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### Editor's Introduction, vol. 17, no. 2

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Ada Long

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Honors students have long entered college with Advanced Placement credits already on their transcript, but in recent years the number of these credits has increased dramatically. At the same time, the more recent phenomenon of dual enrollment credits has ballooned. In a recent article called “As Dual Enrollments Swell, So Do Worries about Rigor,” Katherine Mangan writes, “Fueled by desires to cut college costs and improve access to underserved students, enrollment in dual-credit classes has been growing at a clip of about 7 percent a year nationally” (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5 Aug. 2016, A8). While the possibility of decreased rigor is an institution-wide concern, honors programs and colleges confront the additional concern that, because the credits that students bring with them when they matriculate are concentrated in the liberal arts, incoming students have already fulfilled some, many, or most requirements of a traditional honors curriculum. Consequently, students who would otherwise be excellent candidates for honors are choosing to take the more cost-efficient route toward a diploma and to bypass honors. While some honors administrators might choose to see this trend in a positive light as a way to weed out students who want the status but not the challenge of an honors education, most are struggling to adapt to the trend’s challenges to curricular integrity, academic rigor, diversity, and even survival within the numbers-driven context of higher education today.

Now is thus an opportune time for a *JNCHC* Forum focused on the theme “AP and Dual Enrollment Credit in Honors.” We invited NCHC members to read a lead essay by Annmarie Guzy and respond to issues she raises or address other questions arising from increased AP and dual enrollment credits among potential honors students:

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?

In her lead essay, “AP, Dual Enrollment, and the Survival of Honors Education,” Annmarie Guzy of the University of South Alabama launches the discussion of what she sees as an emerging crisis in honors education. She observes that most honors programs and colleges substitute rigorous and innovative honors courses for general education requirements. As students now enroll in college with general education credits through AP and dual enrollment, she argues, 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 that include the possibility of reducing or eliminating required honors courses.

Three of the five other contributors to the Forum agree with Guzy that honors must adapt in order to survive, and they present an optimistic picture of successful adaptations. In “Rethinking Honors Curriculum in Light of the AP/IB/Dual Enrollment Challenge: Innovation and Curricular Flexibility,” David Coleman and Katie Patton describe a new “Honors Flex” curriculum at Eastern Kentucky University, which mostly dismantles the previous required curriculum, replacing it with “a broad buffet of cross-listed, team-taught, interdisciplinary, topical honors seminars that [honors students] may use to fit into the General Education categories that they have not already fulfilled via AP, IB, or Dual Enrollment credit.” The authors claim that, in the innovative spirit of honors, they have created a curriculum that is beneficial and satisfying to students, faculty, and administrators.

Karen D. Youmans suggests an alternative adaptation in her essay “Using Hybrid Courses to Enhance Honors Offerings in the Disciplines.” She describes a shift at Oklahoma City University from a strict general education

model of honors offerings to a more discipline-centered curriculum, in which students take regular course requirements in the disciplines with an added "Honors Supplement Syllabus," essentially a contract model in which honors students work collectively and not just individually to enrich a regular course offering. Youmans describes the benefits of this approach, which include greater access and flexibility for students, increased quality of regular disciplinary requirements, and rethinking of "the honors classroom, enabling us to look beyond the stark dichotomy between honors and non-honors courses."

In "A Dual Perspective on AP, Dual Enrollment, and Honors," Heather C. Camp and Giovanna E. Walters present a dialogue on the challenges and benefits of the increased AP and dual enrollment credits that honors students bring to Minnesota State University, Mankato. Camp is a faculty member in honors and director of composition, and Walters is an honors advisor and instructor. The authors describe the institutional mandate to encourage dual enrollment as a way to increase income to the university; they acknowledge the problems that arise from college courses taught by rural high school teachers who "lack the materials, time, and rewards to sustain and innovate their college-level teaching"; and they nevertheless welcome the opportunity to think in new ways about honors education, not just in curriculum adjustments but in collaborative partnerships with high school teachers, "envisioning high school teachers as colleagues in light of the significant role they are playing in providing today's college education."

The other two contributors to the Forum are not quite so comfortable and optimistic about college credit offered in high school. In "Got AP?" Joan Digby of LIU Post takes a balanced view, noting the benefits of AP credit and having no trouble accepting them as replacements for honors courses. She appreciates the cost savings and also values the emphasis on the classics in AP English courses, adding that AP classes "can help boost self-esteem and academic confidence. I do not want to be the person to diminish what they have achieved." At the same times, she remarks that "college is in every way different from high school, even from high school classes that pretend to be college" and that AP or dual enrollment courses are not college equivalents despite claims to the contrary. At the same time, she is hardly optimistic about college courses either, even in honors, where the "idea of teaching students how to think and how to expand their intellectual and cultural world has been overwhelmed by utilitarian ends."

The title "AP: Not a Replacement for Challenging College Coursework" is a clear giveaway of the position taken by Margaret Walsh of Keene State

College. Conceding the cost incentives of taking AP and dual enrollment courses, she argues that the focus on acceleration that justifies these pre-college credits is incompatible with the goals of honors, in which students should “shift their focus from getting *out of* course requirements to getting *into* new and different courses to advance their capacity to learn.” While AP and dual enrollment courses have a positive effect in high school, they are in no way equivalent to and should not substitute for honors courses in college: “[N]ow they no longer need to accelerate their education. They need to deepen it.”

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The first of eight research essays in this issue is by Traci L. M. Dula of the University of Maryland. In “The ICSS and the Development of Black Collegiate Honors Education in the U.S.,” Dula provides an in-depth history of interactions between the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student, the precursor of the NCHC, and the multiple programs that had been targeting high-ability students since the 1920s at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Providing important information previously unavailable in the honors literature, Dula shows that Frank Aydelotte and his faculty, who are commonly credited with initiating honors education in the United States during the 1920s, seem to have ignored or dismissed honors-type developments at HBCUs. Joseph Cohen, however, who led the development and activities of the ICSS from 1957 until 1965, visited and actively supported the development of honors education at HBCUs. Dula provides the historical background—especially in the context of race and civil rights—for the evolution of honors at HBCUs and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and for the evolving interactions between them.

Another essay that presents an interesting new context for understanding honors is “Reading Place, Reading Landscape: A Consideration of City as Text<sup>TM</sup> and Geography” by Ellen Hostetter of the University of Central Arkansas. Hostetter compares the rich traditions of NCHC’s signature program City as Text<sup>TM</sup> (CAT) and the discipline of landscape geography. Categories of exploration that landscape geography can offer to buttress CAT strategies include, she writes, “landscape as unwitting autobiography, landscape as an act of will, landscape in a continuous process of becoming, landscape as power, and object orientation vs. people orientation.” Both the overlaps and the distinctions between the professional practices, goals, and theoretical perspectives of the two approaches enrich the possibilities for deeper readings of place.

The remaining six research essays are data-based, beginning with “Demography of Honors: Comparing NCHC Members and Non-Members” by Patricia J. Smith and Richard I. Scott of the University of Central Arkansas. Adding to their previous analysis in “Demography of Honors: The National Landscape of Honors Education” (*JNCHC* 17.1: 73–91), the authors “examine structural features, engagement with regional honors councils, and reasons that non-member institutions’ administrators give for not joining NCHC.” While NCHC members make up more than half of all the 1,503 institutions offering honors education, 640 institutions are eligible to join but have not become members. Among other kinds of findings about institutional and structural differences between member and non-member programs, the survey revealed that the two primary reasons non-members gave for not joining NCHC were expense and lack of awareness, with a small subset indicating that NCHC did not meet their needs. Based on these results, the authors recommend potential strategies to improve NCHC’s outreach.

Addressing an almost universal question that potential recruits ask about honors—whether it will hurt their GPA—Art L. Spisak and Suzanne Carter Squires have produced a study at the University of Iowa to provide an answer. In “The Effect of Honors Courses on Grade Point Averages,” the authors first describe a study that examined two groups of students, all of whom had been automatically admitted to the honors program; in the two-year span of the study, one group took at least two honors courses, and the other group took none. At the end of the study, the GPAs of the two groups were statistically the same. Five years later the authors conducted a second study comparing honors GPAs to overall GPAs among students who had completed at least twelve hours in honors during their first two years, and this study showed that honors and overall GPAs were also statistically the same. Both studies thus demonstrated that “honors courses do not adversely affect the GPAs of honors students,” providing support to honors recruiters who assert that participation in honors does not endanger academic performance.

A question of concern to honors administrators is how best to support students writing honors theses, which are required at three quarters of honors programs at four-year institutions. In “Honors Thesis Preparation: Evidence of the Benefits of Structured Curricula,” Steven Engel of Georgia Southern University reports on a six-year study of four hundred honors students that compared the success of three models: a seminar-based curriculum designed to teach students about thesis writing; an apprenticeship model, most common in the sciences; and no formal structure. The data led to the following

conclusions: “The apprenticeship model led students to stronger gains over the other two models on three dimensions: interaction and communication skills, professional development, and professional advancement. Seminars led to stronger results over the other two models on only one dimension: knowledge synthesis.” Whether the support took the form of seminars or apprenticeships, the study provided “quantitative evidence for the benefits of curriculum structures designed to help students complete honors theses.”

Another issue of interest to honors administrators is the role of digital competency in the curricular focus of honors education. In “A Digital Literacy Initiative in Honors: Perceptions of Students and Instructors about its Impact on Learning and Pedagogy,” Jacob Alan English describes a study of the Digital Literacy Initiative (DLI) that incorporated digital skills into fourteen honors classes within the Georgia State University Honors College. The study includes both quantitative and qualitative analyses indicating the benefits to both students and faculty as well as demonstrating that “intentional technology integration is appropriate for honors education.” As English writes, the essay “introduces a digital literacy model for honors education, provides concrete examples for implementation, assesses the impact of the model on learning and pedagogy, and continues the digital conversation in the honors community.”

In “Helping the Me Generation Decenter: Service Learning with Refugees,” LouAnne B. Hawkins and Leslie G. Kaplan describe a study at the University of North Florida that compared two groups of students in an honors colloquium; all the students attended the same lectures and other traditional course activities, but one group interacted directly with refugees in the local community, and the other group did refugee-related projects but did not interact directly with the refugees. Based on both qualitative and quantitative examination of the two groups as well as external review of the students’ end-of-semester posters, the authors conclude that the interactive group more successfully “decentered,” as revealed in their greater increase in empathy and decrease in narcissism.

The final essay—“The Honors College Experience Reconsidered: Exploring the Student Perspective”—is by James H. Young, III, of Belhaven University; Lachel Story, Samantha Tarver, and Ellen Weinauer of the University of Southern Mississippi; Julia Keeler of Forrest County Hospital in Hattiesburg, Mississippi; and Allison McQuirter of Yazoo Family Healthcare in Yazoo County, Mississippi. The essay describes a study designed to “assess student perspectives on programming and experiences among current

honors college students” at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM). The researchers created three focus groups of honors students, who during two-hour sessions described their honors experience in terms of “connectedness, community, and opportunity.” Based on these results, the USM Honors College has, for instance, revised its vision and mission statements, promotional materials, website, and recruitment plan. The authors believe that their study validates the importance of student input in program development and assessment.



