in this issue

Forum on
“Nontraditional Honors Students”

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2012 NCHC Portz Scholar’s Essay
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Research Essays
Melissa L. Johnson
John S. MacLean and Brian J. White
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*Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* is a refereed periodical publishing scholarly articles on honors education. The journal uses a double-blind peer review process. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology; articles on interdisciplinary efforts, discussions of problems common to honors programs, items on the national higher education agenda, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education. Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu.

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The cover design is a collaborative effort by Sarah Halverson and Wake Up Graphics.

The cover photo, by Mimi Killinger, was taken at the University of Maine Honors College and features honors student Rachel Binder-Hathaway and her son, Jacob Hathaway; Paige Mitchell with daughter Lilly Constance Mitchell; and Emily Patrick with her daughter, Jaclyn McClintick.
CALL FOR PAPERS

The next issue of *JNCHC* (deadline: September 1, 2013) invites research essays on any topic of interest to the honors community.

The issue will also include a Forum focused on the theme “Admissions and Retention 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, available on the NCHC website <http://nchchonors.org>, is by Jerry Herron of Wayne State University. His essay—titled “Notes toward an Excellent Marxist-Elitist Honors Admissions Policy”—argues for quantifiable measurements of the interconnections between admissions policies and other data such as retention and graduation rates or GPAs as a means to demonstrate the value-added of honors. Contributions to the Forum may—but need not—respond to Herron’s essay or the issues he addresses.

Questions that Forum contributors might consider include: Are data available that show a significant correlation between admissions criteria and retention? Should admissions and retention criteria for honors be absolute or flexible, objective or subjective, impersonal or personal, and why? Should admissions criteria focus on academic excellence or social justice or a mixture of the two? Is the quality of an honors program determined by who gets in or by who stays in and graduates? Does a focus on measurable data in admissions and retention limit a program’s potential for innovation and experimentation? What is the ideal mix of admissions criteria (e.g., SAT/ACT, GPA, extracurricular activities, letters of recommendation, personal interviews)? Should conventional academic criteria necessarily take precedence over non-academic talents in, for instance, the arts, athletics, or community service? What do admissions and retention criteria tell students about the program to which they are applying? Is using the SAT or ACT as an admissions criterion a way of shifting the burden of selection to a testing service? Is using GPA as an admissions criterion a way of shifting the burden of selection to high school teachers? How should admissions and retention criteria in honors relate to those criteria within the larger institution?

Forum essays should focus on ideas, concepts, and/or opinions related to “Admissions and Retention in Honors.” Examples from one’s own campus can be and usually are relevant, but essays should not simply be descriptions of “what we do at our institution.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

HALLIE ELLIS SAVAGE

Recently selected as an NCHC Fellow, Hallie Savage has been a major player in honors for the past sixteen years. Having earned her PhD from Kent State University, she joined the faculty of Clarion University of Pennsylvania in 1992 and is Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders as well as, since 1997, Director of the Honors Program. During her years at Clarion, she has produced many pages’ worth of publications and presentations in honors as well as in her academic discipline while also receiving numerous awards for her teaching and service. Her service to the National Collegiate Honors Council began shortly after she became honors director. She was for six years Co-Chair of the Publications Board and ran the Newsletter Contest for four of those years. Subsequently, she was elected to the sequence of offices that included the presidency of NCHC in 2008, and during the past decade she has been a member of the JNCHC Editorial Board, co-chaired the Assessment & Evaluation Committee, served on the Strategic Planning Committee, co-instructed two NCHC Institutes on Honors Assessment and Evaluation, and served as reviewer or consultant for sixteen honors programs. Hallie has done all this while meanwhile, back at Clarion, she has been, among many other responsibilities, Chair of the Faculty Senate and Secretary of the Clarion Borough Planning Commission. The NCHC has benefited immeasurably from her dedication, focus, collegiality, and laughter—not to mention the opportunity to admire her wardrobe. We gratefully dedicate this issue of JNCHC to Hallie Ellis Savage.
The issue of the Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council begins with a Forum on “Nontraditional Honors Students.” We distributed the lead essay titled “Nontraditional Honors,” by Janice Rye Kinghorn of Miami University Middletown and Whitney Womack Smith of Miami University Hamilton, on the NCHC website, on the listserv, and in NCHC e-Newsletters several months in advance, and we invited contributors to consider the following questions:

What is the definition of “nontraditional students,” and why do they need their own category? Is there any such thing as a traditional student? Do honors programs have a social, moral, or economic incentive or responsibility to accommodate nontraditional students? What are good ideas for recruiting them? Are some kinds of honors programs, e.g., those focusing on the liberal arts, more easily able to accommodate nontraditional students than others are? What specific advantages do nontraditional students bring to honors? Are there down sides to increasing the numbers of nontraditional students in an honors program, and, if so, what are they? Do nontraditional students participate as fully, less fully, or more fully in extracurricular honors activities than nontraditional students do? Do the curricular and co-curricular requirements of honors programs work for nontraditional, non-residential students? Is a cadre of alumni and alumnae who were nontraditional honors students a benefit to, for instance, fundraising? Does the current state of the national and global economy have an impact on the role nontraditional students can and do play in honors?

Including the lead essay, the Forum features five essays. The authors are unanimous in asserting the mutually beneficial relationship between nontraditional students and honors programs.

Janice Rye Kinghorn and Whitney Womack Smith begin the conversation by making the case that actively recruiting and welcoming nontraditional students into honors programs is right not only for the students but for the programs. Given the changing demographics in the United States, nontraditional students may be crucial to the future of honors. Having directed honors
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

programs at commuter campuses of Miami University Ohio, the authors share experiences and insights about attracting students who have scheduling conflicts as well as valid hesitations about joining an honors program. The strategies they have adopted include credit for experience and for extracurricular activities, hybrid courses, targeted promotional materials, and a mentor system.

Picking up on Kinghorn and Smith’s acknowledgement that “traditional” and “nontraditional” are constructed terms, Nancy Reichert sets about to deconstruct them in “Signifying Difference: The Nontraditional Student and the Honors Program.” She argues that the term “traditional” brings to mind students who have “banked test scores, AP and honors coursework, and high grades” in high school, and so “nontraditional” implies that students have not banked these assets and are thus defined by what they lack. Supported by the diverse views of students she polled electronically in her honors program at Southern Polytechnic State University, Reichert argues that “nontraditional students need to be measured by what they bring to an honors program instead of by what they lack.” She then describes a variety of strategies that her honors program has adopted to create equal opportunities for nontraditional students.

Angela Salas, like Reichert and also like Kinghorn and Smith, teaches at a campus that especially attracts nontraditional students. In “Nontraditional Honors and the Hopefulness of Summer Reading,” Salas describes her experience in trying to find pedagogical strategies that work in her first-year honors sequence, Common Intellectual Experience, at Indiana University Southeast. Having tried already to move from instructor- to student-led formats, she had encountered some resistance and frustration among her students. Reading Kinghorn and Smith’s essay helped her understand the insecurities her students were feeling as well as the scheduling problems they faced, so she tried adding an online component to the honors courses, a strategy she plans to both continue and expand in her efforts “to meet the needs of nontraditional students with nontraditional courses.”

In “Mothers in Honors,” Mimi Killinger, Rachel Binder-Hathaway, Paige Mitchell, and Emily Patrick eloquently describe the challenges that mothers face as honors students in the University of Maine Honors College. A photograph that Killinger took of her three co-authors and their children is featured on the cover of this issue of JNCHC. These three honors students describe the obstacles they encounter in, for instance, class scheduling, differences between them and their classmates, occasional insensitivity from their instructors, and a general sense of alienation. At the same time, their self-descriptions and Killinger’s commentary vividly demonstrate the rich contributions they make to their honors classes and classmates as well as the
benefits they receive from the honors college. All four authors offer suggestions for changing both the culture and policies of honors to encourage students like them to participate more fully and in greater numbers.

Kimberly Aramburo and Suketu Bhavsar describe another category of nontraditional honors students in “Undocumented in Honors.” Usually encumbered by difficult backgrounds, educational deprivations, and economic hardships as well as legal roadblocks, the Dreamers face overwhelming challenges. With no legal identity, undocumented honors students may work harder and achieve more than other students even without the financial aid, job possibilities, or options for graduate education that motivate their classmates. Dreamers are increasingly likely to become honors students in all parts of the country, and honors administrators and faculty need to recognize the seemingly insurmountable obstacles in their path and make special efforts to help. The authors of this essay provide an invaluable list of seven ways to provide such help effectively.

Each year, the NCHC selects four outstanding student researchers as NCHC Portz Scholars, who then present their research at the annual conference. On rare occasions, the editors of *JNCHC* select one of the NCHC Portz Scholars’ essays for publication, and we are proud to include in this issue a winning essay by Jeffrey Cisneros of the University of Texas at San Antonio. In “John Boswell: Posting Historical Landmarks at the Leading Edge of the Culture Wars,” Cisneros presents the results of his research on one of the most prominent and controversial scholars of early Christianity’s stance on homosexuality. Boswell’s book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, published in 1980, argued that, as Cisneros writes, “the rise in secular hostility was what ultimately led to church proscriptions, not the other way around” and that denunciations of homosexuality on the basis of natural law had their basis in historical circumstances rather than early Christian doctrine. Boswell’s book made him a target for attacks by both the conservative religious community, which was committed to the idea that homosexuality had always been considered a sin in the Christian church, and also by the gay community, which was invested in the belief that the church was hostile to homosexuality. Cisneros gives a vivid and fascinating account of the nature of these attacks and how they played out in an academic setting.

We conclude this issue of *JNCHC* with two qualitative research essays. The first is “Meeting the Aims of Honors in the Online Environment” by Melissa L. Johnson of the University of Florida. Johnson argues that online courses, when carefully designed and delivered, can meet all the primary objectives of honors education, including pedagogical, curricular, and experiential innovation. She presents the results of a survey she conducted on the
NCHC listserv, focusing on interviews with five faculty members who had taught online courses. While the results indicated problems as well as assets in teaching online honors courses, important recommendations arose from the study, in particular the need for models and mentors as more honors faculty commence online teaching. Johnson suggests good resources that could help NCHC guide and encourage online teaching among its members.

We conclude this issue of *JNCHC* with “Assessing Rigor in Experiential Education: A Working Model from Partners in the Parks” by John S. MacLean of Southern Utah University and Brian J. White of Graceland University. MacLean and White point out that experiential education relies on “unpredictable learning opportunities” that arise as students explore on their own, and so faculty, in order to demonstrate the practical and theoretical rigor of experience-based courses, have to create “assessment models without having solid control over the content or the methods of content-delivery.” Based on the 2012 Partners in the Parks adventure in Sequoia National Park, MacLean and White present a valuable model for assessment that includes inquiry, exploration, discovery, analysis, and reflection, culminating in honors projects that require students to understand the curriculum, incorporate unpredictable outcomes, and apply these outcomes to themselves and their communities.
FORUM ON “NONTRADITIONAL HONORS STUDENTS”
While honors programs and colleges often proclaim the importance of recruiting and retaining a diverse group of high-ability students, many are still exclusionary and predicated on assumptions about the student body that are no longer valid. In general, we assume that honors students matriculate straight from high school and, having no family obligations, are able to reside in honors living-learning communities, participate in co-curricular honors experiences, and take advantage of honors study abroad opportunities. The structure and programming of honors can thus prohibit the full participation of nontraditional students and compound the personal and psychological barriers that keep many talented, high-achieving nontraditional students from pursuing honors. Yet the diverse voices that nontraditional students provide can add a fuller range of perspectives to our programs and especially to our discussion-based honors courses. Furthermore, nontraditional students are crucial to the future health of honors; with the seismic shift in student demographics, honors programs ignore nontraditional students at their own peril.

Certainly “traditional” and “nontraditional” are constructed and slippery terms. Many researchers have used age as the sole indicator, typically labeling twenty-five-year-olds and older as nontraditional. Using this single criterion, 38% of students enrolled in colleges and universities in 2007 were nontraditional (Ross-Gordon). In our experience, though, age does not tell the whole story. When our honors students were developing a research project about nontraditional students, they resisted this narrow definition. One twenty-one-year-old student commented that, having spent a couple of years after high school working and then struggling to fit in as a gay man on a predominantly straight campus, he felt anything but traditional. If we define nontraditional to include students with dependents, full-time employment, prior military service, financial independence, delayed entry into college, and part-time status, nearly three quarters of the college student population are nontraditional (Choy). Many nontraditional students come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and are first-generation college students (National Center for Education Statistics). While those of us who teach at community colleges,
regional campuses, and urban universities have been witnessing this trend for some time, traditional residential universities are increasingly likely see growth in their nontraditional populations. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that the “share of students who are over 25 is projected to increase another 23% by 2019” (Bell). This trend, coupled with declining numbers of eighteen- to twenty-two-year-olds, indicates that all institutions will be looking to enroll nontraditional students in order to be competitive and relevant (Kelly and Strawn). Colleges and universities, including their honors programs, will need to adapt to the growing numbers of nontraditional students on their campuses.

We argue that developing honors programs that fully embrace nontraditional students is one of the central challenges the honors community faces in the twenty-first century. We need to do more than simply allow nontraditional students access to existing programs that are designed for their traditional peers; we also need to see nontraditional students as key stakeholders and develop inclusive, flexible programs that serve their specific needs. We also need to better articulate the value of an honors education for these students, demonstrating how innovative, engaged learning and discovery will give them the skills to succeed in a changing world. These demographic changes provide us with an opportunity to assess the missions, strategic goals, target audiences, and intended learning outcomes for honors.

OUR EXPERIENCES

When we became honors directors at Miami University Hamilton (Whitney) and Miami University Middletown (Janice), we had no program and no honors students. We teach at the commuter campuses of Miami University in Ohio, a traditional residential institution. Our campuses have a high percentage of first-generation college students (47%) and Pell Grant recipients (over 60%). The average age at Miami Hamilton is twenty-six and Miami Middletown is twenty-seven, with a large number of students starting or returning to college after working for many years, serving in the military, or raising families. Few of our students have the background and high school successes we associate with a typical honors student. Most did not graduate in the top 10% of their high school classes, were not selected for high school honors or AP classes, and did not have exceptional ACT or SAT scores. Few had the kinds of positive encouragement from parents, teachers, and counselors that would lead them to seek out honors in college.

Our campuses had made attempts over the years to offer occasional honors sections of core courses and honors topics courses, but without a structure to admit and nurture honors students these courses did not fare well. The decision to create honors director positions signaled the campus administration’s
commitment to providing opportunities for high-achieving students, but we needed to develop a program that made sense for our student population. Some students begin their coursework at our campuses and then relocate to the main campus, which has a thriving university honors program, while others complete two- and four-year degrees with us. We needed to develop pathways for our relocating students to complete the university honors program as well as a self-contained program that students could complete entirely on our campuses.

Our first step was to build a relationship with the Miami University Honors Program. In an interesting twist, the UHP, led by Carolyn Haynes, had just spent years developing an innovative outcomes-based program that it was about to roll out in fall 2009 (Taylor and Haynes) that is aligned with AAC&U’s College Learning for the New Global Century outcomes. In order to meet these outcomes, students complete nine honors “experiences” that can include co-curricular activities as well as honors classes. While the program was designed with traditional-age students in mind, we thought its flexibility and emphasis on experiential learning had great potential for the nontraditional student populations on our campuses. The program does not require a specific high school GPA or ACT/SAT score for admission; instead, students are admitted based on the strength of an essay-based application. Our students, many of whom left high school two, ten, or twenty years ago, have often undergone major personal transformations and find themselves excelling academically in ways they never had before, so their high school records and test scores are poor criteria for admission.

As professors, we knew that nontraditional students tend to be motivated, mature, self-directed—the very qualities we seek in honors students. They also bring a diversity of backgrounds and life experiences that we believed would be critical in developing a pluralistic program. With great excitement we began to approach high-achieving nontraditional students to invite them to apply to our new honors program, only to have most of them turn us down. What we had not fully anticipated were the personal, psychological, and institutional barriers that stood between these excellent students and an honors education. We have spent the past three years working through these problems and adapting the program to be more accessible to nontraditional students. Based on our experiences and research on nontraditional learners, we have developed suggestions for ways that honors programs and colleges can address obstacles commonly faced by nontraditional students.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS**

When we initially met with nontraditional students, we heard the common refrain “I’m just not an honors student.” When we probed more deeply,
we found many students struggling to identify as college students at all, let alone as honors students. Even with their classroom successes, many of them carried with them a sense of unworthiness based, at least in part, on previous negative educational experiences.

We needed to find ways to give these students the confidence to consider honors. One of our strategies has been to get our faculty members heavily involved in identifying and encouraging students. Often a nomination from a trusted and respected faculty member allows a student to see herself in a different light. Once our program began enrolling a few nontraditional students, we asked them to serve as ambassadors to their peers. We had them staff tables in the commons and attend new student orientation sessions. Peer recruiting allowed students to hear the stories of others who had similar life circumstances and challenges yet had been admitted to and were thriving in the honors program. As potential students began to see more honors students who looked like them, our recruitment efforts became easier. We have followed up these efforts with structured peer mentoring, connecting more advanced nontraditional honors students with newer ones. We have still found that nontraditional students often take a few semesters of successful work in the program before they begin to see themselves as honors students.

PERSONAL BARRIERS

Nontraditional students face major time pressures and scheduling constraints that can make it difficult for them to access honors classes and opportunities. They often juggle school with part-time or full-time employment, significant family obligations, community involvement, and other responsibilities, often without strong support systems. Spending time on honors can mean making difficult sacrifices and taking uncomfortable risks. Nontraditional students want to know precisely how much time they will have to devote to honors classes and requirements and whether participation in the program will jeopardize their GPAs or their time to graduation, questions that are difficult to answer. As Ashton notes in his article on honors students from lower socio-economic classes, “the risk of failure [for them] is much greater, threatening not just psychological or social damage but financial ruin” (Ashton 67). The same applies to nontraditional students, many of whom have taken incredible risks to enroll in higher education and whose situations are often precarious. They fear taking on any additional responsibilities that may threaten their degree completion and their chances for improving their lives and the lives of their families.

While we cannot deny that joining the honors program is risky for some nontraditional students, we have tried to find ways to mitigate some of these risks. One key has been to design our entry point into the program, an
introductory seminar, to function as a low-stakes trial run in honors so that students would be more willing to explore this option before making a commitment to the program. We have found that nontraditional students need multiple pathways to complete an honors program from different points of entry and over varying numbers of terms; “one size fits all” does not work, and we tailor the number of honors requirements to the length of time a student is in the program. With an increasing number of part-time students joining our program, we started describing our requirements without reference to class year so that these students could navigate the program more easily. Finally, we have developed honors opportunities for both associates and bachelor’s degree students and have made it possible for students to join honors at almost any stage of their college career.

Another key obstacle that nontraditional students face is that they are typically place-bound and thus unable to participate in many of the residential and study abroad opportunities afforded to traditional honors students. Honors programs are often connected to residential living-learning communities that encourage development of support networks and involve cohort classes, intensive mentoring, and social and cultural events. Nontraditional students, who rarely live in residence halls, miss out on these opportunities, and study abroad is similarly inaccessible both personally and financially. Nontraditional students may thus be excluded from forming close relationships with professors and peers and from developing a distinct sense of identity as an honors student, leading to the sense of isolation that many nontraditional learners report feeling on college campuses.

Our job has been to develop inclusive and enriching ways to engage students who do not live on campus or have the means or time to study abroad. An honors mentorship program may allow a student to live with her family yet still connect deeply with the on-campus community. Short-term study-away programs can provide meaningful cross-cultural learning, as can immersive experiences in another culture within one’s home community. In our outcomes-based program, students can petition to receive honors credit for community service and job-related activities, enabling them to construct meaningful links between these experiences and their coursework.

OTHER INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

At times the language that honors programs use, as well as the images they project, reinforces perceived barriers for nontraditional students. In a review of honors program websites, we found that many programs state that nontraditional students are eligible for the honors program while at the same time making honors appear difficult and inaccessible. Nontraditional students may have to complete additional steps in the application process or, if they
are not incoming first-year students, retake core courses to fulfill honors requirements, indicating to nontraditional students that the program is not designed with them in mind and discouraging them from applying. We found that a relatively small number of honors programs provide pictures of nontraditional students or highlight their stories and successes on their websites even though an inclusive website and marketing materials are especially important in recruiting nontraditional students.

Scheduling can also be a major barrier for nontraditional students. Since our programs are small, we typically offer only one section of our required introductory honors course each semester. In order to attract talented students who cannot attend the course at the scheduled time, we developed a hybrid version of the course, half online and half face-to-face, and we are now exploring a fully online version. The option to count co-curricular experiences—-independent research, community service, work activities—also allows students more freedom in scheduling. Offering hybrid, online, and technologically advanced classes, along with allowing students to complete honors requirements outside of honors classes, creates a more accessible and welcoming environment for all students who face major time constraints.

Another institutional barrier is the model of student development upon which programs are predicated. We found that honors requirements designed for first- and early-second-year students were not challenging to some of our nontraditional students, even those in their first and second years of coursework. Someone who has been in the workforce for many years may have skills in collaboration and leadership far beyond typical eighteen-year-old first-year students. A veteran returning from Iraq or Afghanistan may have a cross-cultural awareness that is much more sophisticated than we usually encounter among traditional students, even those who have traveled abroad. Consequently, we allow students to progress at their own pace through an electronic portfolio, which allows some nontraditional students to move more quickly to higher-tier objectives.

**CONCLUSION**

In the Lumina Foundation report “Return to Learning: Adults’ Success in College is Key to America’s Future,” the authors conclude that “[i]n the 21st century, our nation needs to maximize the potential of adult learners to face global challenges” (Pusser et al. 18). Honors can play a large part in that success if we revise and adapt our programs for nontraditional learners. For our own sakes as well as for our students, we need to seize the opportunity to define the future of honors by anticipating rather than reacting to the rapid demographic changes in higher education. Our continuing relevance and
impact depend on making honors programs accessible to nontraditional students.

REFERENCES


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In their essay “Nontraditional Honors,” Janice Rye Kinghorn and Whitney Womack Smith state that students who are “twenty-five-years of age and older are usually considered nontraditional.” However, they first acknowledge that “traditional” and “nontraditional” are “constructed and slippery terms.” One of the most important ways that we as faculty and staff can serve our students through an honors education is to deconstruct terms such as “traditional” and “nontraditional” in order to show the significant gaps between the signifiers and the signified and to expose the negative connotations of a construct that is defined as not being the other construct.

Honors faculty, students, directors, and staff members who enter the dialogue concerning these constructs need to ensure that the terms are not reduced to stereotypes and are not reinforced by those participating in an honors education. According to Paulo Freire, dialogue is a necessary part of an education since it helps people create a critical consciousness. For Freire, a critical consciousness is created by an in-depth understanding of the world that is fostered by exploration of social and political contradictions. Once people begin the process of forming a critical consciousness, they can interrogate language use in order to create new meanings upon which future actions can be based (Education 44). Given the nature of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) and its educational goals, nothing is more important than becoming critically conscious of social constructs that limit our ability to reach out to students.

Because the signifier “nontraditional” is defined against the signifier “traditional,” I want first to look at what “traditional” signifies in an honors student. The obvious answer seems to be a student with a range of abilities who has recently matriculated from high school and who has been accepted into an honors program at the university level.

However, I wanted to see how students themselves define “traditional,” so I sent a question about the definition to the honors listserv for the Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU) University Honors Program. Nineteen
students responded to the question. What I found is that most of the students who responded see the term “traditional” through the lens of what they deem typical of the college students they know. Rugaya Abaza, who was a joint-enrollment student at SPSU during her senior year of high school, indicated that traditional students attend high school for four years, graduate from high school during the year before attending college, and are full-time students. Ciara Hinds, who identified herself as a nontraditional student, added that traditional students either live on campus in a dorm or they live with their parents who live near the campus. Tim Sassone, who identified himself as a traditional student, feels that traditional students carry a full load and their primary role is being a student. Brady Powers, who also identified himself as a traditional student, finds that such students typically do not work to support themselves. He believes that traditional students rely on “parents, loans, scholarships, or any combination so long as they are not working their way through school.”

I believe we could as easily answer the question of who traditional students are by looking at the cultural artifacts of an honors program. Applications, recruitment materials, documents concerned with curriculum and honors activities, and lists of benefits for students tell the story of which students are targeted for honors study. We often assume that the students targeted will bring status to the university.

One way that universities and honors programs often indicate the status of their students is through Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores or American College Test (ACT) scores as one criterion for admission. My research on the usefulness of such scores in determining success in the SPSU honors program has not shown a significant correlation between success and scores. Honors students with an 1150 SAT score have done well in the program, and some have gone on to succeed in graduate school. Some students with 1300–1400 scores have been dismissed from the program with grade point averages of 1.5. Once scores have shown that students have a certain level of ability, they no longer serve as a significant predictor of success.

However, universities and the media often play up high test scores to indicate the quality of a school and its students. In fact, one of the goals of the student recruitment office at Southern Polytechnic State University in 2010–11 was to maintain SPSU’s third- or fourth-place ranking of SAT scores for entering freshman within the University System of Georgia (“Student Recruitment”).

Since the use of such scores is often a traditional means of recruiting incoming students, one item that may determine whether a student is a traditional honors student is having an SAT or ACT score to report on an application. Advanced Placement (AP) test scores and high school grade point
averages may also define an honors student as “traditional.” In other words, traditional students have used their high school years to bank measurements that they then can use to get into an honors program. Ironically, what students have banked may not demonstrate the type of thinking skills that honors programs privilege since national tests rarely ask for the type of critical and creative thinking skills necessary to develop a critical consciousness.

Having defined what we might mean by “traditional,” we can now consider what the construct “nontraditional” might signify. We can assume that “nontraditional” defines students who in high school have not banked test scores, AP and honors coursework, and high grades. However, if we define nontraditional students by what they lack, we define the term quite differently from the way many of the SPSU honors students defined it in my survey, many of whom identified positive differences from traditional students.

The student responses below indicate that the social construct “nontraditional” is indeed a very slippery construct. All humans negotiate how their own identity is shaped through social constructs and their own knowledge of themselves. Several students who answered my electronic survey indicated that, no matter their age, they could be considered nontraditional depending on how they defined the term, which was similar and not so similar to the ways Kinghorn and Smith’s students defined the term.

Meredith Shaddix, who finds herself often defined as a traditional student due to her age, said that she would like to create her own definition of “nontraditional” so that it includes any student “who does not fit into the traditional category.” Thus, it would include her since she was homeschooled, took a year off after graduation, was part of a leadership program, went to a community college, and is now at SPSU.

William Forsyth expanded on this view since he finds an “almost unlimited number of interpretations” depending on one’s point of view. He believes the term could be applied to any student whose style of learning is different from an assumed norm or who seems to deviate from social norms in the community.

Three honors students who began their schooling at SPSU as joint-enrollment students answered the survey, all indicating that they could be seen as nontraditional students. Michael Hallock found that his going to two schools at once as a joint-enrollment student was not “very traditional.” He also considered international students to be nontraditional since “they’re going out of their way to come to the university,” and this is not a traditional way to get educated in America.

Britney Mason, who also began taking classes at SPSU her senior year in high school, had already racked up a number of AP hours before entering the honors program. She is now in the second semester of her first year, but she
is a junior due to the number of course credit hours she has accumulated. She said that she considers herself more of a traditional student than a nontraditional student, but stated, “I have approached college in a less traditional way than most.” Britney finds the term “nontraditional” problematic because its use is similar to the use of labels that occurs in high school cliques: a person becomes known for a “title” based on “only a part of a person.”

Kenneth Gagne’s second definition of “nontraditional” shows how slippery this construct can be. He states that a nontraditional student can be deemed one who considers several “educational options.” That is, “he or she is not satisfied with only obtaining the skills necessary to become employed in his or her ‘dream’ job.” In other words what Kenneth sees as nontraditional today was (and maybe still is) the traditional model of a liberal arts education when I was in college.

If Kenneth’s definition is not enough to show how slippery this construct can be, the definitions from two Chinese students who answered the survey show the wide range of definitions. Ailing Cui said that the term might apply to students who need to take on a part-time job, who need financial aid, or who lack an educational background. Jingyu Rao understands that a nontraditional student in the United States might be a person who is married and has children, but she also said that in China a nontraditional student might be someone who does not attend classes regularly, who submits homework after the deadline, and who disturbs order in the classroom.

Finally Teyanna Henry understands that she is a “poster child” of the “nontraditional student.” She stated that a nontraditional student cannot follow the typical class schedule of a student just out of high school. Obligations and concerns such as a family, job, and health issues have to take first priority.

What complicates the picture quite a bit for me is that SPSU, like the satellite campuses for Miami University of Ohio, would probably be considered a nontraditional school in which to house an honors program. SPSU is a polytechnic state university located north of the Technical Institute of Georgia and was once a two-year feeder school for Tech. Most SPSU students study in engineering, engineering technology, or architecture programs. Nearly half of SPSU students live off campus. A survey I took of entering honors freshmen in 2012 indicated that most were from families of low to middle class status. If we use the ages suggested in Kinghorn and Smith’s essay for “nontraditional,” 44% of SPSU’s undergraduate student body in 2010 would be considered nontraditional (SPSU Factbook). The current enrollment at SPSU is just over 6,200 students, 800 of whom are graduate students; men make up 79% of this population; 54% are Caucasian, 24% African American, 8% Hispanic, 10% Asian American, and the rest either unknown, American Indian, or Pacific Island Americans; and 5% are non-U.S. citizens.
Information about the SPSU population is important because all these students must succeed in difficult coursework in order to graduate. Most graduates from SPSU have studied Calculus I and II and Principles of Physics I and II as base courses for their major fields. Nontraditional honors students, by any definition, not only do well in such classes at SPSU but also are often at the top of their classes in their grade point averages.

Like Kinghorn and Smith, I find that nontraditional students need to be measured by what they bring to an honors program instead of by what they lack. If “nontraditional” means that the student’s background is different from the backgrounds of typical students, then we need to have application materials and programs that offer students a variety of ways to indicate these different abilities. (For more information on what SPSU does to create equal opportunities for nontraditional students, see Appendix A. Appendix B provides student feedback about what we could do better.) Nontraditional students in the honors program at SPSU have served as peer mentors, served on the Student Honors Council, run workshops, written blogs aimed at helping traditional students, and established a presence on the honors webpage as a group known as “Guides on Your Side.” The website <http://www.spsu.edu/guides> contains contact information for the students as well as helpful tips for students and a blog by Shannon Hames. Traditional students such as Delbert Wan had nontraditional honors students from the “Guides on Your Side” come to the class he took on Introduction to Honors. He stated in his definition of nontraditional students that they bring experience and networking skills from the real world, so they are more prepared than traditional students to face college life. In many ways, the word “nontraditional” at SPSU identifies students who bring more skills and capabilities to college than the typical student.

Since nontraditional students are key to the SPSU honors program, last spring we encouraged those working in the “Guides on Your Side” program to make a presentation at the NCHC conference the following fall. I worked with three nontraditional students to write the proposal, and we presented at the 2012 conference in Boston. What soon became apparent to our students was that several people attending the presentation assumed we would focus only on how honors programs can help nontraditional students instead of how nontraditional students in honors act as mentors to help traditional and nontraditional students alike. We were interrupted by questions early on asking if we would soon get to the part where we discussed helping nontraditional students. Even the final question for the panel concerned what extra benefits we provide nontraditional students. While at least one of the members of our audience was a nontraditional student from another school, the SPSU nontraditional students noticed that they were a small minority of students at the conference.
Given the student definitions for “nontraditional” as well as the strong academic abilities of SPSU students who fit the age-defined term “nontraditional,” we need to examine closely how we understand this construct, which determines how we see the students to whom we apply the term and which can affect their future opportunities. Honors programs award credentials that often boost access to jobs after graduation. Graduation with honors can not only determine later income but also create class identity in a society such as America’s. Clearly a lot is on the line.

With so much at stake, we need to interrogate the terms we use, the cultural artifacts we create, and what it means to get an honors education. A number of the practices at SPSU would not be considered within the norm at other schools, but then SPSU is not a traditional school, and we continue to attempt to be more inclusionary. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire indicates that antidialogical action is a “concomitant of the real, concrete situation of oppression” and that “dialogical action is indispensable to the revolutionary supersedence of the situation” (134). What I appreciate about this NCHC Forum on “Nontraditional Honors Students” is that the dialogue opened here might lead to change.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT FOR NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS
(We have tried to create inclusionary measures that work with the term “nontraditional” no matter how it is defined.)

• Created a Departmental Honors Scholar Program which asks student to complete only the upper-level hours of the honors curriculum. This allows current SPSU students and transfer students to become part of the program.

• Created GPA standards that allow entrance to the honors program that are based only on college GPA whether at SPSU or at the college from which the students have transferred.

• Created an essay section in the application that allows students to explain past issues and to discuss current avenues for academic success.

• Recruit students through the following means: an open house or meeting, asking for recommendations from current students and SPSU faculty and department chairs, and speaking at SPSU open houses for incoming transfer students.

CREATING INVOLVEMENT FOR NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

• Nontraditional students on campus during the day are members of our Student Honors Council, lead committees such as the International Mentor Committee, and hold workshops on topics such as organization and time management.

• Nontraditional students on campus during the day and evening are used as peer mentors for traditional students.

• Involving Nontraditional students who are here in the evening only is our greatest weakness, but partaking in electronic roles such as “Guides on Your Side” is available.

• Use of electronic sources for communication: Facebook page, listserv/email, as well as phone calls and mailings.
SAMPLE STUDENT FEEDBACK CONCERNING THE PROGRAM’S ABILITY TO INVOLVE ALL STUDENTS
(pulled from the honors listserv survey)

I think the honors program does serve those who are not traditional students because I know of multiple other joint enrollment students that are in the honors program along with people who took a break from school for several years for work and are coming back to school. I also think that the service to them is just as good as to those traditional students. From what I’ve seen the honors program is trying to get them involved in the program and is trying to use their experiences to the advantage of the other students which helps them feel welcomed and appreciated for what they are as opposed to assimilating them into this group of traditional students.

—Rugaya Abaza

I feel that the honors program does, somewhat take care of its nontraditional students. I don’t feel like they serve nontraditional students as well as traditional students, though. I work a full time, salary job. I can’t make it to campus with one day notice in the middle of the day, I simply just can’t! Calendars, deadlines, and due dates are all in the mix. More than a few days’ notice of events will help so many nontraditional students.

—Ciara Hinds

(We do have honors events posted in several different places usually at least one week in advance; however, university events are sometimes communicated close to the dates because that is when we get them.)

I do not believe the Honors Program serves nontraditional students as well as the traditional. The main reason for this is time. From my personal experience, there are many things that I would have liked to taken advantage of, but I do not have the time. In my opinion, one of the main benefits of being in the honors program is being able to socialize with future tops of the industries. Of the few honor students I know, I see them putting too much time and effort, going above and beyond, to just settle for being another employee.

I see the program aimed mostly at students who live on campus. It gives them the most opportunities, but I also believe that they have the most time to take advantage.
I do not feel there is much that could be done to change the program for the nontraditional student. Instead to take full advantage of the program, the nontraditional student needs to change to become more like the traditional student.

—Tim Dow

Nontraditional students probably don’t get as much out of the program as traditional students (though, since I’ve never been one, this is just a guess), just as I doubt they get as much out of the other programs. Because they’re not on campus as much, or as regularly, they tend to be less aware of the on-campus resources. Even when they are, such resources are noticeably less convenient to use (I could walk over to the ATTIC for tutoring any time I’m not in class, a nontraditional student might have to make an extra trip to the school at an inconvenient time).

—Timothy Sassone

I believe that the honors program does serves all students the same as a way to further our higher education and show others later that we will go the extra mile.

—Nigel Bradley

We’re educated to become hard working individuals who are respectable in our work places, but I feel as if the honors program is guilt tripping me to step away from my 30 hour/week job in order to complete tasks that it deems necessary for us to later obtain good jobs. In my eyes, working experiences that display key qualities will carry over on a resume better than a signed off sheet showing that we were part of such-and-such organization and helped with such-and-such events.

For the traditional students living on campus, I see no reason why they should be neglecting to help out and take part. But for the nontraditional students, I feel as if they deserve more time to adapt to our country and/or their busier schedules without feeling obligate to add more to their already full plate.

—Michael Hallock

While I think that the university as well as the honors program is trying to accommodate the schedules and complexities of nontraditional students, there are some things that could use improvement. Most importantly for me is the timing of events. There are always events that are planned in the evening throughout the week which are pretty
tough for me to return to school to attend. Many of them I have actually had a vested interest in attending. Not to mention that these events go towards honors volunteering hours as well. But my evenings already have to be split between getting all of my homework done along with my children’s homework/projects, dinner, sports practices, etc. I do like the fact that I can get credit for the tons of volunteering that I have always done at the kids’ school and within the non-SPSU community. These things are equally as important to me!

—Teyanna Henry
In the summer of 2012, I had the good fortune to have my summer session course cancelled as a result of low enrollment. While unexpectedly losing a course and a salary was unpleasant, I undertook a reading program designed to help me improve our first-year honors classes. The sequence, Honors 103 and 104, is known as the Common Intellectual Experience (CIE), and it fulfills multiple general education requirements for all but our nursing students. In the course of the year, students read and respond to four texts (generally paired fiction and nonfiction works), prepare a guided, independent research project, give at least five speeches, prepare to attend and participate in a conference, and create and update an electronic portfolio, which they augment throughout their honors program experience. They blog, write, and revise papers of various lengths, learn how to write annotated bibliographies, and prepare paper abstracts. They are mentored by more senior students and learn to mentor others.

My self-directed summer seminar in pedagogy and educational theory resulted in a leaner, more efficient syllabus for the first semester. For example, I replaced the requirement that students edit highlights from their speeches, a requirement that had nothing to do with our educational outcomes and that had made students cry with frustration at using clunky video editing software, with a requirement that they view their speeches and then post their reflective observations on Oncourse so that everyone in our small classes had the opportunity to read and respond to them, which they did with good grace and insight. In all things, I sought to decenter the class and allow students to take charge of their own progress.

The pedagogy I synthesized from all the fine ideas of fine thinkers should have led to an excellent classroom experience. Instead, it flopped. Rather than being empowered, students were anxious. They sent me frantic emails about margins and type-size, asked me to tell them if I agreed with their peers’ commentary about speeches and papers, hovered at my office door before class, and followed me the five feet from the classroom back to my office, wondering if I would “dock” them if their resource materials were short. I cannot remember ever having worked with more fearful students.
In the midst of my confusion, I read the essay on “Nontraditional Honors” by Janice Rye Kinghorn and Whitney Womack Smith, and it offered me reminders about the fears and insecurities students carry with them. It also offered me the opportunity to reconsider the behaviors I was seeing in my class. I grew to see student insecurity less as a problem they were imposing on me and more as a consequence of their prior bad experiences, which I had an obligation to help them overcome.

The essay also clarified the surprising limitations of assumptions we have been working under since the Indiana University Southeast Honors Program was founded in 2006. The majority of our students are nontraditional, whether in age, life experience, financial independence, or familial responsibilities, but our honors program is anchored in courses with defined meeting times, required face-to-face meetings with the director, and on-campus co-curricular activities. We have proceeded under the premise that offering “a liberal arts education on a university campus” cannot occur without intensive interactions in “real time.”

Within the IUS Honors Program, one of the primary reasons for student attrition is scheduling difficulties: conflicts both with required courses in the major and with the demands of student life. In an attempt to make more courses available to our students, we partnered with the IUS Master of Liberal Studies (MLS) Program, cross-listing MLS and HP offerings and thus including more evening and one-meeting-per-week course options for our students. Generally, fewer than four of our sixty-plus students have taken these MLS offerings each semester, and students not making progress through the honors requirements still cite scheduling difficulties as the reason.

Before reading Kinghorn and Smith’s essay, I had been tempted to give up on the scheduling problem, convinced that we in the honors program had done our best for our students, but, after reminding myself that about seventy percent of our students are nontraditional, I consulted my supervisors and secured their blessing to offer an upper-level honors seminar entirely online. I am now immersed in our campus’s online academy as well as in such texts as Salman Khan’s One-World Schoolhouse: Education Reimagined, Palloff and Pratt’s The Excellent Online Instructor: Strategies for Professional Development, and Boettcher and Conrad’s The Online Teaching Survival Guide: Simple and Practical Pedagogical Tips. If I am able to offer my students an excellent and successful honors experience in this course, I hope to offer my faculty colleagues guidance if they wish to pursue this possibility. With some trepidation, I also hope to offer one section of our CIE classes each semester as an entirely online offering.
What makes the possibility of offering CIE courses online daunting is the question of how we can go about developing academic competencies and a sense of community without regular, in-person interactions. I am not sure how it will work to give and respond to speeches without an audience or how we can make sure that students read and respond to each other’s ideas with kindness, tact, and rigor if they do not know each other. However, the chance to meet students’ scheduling and educational needs simultaneously seems worth trying if the pilot project goes well in the fall.

In the meantime, I have reconsidered the Honors 104 syllabus for this semester, easing myself and my students into classroom conversation via blogs and forums. I respond publically to forums like a classmate but embed private observations about ways individual authors can revise, streamline, or expand their ideas so that students receive constructive suggestions from me without the potential embarrassment of public commentary. Students have been flexible about this hybrid model of intellectual interaction, making me hopeful about the possibilities of an entirely online class.

Thus it is that the draft of a *JNCHC* article I read in the fall has cast new light on my previous summer reading and has propelled the IUS Honors Program into a new and unsettling pedagogy for the fall and beyond. My new goal is to help meet the needs of nontraditional students with nontraditional courses, and, while I am at it, we might start rethinking our campus-bound co-curricular offerings.

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Mothers in Honors

MIMI KILLINGER, RACHEL BINDER-HATHAWAY, PAIGE MITCHELL, AND EMILY PATRICK
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

The University of Maine’s 2012 valedictorian, honors student Rachel Binder-Hathaway, gave her graduation speech via Skype last May as she had already begun a yearlong Fulbright Scholarship in Bangladesh. Rachel was putting to use her business and economics degrees, traveling to numerous villages in an effort to determine various best practices in microfinance while also isolating ineffective program elements. She intended to help Bangladeshi women grow their own successful small businesses and thus work their way out of relentless and abject poverty. Rachel is committed to assisting these women, who would otherwise have few opportunities outside the home, to create sustainable work for themselves and, in so doing, finally achieve their full potential.

The goal of fully achieving one’s potential is likewise central to our UMaine honors college mission, and Rachel represents an ideal, wholly evolved honors student who not only has excelled academically but has developed a keen sense of herself as a global citizen and an agent for change. Rachel was also somewhat on the margins in honors, though, as the single mother of a terrific young teenager, Jacob, who has travelled far and wide with her—to Bangladesh, India, and the UMaine Honors Center. Motherhood can make a student exceptionally motivated but can also situate her as non-traditional in honors. We will consider the implications of this nontraditional status for three mothers and suggest how honors colleges might better integrate dedicated student mothers into their programs.

Rachel originally left college to launch a career as a professional jazz singer in New York. When she became a mother, her priorities changed, and she returned to school to triple major in finance, accounting and financial economics, graduating with high honors.

Rachel:

I have always thrilled to the idea of realizing my full potential. As such, I had many academic and personal goals in mind as I worked toward fulfilling my long-anticipated collegiate dreams.
Among my objectives was the pursuit of greater knowledge simply to fulfill my love of learning, and the honors curriculum was a huge part of this quest. Honors provided a fuller, richer experience that heightened my overall academic experience, moving me beyond the number-crunching and economics-based learning I gained in the colleges of business and economics. I viewed the honors curriculum as a chance to enhance my current aptitudes and to discover new ones.

However, there is much more to my story than this. Beyond my love of learning there stood a unique reason for seeking an education. He is a thirteen-year-old boy with curly brown hair and a charming disposition. My long- and short-term parental goals center on providing the best life possible for my son, Jacob. My responsibility and even more my joy is to see that he has a stable home life, a strong education, a safe community environment, and a happy childhood. I realized that if I was to see these goals to fruition, I needed to excel within the university environment, thus providing (I surmised) the upward trajectory we needed to create a bright and secure future.

I have always been a motivated individual, but motherhood shifted my focus away from personal wants and needs. My priorities now revolved around the needs of my son, and, because I was a single parent, this need to provide was heightened dramatically. My path has not always been easy, yet I am glad to have walked a few miles in these shoes, thus opening my eyes to the plight of mothers everywhere, especially those who struggle to provide for their families with little hope of realizing their aspirations for a better life. I carry them with me.

With this maternal (or paternal) instinct comes a sense of focus and determination. I believe this unique perspective lends itself to academic success. As mothers, we do not just like the idea of succeeding but need to succeed. We are moved to action not for ourselves but for the children relying on us. I believe that universities and especially honors programs should actively seek people with this level of determination and help cultivate their gifts. Our nontraditional perspective can enrich the overall honors experience, not just for us as mothers within the program but for younger students and preceptors who likewise benefit from expanded classroom diversification, a greater variety of experiences, and new points of view.

Paige Mitchell (class of 2009), another mother in honors, began her career at UMaine with a 4.0 in her first semester but then floundered and
withdrew her second semester. She returned to school when she became pregnant, finding support and acceptance from our late honors dean, Charlie Slavin. “I f****d up,” Paige told Charlie. “Yes, you did f*** up. Do you plan to f*** up again?” he asked, and then he invited her back into the college. Paige graduated from honors with a double concentration in her English major, writing an honors thesis that integrated her daughter Lilly’s artwork. She graduated from the honors college with highest honors and has since earned her master’s in English and currently teaches English courses at UMaine, works as the ESL specialist in the writing center, and studies French. Paige plans to pursue an MA in French and a subsequent PhD in English. She describes her intense commitment to academic work upon returning to school as a mother.

Paige:

When I returned to the university, I realized my chances of success were slim: I was a single, pregnant woman, I had already failed and withdrawn from the university, and I had a late-night job and a pathetic apartment. Yet I was determined not only to survive but to do well.

After Lilly was born, I struggled to find childcare so I could attend classes and lectures. I struggled with balancing my time between attending classes, taking care of Lilly, and working. I learned quickly that babies are time-consuming and expensive, so I worked three jobs to support my daughter. I decided that, since my time was strained, I would devote my full energy to everything. And that is what I did.

I got all As, I never missed a class, and I doted on Lilly. I learned that, with a child, your reasons for succeeding are stronger because the focus is not just on yourself; the consequences of failure are so much greater. Yet what is of peculiar interest is that I decided to expend my energy in all directions out of spite. I knew the odds were against me as a single mother and as a nontraditional student surrounded by a population who saw me as an outcast, as someone who did not belong in the same classroom as them.

Emily Patrick (class of 2013) is a fourth-year major in wildlife ecology with a minor in anthropology who learned that she was pregnant after her second year of school. Though not a single mother like Rachel and Paige, she functions as one much of the time because her daughter Jaclyn’s father often travels for work. Emily, like Rachel and Paige, describes the profound difference motherhood has made in her academic pursuits.
MOTHERS IN HONORS

Emily:

Not to sound arrogant, but school has always been easy for me. My challenge has always been to find meaning in life, not to get good grades. As a result, I often found myself skipping class and only learning what I needed to pass the exams during my first two years of school.

After finding out I was pregnant and especially after giving birth, all of that changed. Jaclyn gave my life meaning, and, as a result, I have learned to take school much more seriously and have had perfect attendance for the first time in my life.

The same holds true for my honors courses. HON 180, however, posed a special challenge because I had to attend local cultural events without my daughter—in one case, a “sound poetry” reading—and it was the first time I had left my daughter outside of class time since she had been born. It helped me prepare for her being in daycare. Leaving her is always difficult, but it does get easier as time goes by.

Each of these women demonstrates the sort of scholarly drive one hopes to find in an honors student, which might lead one to believe that honors would be a natural home for them. However, motherhood is statistically rare among our honors students, a population constituted by a disproportionately high number of traditional-age, non-parent students relative to the broader university. Of our current 791 UMaine honors students, 99% fall within the seventeen- to twenty-two-year-old age range. Of these students, 56% are women, with only a miniscule (unmeasured) fraction being mothers.

Though Rachel, Paige, and Emily have been stellar students, clearly of the caliber and character one would find commensurate with honors, each described feeling in various ways marginalized or unaccepted.

Rachel:

Although honors was an important part of my collegiate experience, I often walked out of class feeling a vague sense of disconnect, as if an unbridged distance existed between me and the other honors students.

Connections with preceptors [instructors] formed naturally, perhaps reflecting the fact that we shared a shift in perspective that tends to flower over time. Other students did not lack perspective and wisdom; in fact, I learned a great deal from them during our classroom
discussions. I enjoyed getting to know my classmates as individuals, too, but an invisible divide definitely did exist. At times, I felt that students were uninterested in my thoughts and contributions. During these times, I was aware of reactions that I can only liken to behaviors I displayed as a teen when required to interact with teachers or my parents. (Sorry, Mom!) Of course, many special moments counterbalanced this sense of isolation, but generally there was a divide.

Paige also described at times feeling like an outsider even though she had intentionally pursued the honors college as a place to find an academically rigorous community.

Paige:

At first I was a tangible outcast. I joined the honors college in my third trimester. I was huge. Some students in my preceptorial would chat with me and ask to feel the baby. Others would stare and not include me in conversations among non-pregnant students.

This exclusion is understandable since I am sure I was a shock to traditional-age students, who do, and rightfully should, have a different agenda. They are here to learn, yes, but also to socialize, to experience life outside their parents’ home, and to explore larger horizons. Clearly I had already participated in some noticeable social experiences.

Because of the divide, I avoided including my life experiences as a single mother in class discussions; I felt they were both tacitly and explicitly undesired. Yet traditional students routinely connect course texts to personal anecdotes, to boyfriends and girlfriends, or to their high school experiences. I noticed that they would share these anecdotes with a sense of natural entitlement as if they were confident that their personal histories had academic merit, that they connected profoundly with Inanna, Aristotle, and W. E. B. Du Bois.

Many of these students were clearly bright but also cocky. They saw the merit in their associations but not in mine. I found this mind-set intimidating, and I learned to bite my tongue and to silence contributions that my age and experience could have offered.

Although rare, I have seen this attitude modeled by professors. During one preceptorial, my preceptor was reviewing all of our essays prior to handing them back. When he got to mine, he stopped, looked up, pointed at me, and asked, “How old are you?” In a class
of five other students, I was embarrassed and anxious. I could only stammer that I was twenty-five, and as I admitted my age in front of a room full of traditional students, I heard giggles and saw sneers. My professor did not direct this question to anyone else, and he let the uncomfortable silence remain.

Emily remarked on the distance she felt from other students after having had Jaclyn. In particular, she expressed frustration with traditional-age students’ profligate use of time.

Emily:

I most definitely feel isolated from my peers. Their issues now seem insignificant to me, and the lack of sleep that comes with being a mother makes it even harder for me to be sympathetic at times. Group projects pose a problem because many students my age want to do things at the last minute, at night, or on weekends, and daycare is closed during these times! My life requires careful planning now, and it is hard for other students to understand and/or respect that. Having a child has made it hard to relate to other students my age.

Each of these honors mothers describes having felt more connected to older students, faculty, and staff. All of the women remarked upon the openness and support of our late dean, Charlie Slavin. Paige described another mother whose thesis Charlie advised. When that mother brought her son to their meetings, Charlie would afterwards play soccer with him in the honors hallway. Paige commended several faculty members for their understanding, seeing them as likeminded people willing to go out of their way. Emily added, “The faculty and staff at the University of Maine have been amazing!”

They each, furthermore, had suggestions for how to improve and expand experiences for mothers in honors.

Rachel:

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Charlie Slavin, Dean of the Honors College. When I enrolled at UMaine, I wrote to him requesting entry into the college. Had I not taken the initiative, or had Charlie said no, I would have missed out on one of the most important elements of my undergraduate career.

I feel that my means of entry into the honors college supports the value of including mothers as nontraditional honors students. It also indicates that honors colleges and admissions teams often overlook important student segments during the admissions process. By
widening the selection pool and considering those students who are not fresh out of high school, we create a more diversified student body, which has a positive impact on honors programs.

Honors preceptors can be leaders in this expansion movement by sparking conversations about ways to attract and retain nontraditional groups. Promoting an honors culture of sensitivity and inclusion is also important to those nontraditional students who have already gained entrance into the program. Many mothers experience barriers to entry and to program continuation. We face parental responsibilities and unique resource restrictions that can adversely affect our ability to participate fully. If systematic accommodations are made for mothers, I expect retention rates for these students would rise dramatically.

Preceptors also have an important role to play as they set the tone within the classroom. The behaviors they model and sensitivities they display can help create an environment in which all students feel welcomed and comfortable. Insensitivity toward mothers does exist among traditional honors students, and it can create a sense of disconnect for nontraditional students in the group. This lack of group cohesion is more easily overcome when students see preceptors modeling increased sensitivity and when preceptors encourage students to act in kind.

Paige corroborates Rachel’s claims about the need for more creative and inclusive admissions processes.

Paige:

It’s time for the honors college to reconsider their admissions process. Doing so will benefit traditional students and reach out to a population that typically excels in academia but remains marginalized. Traditional students are recruited to the honors college right out of high school and so, understandably, are selected based on their transcripts. Once a transcript satisfies the appropriate standards, high school students receive an official letter and invitation to join the honors college.

By looking only at high school transcripts, however, the honors college ostracizes nontraditional students and renders them invisible. This method also works to instill a sense of entitlement in traditional students and reinforces an uncomfortable division between them.
and nontraditional students, who feel that their presence is neither encouraged nor desired.

A former professor who was a graduate of the UMaine honors program recommended the honors college to me. Were it not for this professor, I might have found out about the program too late or not at all. New criteria and revised methods for recruiting students need to be implemented. A transcript cannot measure the academic merit of nontraditional students, and clearly a transcript seems a pathetic measure when it comes to a mother’s accomplishments.

Emily Patrick argues further that the honors college should actively recruit mothers and then have structures in place to support their work.

Emily:

Single mothers who have still succeeded academically are much more accomplished (at least in my opinion) than cohorts who have the same grades but haven’t faced the same challenges. It takes “true grit” and an impressive work ethic to be a mother, let alone a single mother.

Not only could single mothers be a huge asset to the honors college, but mothers need to know that they can succeed, that others see them as valuable, and that they have the right to better themselves. Mothers are often already at a disadvantage because they put themselves last. I often felt guilty going to class after Jaclyn was born because I felt selfish and frivolous. Encouragement is thus especially important to mothers seeking an excellent education in honors.

My advice is to hold us to the same academic standards but to make scheduling and logistics more flexible. Sometimes we need to take our own vehicles to events and field trips. Sometimes we need to keep our phones on in class in case of an emergency. Group projects can also pose problems because our peers would rather work on projects at midnight the day before they are due, and we just cannot be that flexible. Teachers should expect us to put in the effort but understand that what works for other students just does not work for us any longer. Perhaps teachers could, for instance, email readings to us ahead of time.

Most importantly, if we reach out, talk to us! Every mother faces different challenges, and it is important that a professor and student come up with appropriate solutions that are satisfactory to all parties before there is a problem.
If we listen and talk to these honors mothers, they offer sage advice. They argue convincingly that they are motivated, focused students who bring rich diversity to our programs. They further report disturbing marginalization and isolation that could be ameliorated with support and increased sensitivity on the part of administrators, faculty, and students alike. They propose expansion of admissions criteria that might allow for increased recruitment of these excellent students as well as structural changes to support their retention. As these mothers in many ways represent the ideal honors student, we need to integrate them fully into our honors programs and to help sustain their work. Not only will the women and their children clearly benefit, but honors programs and colleges will move toward achieving our full potential through the wholehearted inclusion of these remarkable women.

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I am a nontraditional honors student. I do not refer to my age (I am 20), or that I did not start college right after high school (I did), or that I am independent of my family (I am not). I am the typical “traditional student” in every sense except one: I am undocumented. (KA)

In the Kellogg Honors College at Cal Poly Pomona, I (SB) have encountered several high-achieving students who, after coming to trust me, have revealed themselves to me as undocumented. These students came to the United States as children through non-legal channels, generally brought by their families, who were searching for opportunities or for escape from dangerous, oppressive situations in their home countries. These students have recently become known as “Dreamers,” after the Dream Acts being debated in the highest levels of government in the United States. Often first-generation college students, they are usually economically disadvantaged.

My family immigrated to the United States from Mexico in 1990 with dreams and hopes of a better life, like many other families in this country’s history. My father, mother and their two-year old daughter (my older sister) began to build a life here. My mother became pregnant with me, and soon things began to go wrong. My parents lost their jobs and the place where they were living. It was a difficult situation for a pregnant woman and a small child, roaming the streets during the day looking for food, and sleeping on park benches at night. My mother decided to go back to Mexico, where I was born, and my father stayed in California. My first nine years were spent without my father. After almost a decade, my mother decided that it was time for the family to be reunited, and we returned to join my father. I started my life in the United States.

I learned a new language and in a short time, through dedication and effort, became fluent in English. I went from being at the bottom of my class, the student that did not know one word of English, to the top of my class. When I graduated high school, I was Salutatorian with a 4.5 GPA. I decided on Cal Poly Pomona because I could not afford to pay for a private university or a University of California
since I was ineligible to receive any kind of financial aid due to my undocumented status. I was also unable to work legally, and I feared deportation not only for myself, but for my family as well.

Being undocumented, I can’t get a driver’s license. I use public transportation to get to school and back, a daily two-hour commute. Most of my required classes are in the afternoon, and there have been many quarters where I often waited for the bus at 10 or 11 pm. I was scared, but my dreams of an education and the struggles of my family kept me determined.

Honors programs and directors can greatly assist these motivated, talented students. The first important step is simply to recognize their background and the unique challenges they face because they do not have a legal identity. Simple advantages and opportunities that many traditional students take for granted—receiving financial aid, being able to travel to a conference, doing study abroad, and having employment—are unavailable to these students because they require a social security number or driver’s license. Perhaps even more seriously, many undocumented students enter higher education with academic and emotional challenges that need to be understood and addressed by student affairs professionals (Perez, Cortez, et al.).

A 1982 Supreme Court decision granted access to K–12 education for undocumented students, but only 10% of males and 16% of females enroll in college (Fortuny et al. 50). Among these small percentages are valedictorians, honors students, and academic and athletic award winners. Although many undocumented high school students are demonstrated student leaders with records of outstanding academic achievement, their higher education prospects in the United States are limited due to their legal status. Their opportunities stand in contrast to the prospects of traditional high-achieving students who are often able to choose among many options for education.

A further difference between traditional and undocumented students appears after undocumented students graduate from college when they often cannot be employed because of their status. At Cal Poly Pomona, for instance, an Hispanic-serving institution known for its engineering college, an honors, magna cum laude, aerospace engineering graduate was not able to take a job at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory for fear of deportation. Had he been a traditional student, this door would have been wide open.

I come from a low-income community where the motivation to achieve a higher education is low and the means to do it are practically nonexistent. I want to do all I can to change that. I volunteer at a youth center as a tutor, where I plant the seeds of curiosity and
desire to learn in children. I want to be an inspiration for other non-
traditional students to pursue a higher education and even become
honors students. I plan to graduate from Cal Poly Pomona and the
Kellogg Honors College with a degree in business administration
and go on to law school to become an attorney.

Honors programs and colleges value civic engagement along with acad-
emic excellence. An examination of civic engagement among undocument-
ed Mexican students revealed that 90% of respondents had been civically
engaged (Perez, Espinoza et al.), this despite frequent feelings of rejection,
part-time employment, and significant household responsibilities. Traditional
honors students do have personal challenges but generally not ones that
include the level of vulnerability and uncertainty faced by undocumented
honors students.

The following are some ways you can make the hard lives of undocu-
mented students a little easier and broaden their opportunities both in and
after their participation in your honors program:

1. Communicate your awareness of undocumented students (“Dreamers”) in
various official and unofficial but low-key ways. You can, for instance,
post “Dreamers Ally” placards and include supportive language on your
course syllabi and your organizational and personal websites.

2. Educate yourself to a reasonable degree on applicable state and federal
laws and programs. For example, in California it helps to know about
Assembly Bill 540 or the more recent California Dream Act, which
includes AB 130 and 131.

3. Facilitate travel for undocumented students when they cannot drive or fly
because they lack an ID. If you have students who refuse to attend a con-
ference, gently probe why; they may be undocumented.

4. Seek out scholarships and aid that do not require citizenship or a Social
Security number.

5. Do not lower academic expectations. Instead, look for ways to be more
flexible in allowing students to fulfill the regular expectations.

6. Support students in maintaining their high levels of intrinsic motivation.
Undocumented students do not have the extrinsic motivation provided by
the anticipation of a good job, which they may not be able to get after gradu-
ation because of their status. Encourage them in their love of learning.

7. When they graduate, strive to stay in touch as with other alumni. Provide
ongoing networking opportunities and be ready to provide strong recom-
mandation documents.
Undocumented in Honors

Decide upfront how you will respond when people question undocumented students’ right to education and other public or private benefits. Understand the possibility that you have undocumented students at your school even though you may not know it. Remember that practically every one of these students was brought here as a child, and the U.S. may be the only country they know.

Undocumented students in honors might look traditional in almost every way, but they are not. They have challenges unlike those of any other group in honors, and to serve them and their dreams well, honors programs and colleges must get to know them better.

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John Boswell: Posting Historical Landmarks at the Leading Edge of the Culture Wars

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most enduring and controversial figures in the field of history is John E. Boswell. His work on homosexuality and the history of the Christian Church was published at a key time during the Stonewall Riots in the late 1960s and the removal of homosexuality from the list of diagnostic mental disorders in the mid 1970s. This social upheaval created a dynamic that not only influenced Boswell personally but contributed to the vehement reaction to his book Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century. Written in 1980, this book has profoundly influenced theological debates in numerous Christian denominations, particularly in the United States.

Boswell earned his PhD at Harvard in 1975 and was immediately hired in a tenure-track position at Yale University (curriculum vitae, Boswell Papers). His first book was based on his doctoral dissertation, The Royal Treasure: Muslim Communities Under the Crown of Aragon in the Fourteenth Century, which displayed his gifts as a medieval philologist working in Catalan, Aragonese, Castilian, French, and Latin with equal facility. The book investigated mudejeres (later called moriscos), Muslims living under Christian protection prior to 1492 who did not convert to Christianity. The book received favorable reviews, and Boswell developed a reputation as an Iberian scholar with a talent for languages and an interest in the religions of medieval Western Europe. He also seemed to have special insight into the challenges of being the outsider within a dominant Christian culture, a talent that would be important to his second monograph, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century (hereafter CSTH), published in 1980.

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Boswell’s private papers illustrate the controversy surrounding the publication of CSTH, the heart of which centered on his contention that Christianity was not always hostile to homosexuality. This contention was poorly received by secular gay activists on the left, who were negative about the Church, as well as by religious conservatives on the right, who were negative about homosexuality. Boswell’s book created a moment in time when politically odd bedfellows worked together to defend outdated but cherished ideas about how Christianity historically treated homosexuals.

THE ARGUMENT OF CHRISTIANITY, SOCIAL TOLERANCE, AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Boswell writes in the introduction to his book that his intent is to “rebut the common idea that religious belief—Christian or other—has been the cause of intolerance in regard to gay people” (CSTH 6; this and all other citations of CSTH refer to the University of Chicago edition of 1980 unless otherwise noted). Boswell divides his book into four sections and twelve chapters. The first two chapters handle the introduction and definitions. The exposition starts in the third chapter on Rome, which is the foundational chapter, and proceeds chronologically through the ninth on the High Middle Ages. Boswell uses the final three chapters to analyze and conclude his argument.

Boswell argues in Chapter Ten that proscriptions against homosexuals came about as a result of social change, but, unlike what had been claimed previous to the publication of CSTH, he argues that the legal prohibitions had been the result of a general interdiction in Europe against all groups that did not conform. What is remarkable about this argument is not that it is new but that it reiterates an argument that medieval historians generally agree on: that restrictions on groups that did not conform were on the rise in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Prior to CSTH, few had acknowledged that homosexuals were caught up in this shift in sentiment in Western Europe. Boswell mentions two key events that had a profound influence on the shift: the Third Council of the Lateran in 1179 and the Fourth Council of the Lateran in 1215. Both of these proceedings were adopted almost seamlessly into secular law and were particularly harmful to gays, Muslims, and Jews (CSTH 272–75).

In Chapter Eleven, Boswell presents an analysis of the argument put forward by scholars in the High Middle Ages that marshaled denunciations of homosexuality, associating it with animal behavior and featuring the central claim that homosexuality “violated nature” (CSTH 303–10). This natural law argument has been prevalent in Christian teaching against homosexuality since St. Thomas Aquinas successfully molded elements of Greek philosophy, late Roman law, post-classical bestiaries, and medieval medical judgments into a cohesive but contrived argument (Henry 440). Generally, the
natural law argument has taken elements of animal behavior and equated it to human behavior, making the partial assertion that, since animals do not engage in same-sex couplings, it is unnatural and wrong that humans do. The problem with this argument is that it falls apart under scientific observation, which reveals myriad examples of same-sex coupling in the animal kingdom. Joan Roughgarden, a distinguished evolutionary biologist, has published articles arguing that same-sex pairing behavior is observable in all areas of the animal kingdom. The culmination of her primary work, which began in the early 1990s, is *Evolution's Rainbow*. Her monograph provides insight into how genes and hormones control diversity in sexual selectivity and constructs a scientific refutation of natural law arguments cherished by Darwin and embraced by the Church since Aquinas. Admittedly, Aquinas did not possess the sophisticated tools that Roughgarden has used in the compilation of her data, but the modern Roman Church does. Roughgarden’s study supports Boswell’s argument from a scientific viewpoint and has done much to dispel the authority of the natural law argument that the Church has cherished.

But Thomistic arguments have not been the only source of medieval antipathy toward homosexuality. Alain de Lille’s twelfth-century *Complaint of Nature*, for example, features the goddess *Natura* in the role of complainer-in-chief. *Natura* bemoans unmanly behaviors in society as an example of unnatural incontinence: “For the human race, derogate from its high birth, commits monstrous acts in its union of genders, and perverts the rules of love by a practice of extreme and abnormal irregularity” (*Prose IV*). Boswell observes in CSTH, “Alain was very much influenced by the hostility to non-conformity which was sweeping through Europe in his day, and he consciously tried to erect an intellectual structure which could support it” (CSTH 310).

Thematically, Boswell argues that the rise in secular hostility was what ultimately led to church proscriptions, not the other way around as had been argued prior to CSTH. Thus, Boswell argues, Aquinas arrayed the secular elements of natural law as a series of leading questions and prescriptive, authoritative answers in his *Summa Theologiae* (CSTH 318–330). Aquinas’s answers have been used as the basis for natural law arguments against homosexuality all the way into the present, a period of approximately seven hundred years. CSTH, while certainly not the first salvo in the war against the natural law argument, came at a time when the combination of political and social forces provided a dynamic opportunity for Boswell’s arguments to be made.
THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF CHRISTIANITY, SOCIAL TOLERANCE, AND HOMOSEXUALITY

The publication of CSTH came only eleven years after the Stonewall Riots in New York on June 28, 1969, the moment in history that marks the beginning of the modern gay rights movement. The events of Stonewall occurred early in the morning and continued over the following days. It began when drag queens and a group of gay patrons were harassed in a bar and refused to cooperate with police, refused to get into paddy wagons voluntarily, and ultimately forced the outnumbered police officers and detectives to barricade themselves inside the Stonewall Inn. The initial riot ended at about four in the morning with thirteen arrests and four police officers injured. The riots and civil unrest continued over the week, galvanizing a community that prior to Stonewall had been meek and restrained. Homosexuals had finally fought back and embarrassed the New York Police Department.

Social upheaval was not the only sign that changes to the lives of homosexual men and women were on the way. The scientific community had been pursuing answers to the question of whether homosexuality was a pathology. After years of study that started with the groundbreaking work of Alfred Kinsey and Evelyn Hooker, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of diagnostic mental disorders in 1973, with full ratification in 1974, and the American Psychological Association followed suit in 1975.

Kinsey’s groundbreaking studies in 1948 and 1953 are typically credited with the beginning of the study of homosexuality. While it is true Kinsey’s study revealed that many more adults than previously expected had engaged in homosexual behavior or had same-sex fantasies, Kinsey’s study was quite general and was not geared to a specific empirical study of homosexuality; it merely set the groundwork (“Facts about Homosexuality”). The first study that directly refuted homosexuality as indicative of psychopathology was conducted by Evelyn Hooker in 1957. In brief, Hooker recruited two groups of men matched for age, IQ, and education at the time of the study. None of the men in either group was in therapy at the time of the study, and Hooker used a double-blind procedure that asked experts to rate the adjustment of the men without any prior knowledge of their sexual orientation (“Facts”). Projective tests—Rorschach, TAT, and MAPS—were conducted. The Rorschach experts put two thirds of the heterosexual group and two thirds of the homosexual group in the top three categories of adjustment. When asked to identify which tests were obtained from homosexual men, the experts could not distinguish sexual orientation at a level better than random chance (“Facts”). The results for TAT and MAPS also did not differ significantly.
Hooker concluded that homosexuality was not a clinical illness and that homosexuality was not associated with psychopathology. Her results have since been replicated by other researchers using a variety of research methods. Thus, while Kinsey was important, Hooker’s study was the true basis for why psychiatrists and psychologists altered their views.

While the medical community was clarifying and demystifying homosexuality, the Church was resisting this scientific evidence, setting the scene for Boswell to confront the traditional ecclesiastical argument. In 1976, Pope Paul VI, via the Society of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, announced the Vatican’s response to the statements of the “psychological order” by both the APA and the Church (Persona Humana Sect. VIII). In brief, Paul conceded that a change in pastoral care was needed to care for gay members of the Catholic community, but homosexuality was still “intrinsically disordered and in no case can be approved of” (Persona VIII). The Church was invested in the continuation of the over seven-hundred-year-old Thomistic argument surrounding natural law that would later figure prominently in Boswell’s book.

Another feature of the cultural landscape that lay behind Boswell’s book was the anti-gay rhetoric that became prominent in the modern culture wars. Anita Bryant became the public face of the anti-gay movement in 1977 with her “Save Our Children” campaign in Miami, where she openly advocated the repeal of Miami’s ordinance banning anti-gay discrimination; her attempt was successful by a margin of 69% to 31%. Bryant’s campaign ultimately resulted in a law passed by the Florida legislature that absolutely banned gays from adopting children.

At the same time on the other side of the country, Harvey Milk was elected as a San Francisco city-county supervisor, only the third openly gay U.S. politician to serve in any capacity. Milk’s eventual assassination along with that of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone in 1978 by former supervisor Dan White gained nationwide attention as did White’s acquittal on the charge of first-degree murder—after the so-called “Twinkies defense” that he had eaten too much sugar—and his conviction on the lesser charge of voluntary manslaughter (Shilts).

Bryant and White epitomize two political sides at war over the issue of fundamental rights. One side was religious and socially conservative, and the other side was secular and socially liberal. CSTH emerged to gain the attention of the general audience and became an immediate topic of public debate that loosed a firestorm of criticism from deeply opposed political sides that agreed on virtually nothing except that John Boswell was wrong.
THE RECEPTION OF CHRISTIANITY, SOCIAL TOLERANCE, AND HOMOSEXUALITY

The University of Chicago Press could scarcely have predicted the demand for CSTH. In its first year of publication, CSTH was reprinted six times, and the demand for the book was greater than the publisher could supply (undated letter from the UCP editor to Boswell, Boswell Papers). The book is still not out of print. CSTH was reviewed in popular magazines such as Newsweek and Time; Boswell enjoyed a measure of celebrity; and requests for speaking engagements and public appearances far exceeded his ability to fulfill them all. I reviewed a large file of such requests in his papers and discovered no less than a hundred politely worded letters in which Boswell had to refuse requests to appear because his schedule was booked as far out as two years in advance (Boswell Papers). Yet Boswell’s flirtation with celebrity did not result in universal acceptance of CSTH.

CSTH had and still has a large number of public detractors. In a review published in the New York Times Literary Supplement, Peter Linehan, a distinguished Fellow of St. John’s College at Cambridge University whose research specialty is the medieval Church, takes Boswell to task, calling his account of St. Anselm of Canterbury “as much tendentious as misinformed . . .” (73). Throughout his strongly critical review, Linehan cites examples from CSTH and asserts academic bias, arguing that Boswell’s book is guilty of “claiming too much, by insistently, and at times recklessly, crowding out other considerations in its concern with the centrality of its theme” (73). Linehan frequently asks rhetorical questions within the body of the review to question Boswell’s motivations and cast Boswell in a negative light. For example, in his response to Boswell’s interpretation of St. Anselm, Linehan asks rhetorically, “Even if such language be allowed to be understood literally, is it safe to judge the archbishop’s actions solely in the light of private correspondence of twenty to forty years before? (Would a historian, or a journalist, judge those of a statesman solely in the light of his war-time, public school crushes?).” These questions combine with frequent assertions that Boswell is “too hasty.”

However, Linehan does manage to ask some interesting questions and register some legitimate concerns. He points out, for example, that St. Peter Damian’s Liber Gomorrhianus (1051 CE) expressed official disapproval of clerical homosexuality; indeed, Damian is frequently cited as the originator of the argument against same-sex physical relations between priests. Though Boswell contends that Pope Alexander II (1061–73) suppressed the Liber (CSTH 216), it seems clear that the pendulum was beginning to swing toward proscriptions and thus that Linehan’s critique of Boswell has some substance.
Another of Boswell’s vocal critics was the late Louis F. Crompton. Crompton was generally regarded as one of the early fathers of what is now called Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies. Crompton took issue with Boswell’s contention that the Church did not always proscribe gay persons. Crompton’s review dedicates the first column and a half to citing examples of executions of gay persons ranging from Emperor Justinian’s *Institutions* in 538 CE to the first known execution for homosexuality in Western Europe in 1277 (338). A potential counter-argument to Crompton, however, can be found in Eva Cantarella’s *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, which suggests room for doubt that Justinian’s writings had any significant effect outside of religious law: no proof has been found of executions for homosexuality during Justinian’s reign although Justinian was no doubt hostile to same-sex physical intimacy (181–83).

After a lengthy introduction wherein Crompton asserts that the Church was always anti-gay, he mounts his major argument against Boswell. Crompton draws a line from Leviticus 18:22 (“Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination”) to Corinthians I 6:9 (“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor catamites, nor sodomites . . .”) and from there to Romans I, which he calls “. . . the real prop of legal and moral condemnation” (339). The “prop” Crompton refers to is Romans 1:26–27, “For this cause God gave them up into vile affections . . . also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another.” In the review, Crompton states halfway through the third column, “. . . despite all of the scholarly exegesis, his [Boswell’s] arguments left the reader unconvinced” (339).

Crompton’s personal resentment of Boswell is discussed in a personal letter from Mel Goldstein of the University of Hartford to Boswell himself: “You finger my apprehension precisely when you refer to Crompton’s animus toward you, which may be reflected in his response to my article. . . . Though I find myself in the role of peacemaker and hope Crompton will mellow out on some issues I wouldn’t bet on it” (Boswell Papers). Crompton’s language in the review is clearly judgmental and seems to reflect his resentment in statements such as this one: “Concerned to get Christianity off the hook, Boswell is perplexed to explain the increasing intolerance of homosexuality after the fall of Rome” (340).

In an at least equally personal critique, Richard Hays, a New Testament scholar of the Duke Divinity School, wrote a response to CSTH wherein he claims that Boswell’s interpretation of Romans I: 26–27 “has no support in the text and is a textbook case of reading into the text what one wants to find there” (214). Hays deploys his antipathy in language such as “I am sure . . .
that Boswell’s exegesis of Romans I: 26–27 is in error; I am strongly suspi-
cious that his historical construction may be equally in error . . .” (215). Ar-
guments about scriptural exegesis and scholarly construction aside, Hays and
others allowed their personal feelings to influence their interpretation of
the texts, in my opinion weakening the scholarly credibility of their reviews.

The final example of a critical review is a commentary written in 1994
by Father Richard J. Neuhaus on the website First Things, a site for religious
traditionalists and conservative religious scholars of all denominations.
Father Neuhaus takes Boswell and his work sharply to task. Neuhaus writes
about “revisionists of the Boswell school” and alleges that Boswell’s work
was used uncritically by religious denominations to justify a more tolerant
position on homosexuality, a position opposite to the one taken by the Gay
Academic Union. Neuhaus cited the 1993 draft position of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America as an example of uncritical acceptance of
Boswell’s book. Neuhaus concludes in his March 2009 column titles “In the
Case of John Boswell” for First Things that “despite his assiduous efforts,
what Boswell’s historical scavenger hunt does not produce is any evidence
whatever that authoritative Christian teaching ever departed from the recog-
nition that homosexual acts are morally wrong,” as if his pronouncement is
the end of the matter. Neuhaus never cites any of his own evidence but recy-
cles the arguments of Richard Hays and David Wright, both conservative reli-
gious scholars of the traditional mold.

Like other negative papers and reviews of Boswell’s work, the emotion-
al undertone of Neuhaus’s polemical reviews tends to be truculent and dis-
missive, as in this passage from “In the Case of John Boswell”:

Christian history is a multifarious affair, and it does not take much
sniffing around to discover frequent instances of what is best
described as hanky-panky. The discovery process is facilitated if one
goes through history with what is aptly described as narrow-eyed
prurience, interpreting every expression of intense affection between
men as proof that they were ‘gay.’ A favored slogan of the contem-
porary gay movement is ‘We Are Everywhere!’ Boswell rummages
through Christian history and triumphantly comes up with the con-
clusion, ‘They were everywhere.’

Neuhaus did have valid points to make, but he became too emotionally
involved to remain objective; this is apparent in his unsupported claim that
Boswell’s book was accepted uncritically.

Over the years, hostile criticism of Boswell has turned into a cottage
industry, and Neuhaus’s twenty-nine-year history represents the most
extreme example. With all of the accusations from both conservative
religious scholars and secular progressives that Boswell was guilty of hasty, tendentious, or faulty scholarship, I was not surprised to encounter similar sentiments in an interview I conducted with John Lauritsen in March 2011. Lauritsen accused Boswell of knowing and deliberate academic dishonesty. Lauritsen, Boswell’s self-described harshest critic, along with R. Wayne Dynes and the late Warren Johansson, formed the core of the Gay Academic Union (GAU) and represented the political left of the gay community. Of these three men, only R. Wayne Dynes has a PhD; Mr. Lauritsen earned an AB from Harvard, and Mr. Johansson was a non-degreed linguist. None of the three men was a credentialed historian.

In the interview Lauritsen stated that he and his fellows had been academically blacklisted for their views, ascribing the blame to Boswell and other academic apologists for the Church. At several points in the conversation, Lauritsen recollected being disallowed from presenting his views at conferences. Without the weight of evidence otherwise, it seems more likely that Mr. Lauritsen was not invited to speak at certain venues because he had only received a baccalaureate degree and was not sufficiently credentialed; any other number of academically valid reasons other than his opinions could have led to his not being invited to speak.

Although Lauritsen was unfailingly polite to me in our interview, he was like Neuhaus in that he effectively undercut potentially legitimate points with his personal bitterness toward Boswell and unsupported assertions of outright academic dishonesty. One of the milder examples of his resentment follows:

It is not surprising that Professor Boswell has been hailed enthusiastically by the gay Christians, to whom he appears as a new Savior who will rescue them not only from the queer hating religionists, but from gay liberation secularists as well, by demonstrating historically that it’s alright to be a gay Christian. Well before publication of the book, Boswell was in demand as a speaker before meetings and conventions of Dignity (gay Roman Catholics) and Integrity (gay Episcopalians). In time Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality may become a fifth gospel to gay Christians, to be inserted behind the Book of the Beloved Disciple. (Culpa Ecclesiae”)

This kind of negative review from both political and religious sides makes it clear that the controversy started early as a result of arguments not against the book but against Boswell himself perhaps motivated by jealousy at the public adulation Boswell received. Boswell’s celebrity rendered him a convenient target for public critics and was a source of discord among some of his colleagues in the professoriate, many of whom were positive about his work.
One example of a balanced and mostly positive approach is a review of CSTH by John C. Moore of Hofstra University in the April 1981 issue of the American Historical Review. Moore recommended CSTH as a “splendid piece of scholarship” (382). One of his main reservations concerns Boswell’s interpretation of the story of Lot in Genesis: Moore is not entirely convinced by Boswell’s argument that the sin of inhospitality is the sole crime being condemned. Moore also questions Boswell’s assertion of the moral neutrality of the phrase “beyond nature” uttered by St. Paul.

Specialists like Moore, who generally favored Boswell, and Hays, who opposed Boswell’s argument, have reasonable but opposing viewpoints about Boswell’s translations. For a clearer understanding of his translations, I read Appendix One in the 1981 Phoenix edition of CSTH (335–353) entitled “Lexicography and St. Paul,” which provides multiple interpretations from differing sources besides his own to demonstrate his diligence in interpretation. Based on this lexicography, I judge that his translations are not all that different from other reliable sources. For example, the Masoretic text Jeremiah 5:8, Septuagint (LCC) contains the sentence “They became horses and mad after females”; the Jerusalem Bible translates the same phrase as as “They were well-fed, lusty stallions”; and the New English Bible translates it “Like a well-fed and lusty stallion” (CSTH 336). I found that, in service of scholarship, Boswell was scrupulously honest in presenting alternative translations, but whether he was correct in his translations is for expert philologists to decide.

The issue of translation aside, Moore asserts that Boswell “argues responsibly, plausibly, and with remarkable erudition” (382); he compliments Boswell for a study that is “admirably dispassionate and objective” and judges CSTH fundamental for future studies of sexual attitudes in the West (382).

In another positive response to Boswell’s work, the late John F. Benton presented a paper at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in December of 1981 assessing the arguments Boswell presented about the late eleventh and the twelfth centuries. In his paper, Benton concurs with Boswell’s argument that indifference toward gay people had begun to dissipate and was being replaced by two opposite approaches. In the first approach, a small but vociferous group of ascetics revived the violent hostility of Chrysostom and claimed that homosexual acts were not only sinful but gravely so, comparable to murder; the second approach began to assert the positive value of homosexual relations (CSTH 210). Benton views these approaches as a valuable corrective to the idea that St. Peter Damian’s Liber Gomorrhianus was a “typical, rather than an eccentric product of the eleventh-century reform movement and that the great twelfth-century codifiers Gratian and Peter
Lombard concerned themselves with homosexuality.” Benton goes on to compliment Boswell, observing that, although Boswell has a point of view and the book has an argument, there is a “striking commitment to following historic truth wherever it leads” by including arguments contrary to his own. In the latter half of his paper, Benton offers an alternative explanation to Boswell’s suggestion of a close association of urban revival and increase in homosexual activity. Benton posits that homosexuality did not increase but became more visible due to the development of written literature after 1050. Benton provides thoughtful discussion and posits reasonable alternatives, not just a positive evaluation of CSTH.

The most balanced and collegial response to Boswell’s work has come from Marcia Colish, an expert on the Stoic intellectual tradition and Peter Lombard whose academic history includes a thirty-eight-year career at Oberlin College as the Frederick B. Artz Professor of History and who is a Fellow and past president of the Medieval Academy of America (hereafter MAA). Having reviewed Boswell’s use of literary and philosophical sources, Colish offered a paper at the 1981 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion as an attempt not to undermine CSTH but to strengthen it. Her paper notes that her remarks “will be suggestions for correction that can be found in publications that appeared too recently for Boswell to use.” Colish addresses Boswell’s idea of urban revival, the rise of autocracy, and the decline of the nuclear family (CSTH 207–10). She initially concedes that Boswell used this causative chain guardedly although she also asserts later that he used it throughout the book as a “canon of explanation.” Colish cites three reasons why Boswell’s assertion is untenable: (1) historians of the family agree that the extended family was normative throughout the period; 2) weak, decentralized, and constitutionally limited rule was more likely to coincide with ruralism than urbanism prior to the modern age; and 3) many of the groups Boswell cited evidence from were not town dwellers. Although Colish disagrees with Boswell on these points, she also compliments him for having “written an important and welcome book, one that brings to light a wealth of information ignored, misconstrued, or even deliberately suppressed by previous authors.”

One of the common features of the positive reviews is that they address the quality of Boswell’s sources and research. There is almost universal acclaim among the positive comments, papers, and reviews regarding Boswell’s ability to follow sources where they lead him rather than presupposing an outcome. His erudition is also a common theme in both the mixed and positive reviews. The major difference between the positive and negative views is the tenor of the comments.
CONTROVERSIES SURROUNDING CHRISTIANITY, SOCIAL TOLERANCE, AND HOMOSEXUALITY

The International Congress of Medieval Studies (IMC) is held annually at Western Michigan University (WMU) in Kalamazoo, Michigan. At the 1989 IMC, Marsha L. Dutton presented a panel presentation titled “Aelred of Rievaulx and John Boswell: A Scholarly Scandal.” Dutton, an Aelred scholar, was then employed at the University of Michigan and is currently Chair of the Department of English at Ohio University. In my investigation into her paper and its aftermath, I refer to a series of letters written by L. J. Andrew Villalon (currently employed at the University of Texas) to Boswell, to Rozanne Elder of the Institute of Cistercian Studies (ICS) at WMU, and to Dutton. I also refer to the Cistercian Institute’s response to Professor Villalon and Boswell’s letter of complaint to the Director of the Medieval Institute, the late Otto Grundler. All of this correspondence is to be found in the Boswell Papers at Yale. I sought a written response from Dutton to either Villalon or Boswell but found none.

Dutton presented her paper as a rebuttal to Boswell’s contention that Aelred might be gay (CSTH 224–25). In my investigation, I discovered personal correspondence where Boswell was angered and wounded over allegations of academic dishonesty. Dutton accused Boswell of plagiarism in his use of material from Douglas Robys’ work on Aelred without citing it. In Rozanne Elder’s response to Villalon, this incident in particular was discussed, where Elder informed Villalon she was discomfited by Dutton’s assertions (Elder to Villalon, 25 May 1989). In fact, Boswell consulted with Robys on his book, and Robys is included in the author’s personal thanks; to my knowledge Robys never accused Boswell of using his work in an unattributed manner. Nevertheless, Dutton continued on after Boswell’s death with a paper written in 1996 for The American Benedictine Review, where she argued, “. . . there is finally no way of knowing the details of Aelred’s life, much less his sexual experience or struggles. . . . The question of Aelred’s sexuality is the wrong question” (432). The title of the article is “The Invented Sexual History of Aelred of Rievaulx, A Review Article.” This article takes on Boswell and also Brian Patrick McGuire, author of Brother and Lover: Aelred of Rievaulx. Dutton makes a persuasive argument that it is difficult to prove Aelred’s sexual orientation and that, without the weight of clear and compelling evidence, any discussion about the possible sexual orientation of Aelred is, at best, educated guesswork.

On May 11, 1989, Villalon wrote a letter to Boswell recounting the IMC panel presentation that Dutton had recently delivered and reported, “I found the overall tone of her talk both insulting and patronizing, not only to you, but
Jeffrey Cisneros

to gay history as well.” The panel was also attended by Ruth Mazo Karras, one of Boswell’s former graduate students, and Dutton terminated her attempt to defend Boswell mid-sentence, providing no opportunity for a complete rebuttal. Boswell (who was at the IMC, but did not attend the panel) wrote a letter to the panel organizer expressing his concern, part of which states, “I am told Marsha Dutton accused me of falsification and fraud. . . . [A] responsible institution would not allow a participant in a session of this sort to attack by name a living scholar without making sure he had the opportunity to respond” (Boswell to Grundler 11 May 1989). Boswell closed his letter as follows: “. . . only two persons spoke on my behalf, and Ms. Dutton interrupted and terminated the rebuttal offered by Professor Karras. I hope this does not mean that you consider Ms. Dutton’s remarks or behavior appropriate.”

I searched for a letter from Boswell to Dutton in Boswell’s papers and found none, but Villalon describes the event in his letter to Dutton: “As you are well aware, the discussion of your paper was cut off rather abruptly (with a totally inadequate quip about continuing it at the happy hour), and never taken up again” (Villalon to Dutton 11 May 1989). Villalon’s letter also expresses his objection to the title of the paper, which he asserts is quite rude. Initially, he had considered the title as some sort of inside reference, but, after attending the session, he has come to a different conclusion. Villalon also defends Boswell against a charge that “permeated” Dutton’s paper: “that in order to ‘prove his thesis’ he purposely slanted or omitted evidence to deceive his audience.” He offers a corrective to Dutton, suggesting that perhaps it might have been better to issue an invitation to Boswell and to provide him with a copy of the paper for a response as well as time to present a rebuttal.

Villalon’s letter to Rozanne Elder of the ICS offers the same corrective and takes the ICS to task for not living up to their responsibility in the process (21 May 1989). In reply, Elder takes full responsibility for the lack of oversight of the paper and, even though she offers a brief scholarly defense of Dutton’s paper, admits that she had been “quite unprepared for the rather different thesis and for the tenor of Professor Dutton’s paper. And I must admit that, as a scholar and as a sponsor, I was discomfited by it” (25 May 1989). In other words, Elder defended the scholarship of the paper but was upset with its tenor.

I am not privy to any correspondence between Elder and Dutton, Elder and Boswell, or Dutton and Boswell; none was to be found in the papers although I searched diligently. However, based on what I have read and what I now know about the incident, I believe that Dutton did indeed act in a rude manner at the Congress; both Villalon and Karras took her to task for it. I can only speculate that, perhaps in the zeal of her responding to Boswell, Marsha
Dutton forgot her academic good manners. Her major error was to accuse Boswell of falsification and fraud both in public and in absentia, and Dutton would continue to take on Boswell after his death by taking an academic swipe at his work in her review of Brian Patrick McGuire.

Another incident was the public attempt by the Gay Academic Union to discredit Boswell. GAU maintained an unshakeable belief that Christianity had always treated homosexuals intolerantly and, moreover, that this intolerance had included a consistent application of punitive measures against homosexuals. When Boswell, a self-identified gay man of faith, produced a study that countered their belief, it was not surprising that they would react defensively and lash out. John Lauritsen was their spokesperson and self-proclaimed critic of Boswell. During my interview with Lauritsen, he asserted that the scholarly reception of CSTH was “highly critical”; however, based on the evidence available, the reaction among scholars was mixed, a fact that can be confirmed by Paul B. Halsall, who maintains a collection of reviews of Boswell’s work. In my interview with Lauritsen, he overstated his case against Boswell on more than one occasion; for example, late in the interview Lauritsen said, “[T]o me it is dishonest to do what Boswell did, to pretend that there was no homophobia in the Christian religion.” This statement is factually inaccurate; Boswell acknowledges in the introduction to CSTH that religious beliefs may indeed cloak intolerance (CSTH 6–7). Boswell’s argument stems from the difference between “conscientious application of religious ethics and the use of religious precepts to justify oppression . . .” (CSTH 7).

Although most of Boswell’s academic critics exhibited courtesy and fair play when taking him to task, more than one incident reveals the contrary. The late David F. Wright of the University of Edinburgh, who was Professor of Patristic and Reformation Christianity, wrote articles and scholarly papers that attempted to discredit Boswell. In much the same manner as Richard Neuhaus, Wright was a very conservative evangelical who was uncomfortable with homosexuality according to Paul Halsall, then a graduate student and witness to some of Wright’s speaking engagements on the topic. Over the years, Wright published at least four papers that invoked Boswell and his work. In his definition of “homosexuality” for the Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, Wright placed the following statement: “The conclusion must be that for all the interest and stimulus Boswell’s book provides in the end of the day there is not one piece of evidence that the teaching mind of the early Church countenanced homosexual activity” (Halsall). This entry, supposed to be definitive, is biased since scholars are still divided on the issue years after Boswell’s death.

Wright also critiqued CSTH by employing philological arguments about specific words in Attic Greek uttered by St. Paul, such as malakoi and
arsenokoitai (“Homosexuals and Prostitutes”), without acknowledging that scholars have debated the patristic use of those words for well over a century with no definitive answer forthcoming. Boswell argues, for instance, that arsenokoitai might mean “male prostitute,” and Wright contends it means “homosexual.” In fact, William L. Petersen in Studia Patristica criticizes both Boswell and Wright for their translations of arsenokoitai. Wright on four occasions wrote papers disagreeing with Boswell’s translation of arsenokoitai as “male prostitutes.” With this academic debate currently unresolved and the definition of the Greek terms murky at best, any evidence Wright presented in his attempted refutation of Boswell is inadmissible. Whether he was correct or not, Boswell properly presented evidence and discussed the reasoning for his definition in Appendix One of CSTH (346–53). (For the specialist reader I recommend A.W. H. Adkins, Moral Values and Political Behavior in Ancient Greece, London 1972, and Andre Pellicer, Natura: etude semantique et historique du mot latin, Paris 1966, 17–35.)

Each of the incidents above involves a person who accused (or is still accusing) Boswell of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, falsification, fraud, or deliberate deception. I will note that in over thirty years not one of these charges has ever been confirmed as accurate, and I view such charges as spurious. The accusers hail from very different political and academic backgrounds: John Lauritsen is politically active on the gay left; Marsha Dutton is a medieval academic of indeterminate political and religious status; and the late David Wright was a conservative, evangelical Patristic scholar. What they have in common is how they reacted to Boswell, leading to the question of a possible conflation of the man and his work.

CHRISTIANITY, SOCIAL TOLERANCE, AND HOMOSEXUALITY IN A THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Boswell’s work threatened firmly entrenched political arguments from both sides of the political spectrum. The GAU’s arguments assume that the Church and religious community are completely hostile to the homosexual community. For the conservative religious community, Boswell’s book and his personal popularity call into question over six hundred years of the majority interpretation that homosexuality is a mortal sin, punishable at the very least by being denied a place in heaven. The Fourth Council of the Lateran (1215) was the blueprint for secular law in Western Europe, and St. Thomas Aquinas gave his answers in Part II of the second part of the Summa Theologiae (1265–74). The various Christian reformation movements did not formally set aside the answers of Aquinas and, until the period just prior to the publication of CSTH, never embraced same-sex intimate behavior.
From the Stonewall Riots in 1969 to the removal of homosexuality from the list of diagnostic mental disorders by the American Psychiatric and Psychological Associations in 1975/76, organized religions have felt compelled to justify their theological positions. The publication of CSTH added an important historical dimension to these theological debates, helping to change the terms of the discussion from if and how the individual homosexual could be saved to a discussion about the historical place of homosexuals within Christianity. Prior to CSTH, it was simple enough for a religious denomination to state or publish a position based on scripture outside of historical context, but, with the publication and major success of CSTH, churches were put into the unusual position of having to respond to a detailed academic argument that also had the merit of being a mainstream publishing success. The research simply could not be ignored or dismissed out of hand.

Events leading up to the publication of CSTH indicated the beginnings of a fundamental shift in how churches and their parent denominations would address the question of homosexuality during these debates. On December 29, 1975, the Catholic Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (SCDF) issued a “Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics.” Published within the Papal Decree *Persona Humana*, this extraordinary document directly addressed the Vatican’s position on homosexuality and dedicated an entire section to its reasoning. The fact that the Vatican felt compelled to reissue pastoral guidance on homosexuality is extraordinary enough, but to do so in response to pressures within its own congregation was remarkable. Not only was this document issued in response to social changes that permeated western society, but it also addressed the judgment of secular authority about sexual orientation. The first paragraph of Section 8 of *Persona Humana* observes,

> At the present time there are those who, basing themselves on the observations in the psychological order, have begun to judge indulgently, and even excuse completely, homosexual relations between certain people. This they do in opposition to the constant teachings of the Magisterium and to the moral sense of the Christian people.

This opening statement is followed by a restatement of of church opinion relating to “. . . homosexuals whose tendency comes from a false education, from a lack of normal sexual development, from habit, from bad example, or from other similar causes, and is transitory, or at least not incurable . . .”

Clearly the Church was responding to the judgment of the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association; in fact, the section concludes: “In Sacred Scripture they [homosexual relations] are condemned as a serious depravity and even presented as a sad consequence
of rejecting God. . . . Scripture does not of course merit us to conclude that all those that suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible for it,” but “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of.” This statement attempted, first, to diminish or not recognize the judgment of medical professionals in the eyes of the worldwide congregation and, second, to confirm a hierarchical order that emphasized the religious order over the secular world. For the first time, this pastoral instruction softened the language in its instructions in regard to homosexual orientation, but lesbian and gay American Catholics started to splinter off from the main church and leave communion with Rome, concerned about their place in the Catholic community (Jordan 238). A group of openly gay Catholics called Dignity, founded in 1973, responded to the SCDF in their February 1976 newsletter condemning the statement and asking the Church to “appoint a committee of theologians, social scientists, and gay persons to more adequately study the question of homosexuality (and) its implications for Church and society” (National Office of Dignity).

The Roman Catholic Church was not the only body interested in responding to the decision of psychiatrists and psychologists. Less than a week after the SCDF, the United Methodist Council on Youth Ministry released a report that formally called for a church-wide study on human sexuality in anticipation of a three-year period of mandatory education within the United Methodist body. Along with other biblical scholars, Boswell participated in a public forum on December 29, 1976, that strongly affected the outcome of the report. As one observer noted, “Dr. Boswell’s presentation offered what may well be new and persuasive evidence in this arena to challenge the church’s traditional injunctions against the practice of homosexuality” (United Methodist Council). The progress of the United Methodist denomination has been incremental over a period of decades, and perhaps some of the incremental progress is owed to Boswell and other social scientists who conducted studies that attempted to bring to light the hidden history of gays and lesbians within Christianity. While the current policy, as determined by the quadrennial meeting of United Methodist delegates (called the General Conference), has evolved over the decades, the United Methodist denomination has since 2001 called for gays and lesbians to serve openly in the armed forces of the United States, relaxed prosecutions of ministers blessing same-sex unions (although such blessings are still not legal), and called for equality in pastoral care for every person (United Methodist Church).

Despite the statement of the SCDF, some in the Roman Catholic Church reacted favorably to the publication of Boswell’s work. In a review of CSTH, Father Paul K. Thomas, who worked for the Catholic Archbishop of Baltimore, wrote in the Catholic Review, “Today’s Christian ministers can
reduce or eradicate the suffering associated with intolerance by being responsive toward well-founded interpretations of scripture and tradition, by becoming cognizant of new theological perspectives, and by remaining open to modern scholarly research” (n.p.). The Bishops Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices (hereafter CPRP) invited Boswell to send comments on a proposed pastoral statement that would “articulate more clearly the gospel principles that underlie the Church’s teaching on sexual morality, elaborate on some of the new positive developments in sexual morality, while still affirming the Church’s teaching of moral norms, (and) contrast the difference between the high standards of Christian morality and those of a secular society such as ours” (Lessard to Boswell, Papers).

The chair of the CPRP and Bishop of Savannah, Raymond W. Lessard, communicated with Boswell, but, while Boswell’s input was taken into account, nothing fresh emerged from the Bishops Committee. In fact, a more aggressive policy of silencing dissident voices in the Church emerged at the diocesan and archdiocesan levels. One of the most prominent voices for Catholic social justice came from Fr. John J. McNeill, S.J., and he was officially silenced and prohibited from speaking on the matter of homosexuality in 1979. McNeill had a long history with Dignity and even gave the keynote address at Dignity’s first U.S. convention in California in 1973. The keynote reads in part, “All too often in the past the Church and its moral theologians have made a priori statements concerning the morality and lifestyle of homosexuals without any serious effort at dialogue.” McNeill published his first book, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Beacon, 1976), and received *imprimi potest* (formal permission for publication) from the Vatican only to have it retroactively taken away two years after publication. McNeill’s comments would prove controversial and would set him on the road that eventually led to his expulsion from the Society of Jesus in 1988 by order of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who was then in charge of the SCDF and later became Pope Benedict XVI. McNeill refused to remain silent after his expulsion from the Jesuit Order in 1987 and has published a number of books in addition to *The Church and the Homosexual*. This list includes *Taking a Chance on God* (Beacon, 1993), *Freedom, Glorious Freedom* (Beacon, 1995), and his autobiography, *Both Feet Planted Firmly in Midair* (Westminster Press, 1998).

Boswell was active in Dignity, and, while his work owed more to Derrick Sherwin Bailey’s *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1955) than to McNeill’s *The Church and the Homosexual* (Beacon, 1976), Boswell admired McNeill’s work and frequently quoted from it in CSTH (406). Boswell owed his work to those who came before him and some who would survive him among gay people of faith. While the conservative elements of religious academia mostly
panned Boswell’s work, some positive reviews were posted in academic religious journals.

In the *Bulletin de Theologie, Ancienne et Medievale*, an important annual journal of ancient and medieval theology that compiles studies on the Church from the New Testament to early seventeenth century, an anonymous reviewer gives a positive review of CSTH, referring back to the statement of the SCDF in 1975 as a starting point in reappraising pastoral care of homosexuals in the Church. The reviewer agrees with Boswell throughout, once again demonstrating a remarkable tendency of reviewers either to embrace Boswell’s work fully or to reject it utterly. The reviewer speaks of Boswell’s closing his work at the fourteenth century not as a dividing line but as a natural end point. The reviewer’s assertion is that Church policy did not change significantly over a seven-hundred-year period after St. Thomas of Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* (*Bulletin*).


At the outset, Hauerwas qualifies his review and sets the terms of his comments carefully: “. . . [T]he reader must be warned that Boswell’s book is not morally significant because it is about a subject most assume involves moral questions. The book more importantly takes the form of a moral argument that depends for its cogency on the historical analysis” (228). According to Hauerwas, Boswell challenges the assumption that an issue “. . . like homosexuality can be determined by formal or abstract philosophical and theological considerations” (228). Hauerwas gets to the very heart of why Boswell is so intensely polarizing: his book challenges comfortable stereotypes and theological positions that had allegedly been settled for over seven hundred years. This fact brings into focus why some gays of the secular left attacked Boswell: his work attacked the settled notion that gays could not realistically be people of faith because, in their notion of history, the Church had always been intolerant of gays. According to Mark Jordan, only a gay historian of faith, determined to reset the record, could have done this work. Boswell could have gone too far, writing what his heart wanted to say, but instead he goes to the heart of matter and seeks out the truth, no matter how painful the results. At the same time, Hauerwas points out that Boswell is not writing a “value-neutral” history (229). Boswell has a point of view, and he argues it—a fact that, as we have seen, pleased some of his readers and angered others.

Hauerwas singles out for special notice chapter six of CSTH, where Boswell discusses moral and theological rationales—specifically the
JOHN BOSWELL: POSTING HISTORICAL LANDMARKS

comparison, during the third through sixth centuries, of human to animal behavior in order to “. . . justify the attitude toward homosexuals . . .” (230). Hauerwas goes on to assert that this notion was “simply bizarre” (230) and that what is now commonly referred to as the “Natural Law” argument was not sufficient to turn the tide of opinion against homosexuals. Hauerwas points out that Aquinas argued that “homosexuality is against nature but that ‘nature’ cannot refer to the act itself since nocturnal emission is natural” (230). We see only carefully selected elements of the natural law argument deployed in Thomism. Since the argument was selective, it did not have the same weight as the secular argument for punishing nonconformity by various groups. In this period, the fear of “the other” had been firmly established in both the secular and religious communities. Muslims, Jews, and heretics were noteworthy victims of this attitude. It did not take much effort to demonize and whip up fears of the homosexual as also being other. Thomas codified and justified this othering by “natural law” but only by making tortured and qualified assumptions about the rationality of animal behavior (231). This argument is a threat to conservative religious scholars for the same kind of reason the secular left felt threatened: Boswell is disturbing long-settled theological questions and expressing a rational argument about Thomas that no self-protective Catholic theologian would make.

Hauerwas closes his review by complimenting Boswell for “. . . putting the issue in the right context” (232). He also makes a powerful plea that “. . . we must return to the fundamental vision of community characteristic of the early church. It is the gospel imperative that must determine the issue, not concentration on particular Scriptural passages and/or arguments about how homosexuality is or is not natural” (232).

In Church History, the journal of record for the American Society of Church History, Patrick Henry of Swarthmore College wrote a positive review of CSTH that notes: “Like all good historical argument, Boswell’s case is orderly, but not easy to summarize.” Henry nevertheless homes in on Boswell’s surprising historical judgment that “it would be misleading to characterize Christianity as somehow peculiarly liable to antigay feelings or doctrines” (CSTH 127–28) and agrees with Boswell that, in the latter half of the thirteenth century, homosexuality passed from being “completely legal in most of Europe to incurring the death penalty in all but a few contemporary legal compilations” (CSTH 293). At this juncture one must ask, why was this the case? Henry summarizes Boswell’s argument with Aquinas:

The natural law which underlies Saint Thomas’s teaching on homosexuality, which for centuries has been the grounding of the Christian teaching on the subject of homosexuality, is shown to be a
hodge-podge of Greek philosophy, medieval bestiaries, social convention, and Roman law. (449)

Prior to Boswell, all a Christian religious denomination had to do was either quote Aquinas or quote biblical scripture out of context and leave it at that. Boswell changed the modern landscape by being a religious, gay academic who used the intellectual gifts at his disposal to challenge conventional wisdom, and it helped that he was also was a witty, charming man who used his personal appeal to bolster his argument.

CHRISTIANITY, SOCIAL TOLERANCE, AND HOMOSEXUALITY IN AN ACADEMIC CONTEXT

While CSTH had a significant effect on the study of male homosexuality, it had little to no impact on the study of female homosexuality. The book sparked an explosion in the study of homosexuality in all fields, but it inadvertently contributed to theoretical differences in how homosexuality was to be studied.

With higher visibility for work in the theological history of homosexuality, parallel work was coming to fruition in the field of literary analysis. While Boswell’s book gained the lion’s share of public attention, developments in the field of literary theory had gone almost unnoticed until prominent writers started promulgating “queer theory.” Queer theory builds upon the work of Michel Foucault and structural theorists who attempted to destabilize simple conceptions of gay or lesbian identity, departing from the essentialist theory of historians who maintain that certain phenomena are natural, inevitable, universal, and biologically determined. Boswell and essentialists maintain that homosexuality is genetically determined, an argument that is still prominent today. Structuralists argue that biology is only one of a number of factors that determine sexual orientation. Structuralism does not deny that biology is a significant factor, but it allows for the elements of nurture and choice in its arguments.

The split in academia between essentialist historians and queer theorists represents a shift in how the study of sexual history and identity would continue to play out even after Boswell’s early death, and these theoretical differences have sometimes made interdisciplinary conversations difficult. Boswell and Foucault were friendly with each other, but Boswell adamantly opposed the social constructivist views presented by Foucault as a reemergence of medieval nominalism. In a review of David Couzens Hoy’s Foucault: A Critical Reader, Boswell expresses an equal measure of affection and frustration with Foucault. Even though the review is ostensibly about
Hoy’s book, it turns into a rumination about Foucault’s *The Care of the Self*. At times critical and other times admiring, Boswell observes:

Two explanations occur to me. By canonizing these texts [in brackets, you need to explain briefly what texts Foucault was talking about here] as a kind of “patristics” (both a sacred literature and a statement of the authority conferred by age and gender) of human sexuality, Foucault may have been making a wry comment on truth as a scholarly artifact; or the vastness and complexity of sexuality in Rome may have seemed to him not reducible to comprehensive treatment, so he simply excerpted and selected texts to make the points he considered important without even trying to explain their context. The two are not incompatible, and either or both would constitute a worthy epistemological riddle from the author of so many previous challenges to the way we understand thought, language, history and their interaction. (“Good Sex at Home”)

This disagreement remains even though the men responsible for beginning it have passed on; I suspect, as in most disagreements, the truth lies somewhere in between the two sides.

Boswell’s work was groundbreaking and important because of the debate it opened in both academia and the general public. As with all historical works, it is the responsibility of historians to reexamine, refine, and build upon the work that preceded theirs, as Boswell indicates in Chapter One of CSTH:

Once the terrain has been better mapped, it will be possible to improve initial surveys very substantially; early studies may appear in retrospect absurdly roundabout or totally useless. To this ineluctable hazard of early research is added the difficulty in the case at issue that a great many people believe they already know where the trails *ought* to lead, and they will blame the investigator not only for the errors of first explorations but also for the extent to which his results . . . do not accord with their preconceptions on the subject. Of such critics the writer can only ask that before condemning too harshly the placement of his signposts they first experience for themselves the difficulty of the terrain. (39)

**CONCLUSION**

In the study of history we often bandy about the word “objectivity” as the chief goal of all historical inquiry, but this “objectivity” may stifle genuine inquiry by imposing a false expectation on the historian. Peter Novick writes that the principal assumptions of objectivity for the profession of history
include a commitment to the reality of the past, and to truth as correspondence to that reality; a sharp separation between knower and known, between fact and value, and above all, between history and fiction. Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation: the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accounts for the facts; if contradicted by the facts, it must be abandoned. Truth is one, not perspectival. (1–2)

Why do we as historians find these aims desirable? Novick argues that:

. . . the foundation of an historical profession—a community of the historically competent—was . . . an indispensable prerequisite for the establishment, identification, and legitimation of objective historical truth. (52)

Judy Hensley argues that elements of the discipline of history “were tangled with assumptions about science and the nature of professional consensus and comity.” It seems that some in the profession of history tend to treat the discipline as a hard science, setting up problematic and unrealistic expectations that historians should divorce themselves from their point of view.

Boswell had a strong point of view, but it did not compromise his pursuit of fact-based truth. He was engaged in two worlds, that of an academic and that of a man of deep, personal faith; his sexual orientation was an integral part of both worlds. His convictions drove him: both his sense of duty as a “thinking Christian” and his academic duty to answer the questions he found along the way. These convictions motivated him to stay on the path to truth. Despite the accusations of his critics, he did not have a “secret” agenda, did not play fast and loose with the facts to arrive at a pre-determined outcome, and did not “make up” history as Marsha Dutton charged on at least two occasions.

Why would Boswell expose himself to critics on both sides who were demonstrably offended by his arguments and conclusion? A partial answer was provided by Boswell himself in his private musings: “it’s a question of conviction, but what sort of conviction if I sometimes find myself in substantial disagreement with the church I adhere to?” (Papers). He later clarifies this dilemma in relation to his being part of a Catholic community: “I am as much the church as anyone else; it’s not me disagreeing with ‘them’ (the hierarchy, theologians, Rome, more conservative Catholics); it’s ‘us’ disagreeing among ourselves” (On Being a Thinking Christian in a Post Christian World” in the Boswell Papers). Motivated by his strong convictions, he pursued the truth with no intention of being divisive in either the theological or the academic world, but critics in both worlds saw him as a threat.
to their cherished assumptions, and, given the volatile times in which he was writing, his book both propelled him to renown and opened him to attack.

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RESEARCH ESSAYS
In 1998, the Boyer Commission called for using more innovative methods of course delivery, moving away from the traditional lecture toward inquiry-based learning. The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) has long held that undergraduate honors education is one arena where pedagogical innovation takes place. Members of the honors community note that what makes honors unique is that honors courses serve as laboratories of curricular innovation and experiential learning (Braid, “Cultivating”; Braid, “Majoring; Bruce; Hutget; Lacey; Schuman, “Cultivating”; Strikwerda; Werth; Wolfensberger, van Eijl, & Pilot). Exemplary honors courses should include participatory learning, an emphasis on primary sources, interdisciplinary and experiential themes, and content that “thrive[s] at the cutting edge of curricular experimentation” (Schuman, Beginning 36). Online honors courses can meet all these aims of honors education.

Although the honors community is united in its focus on innovation, it is divided on how or if technology fits into the experiential and inquiry-based features of honors courses (Albert & Bruce; Braid, “Cultivating”; Carnicorn, Harris, et al.; Clark & Crockett; Cobane; Doherty; Fuiks & Clark; Gresham, Bowles, et al.; NCHC; Otero; Schuman, “Cultivating”; Schuman, Beginning; Schlenker; Spurrier). Although a small body of descriptive work has emerged on the values of technology in the honors classroom, little research has been conducted in this area.

While little data-based research is available on the use of technology in the honors classroom, data on the nature of online honors courses are even rarer. In undergraduate education generally, enrollment in online courses has been increasing annually, outpacing enrollment in traditional, face-to-face environments. During fall 2011, more than 6.7 million students took at least one online course, an increase of 570,000 students since the previous year (Allen & Seaman). Negative views about online learning in honors have been noted recently by Doherty in 2010 and Gresham et al. in 2012, and I have personally observed such negativity at the NCHC annual conferences, in the association newsletters, and on the unofficial email listserv. Many in the honors community believe that online learning is tied to for-profit education even
though Allen and Seaman note that, even in 2002, more than 90% of public institutions were offering online courses, if not fully online programs. Nevertheless, honors faculty and administrators believe that the aims of honors education cannot be met in an online environment.

**STUDY PURPOSE AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The purpose of this study was to determine how online courses might meet the aims of undergraduate honors education from the perspective of the instructors teaching them. Based in my larger dissertation study on the phenomenon of online honors courses, this study followed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (van Manen) with a focus on the “historical meanings of experience and their developmental and cumulative effects on individual and social levels” (Laverty 15).

In 1990, van Manen provided the following considerations for conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological study:

- Select a phenomenon which seriously interests you and commits you to the world;
- Investigate the experience as we live it rather than how we conceptualize it;
- Reflect on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- Describe the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- Maintain a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and
- Balance the research context by considering parts and whole. (30–31)

This research study follows the hermeneutic phenomenological framework through its development of a research purpose and question centered on meeting the aims of honors education through online learning. The data collection methods included a series of interactive interviews in which the researcher allowed the participants to share openly their experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas). The historical meaning behind the phenomenon was highlighted throughout the interviews. A focus on the writing, reflecting, thinking, and rewriting, followed by re-reflecting, and re-thinking (van Manen), followed in the hermeneutical tradition.

**METHOD**

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board, I recruited participants via the email listserv affiliated with the National Collegiate Honors
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Council. The minimum criterion for participants was experience teaching an online honors course for at least one semester. The participants also had to have designed their online course. As online honors courses are rare and somewhat controversial within the field, finding participants was difficult. Only five instructors who met the study criteria were willing to participate. However, the sample size has a different meaning in qualitative rather than quantitative research. As Patton notes,

[T]here are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources. (244)

He continues to say that “the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size” (245). Given the uniqueness of my study topic as well as the difficulty of identifying participants who met the study criteria, five participants seemed adequate (Lincoln & Guba; Patton).

In the following brief descriptions of each participant in the study, pseudonyms have replaced real names.

Harvey currently serves as a professor and administrator at a primarily associate’s-level institution in a rural area. He has served at this institution for almost two decades and teaches interdisciplinary courses in the humanities. He has taught for the honors program since the late 1990’s. Harvey taught one online honors course in the humanities during a recent summer term although he has taught non-honors courses online for more than a decade.

Patrick is a doctoral student in education at a research university with high research activity. His background is in secondary education and non-profit work. He has taught a blended course in educational technology open to all students for the past three years. He has taught for the honors program for two years, including his online course that focuses on developing twenty-first-century skills using a real-time strategy game as the learning environment and a one-credit, face-to-face literature course.

Alma is an emerita professor at a research university with high research activity. Her background is in economics and women’s studies, and her current online honors course focuses on that topic. She has taught for the honors college for more than a decade. Prior to teaching a course in economics and women’s studies, she taught a face-to-face research methods course for the honors college.

Mark is a faculty member for the virtual campus of a baccalaureate/associate’s college. His background is in the humanities although he has a
doctorate in educational technology. After teaching secondary-level English for fifteen years, he transitioned to his current institution where he currently teaches humanities and philosophy courses primarily online. He has designed and taught online courses for several institutions. Because his institution is a virtual campus, his exposure to the honors college has been limited to those students who take his online courses through an honors contract system. He is currently teaching a course in non-western humanities that includes several honors students on contract.

Vicky is an emerita professor at an associate’s-level institution in an urban area. She has taught at this institution for her entire career in higher education and has extensive experience serving as an instructor and former administrator for the honors program. She teaches interdisciplinary humanities courses as well as faculty development, and she has participated in college governance and assessment areas. She started teaching non-honors courses online before teaching her current honors humanities course online.

Each of these instructors participated in three individual, semi-structured interviews as recommended for phenomenological studies by Seidman. Each interview focused on a particular aspect of teaching an online honors course, including course design, teaching, and reflection. As participants were from various parts of the country, all interviews took place by phone. Interview data were analyzed according to van Manen’s hermeneutical phenomenology approach in concert with Creswell’s process for analyzing qualitative data.

For this particular study, van Manen’s thematic approach was used to “elaborate on an essential aspect of the phenomenon under study” (168). Creswell’s approach included coding and organizing data into meaningful units, formulating data into themes, and transforming themes into a descriptive narrative. Rigor for this study, as defined by Lincoln & Guba, was demonstrated through the use of member checking, thick description, an audit trail, and reflexivity.

**RESULTS**

The themes that emerged in this study spoke to the underlying issues, concerns, and recommendations the participants shared about teaching an honors course online. The results from the thematic approach included meeting the aims of honors online as well as suggestions for implementing online learning in honors. For an in-depth description of the participants’ teaching experiences and descriptions as well as other themes that emerged from the data, see Johnson.
MEETING THE AIMS OF HONORS ONLINE

Participants had varying opinions on whether their courses met the aims of honors education. All of the participants agreed that their courses featured the small class size, deep engagement, and innovative pedagogies that are necessary characteristics of honors courses, and they had additional criteria that they felt were important to honors education. Harvey’s courses included peer review, and he expected a high level of scholarship and critical thinking. Patrick thought that an experiential approach was essential to an honors course as well as having a one-on-one relationship with the instructor. Alma thought honors courses needed to be interdisciplinary and research-oriented. Vicky focused on application and synthesis.

Harvey expressed the strongest negative opinions about online honors courses. “From my honors students I expect self-motivation. I expect a lot of ability to do independent work. I expect preparation. I expect a deeper level of discussion. And I just didn’t get that from my online class.” His experience teaching online led him to believe that online was not necessarily a good environment for honors students. He liked the idea of being able to see a response in his students’ faces, seeing if they understood the material. He did think a hybrid course environment might work “especially if you have them complete the content online, assessments online, and then come in and have a totally seminar-type discussion.” Otherwise, he did not see how an online honors course might work.

Patrick also questioned whether online was the best format for his honors course.

He felt that his course was highly participatory and experiential, but he conceded that the online environment hindered engagement among peers.

It really puts sort of a damper on the social interactions, which I think should be a major part of honors education. But again, you could have a bad honors course that’s in person. So I think that it’s possible to facilitate richer dialogue via an online forum.

While he wondered if a face-to-face or hybrid course might work better, he believed that ultimately his course met the aims of honors education. “Honors education is all about experimenting, giving students a different perspective or allowing them to experience different things on their own. And I think the course really, really hits that.”

Mark was not entirely convinced either. Although honors students had performed well in his course, he had not found their work to be outstanding as compared to some of his other students. At the same time he thought that taking online courses should be an option for honors students because “it
simply provides an alternative modality.” He thought all students needed to be savvy about being online learners and about the skills they could gain by experiencing an online course.

Vicky believed that offering only online honors courses would be a mistake even if online courses filled enough of a need for students that they should be an option. She believed that honors students flourish with the mentoring they receive in a face-to-face environment, especially considering that these students often go on to become leaders in their fields. On the other hand, online honors courses allow students to see a broader spectrum of honors education and provide greater access when schedules are restricted. She felt that online honors courses meet the aims of honors education and that they are “qualitatively as good as a face-to-face class, but it’s different.”

Finally, Alma had no qualms about offering online honors courses and continued to convince her dean that the courses were worthwhile. While she did not get to know her students as well online, she felt that she could teach the same content regardless of format. “I could do the same topic on a person-to-person basis, face-to-face or online. For me, the topic is no different.” She believed the quality of work she received from the students was the same in her online course as it had been in her face-to-face course, so she saw no reason not to endorse online honors courses.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

“Don’t do it”—Harvey.

However, each of the participants, including Harvey, shared suggestions for their colleagues interested in teaching an online honors course. Harvey recommended having a critical mass of students as well as setting aside time for synchronous communication. He wondered if having video chats available when he taught might have made a difference in the level of engagement with his students in the course. Patrick agreed that synchronous chat opportunities would be helpful, noting that Skype was one particular tool he recommended.

Alma, Vicky, Mark, and Patrick all believed that it was important to consult others as part of their planning process. As Alma suggested, “You cannot do this without training.” Vicky encouraged faculty to look to the pioneers in the area for guidance. As Mark noted, “You need to look and see what others have done online. You need to see models . . . so you don’t reinvent the wheel.” Patrick agreed: “If you take the time and put in the effort and consult the experts on it, then I think your course has a much higher chance of success, and students will appreciate that.”

Many of the participants stressed that faculty could not simply move their face-to-face course into an online environment with few modifications.
As Patrick observed, “You can’t just cut and paste.” Alma believed that training would help faculty understand this principle and better prepare their courses for the transition. She also said that faculty needed to plan far in advance for their online courses. She typically submitted her course content months in advance to the online staff. Mark agreed that faculty needed to “try to get 99% of all the work done before the course ever starts. You can’t do it on the fly.”

Vicky relied on her experiences in faculty development to provide advice on preparing to teach online. Throughout the process, she thought that instructors needed access to good faculty development and technical support. She believed that faculty interested in teaching online should start by moving some of their course materials online: “Most faculty can make that step pretty easily.” Then, they can move to a hybrid course by considering “what am I doing right now, and how is that going to work as well online?” Gradually, faculty can begin to think about moving other components online. “I think having a program that allows them to evolve naturally is better.”

At the national level, Harvey and Patrick both believed that there needed to be a compilation of best practices or examples of online honors courses. Vicky recommended a list of “ten things that successful online honors teachers do” as well as a resource page with potential online learning consultants. She also thought that a blog could be a place to share ideas, challenges, and successes among online honors instructors.

I could see that working really well to have blogs and a place where people could go and share ideas. Might be asynchronous discussion, something about honors education, and get some feedback or connect with somebody that knew something about the subject from doing it. This would save innumerable hours.

To Vicky, developing partnerships was very important.

Mark and Vicky both had similar views about developing an online pedagogy for honors. Mark believed more research was needed about teaching in honors and the needs of honors students so that they could apply that knowledge to online pedagogy. “We need to gather more research on what distinguishes honors students and honors colleges . . . from the regular, larger population. And then design those sorts of experiences in online learning.” Vicky agreed, stating “there’s a lot of literature about best practices in online teaching and learning, but it doesn’t deal with honors.”

DISCUSSION

Perhaps the largest barrier to online learning in undergraduate honors education is the fear that the aims of honors education will not be met in an
online environment. The National Collegiate Honors Council has provided guidelines for honors course objectives that include developing written and oral communication skills, developing the ability to analyze, synthesize, and understand scholarly work, and helping students become independent and critical thinkers. All of these outcomes can be met in an online environment, even oral communication skills. The challenge is helping honors faculty understand the links between such outcomes and the online environment.

The Community of Inquiry (COI) framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer) provides one way to address the aims of honors in an online environment. The three core elements of COI include social, cognitive, and teaching presence (Garrison, “Online Collaboration”).

**SOCIAL PRESENCE**

Social presence involves the way students connect with each other on a personal level online. While not included specifically in NCHC’s course outcomes, many of the participants of this study noted the importance of building community among students. Harvey struggled in this area. Even with only five students, he did not feel as though they formed the type of learning community online that he typically found in his face-to-face courses. Patrick was able to form smaller communities within work groups, but in the larger class he noted a lack of social interaction among students. Alma also feared that students did not get to know each other as well online although she was willing to move past that issue due to other factors.

In an online environment, communication is structured differently; it happens less frequently but with more deliberation (Garrison, “Online Collaboration”). The beginning of the course is the ideal time to set expectations about communication and community, increasing social presence through student introductions, discussing expectations for communication in online forums, and including ways for students to see each other’s faces through pictures or synchronous communication activities (Garrison, “Online Collaboration”; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer).

The participants in my study all started strong by including an orientation to their course. Many of these orientations included a discussion forum for introductions as well as for expectations of student performance. To increase social presence, the instructors could have had students create multimedia introductions rather than text-based introductions or had students discuss course expectations in small groups. From the outset of the course, the teacher needs to set the standards for the quality of interaction, timely responses, message length, and group size (Garrrison, “online Coomunity”; Tu & McIsaac).
Instructors can also increase social presence through the use of synchronous communication tools (Hrastinski, Keller, & Carlsson; Leo, Manganello, et al.; McBrien, Jones, & Cheng). Although many of the participants were hesitant to use chat or hold virtual office hours, Harvey mentioned that, if he ever taught again, he would consider adding more synchronous communication tools to help build community. Synchronous communication allows participants to be in any location but to interact in real-time through the use of text, audio, and video chat, whiteboards, and screen-sharing (Bower; Hrastinski et al.; Martin). Such tools also aid students in small group collaboration (Hrastinski et al.; Marjanovic), clarification of course content (Leo et al.), immediacy of feedback (Martin), and comfort in expressing opinions (McBrien, Jones, & Cheng).

COGNITIVE PRESENCE

Cognitive presence is the manner in which students construct meaning through reflection and discourse (Garrison, “Online Collaboration”). Critical thinking, one of the outcomes of honors courses (NCHC) is the desired process and outcome of cognitive presence as well (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, “Critical Thinking”). Four phases of critical inquiry include triggering events, exploration, integration, and resolution (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, “Critical Thinking”) and can be explored by studying messages and responses within the discussion forums.

Harvey and Mark were both concerned about the depth of critical analysis demonstrated in their online discussions. While Mark’s honors students performed well in discussions, he did not find their work exemplary. Harvey was disappointed in all aspects of his students’ discussions. On the other hand, Alma and Vicky both found their students’ critical thinking skills to be on a par with their previous experiences teaching face-to-face.

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 (Garrison, “Online Collaboration”). The types of questions instructors pose in discussion forums should allow for more reflection and in-depth responses (Bangert; Ertmer, Sadaf, & Ertmer). Creating expectations for discussion responses as well as rubrics to evaluate them can help improve the types of responses students give (Gilbert & Dabbagh; Swan, Shen, & Hiltz). Activities need to be selected that match the various phases of critical inquiry (Garrison, “Online Collaboration”) and should be meaningful and purposeful to the student (Ke, Chavez, et al.; Young & Bruce).
MEETING THE AIDS OF HONORS IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

TEACHING PRESENCE

The final component of the COI model involves teaching presence, or the design and facilitation of a course in a way that supports the social and cognitive presence (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, "Critical Inquiry"). The instructor creates the opportunity for students to develop their written and oral communication skills, to interact with scholarly material, and to become critical thinkers. Shea found that instructors who exhibited stronger behaviors in this area—including instructional design, course organization, and directed facilitation—were able to create a stronger sense of community in their courses.

All of the study participants except Harvey used either an instructional-design approach or worked with an instructional designer to plan their courses. Alma’s and Vicky’s classes in particular were exemplary models of organization and facilitation. That their courses were the two with the highest success rates in meeting the aims of honors education is not surprising given the time and effort they put into planning and teaching their course.

The discussion forum is one of the most evident displays of teacher presence, and instructors have the opportunity to define their role as facilitator in this area (DeNoyelles; Shea, Vickers, & Hayes). Too much involvement in discussion might stifle students while too little involvement might turn students off (Garrison, “Online Collaboration”; Shea). Teacher presence can be exhibited outside the realm of discussion through a focus on assignment feedback and opportunities to communicate with the instructor (Shea, Vickers, & Hayes).

In addition, students can develop their own forms of teacher presence if the instructor allows them to take leadership roles within the online environment (Shea, Vickers, & Hayes). Such an opportunity sounds ideal for honors students who enjoy taking leadership roles in the classroom. Mark had the opportunity through his honors contract requirements to set more formal expectations of students taking a leadership role. Unless the teacher sets such expectations, students might not know what they should be aiming for, especially in the midst of competing obligations. If Mark had delineated the kind of specific roles for his online honors students that he was developing for his face-to-face honors course, he might have been more satisfied with their performance in taking leadership roles in the class.

Within the Community of Inquiry framework, Harvey was resistant to seeking assistance in designing and teaching his course. Relying solely on his previous experiences teaching online, he faced alone the burden of converting his honors course to an online environment. An instructional designer might have (1) provided valuable guidance in crafting discussion questions and other assessments that led to critical inquiry, (2) helped solve the problem...
that the small class size hindered social bonds among students could form, and (3) suggested ways to improve the quality of individual projects that his students were submitting.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Four of the study participants provided their take on the impact of adopting or failing to adopt online learning within honors. Although their online teaching experiences varied, most of the participants recognized the potential for online learning in honors. Vicky thought it would be a “negative implication for honors to turn its back on online education.” Alma agreed that “it’s the future.” She believed that honors would have to provide more online courses eventually.

Patrick reiterated that “honors education is supposedly such a free and open-to-experimentation program . . . ; instead of . . . automatically dismissing it as inferior, maybe more work needs to be done to see how you can improve it.” He cautioned that “if honors education refuses to at least address some of these issues, then they risk being left behind.” He worried that honors might become irrelevant if it did not cater to the needs of its students.

Mark also argued that honors educators could not “bury our heads in the sand and just ignore it, and it will go away.” He believed that online education in honors could be “made a very enriching experience.” He acknowledged that faculty would have to relinquish some of their authority and become more of a guide, but those changes could be exciting. As Patrick concluded, “you’ve got the opportunity to change on your terms.”

Currently there is limited research on undergraduate honors education as it relates to pedagogy and technology. This study, as well as the larger study from which it was derived (Johnson), was designed to explore online honors courses from the perspectives of the instructors. A variety of related qualitative studies could be conducted on, for instance, the perspectives of honors administrators who serve as gatekeepers to online course adoption, faculty at the other end of the adoption curve, and students who have taken these courses. Quantitatively, this topic could be explored through a content analysis of online discussion forums, surveys of students and faculty about their experiences with online learning, and studies of social, cognitive, and teaching presence using the Community of Inquiry model. Finally, studies could be conducted on the design and development of online or hybrid course options for honors.

One of the important recommendations for the honors community is that, as many of the participants stated, teachers need access to resources ranging from examples of online or hybrid honors courses to experienced instructors who can serve as mentors and support. While some early adopters may find
it easier to experiment and troubleshoot problems on their own without access to examples or mentors, most honors faculty will need much more guidance if they are going to adopt online learning.

At the national level, the NCHC should create resources for honors faculty. Two excellent models already exist: the University of Central Florida’s Teaching Online Pedagogical Repository (TOPR) and the National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education (NITLE). TOPR is a public wiki in beta release where instructors contribute pedagogical practices, including actual artifacts from online and hybrid courses (Thompson & Chen). Current contributions include methods of social interaction, discussion prompts, assessments, and presentation of course content. The site is guided by an editorial board and will include a formal submission and review process once it is in full release.

NITLE is a national network of liberal arts colleges and universities originally founded to help integrate technology use into teaching and learning at those institutions. NITLE provides consulting services to help liberal arts institutions plan strategically for technology decisions related to teaching and learning. NITLE Labs has created an Innovation Studio in concert with their symposium for participants to tackle challenges, develop solutions, and build models related to issues in liberal education. Participants are guided by mentors throughout the process. In addition NITLE provides listservs focused on a variety of technology topics as applied to liberal arts disciplines and case studies on effective models and practices.

CONCLUSION

Change is always difficult, though, when the majority is not ready for it. Prior personal experience and the experiences of several of this study’s participants, as well as evidence from national conferences, association newsletters, and the listserv, have shown that the honors community at the national level still feels strong opposition to online learning. In some instructors’ eyes, innovation in honors education remains a product of the face-to-face classroom environment, not to be disrupted by something that for-profits do (Carnicorn, 52), but the face-to-face classroom does not hold an exclusive grasp on the market of creativity, critical thinking, and communication. Online learning proponents, with the backing of evidence-based research, must begin advocating more loudly and clearly to demonstrate their place at the table of honors education.

As many of this study’s participants stated, the honors community’s unwillingness to acknowledge and incorporate online learning would be a long-term detriment as students looked elsewhere to meet their academic needs. Online learning increases access for students and openness to
experimentation, and, with its proponents providing support through examples and experienced faculty, it should soon make further inroads within the undergraduate honors community.

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Assessment has become a popular buzzword on academic campuses over the last few decades. Most assessment models are designed to evaluate traditional learning structures. If we were to state simply the process of assessment, it might read like this: a) what you want the students to learn; b) how you want to teach the material; c) how you know if the students learned the material. In a traditional pedagogical environment, for example, an instructor might want the students to learn how early geologists deduced the influence of glaciation in the Sierra Mountains from striations on polished granite surfaces. She would design a lecture that presents the information, and then she might create a test or project to find out whether the students retained the material in a useful way. One could argue that current assessment strategies are often designed to validate rather than assess traditional pedagogical practices, leaving little room for the development of teaching and learning practices that might radically deviate from the norm.

Honors programs and honors education, however, have long been defined as educational experiences that push traditional pedagogical boundaries in numerous ways. Just ask any honors director or sample the website of any honors program and you will find evidence in support of such claims. Both the NCHC-affiliated Partners in the Parks program and City as Text™ experiences push the boundaries of traditional learning models even further by incorporating experiential education in their core design. But experiential education practices are logistically difficult to assess using conventional evaluation models given the prevalence of unexpected “teachable moments” and unpredictable learning opportunities. If instructors cannot anticipate what students will experience and learn, then they have less control over outcomes.
In short, designing assessment models without having solid control over the content or the methods of content-delivery is tricky.

We can offer one model of an assessment strategy for experiential education programs based on the 2012 Partners in the Parks adventure in Sequoia National Park, where we qualitatively measured the rigor of this week-long program by requiring participants to propose interdisciplinary honors research projects that combined the students’ chosen fields of study with their sometimes unpredictable learning moments and experiences.

**RIGOR IN EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION**

In “Differences between Experiential and Classroom Learning,” Coleman argued that traditional classrooms use an information-assimilation process in which students receive information through lectures and textbooks, organize the information, draw inferences to apply the information, and act on the inferences. However, because of time constraints and other factors, modern schools rarely reach the action phase, which is probably the most important (Kraft and Sakofs). Experiential education accomplishes the process in reverse order so that action is the first phase, followed by inferences, organization, and understanding. Because the vast majority of our schools maintain the information-assimilation model, students who have not mastered the first phases of the process are doomed to failure when action is required (Coleman). Conversely, experiential education is intrinsically motivational and employs our natural style of learning (Kraft and Sakofs). Unfortunately, experiential education is time-consuming and does not conform to pencil-and-paper forms of assessment, which has slowed its widespread adoption in higher education.

One of our home institutions, Southern Utah University (SUU), recently joined a growing movement in higher education to incorporate experiential education into formal curricula. SUU’s Academic Roadmap states that “the general studies component of every undergraduate degree includes an experiential education requirement and capstone project.” To fulfill this requirement, students may enroll in experiential programs in their community, overseas, the outdoors, or programs that involve creative and innovative initiatives or leadership. The Academic Roadmap caused shifts in established curricula, leading many academics and administrators to question “the rigor” of experiential education. In addition to critical viewpoints that see experiential education as more fun than academic, many have predicted that the requirement will become a check-the-box process unlikely to add much to students’ education. Such concerns arise when any educational philosophy or approach veers from traditional pedagogical traditions, and they need to be quickly and thoroughly addressed.
To assess rigor in experiential education, we must first define each of these terms. Research on experiential education has been ongoing since the mid-1970s, and numerous definitions have been proposed (e.g. Kolb and Kolb; Kraft and Sakofs). The Association for Experiential Education (AEE) offers this definition:

Experiential education is a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people’s capacity to contribute to their communities.

While the AEE’s definition outlines a philosophy, it fails to address the means by which to guarantee and assess the academic rigor of the experience.

The definition of rigor in the context of an academic experience is elusive. Educators seem to have developed an evolving definition that includes (1) the practical rigor of holding students accountable to a specific set of standards and/or knowledge and (2) the theoretical rigor of developing critical thinkers (Jacobs and Colvin). An example of practical rigor would require students to learn lists of definitions and concepts that must be repeated on a fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice test. An example of theoretical rigor would require students to use a set of data or information to make inferences and interpretations regarding a particular topic.

Assessing the practical and theoretical dimensions of rigor requires a predefined set of educational standards, a method to assess students’ understanding, and a method to assess students’ ability to apply the concepts to a broader perspective. These prerequisites are challenging in the realm of experiential education because students encounter unpredictable lessons during countless and unconventional “teachable moments.” During the Partners in the Parks adventure to the Outer Banks National Park, for instance, the students had the opportunity to observe the rescue of a beached whale, an opportunity that no one hopes for but that cannot be ignored. Lessons learned from such observations can heighten students’ ability to apply their experiences and attain broader perspectives than prescribed standards allow, but they cannot be assessed in a standardized test. Our assessment strategy tries to build a model that addresses both the practical and theoretical dimensions of rigor.

**PARTNERS IN THE PARKS**

As outlined in the 2010 NCHC monograph *Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks* (Digby), the program immerses a group of approximately six to sixteen honors students in a national park for one week in order to “educate students about the national...”
parks, to engage them in recreational activities that are the essence of park experiences, and ultimately to urge stewardship of these treasured spaces through a lifetime of involvement” (17). Academic goals include, but are not limited to, the Leave No Trace ethic, camping and teamwork lessons, scientific lessons, reflection skills, and service learning. To help achieve these goals, students are introduced to a wide variety of National Park Service employees, ranging from volunteers and interns to the chief of interpretation and park superintendents. They conduct scientific research, learn about maintenance and management issues, engage in deliberative dialogue on controversial issues, and perform service projects. A common element in each Partners in the Parks program is a nightly group reflection, often called a “circle.” With the project design, the students’ participation, and the circle, the program includes three main components of experiential education: purpose, authenticity, and reflection (Kolb and Fry).

Since its inception in 2006, the Partners in the Parks program has led 355 honors students from 86 universities to 18 national parks across the country. Anecdotal results indicating transformative impacts on students are easy to find. For instance, Jackson L.’s experiences during the Acadia adventure in 2008 caused him to change his lab-based biological focus to a field-based environmental focus. He has since joined the Peace Corps. Similarly, Jayde U. decided to forgo a career in music in favor of a career with the National Park Service, and she recently participated in an internship at the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument. Stories like these are testaments to the benefit of the Partners in the Parks program, but they do not afford a viable dataset to assess the program’s success in either the broad philosophy of experiential education or the rigor of its academic standards.

SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK ADVENTURE

In order to address the data gap and to find the knowledge, skills, and values the students take away from a Partners in the Parks adventure, we designed the 2012 Sequoia National Park adventure to include a unique assignment that was to be presented orally by each participant during the final evening’s circle. Each honors student proposed an interdisciplinary project combining what s/he learned or experienced during the week within the student’s major or area of interest. This strategy required students to illustrate an understanding of the academic nature of the experience by critically applying it to their schools, communities, or other contexts far removed from the actual experience.

Through a strong partnership with the National Park Service, we introduced students to several academic disciplines represented in Sequoia National Park during a two-day tour of the front country. “Front country” is
the name for the area of the park with restroom facilities, visitor centers, and roads. Included in our activities were a tour of Crystal Cave and a three-and-a-half-hour discussion with Bill Tweed, the former Chief of Interpretation at Sequoia National Park. From these two opportunities, students learned about interrelationships between geology, biology, ecology, forestry, ethics, philosophy, climate change, resource management, road maintenance, air quality and pollution, and other content areas. One of the most powerful discussions revolved around the struggle between the mission of the National Park Service to preserve the area’s resources for future generations and the perceived role of the National Park Service to provide recreational activities for today’s public.

After two days in the front country, we began our four-day wilderness experience, a remote backpacking adventure in the Mineral King portion of Sequoia National Park. During the wilderness experience, students were challenged to apply what they learned in the front country to the wilderness. Alysia Schmidt, a front country ranger, joined us on our entire backpacking trip and provided invaluable expertise in formal lessons and informal discussions throughout the four days. Each evening, students reflected on their experiences of the day, the relationships between various disciplines in the park, and how Sequoia National Park serves as a microcosm for our culture’s relationship to the natural world. On the final evening of the trip, we devoted our circle to the students’ proposed honors thesis projects.

**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS’ EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION**

Although the Partners in the Parks program has a core curriculum that includes lessons about the interrelationship between scientific disciplines, management issues, recreation, and stewardship, the most profound education some students receive lies beyond these core concepts in the benefits of experiential education, the academic rigor of which is more difficult to assess. One major reason for the difficulty is the inevitability of unexpected and unpredictable learning moments and results. Furthermore, students’ prior frames of reference influence their responses to wilderness experiences, making individual educational experiences vary.

We assessed educational rigor during the 2012 Sequoia National Park adventure by challenging our participants to apply what they learned and experienced during the trip to their chosen interests or fields of study. Our hope was that this final academic project would require students to bring together and demonstrate both the theoretical and practical rigor inherent—but not yet articulated and made assessable—in the Partners experience.
Specifically, this project required them to grasp the basic concepts inherent in every Partners in the Parks adventure before critically thinking about how these concepts relate to and affect their individual lives. Four proposed honors projects illustrate how our participants were able to exemplify both the practical and the theoretical definitions of academic rigor.

1. Kara D., an honors student in the Appalachian Mountain region, has been interested in the environmental impact of mountaintop removal and strip mining. After learning how the National Park Service interacts with and educates the public about environmental and management issues, she developed the idea of initiating an educational backpacking program to raise awareness of the water quality and hydrology ramifications of mountaintop removal. Her audience will begin with her honors community and expand to the general public.

2. Emily B. is an honors English major in Virginia focusing on creative writing and poetry. Her childhood did not include much traveling, but she is now starting to see different parts of the world, including Sequoia National Park. She was struck by the majesty and solitude of the mountains, so she designed a plan to record her thoughts and feelings in a journal and to include a poem with each journal entry. The project will serve as a creative memoir of her experiences in natural places, with the goal of creating new ways to inspire readers to appreciate conservation and preservation.

3. Tim H., an honors student from New York majoring in earth science education, observed the benefit of seeing examples of our planet’s processes first-hand in the wilderness. Considering his desired career as a middle or high school teacher, Tim proposed a project to modify the Partners in the Parks educational strategy for his future students. His plan is to bring students into wilderness settings in New York during the summer before their earth science class to introduce them to the core curriculum in an experiential education setting. He will then track the students in a longitudinal study to measure the benefit of his program.

4. Aimee D. participates on the track and field team and in the honors program at a mid-size university in rural Texas. She began to evaluate the difference in motivation between exercising in a gym and exercising in an outdoor, natural environment on the trip. She plans a collaborative project between her honors program and the track and field team that will build support for a trail system around the campus to provide a natural setting in which students can exercise. Additionally, she envisions the trail system being used for K–12 botanical and ecological education.
These examples demonstrate how project participants applied what they learned in Sequoia National Park to their own lives and communities. The proposed honors projects not only required the students to understand the general curriculum but also allowed them to develop unpredictable outcomes. Some of these proposed projects are currently being implemented, and we hope to use their successes as examples in future Partners in the Parks adventures.

CONCLUSIONS

Simply allowing students to participate in an experience does not prove they received an experiential education. The Association for Experiential Education lists several principles of experiential education practice (AEE), including the following five:

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
- Experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning.
- Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.
- The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.

The Partners in the Parks—Sequoia experience provided a rough model to assess the rigor of experiential education by requiring the students to show that each of the principles listed above was met. For example, the first criterion above was met each evening when students reflected during the circle discussions. The second criterion was met as certain students elected to pursue their proposed projects, thereby taking initiative and working toward finished products. The third and fourth criteria were met throughout the adventure in the immersive quality of the experience. The fifth criterion was met explicitly through the design of the final project. Additionally, the experience met both the practical and the theoretical definition of academic rigor by forcing students to think critically about how the content related to their lives and communities.
The benefits and results of experiential education can be unpredictable, but experiential education practitioners can prepare for unexpected results by designing assessments that allow students to show what they learned rather than by prescribing a limiting curriculum. In this age of increasing focus on assessment, we need to validate experiential education opportunities and demonstrate both practical and theoretical rigor. The variable and unpredictable nature of experiential education calls for non-standardized methods of assessment. We recommend using the methods we describe above as a model to construct other creative ways to measure academic rigor in experiential education.

REFERENCES


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Fundraising for Honors: A Handbook by Larry R. Andrews (2009, 100pp). Offers information and advice on raising money for honors, beginning with easy first steps and progressing to more sophisticated and ambitious fundraising activities.


A Handbook for Honors 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 Gory (2003, 182pp). Parallel historical developments in honors and composition studies; contemporary honors writing projects ranging from admission essays to theses as reported by over 300 NCHC members.

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

Inspiring Exemplary Teaching and Learning: Perspectives on Teaching Academically Talented College Students edited by Larry Clark and John Zuhlizarteta (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.

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 (2001, 128pp). Presents a variety of perspectives on teaching and learning useful to anyone developing new or renovating established honors curricula.

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

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