. (Mead 14)

Clearly, a great debate is afoot about primary and secondary education with some experts arguing that the educational system undermines girls and others arguing that the system disenfranchises boys. Given limited resources in schools, administrators need to know how to best support their students. Ultimately, the secondary educational system in the U.S. does not seem to be meeting the unique needs of young men and women, with the result that neither are able to reach their full potential.

THE ROLE OF GENDER IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Psychologists and others who do research on educational development often focus on students under nineteen. Linda Sax’s research provides a challenge to those who educate college students to think more about their needs. While the students who navigated primary and secondary school more successfully than their peers are likely the ones who get to colleges and universities, these students still need support in ways that are particular to their gender, and honors programs and colleges are well-suited to offer students the guidance and help they need.
Linda J. Sax’s *The Gender Gap in College* is a survey of 17,000 college students who attend 200 different American colleges. Her data are mostly limited to self-assessment and aspirations but also include student grade point averages. She finds that women in their first year at college rank themselves lower on almost every self-rating than do men (2). Moreover, women attribute their intelligence to hard work and not innate ability. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) found that students who work hard in their studies often perceive themselves as being less able (291). What makes this information striking is that women come to college with higher high school grades, better study habits, and a greater interest in education than do their male peers. Women seem to have the skills but not the confidence. Men often have the confidence but neither the same level of academic preparation nor the strong grades, according to Linda Sax’s research (25–27).

The AAUW has conducted considerable research into the classes high school students take and how this coursework prepares them for college. In the 1980s the organization said that teachers should encourage girls to take more math and science courses. By the 1990s, girls took more math and science classes, but they commonly stopped their mathematics education with Algebra II, which did not prepare them sufficiently for Calculus (AAUW 279). This mathematical disadvantage has a real impact upon women’s achievement on high-stakes tests of mathematical aptitude, such as the SAT, ACT, MCAT, LSAT, and GRE (Sadker et al. 24) even though girls now complete more college-preparatory math and science courses than boys. (DiPrete and Buchmann, *Rise* 100). While boys take fewer English classes, except for remedial courses, and fewer classes in foreign languages classes, psychology, and sociology, girls take more high school honors courses and outnumber boys in all AP classes except physics; however, girls also drop out of honors courses more rapidly than boys do, which some researchers attribute to cultural priorities (choosing socially acceptable methods of achievement over academic achievement) as well as a lack of confidence (AAUW 290). This information is useful to higher education faculty. Young women and men come to college from the same high schools but with different course trajectories and a different set of experiences. Young men might need additional help in their introductory English classes while young women might need more upper-division options to replace the introductory courses for which they received AP credit. Women might also need guidance in taking preparatory math classes to be ready for calculus or other advanced math and science classes.

When bright and well-prepared girls leave high school, they have already gone through the exasperating process of applying to college and often seeing

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themselves rejected from the same schools that admitted the boys sitting next to them who had earned lower grades. Young women also tend to be more willing than young men are to live at home and attend college, which can be helpful to their families but does not cultivate their independence. Linda Sax finds that female students express greater scholarly confidence when they live away from home (82). Young women who commute might not opt for the most competitive colleges, and they may not consider themselves as engaged in the culture of learning. The current economic climate is also making it harder for students to attend the colleges of their choice, and many are opting for schools that offer substantial financial aid even if they are less prestigious institutions.

Women continue to see education as the path to advancement, but more women are coming to college from disadvantaged and poorer backgrounds, and they often lack the support network of family members who have attended college. In contrast, Linda Sax showed that young men entering college in 2006 had family incomes $12,000 higher than for women (16). Some of these less advantaged women no doubt attend local colleges where they receive the best financial aid, have a better academic profile than their peers, and feel little connection to the campus as commuters.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR HONORS EDUCATORS

Women who enter college are “slightly overrepresented” at less competitive colleges with higher acceptance rates, lower standardized test scores, and lower fees (Jacobs 155). Honors programs and colleges often thrive at institutions because of the high-caliber women who, often for financial or personal reasons, attend them. High-achieving young women populate honors programs and colleges because they want to get the most out of their education even if they do not attend the most competitive institution that admitted them. The job of honors directors and faculty members is to create dynamic and challenging environments for their students, the majority of whom are female.

Every fall about one million students begin their college careers at institutions across the country, and universities award 57.4 percent of bachelor’s degrees to women (Tyre 6). Women outnumber men at most institutions of higher learning, and the percentage of women in honors is usually higher than their overall enrollment percentile. In 2013, the National Collegiate Honors Council gathered data from 890 institutions and found that the percentage of undergraduate females in institutions as a whole averaged $6.6 compared to
64.7 for honors programs and colleges. Knowing that more women than men are involved in honors at most institutions should encourage honors directors to develop their programs in ways to enhance the experiences of women. Honors provides pedagogical innovation in supportive communities, and it should model best practices for young scholars in ways that compensate for the shortcomings of secondary education. Honors directors can offer mentorships, leadership opportunities, and enhanced academic support to their female and male students (Linda Sax 26), and they can design curricula and communities to keep the best and brightest students engaged and academically successful.

Honors faculty and directors should be aware of research indicating that young men and women understand academic success and failure differently. Eva Pomerantz et al. argue:

Girls generalize the meaning of their failures because they interpret them as indicating that they have disappointed adults, and thus they are of little worth. Boys, in contrast, appear to see their failures as relevant only to the specific subject area in which they have failed; this may be due to their relative lack of concern with pleasing adults. In addition, because girls view evaluative feedback as diagnostic of their abilities, failure may lead them to incorporate this information into their more general view of themselves. Boys, in contrast, may be relatively protected from such generalization because they see such feedback as limited in its diagnosticity. (402)

Honors programs and colleges can be places where young women are encouraged to take academic risks, reassess the meaning of failure, and develop self-confidence. To accomplish this objective, honors deans, directors, and faculty need to understand how young women interpret the feedback they receive at their universities.

Linda Sax found that women's self-confidence decreases as they progress through college (79) whereas this should be a time to regain their self-esteem and acquire the skills needed to succeed in the workplace. Honors programs are an ideal venue to bolster the confidence of young women before they head to graduate school or a job. As NCHC Fellow Charlie Slavin made clear, “[M]ore than any other administrators, honors directors and deans are personally involved with the faculty, students, curricula, and graduates of their programs and colleges” (17). Honors directors are thus in a position to develop programs to support female scholars. As Linda Sax points out, honors courses
increase the level of academic engagement of all students and are important in developing a strong sense of scholarly accomplishment (182).

Honors programs can instill in young women the confidence possessed by their male peers. Shelly Correll’s work indicates that men pursue challenging subjects in part because they believe in their abilities to do so. Her sociological research indicates that when she assigns men and women a task and tells them that their abilities are equal, the men perceive that they will do the task better. Correll argues that “men make higher assessments of their own mathematical ability than women, which contributes to their higher rates of persistence on paths to careers in science, math, and engineering” (93). Women do not enter these fields in the numbers that men do, but by encouraging women to take more challenging math courses and offering them support, honors directors might help motivate more female students to enter the STEM fields.

“Women continue to lag far behind men in engineering and physical science degrees even as they have achieved parity or an advantage in elite fields such as medicine, law, and the biological and life sciences” (DiPrete and Buchmann, Rise 198). Clearly, women do enter traditionally male fields when they are supported in their efforts to do so. Both high schools and universities can cultivate more women in STEM fields through interactions with faculty from these disciplines.

Recent research demonstrates that college-bound girls largely form their orientations toward physical science, engineering, or mathematical fields of study by the end of high school. Girls who have signaled an intention to major in one of these fields by this point are just as likely as boys to graduate from college with a STEM degree. But girls are much less likely than boys to enter their fields in colleges if they have not already declared an interest in STEM by high school. (DiPrete and Buchmann, Rise 198–99)

Honors deans and directors can, for instance, forge partnerships at feeder high schools to encourage girls to consider degrees and careers in STEM fields.

Honors can cultivate high-achieving students academically and personally in many different ways. Students who lack confidence in their academic abilities need a supportive atmosphere that takes them seriously as scholars and encourages them to pursue difficult subjects and challenging careers. Linda Sax’s research shows that students thrive when they have close contact with faculty members but that female students respond more negatively than males when faculty do not take their ideas seriously (207). Therefore, women
need to create meaningful relationships with faculty who will recognize and support their ideas as they get to know them better and serve as their mentors. Honors programs often have a body of faculty who are interested in working with high-achieving students in classes and on research projects, getting to know students well and mentoring them closely. When students form strong bonds with faculty, they can get research experience and meaningful recommendation letters that lead to success in later education and beyond.

Honors programs can encourage students to pursue a diversity of majors by creating a culture that supports and encourages students to take academic risks. Girls are taking more math and science courses in high school, but fewer women pursue math and science degrees when they get to college. According to David and Myra Sadker and Karen Zittlemen, “something happens along the way to undo girls’ progress, to derail these careers. . . . In large numbers, they [have] turned away from careers in engineering, the physical or computer sciences” (171).

In an essay about women in the Western Washington University Honors College, honors director George Mariz explains that at his institution women earned 57.2 percent of all bachelor’s degrees in 2002 but only 38 percent of those in mathematics, engineering, biological sciences, physical sciences, and computer science (96). Mariz further explains that women outnumber men by about two to one in his program, and 36 percent of them take degrees in the natural sciences: “Among Honors students, women constituted an astonishing 94% of the environmental science degrees, 79% of those in biology, and 50% each of those in chemistry, physics, and mathematics” (Mariz, 97). Moreover, Mariz found that women in honors outnumbered men three to one in getting into medical school. Following this example, honors directors might think of ways to make their programs hospitable places for students pursuing non-stereotypical areas of study, whether women in physics or men in nursing.

Gayle E. Hartleroad was interested in the success rates of first-year female engineering students at Purdue University and compared the GPAs of female students in the honors program to those who were not in honors. About 20% of engineering students at Purdue were women, and the university wanted to retain them. Hartleroad found a significant difference in the students’ GPAs: those in honors earned an average first-year GPA of 3.42 while those not in honors earned a 2.80. Hartleroad interviewed female engineering students and found that they felt isolated in classes dominated by men and thought that the honors program would offer women more support. She stated, “It
was believed that attracting these students to a welcoming honors program that offered a supportive environment, a challenging practical application of engineering concepts, and a realistic view of the engineering profession would accomplish this goal” of improving retention (110). Honors clearly has a role to play in encouraging women to pursue STEM degrees by providing a nurturing environment that decreases women’s feelings of isolation and increasing their self-confidence.

In our enthusiasm to address the needs of women, we need to remember that the needs of the young men coming to college are likely to be quite different. They tend to have more confidence, which may well lead them to take healthy academic risks but can lead them away from seeking support. The result is that young men are often ill-prepared to recognize that they are less likely than their female peers to have the skills necessary to meet the challenges posed by college courses.

Men’s unrealistic perceptions inhibit them from self-improvement. Men spend more time playing video games and sports, partying, and watching television than women do. . . . How can colleges help males balance their leisurely interests with academic pursuits? How can we help men understand that reading and studying are important activities?” (Sadker et al. 246)

While young men should not lose entertainment and athletic outlets, honors directors need to create a culture that enables young men to evaluate their performance more accurately and that helps them to find academic support resources. In the program that I helped to develop at William Paterson University between 2005 and 2015, I tried to have a good number of male mentors living in residence to serve as role models for first-year students in the honors learning community. Jennifer Delahunty-Britz, admissions director at Kenyon College, asked in a 2006 essay, “What are the consequences of young men discovering that even if they do less, they have more options?” Honors directors need to expect more of young men in our programs, providing the academic support and nurturing environment that they need to improve their academic skills but also making sure that they understand the consequences of their choices about studying and playing. Honors directors also need to work at cultivating young men’s love of learning, encouraging them to be more serious in their studies, and, according to Tracy Davis and Jason A. Laker, appreciating the “multiple dimensions of identity” young men bring to college in order to offer them “appropriate levels of challenge and support” (55).
At William Paterson University, I worked with the registrar to place honors students in their first-semester classes, most of which are clusters of honor courses. Typically, three courses meet back to back with the same group of students staying together for the morning or afternoon two or three times a week. Once a week all three faculty members stay for the duration of the cluster to permit cross-disciplinary discussions, larger-scale debates, or off-campus field trips. Most professors who teach in honors clusters are full-time faculty, and many teach upper-division honors courses. These faculty members teach introductory classes for the honors students so that they get to know them early in their careers and can begin to mentor them. The cluster provides a place for students to get to know each other well, which is particularly helpful for commuters, and it provides a close connection to three members of the faculty. The clusters help students create strong ties to campus during their first term when retention is especially important. I have had students in their senior year tell me that their first-semester cluster was the most important academic experience they had on campus.

In many ways, the cluster teaches students how to do the difficult work demanded of them in college. They learn together how to “do college.” Every fall the clusters organize trips for the students that are relevant to their classes; in the past year, students have been to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Cloisters Museum, Ground Zero, and Ellis Island. Although most of our students are from New Jersey, many have not spent much time in New York, and experiencing the City shows them that it is a safe and exciting place twenty miles east of campus. These off-site experiences expand the students’ academic horizons and help them develop as citizens of the world within a group that begins to define itself as scholarly.

The clustering of honors courses works well for young men in my honors college because they are with a group of students who expect them to attend class, arrive on time, and do their homework. Moreover, they work closely with faculty in these courses and can receive individualized guidance without feeling that the instructors are singling them out for help. The residential community is also important because the men live with a large number of women, who organize study groups that they can join. I find that our male honor students initially avoid tutoring but are willing to participate in study groups or work with study partners, eventually making their way to the science and math enrichment centers. Living in the learning community puts them into a space that is reasonably quiet, that has few distractions, and where most students have high expectations for their academic performance. According to
Alexander Astin, “the student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years” (398). Honors directors can take advantage of peer group influence by designing curricular and co-curricular programs that help students develop good study habits and work together for academic success (Astin 427).

Students enroll in honors programs for many reasons, including the promise of enhanced academic experiences and scholarships. Honors programs are ideally situated not only to fulfill these promises but also to give students opportunities for personal as well as academic growth. Institutions benefit from having students who improve their academic profile and enrich the quality of classes; in return, these students deserve a dynamic, challenging, and nurturing educational community. If students are bored academically and cannot connect with other strong students, they will not thrive and may well leave the institution. If students are perpetually stressed or feel that their instructors do not care about their success, they may also leave the institution. As the cost of higher education rises, more families are sending their students to less expensive state schools, most of which have honors programs or colleges as a way to woo high-achieving students. These students, whether male or female, need to know that honors offers them a thoughtful and intense educational experience that addresses their individual needs.

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A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
Toward a Science of Honors Education

Beata M. Jones
Texas Christian University

The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.

—Socrates

As Sam Schuman wrote in 2004 and as George Mariz points out in his lead essay for this issue of JNCHC, the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) and academics alike have long recognized the importance of research in honors. Cambridge Dictionary Online defines “research” as “a detailed study of a subject in order to discover information or achieve a new understanding of it.” Given the roots of U.S. honors in the liberal arts, U.S. practitioners who have written for JNCHC have often been driven by the research models of their home disciplines. With fifteen years’ worth of publications, JNCHC contains a vast array of inspiring, reflective essays about honors practices (e.g., Frost on “Saving Honors in the Age of Standardization”), captivating case studies (e.g., Davis and Montgomery on “Honors Education at HBCUs: Core Values, Best Practices, and Select Challenges” and Digby on her program at Long Island University, C.W. Post Campus), and an occasional survey across institutions reporting “The State of the Union” in
honors (e.g., Driscoll and England). In contrast, our European honors colleagues, often coming from disciplines rooted in the sciences, have begun in recent years to advance a systematic study of honors that has yielded a more generalizable understanding of our field, e.g., Wolfensberger’s books in 2012 and 2015.

 Sadly, there seems to be little cross-pollination of the European ideas within the U.S. about the teaching of academically talented students. For example, NCHC’s current website guidelines on “Honors Teaching” make no use of Wolfensberger’s research. Further discouraging is the fact that the website makes no reference to any evidence in support of the recommended pedagogical guidelines in “Honors Course Design” even though the site houses a “Bibliography of Journals and Monographs Consolidated.”

 While both continents’ approaches to studying honors help us “achieve a new understanding” of honors and become more effective honors practitioners, we need an honors research agenda to produce evidence-based practice. As Mariz points out in this issue, “Ours is a data-driven age.” We work in an age of accountability and the need to demonstrate not only what we do but how we make a difference. Constructing a comprehensive research framework to guide our pursuits and taking stock of what we already know about teaching academically talented students can allow us to prioritize items on the vast horizon left to explore and to develop a more systematic study of honors. The ultimate goal of such an endeavor is not only to achieve a more holistic understanding of the dynamics of our field for the sake of knowing, which is a fine endeavor in itself for honors academicians, but also to transform our practice based on research and the inspiring stories that embellish the research findings.

  In 2004, Schuman pointed out the need for a more systematic study of the honors field, advocating more rigorous honors scholarship related to honors students, faculty, courses, curricula, pedagogy, historical analysis, and miscellaneous issues. I would like to reiterate his sentiment and offer this essay as:

  1. A manifesto to all honors practitioners in the U.S. and around the world to join forces and develop an honors research agenda; and

  2. A call to the NCHC to serve as the archive and the promoter of such an agenda as well as the associated research findings.

 Seeking to bring together a diverse body of knowledge into a coherent whole, I make the following suggestions:
We should learn from the related disciplines that inform our practice, such as instructional design, higher education administration, organizational behavior, psychology, sociology, anthropology; and

We should borrow from our rich backgrounds to build helpful research frameworks for the study of honors through the prisms of our disciplines and the field of education.

The unique contextual variables of our universities make it challenging to study honors phenomena across different settings and to generalize findings, which are often cited as obstacles to engaging in more systematic pursuits of honors science. However, keeping track of all the moderating variables will make it possible for us to improve our understanding of honors.

A computer scientist by training, a business faculty member by choice, and an honors education enthusiast by passion, I have a background that colors my ideas about research. I seek models and frameworks to inform my practice, and I then want to embellish them. Using the theory of organizational behavior and instructional design, I want to begin building a comprehensive framework for the study of honors. I offer this paper as an attempt to capture and organize in a systematic manner what we might wish to study in honors and why, citing relevant prior explorations of the topics. To be sure I identify the important issues, I concentrate on the identification of key attributes vital to the study of honors rather than on their specific measures. I encourage my honors colleagues to help embellish the framework proposed in this paper and propose complementary frameworks, colored by our backgrounds, that will enable us to refine and advance a rich honors research agenda. With the help of NCHC and through collaboration, we might be able to accomplish the following:

1. Create a rich and evidence-based set of guidelines for all of us in honors; and

2. Better showcase how we make a difference and thus increase institutional support.

THE FRAMEWORK

For the purpose of this analysis, I am viewing honors units as organizations according to the definition by Greenberg and Barron as “a structured social system consisting of groups and individuals working together to meet some agreed-on objectives” (4). To comprehend the dynamics of honors programs and run them effectively, we may borrow from organizational
behavior theory, which uses three levels of analysis in its research: individuals, groups and organizations, recognizing the need for all three levels of analysis (Greenberg and Barron 5). In the context of honors, we would thus analyze honors stakeholders at the individual level of analysis, honors courses at the group level, and honors programs and colleges at the organizational level. We should also recognize that honors organizations do not exist in a vacuum and that their external environments shape the realities of running the programs or colleges and vice versa. Therefore, the framework for honors investigation will use four levels of analysis and identify their relevant attributes/characteristics (see Figure 1). In the remainder of the paper, I briefly describe each level of analysis and the attributes that might be of interest for us to study, relating them to the existing JNCHC publications and other relevant literature.

**INDIVIDUAL HONORS STAKEHOLDERS**

A stakeholder is a person who has interest or concern in an organization. We can categorize the multiple honors stakeholders, according to their level of interest in honors, as primary or secondary (see Table 1).

Primary stakeholders in honors are the honors students, faculty, staff, and program directors or deans since they are the ones most vested in honors education. Secondary stakeholders, less invested in honors education given the nature of their association with honors units, include honors alumni, honors board members, honors committee members outside of honors, friends of honors, and university administrators.

To determine how to run an effective organization, one may find it helpful to analyze the attributes of the organizational stakeholders from a lifecycle perspective. Figure 2 presents the attributes that might be of interest to study within each honors stakeholder group. These stakeholder attributes are

**Figure 1. The Framework—Analysis Levels**
particularly important to understand for the primary stakeholders. Following
is a list of areas that an honors organization should understand in order to
operate effectively, including citations of resources that provide information
about each area:

1. The profile of their faculty and students: Achterberg, 2005; Blythe,
2004; Brimeyer et al. 2014; Carnicom & Clump, 2004; Castro-John-
son & Wang, 2003; Clark, 2000; Edman & Edman, 2004; Freyman,
2005; Grangaard, 2003; Kaczvinsky, 2007; Otero, 2005 (“What Hon-
ors”); Owens & Giazzoni, 2010; Rinn, 2008;

2. What students and faculty joining honors expect: Hill, 2005;

3. How best to recruit students: Eckert et al., 2010; Nichols & Chang,
2013;

4. What orientations to honors the students need to be successful and
what motivates them to excel: Clark, 2008; Weerheijm & Weerheijm,
2012;

5. How to retain students: Cundall, 2013; Eckert et al., 2010; Goodstein
& Szarek, 2013; Keller & Lacy, 2013; McKay, 2009; Nichols & Chang,
2013; Otero, 2005 (“Tenure”); Salas, 2010; Savage et al., 2014; Slavin
et al., 2008; Smith & Zagurski, 2013;

6. How to develop students while they are a part of honors: Ochs, 2008;

7. How to recognize students’ achievements and offer feedback as well
as appropriate rewards for those achievements: Guzy, 2013; Hartle-
road, 2005;

8. How to understand the characteristics of successful honors students
and faculty: Wolfensberger, 2004 & 2008; Wolfensberger & Offringa,
2012; and

**Table 1. Honors Stakeholders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Stakeholders</th>
<th>Secondary Stakeholders</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honors Students</td>
<td>Honors Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors Faculty</td>
<td>Honors Board Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honors Staff</td>
<td>Friends of Honors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors Administrators</td>
<td>University Faculty and Staff Outside of Honors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University Administrators</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
9. What effects honors programs have on students: Karsan et al., 2011; Kelleher, 2005; Long & Mullins, 2015; Shushok, 2006.

Similarly, scholars should research other stakeholder groups to better understand how the attributes of each individual stakeholder group contribute to success in honors, as described by Frost in “Success as an Honors Program Director: What Does it Take?”

HONORS COURSES

The field of instructional design and our own honors practices offer rich frameworks for analyzing courses in honors, suggesting preferred ways to design and teach them. The details of effective course design and its classroom implementation are two areas in which honors administrators may guide their faculty.

FIGURE 2. STAKEHOLDER ATTRIBUTES OF INTEREST
In assessing the design of a course for significant learning experiences, Fink recommends exploring the relationships between (a) desired learning goals, (b) feedback and assessment, and (c) teaching and learning activities within a context of (d) situational factors at the university (see Figure 3).

To develop strong honors courses, we need to closely align the desired learning goals, teaching and learning activities to achieve the goals, and feedback and assessment mechanisms. According to NCHC’s “Honors Course

**FIGURE 3. CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING COURSE DESIGN (FINK 2)**

[REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION OF FINK]

The major criteria are shown in bold.
Design,” desired learning goals might entail effective development of the following:

1. written and oral communication skills,
2. ability to analyze and synthesize a broad range of material,
3. critical thinking skills,
4. creative process, and
5. analytical problem solving.

These desired learning goals appear to be rather generic, and non-honors courses often embed them as well. According to West, the particular goals of honors education might also involve developing self-reflectiveness, passion for learning and sense of wonder, and ability to collaborate, appreciate diversity, and tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity. These goals suggest that honors courses “should contribute to students’ intellectual, emotional, moral, and social maturity” (3), preparing individuals to excel in the world. If the goal of honors education is to evoke excellence in the world that our graduates will be entering, perhaps an appropriate set of learning objectives might also include Newmeier’s *Meta Skills: The Five Skills for the Robotic Age*. Newmeier advocates development of the following five metacognitive skills:

1. Feeling: a prerequisite for the process of innovation, feeding empathy, intuition, and social intelligence.
2. Seeing: the ability to craft a holistic solution, also known as systems thinking, which helps solve complex, non-linear problems of the Robotic Age.
3. Dreaming: the skill of applied imagination, which yields innovation.
4. Making: “design thinking” that requires mastering the design process, including skills for devising prototypes.
5. Learning: the ability to learn new skills at will, producing learners who know what and how to learn just in time for a new problem.

Given the changing realities of education in the twenty-first century, research on course outcomes and current practices might suggest an up-to-date set of desired learning goals for our honors courses.

Honors faculty members can explore teaching and learning activities within honors courses through the prism of:
1. Relevant pedagogies used in courses: Mihelich et al. on Liberation Pedagogy; Braid on Active Learning; Machonis on Experiential Learning; Wagner on Inquiry Learning; Scott & Bowman on Project-Based Learning; Wiegant et al. and also Fuiks on Collaborative Learning; Camarena & Collins on Service Learning; Braid & Long on City As Text™; and Williams on PRISM; and

2. Characteristics of specific learning activities used in courses: Chickering and also Johnson on choices offered and community building; Wolfensberger on engendering academic competence; and the NCHC website on modes of learning in “Definition of Honors Education.” (See Table 2.)

While Fuiks and Gillison claim that there is no single model for teaching an honors course, Wolfensberger suggests in *Teaching for Excellence* a single signature honors pedagogy, with three distinct themes. I believe we can refine Wolfensberger’s pedagogy for honors faculty, closely aligning characteristics of teaching and learning activities with assessments and desired learning goals as well as the needs of today’s society to prepare students for twenty-first-century realities (Davidson; Lopez-Chavez and Shepherd; Wagner; Wesch).

Honors instructors can examine the frequency and types of feedback offered (formative vs. summative) as well as the structure of the feedback and assessment (informal comments vs. rubrics). (See Table 3.) Relevant

### Table 2. Relevant Dimensions of Honors Teaching and Learning Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples Relevant to Honors Pedagogies</th>
<th>Characteristics of Honors Learning Activities (Wolfensberger, 2012)</th>
<th>Modes of Honors Learning in NCHC’s “Definition of Honors Education”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Learning</td>
<td>Choices Offered</td>
<td>Research &amp; Creative Scholarship</td>
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<td>Inquiry Learning</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Learning</td>
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<td>Project-Based Learning</td>
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<td>Service Learning &amp; Leadership</td>
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<td>Collaborative Learning</td>
<td>Engendering Academic Competence</td>
<td>Experiential Learning</td>
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<td>Service Learning</td>
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<td>Learning Communities</td>
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research in these areas can be found in Brown; Carnicom and Snyder; Haggerty et al.; Otero, “Grades”; Ross & Roman; Snyder and Carnicom; Wilson. Understanding what type and structure of feedback might work best within different educational contexts might help us better structure our course.

Situational factors at the university will affect not only the design of honors courses but their outcomes (see Table 4). The factors include the course’s (inter)disciplinary setting, class size (Zubizarreta, “The Importance of Class Size”), the characteristics of students in the learning environment (Ladernenheim et al.; Merline), and the resources available within the course, e.g., budget available to support field trips, support staff to work with students, appropriateness of physical space and support facilities, and technology used to help achieve learning outcomes (Randall; Yoder; Zubizarreta, “The Learning Portfolio”).

The success of honors course implementation depends on many variables related to characteristics of the faculty, the course, the student, and the context. Fundamental tasks of teaching involve having solid knowledge of the subject matter, managing the course, designing learning experiences,

**Table 3.** **Relevant Dimensions of Feedback and Assessment in Honors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Type</th>
<th>Assessment Structure</th>
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<tr>
<td>Formative</td>
<td>Informal Comments</td>
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<td>Summative</td>
<td>Rubrics</td>
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**Table 4.** **Sample Situational Factors in Honors Course Design**

<table>
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<th>Relevant Situational Factors in Honors Course Design</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Inter)Disciplinary Setting</td>
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<td>Class Size</td>
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<td>Characteristics Of Students</td>
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<td>Budget</td>
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<td>Support Staff</td>
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<td>Physical Space</td>
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<td>Support Facilities</td>
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<td>Technology</td>
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and interacting with students. According to Fink in “Transforming Students through High-Impact Teaching Practices,” the five high-impact teaching practices include:

1. changing students’ view of learning,
2. learning-centered course design,
3. team-based learning,
4. service learning, and
5. being a leader with the students.

Faculty in honors might also learn from Slavich and Zimbardo, who present the specific elements of transformational teaching, and from Wolfensberger, Drayer et al., who have proposed an Integrative Model of Excellent Performance (see Figure 4), which also sheds some light on what a successful course implementation might entail. Further studies need to examine closely the relationship between student, course, and context to offer helpful guidelines for effective honors course implementations in different disciplines and settings.

**HONORS PROGRAMS/COLLEGES**

Scholarship on honors programs and colleges has a long history in honors research and is the most studied level of the proposed framework, with multiple publications available for honors administrators; see, for instance, Long’s *A Handbook for Honors Administrators*, Sederberg’s “Characteristics of the Contemporary Honors College: A Descriptive Analysis of a Survey of NCHC Member Colleges,” and Schuman’s *Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges and Beginning in Honors: A Handbook*. Table 5 presents typical attributes of honors organizations that have received attention in the literature. The NCHC website clearly elaborates the differences in these attributes for honors programs versus honors colleges; see NCHC’s Basic Characteristics of an Honors Program and Basic Characteristics of an Honors College; Achterberg’s “Differences between an Honors Program and Honors College”; and Sederberg’s *The Honors College Phenomenon*.

Only a few studies analyze the interrelation between the attributes; one of these is the discussion by Bartelds et al. of the relationship between mission, performance indicators, and assessment. Numerous honors practitioners, however, have contributed articles to the NCHC literature on
Figure 4. The Integrative Model of Excellent Performance (Wolfensberger, Drayer, et al.)
[Reproduced with permission of Wolfensberger]
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<th>Guiding Principles</th>
<th>Governance</th>
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individual attributes of honors organizations. For example, Clark (“Honors Director as Coach”), Godow (“Honors Program Leadership”), Mariz (“Leadership in Honors”), Schroeder et al. (“The Roles and Activities of Honors Directors”), and Zane (“Reminiscences”) have looked at leadership in honors. Ford (“Creating an Honors Culture”), Mariz (“The Culture of Honors”), and Slavin (“Defining Honors Culture”) have studied the honors culture, and the community aspect of honors culture has been the focus of Gillison, Stanlick, Swanson, and van Ginkel et al. Scholars have written relatively little about honors curricula considering how critical the topic is to the existence and success of honors organizations, but see Slavin & Mares. Honors organizational processes, however, have been the subject of many explorations by NCHC researchers. Green and Kimbrough, Guzy, Herron, Stoller, and Smith and Zagurski have explored honors admission. Spurrier has studied advising. Flynn, McLaughlin, and Myers and Festle have examined issues associated with honors growth while Larry R. Andrews has explored fundraising. Jones and Welhburg have discussed the need for program assessment while Lanier and Otero and Spurrier offered a framework and handbook to execute it.

The honors literature also offers advice about honors resources and their use. Railsback has offered wisdom regarding honors budgets while Taylor and also Rinn (in her essay “Academic and Social Effects of Living in Honors Residence Halls”) have mused on the role of honors housing. Clauss and Cobane have examined the institutional outcomes of honors education, and Kelly has inspected the concept of the overall success of honors.

Despite all these studies, the field of honors scholarship field needs a meta-analysis of honors organizational research, shedding light on our best practices for honors in different contexts and bringing clarity to what we know and what we still need to determine.

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

Honors practitioners have focused also on the external environments of honors practitioners, recognizing the interdependence between honors and its institutional or other contexts (see Table 6). JNCHC authors have identified external environment factors such as university setting (Cosgrove; Hilberg & Bankert), historical context, country and local settings (Barron and Zeegers; de Souza Fleith et al.; Khan and Morales-Mendez; Kitakagi and Li; Lamb; Skewes et al.; van Dijk; Yyelland, and numerous articles by Wolfensberger and co-authors), and assistance from professional honors organizations (Digby). The literature also contains discussions of coalitions with research
programs (Arnold et al.; Levitan), non-profit organizations (Stark), and for-profit support programs (Nock et al.), including internships, service learning, and study abroad programs. All these contexts can play a significant role in determining how an honors program or college operates and what outcomes it can generate.

CONCLUSION

While honors practitioners around the world will continue to delight us with inspirational, reflective essays about their honors practices, I hope that honors scholarship will evolve to include examinations of prior relevant research and more rigorous studies. As Schuman noted in 2004, “good scholarship is . . . generalizable. . . . [I]t articulates insights, suggests actions, or makes propositions, which are based upon thoughts and principles.” The NCHC Board of Directors has designated research as one of its top priorities for the organization (NCHC, “Research”). I have made a preliminary attempt at organizing our honors discipline into a comprehensive framework that can guide our explorations and shed light on specific attributes of honors entities in the framework of their interrelationships. The framework offers an approach to deal with the inherent fragmentation of our field, which can lead to incoherence.

As we ask our honors students to push boundaries of knowledge in their research, we also should be tasked with similar challenges and model good scholarship in the field of honors education. Summarizing what we already know about honors from the annual surveys and prior studies of honors is one way to start. Analysis of the research data compiled by NCHC and available on the NCHC website is already underway, and we can continue to collaborate on further data collection. With the help of NCHC publications, NCHC

TABLE 6. KEY FACTORS OF HONORS EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENTS

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conferences, and orchestrated honors community work, we might be able to write a comprehensive, evidence-based *Field Guide to Honors Education* in the next five years. We will not only all benefit by better understanding how we make a difference and for whom, but we will also leave a legacy of enlightenment to those who follow in our footsteps in the next fifty years of honors.

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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 4,000 students.

The Honors Thesis: A Handbook for Honors Directors, Deans, and Faculty Advisors by Mark Anderson, Karen Lyons, and Norman Weiner (2014, 176pp). To all those who design, administer, and implement an honors thesis program, this handbook offers a range of options, models, best practices, and philosophies that illustrate how to evaluate an honors thesis program, solve pressing problems, select effective requirements and procedures, or introduce a new honors thesis program.

Housing Honors edited by Linda Frost, Lisa W. Kay, and Rachael Poe (2015, 352pp). This collection of essays addresses the issues of where honors lives and how honors space influences educators and students. This volume includes the results of a survey of over 400 institutions; essays on the acquisition, construction, renovation, development, and even the loss of honors space; a forum offering a range of perspectives on residential space for honors students; and a section featuring student perspectives.

If Honors Students Were People: Holistic Honors Education by Samuel Schuman (2013, 256pp). What if honors students were people? What if they were not disembodied intellects but whole persons with physical bodies and questing spirits? Of course . . . they are. This monograph examines the spiritual yearnings of college students and the relationship between exercise and learning.

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.
The Other Culture: Science and Mathematics Education in Honors edited by Ellen B. Buckner and Keith Garbutt (2012, 296pp). A collection of essays about teaching science and math in an honors context: topics include science in society, strategies for science and non-science majors, the threat of pseudoscience, chemistry, interdisciplinary science, scientific literacy, philosophy of science, thesis development, calculus, and statistics.

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.

Preparing Tomorrow's Global Leaders: Honors International Education edited by Mary Kay Mulvaney and Kim Klein (2013, 400pp). A valuable resource for initiating or expanding honors study abroad programs, these essays examine theoretical issues, curricular and faculty development, assessment, funding, and security. The monograph also provides models of successful programs that incorporate high-impact educational practices, including City as Text™ pedagogy, service learning, and undergraduate research.

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.

Writing on Your Feet: Reflective Practices in City as Text™ edited by Ada Long (2014, 160pp). A sequel to the NCHC monographs Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning and Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education, this volume explores the role of reflective writing in the process of active learning while also paying homage to the City as Text™ approach to experiential education that has been pioneered by Bernice Braid and sponsored by NCHC during the past four decades.

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.
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