Spring 2018


National Collegiate Honors Council

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Ashlyn Stewart

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The National Collegiate Honors Council is an association of faculty, students, and others interested in honors education.

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The cover image is of Bryan Stevenson, Founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, and author of Just Mercy. He was the keynote speaker at the NCHC conference in Atlanta on Friday, November 10, 2017. Photo by Jensen Sutta.
CALL FOR PAPERS

The next issue of *JNCHC* (**deadline: September 1, 2018**) invites research essays on any topic of interest to the honors community.

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

This Forum has two lead essays, which are posted on the NCHC website: [https://www.nchchonors.org/uploaded/NCHC_FILES/Pubs/Gifted_Education_to_Honors_Education.pdf](https://www.nchchonors.org/uploaded/NCHC_FILES/Pubs/Gifted_Education_to_Honors_Education.pdf) and [https://www.nchchonors.org/uploaded/NCHC_FILES/Pubs/Honors_Is_a_Good_Fit_for_Gifted_Students.pdf](https://www.nchchonors.org/uploaded/NCHC_FILES/Pubs/Honors_Is_a_Good_Fit_for_Gifted_Students.pdf).

The first is by Nicholas Colangelo, Director Emeritus of the Connie Belin and Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development and Dean Emeritus of the College of Education, University of Iowa. His essay, “Gifted Education to Honors Education: A Curious History, a Vibrant Future,” describes the special needs of gifted high school students that are often surprising or invisible to honors professionals, and he calls for more communication between scholars and practitioners in the fields of gifted and honors education in order to serve gifted students more effectively. This communication is just now beginning in shared programs of the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). The second essay, “Honors Is a Good Fit for Gifted Students—Or Maybe Not,” is by Annmarie Guzy, Associate Professor of English at the University of South Alabama, NCHC Fellow, and author of *Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices*. Guzy contrasts the typical traits of gifted students and high-achievers (honors students), pointing out incompatibilities that often prevent gifted students from joining or being successful in an honors environment. Like Colangelo, she argues that if honors teachers and administrators want to recruit and retain gifted students, they need to understand and implement changes that welcome these students.

Contributions to the Forum may—but need not—respond to the two lead essays.

Questions that Forum contributors might consider include: A focus on one or more contrasting traits of gifted and honors students and how to interpret and accommodate them. A discussion of insights gleaned from past experiences in trying to accommodate gifted students in honors. The assets and liabilities of adjusting the honors culture to make it welcoming to gifted students. A discussion of not just how honors programs can help gifted students but of how gifted students can help honors. An argument that maybe gifted students really do not belong in honors. A discussion of why honors educators have remained unconcerned or unaware of issues in gifted education for so long. Concrete suggestions for better adapting honors programs...
to the needs of gifted students. Suggestion of a road map for ways that NAGC and NCHC can work together in the future.

Forum essays should focus on ideas, concepts, and/or opinions related to “Gifted Education and Honors” and not just on descriptions of practices at individual institutions.

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

NCHC journals and monographs are included in the following electronic databases: ERIC, EBSCO, Gale Cengage, and UNL Digital Commons. Both journals are listed in Cabell International’s Directory of Publishing Opportunities.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council is a refereed periodical publishing scholarly articles on honors education. The journal uses a double-blind peer review process. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology, articles on interdisciplinary efforts, discussions of problems common to honors programs and colleges, items on the national higher education agenda, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education. Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu.

DEADLINES

March 1 (for spring/summer issue); September 1 (for fall/winter issue)

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We accept material by email attachment in Word (not pdf). We do not accept material by fax or hard copy.

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

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

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

Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at adalong@uab.edu or, if necessary, 850.927.3776.
With his distinguished mustache and bowtie, Jack Rhodes has been an immediately visible presence in the National Collegiate Honors Council for as far back as most of us can remember. As a member of the Board of Directors, Site Visitor, and conference session presenter, Jack has played an important role in the history and development of the NCHC. He has also been a major contributor to the Southern Regional Honors Council, where he has served as president and program chair.

Jack is Professor of English at the Citadel and has been Director of the Honors Program there since 1986—providing another source of his visibility in honors since he is regularly surrounded by a corps of crisply uniformed cadets. At the Citadel, he has been a member of the National Scholarship Committee, selecting candidates for the Rhodes and Fulbright and such, since 1985, serving as chair for several of those years. He has also been a coach and sponsor and advisor to numerous organizations such as the College Bowl team, the English Club, and the campus newspaper.

A Keats Scholar, starting with his PhD dissertation at the University of South Carolina, Jack has produced numerous papers and articles on Keats as well as two books: *Keats’s Major Odes: An Annotated Bibliography of the*
DEDICATION

Criticism (Greenwood Press, 1984) and Approaches to Teaching the Poetry of John Keats, with Walter H. Evert, Jr. (MLA Press, 1991).

One of Jack’s sessions at an NCHC conference was titled “With Friends Like These . . . Dealing with Problem People in Honors.” As an exemplar of civility and goodwill, Jack would be the perfect advisor on this topic as well as many others, and we are grateful to him for all his generous and genial contributions to the honors community.
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION
Ada Long
University of Alabama at Birmingham

Even in these perplexing times, most citizens of the United States would agree that social injustices in this country need to be addressed and alleviated. Most would acknowledge the high rates of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, incarceration, economic inequality, racial discrimination, and bias in college admissions, for instance, that undermine the ideals essential to a thriving democracy. The challenge, though, is getting beneath these abstractions to a level of empathy that can bring about change. While the National Collegiate Honors Council has taken on this challenge in years past, the energy and commitment required to meet the challenge has generally waned as years have passed and as programmatic, institutional, and organizational issues directly related to honors education have taken precedence.

Under the leadership of NCHC president Naomi Yavneh Klos of Loyola University New Orleans, a new agenda to address social injustices is now underway to make diversity and social justice a central focus of the organization, and so it is fitting that she opens this issue of the Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council with the lead essay for a Forum on “Honors and Social Justice.” A Call for Papers on the Forum topic went out via the NCHC website, listserv, and e-newsletter inviting members to contribute to the Forum. The Call included a link to Yavneh Klos’s essay, “Thinking Critically, Acting Justly,” with the following comments:

Yavneh Klos asks readers to consider two questions: “first, how to engage our highest-ability and most motivated students in questions of justice; and second, how honors can be a place of access, equity, and excellence in higher education.” She describes the ways her program has wedded traditional and experiential educational goals with justice education to fulfill the Jesuit honors mission to “embrace diversity; foster reflection and discernment; promote social justice and preferential care for the poor and the vulnerable; and bring ‘intellectual talents into service of the world’s great needs.’” Rejecting the notion that a student’s qualification for honors can easily be identified by test scores and high school GPA, she suggests ways that admissions policies and curriculum decisions can achieve equitable and inclusive excellence for the public good.
The Call for Papers then provided a list of questions that Forum contributors might consider:

What kinds of honors admissions policies best serve the cause of inclusive excellence? Is the notion of “inclusive excellence” an oxymoron? Can virtue and social justice really be taught at all? How might honors faculty and administrators address the notion that they should teach practical skills and “book learning,” leaving matters of morality and justice to parents and religious groups? Is social justice a partisan issue, part of a left-wing agenda? While diversity in an honors humanities curriculum is common practice, how might the sciences or engineering or computer science achieve a goal of inclusivity?

The Call indicated that “Contributions to the Forum may—but need not—respond to Yavneh Klos’s essay.” Four contributions were accepted for publication.

The first essay responding to Yavneh Klos’s challenge is by the incoming president of the NCHC, Richard Badenhausen of Westminster College. In “Making Honors Success Scripts Available to Students from Diverse Backgrounds,” Badenhausen explores beyond exclusionary admissions policies and examines the way we talk about honors as potentially obstructive to diversity. He contends that the narrative about honors we display to potential students on our websites and in our promotional materials tends to foreground test scores, study abroad, and national scholarships as markers of success in honors. The terminology and content of our narratives about honors create a script for success that alienates many students even before they might apply and creates an environment of privilege that is uncomfortable for students we want and need to welcome. Critical evaluation of this honors script can and should lead us toward greater inclusivity.

While Badenhausen addresses Yavneh Klos’s issue of “how honors can be a place of access, equity, and excellence in higher education,” the next essay addresses the other half of her formula: “how to engage our highest-ability and most motivated students in questions of justice.” In “Cultivating Empathy: Lessons from an Interdisciplinary Service-Learning Course,” Megan Jacobs and Marygold Walsh-Dilley describe a two-semester, interdisciplinary course at the University of New Mexico that immersed relatively privileged students in the realities of mass incarceration. Through the lenses of sociology and art, the course “intentionally constructed opportunities for students
to think in an interdisciplinary manner as a means to put a face on the quantitative research about mass incarceration, thereby cultivating empathy." The research and projects of the first semester prepared students to partner during the next semester with nonprofit organizations that assist at-risk youth. The students developed curricula, taught classes, and worked together with their young at-risk partners to create a zine of poetry and photographs. The projects led students to see their interconnections with the at-risk youths and to "recognize the intersections of privilege and exclusion within our own classroom."

In "Socioeconomic Equity in Honors Education: Increasing Numbers of First-Generation and Low-Income Students," Angela D. Mead of Appalachian State University homes in on an important component of diversity and social justice in honors that often goes unnoticed because it is not as easy to measure as race or gender. Mead provides a rich range of data about first-generation and low-income students, pointing out that these students can be hard to identify. She writes, "Although recruiting such students may require greater effort, the social justice payoff is well worth the time." She specifies ways of identifying these students and suggests strategies for recruiting, admitting, and supporting them. Mead shares her own roots in the kinds of populations that too often remain invisible to honors administrators as an illustration of what such students must overcome and what honors programs have to gain from recognizing and including them.

In the current political climate, social justice is often equated with a left-wing agenda as a way to disparage it. Sarita Cargas of the University of New Mexico addresses this issue in the final essay of the Forum, "Social Justice Education in Honors: Political but Non-Partisan." Cargas writes, "I contend that we can and must teach social justice from a non-partisan perspective and will offer recommendations for best practices for [social justice education] in the context of an honors program." She offers a variety of definitions of social justice education and their overlap with objectives of the NCHC. She then provides recommendations for how faculty members can advocate social justice while avoiding "teaching from their own bias." Her suggestions include critical thinking, multicultural understanding, civic engagement, and fostering empathy through narrative.

The first two research essays in this issue of JNCHC continue the Forum's focus on social justice, both emanating from Jesuit institutions and picking up on the themes introduced by Naomi Yavneh Klos. In "What Makes a Curriculum Significant? Tracing the Taxonomy of Significant Learning in Jesuit
Honors Programs,” Robert J. Pampel of Saint Louis University shares the results of his study of eight honors programs at Jesuit universities. He writes that these programs “are marked not only by their adherence to principles of honors education but also by what the Honors Consortium of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) calls ‘essential characteristics of a Jesuit Honors Program’: “integrative learning, reflection and discernment, and commitment to social justice in the spirit of the ‘intellectual apostolate.’” He uses Dee Fink’s significant learning taxonomy to examine honors programs generally and to distinguish the special characteristics of Jesuit honors programs. He notes that the Jesuit programs promote “knowledge not only for students’ advancement but also for the advancement of the poor and disadvantaged” and also a high “level of intentionality” in guiding students “toward knowledge of self.” He suggests the “potential for Jesuit-inspired ideals of reflection, discernment, and social justice to enrich and differentiate a program’s curriculum and academic practices.” These strategies of “personal discernment and social justice,” he writes, “can serve as a model for other institutions interested in similar outcomes.”

Illustrating some of the principles of social justice described in previous essays, Lydia Voigt offers the example of a seminar at Loyola University New Orleans titled “Violence and Democracy.” In “Linking Academic Excellence and Social Justice through Community-Based Participatory Research,” Voigt describes the course objectives, the principles of social justice pedagogy, and the structure of the seminar, during which students collaborate with both campus partners and a social service agency on a project designed to meet the agency’s needs. One such semester-long research project, for instance, was a comparative cost analysis of “unassisted homelessness versus the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) approach” that “contributed to the expansion of the PSH program and ultimately a reduction of homelessness in New Orleans.” In line with both honors and Jesuit missions, the seminar “attempts to connect educational excellence with social justice through engagement with the community, solidarity with the needs of community members, and advocacy of social justice and human rights.”

While designing curricula, policies, and program-related activities to encourage social justice is one of the most satisfying challenges for honors administrators, dealing with the current drug crisis is one of the scariest. In “General Strain Theory and Prescription Drug Misuse Among Honors Students,” Jordan Pedalino and Kelly Frailing provide some understanding of this problem and potential ways to address it. After reviewing the literature
about prescription drug abuse among college students in general as well as three theories for explaining it—social bond theory, social learning theory, and general strain theory—the authors adopted the latter as the basis for a study of alcohol and drug misuse among honors program students at Loyola University New Orleans. Based on a data analysis of survey responses from 93 students, they determined to their surprise that the “lower respondents’ expectations of themselves, the more likely they were to report prescription stimulant misuse” and that relationship strains were generally not associated with prescription painkiller misuse. Pedalino and Frailing provide a number of possible explanations and caveats about these unexpected findings but nevertheless make several recommendations based on their results, such as providing upper-class mentors for newer students to help bolster their self-expectations.

Pedalino and Frailing address the question of anticipating and addressing the special needs of honors students in the context of the national drug crisis, which is surely one of the many considerations that honors advisors must take into account in serving this population. The work of honors advisors—how they perceive it and how it is distinct from that of other advisors—is the subject of “Perceptions of Advisors Who Work with High-Achieving Students.” The three authors—Melissa L. Johnson of the University of Florida, Cheryl Walther of Colorado State University, and Kelly J. Medley of Arizona State University—begin with a literature review on the characteristics of honors students and the need for specialized advising. They then describe a study they conducted after soliciting the participation of honors advisors around the country and then doing a thematic data analysis of telephone interviews with the twenty-two advisors who agreed to participate. Themes that emerged were that honors advisors provide a “one-stop shop”; build “connections and referral networks”; indulge a “future orientation”; and cultivate a “support system.” The participants also made detailed distinctions between honors and non-honors advising, with particular emphasis on the “time-intensive nature” of honors advising. The authors conclude by drawing parallels between honors advising and honors teaching and by attesting that honors advising is, in fact, teaching.

The next essay contends that developmental assessment centers can complement the work of advisors in preparing students for the next step in their lives and careers. In “From Campus to Corporation: Using Developmental Assessment Centers to Facilitate Students’ Next Career Steps,” Rick R. Jacobs, Kaytlynn R. Griswold, Kristen L. Swigart, Greg E. Loviscky, and
Rachel L. Heinen of Pennsylvania State University describe the practices used in the Schreyer Honors College’s Leadership Assessment Center to provide honors students with the skills and understanding they need as they prepare to enter the workplace. They summarize the competencies that students will need, their strategies for identifying students’ strengths and weaknesses in these competencies, and the method they use to “recreate a typical workday by including activities characteristic of an office environment, e.g., presentations, meetings, and email.” They then describe adaptations of the Schreyer Honors College’s model to the Huck Life Sciences Institute at Penn State and to other institutions such as Bryn Mawr College and Northeastern University. They describe how to build an assessment center based on this model, including how to develop assessment tools and what to assess, and they conclude by describing the benefits and success of this model.

Echoing the value of focusing on careers but transitioning from a corporate to a philosophical approach, Christopher Keller of Western Kentucky University offers an approach to “the liberal arts and humanities that does not pit them against career-centered programs and people but instead offers ways for honors educators . . . to impose limits and boundaries in the context of institutions and programs that continually seek their removal.” In “How to Drink from the Pierian Spring: A Liberal Arts and Humanities Question about the Limits of Honors Education,” Keller argues against the idealization of the arts and humanities and the demonization of career-oriented education. He suggests that “the liberal arts and humanities can sustain only so much pressure to rise above the fray and represent access to universal truth and wisdom before they must be brought back down to terra firma and the realm of workplaces and job skills.” He questions the connections between the lofty goal of high-minded wisdom and “the specific types of people, citizens, and professionals that honors educators seek to develop and send out into the world.” He argues that “asking and expecting more from students, expecting them to dig deeper, go farther, explore broadly, and form endless appetites for knowledge . . . necessitates a responsibility to spend as much effort producing a language and rhetoric of limits and boundaries.” As Keller points out, Alexander Pope’s “Pierian Spring offers a knowledge in limits: the more one drinks, the deeper one drinks, the more one comes to recognize the unattainable heights and breadth of learning’s terrain.” Honors educators need to acknowledge these limits rather than making claims that their students can attain limitless heights of wisdom without having to deal eventually with all the limits of a job.
We conclude this issue of JNCHC with one of the winning essays in NCHC’s annual Portz Prize competition. We are proud this year to publish an essay by Ashlyn Stewart of the University of Denver as an example of the exceptional accomplishments of honors students nationwide. “Creating a National Readership for Harper’s Weekly in a Time of Sectional Crisis” is an analysis of one of the first national magazines in the United States, launched in 1857 just as the country was starting to move toward the Civil War. Stewart describes the dilemmas confronting the editors of this fledgling periodical as they tried to maintain a wide circulation in both pro- and anti-slavery regions of the country. She analyzes Harper Weekly’s coverage of “the Dred Scott trial of 1857, John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry in 1859, the fallout of the 1860 election, and the buildup to the firing on Fort Sumter in 1861” in light of the editors’ increasingly challenging attempt to maintain a national readership and remain profitable. The periodical progressed through various phases to achieve their goal of remaining viable; coverage shifted from avoiding controversial issues to appealing to a majority of readers to relying on illustrations to appease all sides to constructing “a narrative of the war by placing stories—both fictional and nonfictional—about the war in a collection built to last beyond the week’s news cycle.” All the while they were conditioning readers “to have certain expectations about what a national weekly periodical would and would not cover, making them true arbiters of the genre.” Stewart’s analysis perhaps sheds light on how national periodicals cover issues of social justice today.
Thinking Critically, Acting Justly

NAOMI YAVNEH KLOS
Loyola University New Orleans

In October 2011, just two months after I became Director of the University Honors Program at Loyola New Orleans, my new home town was simultaneously proclaimed both “America’s Best City for Foodies” (Forbes) and the country’s “Worst Food Desert” (Lammers). The city known for beignets and crawfish, Mardi Gras and jazz, was revealed to have only one supermarket for each 16,000 residents (half the national average), with some residents traveling over fifteen miles from their homes to purchase fresh produce.

In the past six years, the situation has been somewhat ameliorated by multiple farmers markets throughout the city that accept food stamps and by an urban farm movement that has been repurposing land, abandoned and overgrown since Katrina, in the Lower 9th Ward and St. Bernard Parish. Even so, one of six children in New Orleans experiences food insecurity, and food injustice is not the only challenge facing this city of tremendous inequities:

• 40% of adults are illiterate;

• 39% of New Orleans’ children live in poverty; and
1 in 14 black males is incarcerated in a city where 60.2% of the population is African American. (Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the world.)

I emphasize my city’s inequities because Loyola, a Jesuit university located in uptown New Orleans, intertwines with its community as both a place of privilege and a point of access. Loyola, a masters-level institution, is far more diverse than Tulane, the much larger, less “artsy,” and more affluent research university next door. In 2017, Loyola was ranked #4 in the region for ethnic diversity by the U.S. News & World Report and, according to The Princeton Review, #13 in the country for race/class interaction (Loyola). Although the Loyola University Honors Program is, like many other honors programs and colleges, somewhat “whiter” than the rest of the institution (half of whose undergraduates are students of color), approximately 30% of honors students are people of color, 30% are the first in their families to attend college, and 26% are Pell-eligible. Geographically, 60% of honors students come from outside of Louisiana; some may come for our nationally ranked music industries program, knowing nothing about the city’s social justice challenges, while others may decide to come after a “Voluntourism” service or mission trip here in high school. At least 25% of honors students, however, are from the greater New Orleans area and so have experienced in some way the loss and displacement of Katrina regardless of their childhood social and economic backgrounds. More recently, a number of our students lost their homes (some for the second time) or were otherwise affected by the flooding near Baton Rouge in the summer of 2016. Now, as I write this essay, images of devastation from Houston, along with our own city’s torrential rain and dysfunctional pumps, are bringing up painful memories and raising anxiety.

I suspect that my colleagues on the provost council at Loyola have turned our conversations into a virtual drinking game, betting on how quickly I will say the word “honors.” NCHC board members, in turn, may secretly promise themselves a shot each time I bring up Loyola or New Orleans. I do think my program is special, as each of us does, or at least should, but I am starting my discussion with Loyola because our story crystallizes two essential questions about honors education and social justice: first, how to engage our highest-ability and most motivated students in questions of justice; and second, how honors can be a place of access, equity, and excellence in higher education.

With respect to teaching justice, the startling dichotomy between the outside perception of New Orleans and its challenging realities, along with the diverse backgrounds of our students, was my inspiration in developing
the social justice pedagogy that is now the heart of the Loyola University Honors Program’s core curriculum. The precepts underlying this curriculum—although articulated in the context of a Jesuit honors program—are not specific to faith-based or private education, but I believe they can and should be central to public education as well, preparing students to serve the common good, whatever their career paths or vocation. These precepts include the following:

- Education, particularly for high-ability students, should be grounded in an approach to knowledge that values education for its own sake and also calls students to bring their talents into the service of the world’s great needs, i.e., to relate intellectual concerns to the goals of service, wisdom, and compassion.

- Justice education must be scaffolded into the curriculum as a whole. We cannot expect students to acquire the requisite skills to understand and grapple with questions of justice through a one-off service requirement any more than we can expect first-semester students to write a thesis. Just as we break undergraduate research into a framework of skills—how to read texts, how to find and analyze sources, how to develop an original hypothesis that draws from and responds to received opinion—so we need to provide incremental and ongoing training in the historical understanding of justice, in the embrace of diverse cultures and traditions, and in the experience of others. The Loyola program has articulated and works hard to assess specific “Ignatian values” learning outcomes relating to these issues.

- Experiential education is vital. To understand a community, students need to be part of it, not just talk about it in the classroom. They need to go out into the larger community not just to serve or give back but to comprehend their similarity and solidarity with others whose lives on the surface may seem disparate from their own. And such experiences, incrementally, should go beyond encounters to community-engaged research.

Institutional research has shown that only about 4% of incoming students list “Jesuit mission” as a top reason for choosing Loyola, but that mission—which to the dismay of some of our board members has virtually nothing to do with teaching Catholicism—is to “educate students to be men and women for and with others.” The Honors Consortium of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) has articulated “Essential Characteristics of
a Jesuit Honors Program” <http://academicaffairs.loyno.edu/honors/essential-characteristics-jesuit-honors-program> that include a charge to embrace diversity; foster reflection and discernment; promote social justice and preferential care for the poor and the vulnerable; and bring “intellectual talents into service of the world’s great needs.”

These values, to my mind, should be universal. I am not a Catholic and, until I came to Loyola, had only taught at public institutions. My educational background, my experiences in honors at Loyola and previously at the University of South Florida, and my own faith all contribute to my belief that, yes, honors education should prepare students for graduate and professional schools as well as for distinguished careers in both the public and private sectors, but students must also learn how to use their gifts to develop an understanding of the world in its complexities. Specifically, honors graduates need the critical thinking skills to find solutions to twenty-first-century challenges, globally or locally; the ability to listen to and engage with divergent opinions in order to effect a workable compromise; and a moral compass that reminds them to consider the ethical implications of their actions.

In addition to promoting these values in the classroom, we need to address how honors education can promote justice institutionally. As many of us know, in discussions of access, affordability, and equity in higher education, honors is often left out of the conversation because of a false dichotomy between “high ability” and “high need” that is based on an assumption that all highly engaged and creative students come from affluent backgrounds and will excel regardless of the resources afforded them by their institutions. In fact, the high-impact practices included in the NCHC’s “Basic Characteristics” of honors education are of particular benefit to students from underrepresented backgrounds and low socioeconomic status, including first-generation, ethnic minority, undocumented students, and at my institution, “first in family” honors students have the same high four-year graduation rate as those whose parents graduated from college. I suspect that other honors programs have similar outcomes and would appreciate research on this topic.

The power of honors to promote inclusive excellence, however, is not widely recognized, let alone celebrated. At a recent AJCU conference on “the commitment to justice in higher education,” I heard multiple calls for “a new definition of prestige” even as eyes glazed over when I uttered the word “honors.” The important and ongoing conversations about systemic racism included a subtle but palpable bias: a presumed disconnect between the challenges facing marginalized populations in higher education and the
importance of a vaguely defined concept of excellence. Part of that disconnect is the misunderstanding about who actually participates in honors education. The NCHC’s 872 member-institutions are public and private, two- and four-year, faith-based and secular. Honors students come from all academic disciplines, represent every U.S. state and many other nations, and are both citizens and undocumented residents. Many are the first in their families to attend college. Many are veterans. They represent the full spectrum of racial and ethnic diversity afforded by our country and may be gay, straight, or transgender.

Public conversations about affirmative action and access for minority students, however, most frequently focus on the 0.04% of American college students who attend Ivy League and other elite institutions, rarely including the 49% attending two-year colleges. The *New York Times* and *Chronicle of Higher Education* rarely, if ever, publish articles about honors at two-year institutions or highlight honors colleges and programs, collectively, as one of this nation’s best-kept secrets in addressing issues of access, affordability, and excellence.

As an honors community, we need to do a better job telling our story, but we also need to do a better job in our essential task of thinking critically and acting justly regarding who participates in honors. For example, most of us recognize the cultural biases in the standardized tests, which are still an important component of our country’s educational landscape, but even when we assess success in honors programs with more qualitative data, we often extoll our students’ standardized test scores and GPAs to board members or upper-level administrators. Many large honors colleges—and some smaller colleges and programs as well—still rely predominantly or exclusively on a matrix of test scores and GPAs. Even at some avowedly “test optional” schools, the SAT or ACT is no longer optional if the student wishes to be considered for the institution’s honors program.

The GPA, combined with class rank, can balance some of the shortcomings of the ACT; the valedictorian at even the most poorly resourced high schools is generally bright, engaged, and highly motivated. The GPA alone is also not the answer, though; a student’s grades might have slipped in a given semester because his family lost their home or a parent was struggling with addiction. A holistic review process examines and questions all parts of a student’s dossier. For example, a student may not have a lot of clubs or leadership positions listed on her application because she was working after school or helping to care for younger siblings so her single mom could work. Admitting
such a student to honors hardly constitutes a lowered standard of excellence; instead, it re-envisions valued traditional standards such as “commitment to service” or “work ethic” that we value when linked to the same type of activities framed as “tutoring children from disadvantaged backgrounds” or “volunteering in a soup kitchen” or “principal cellist for the youth orchestra.”

We need a more nuanced reevaluation of standards that recognizes the role of systemic bias in traditional metrics of academic excellence and that holistically evaluates each student’s strengths and challenges in the context of individual and cultural experience. Such practices strengthen honors by identifying a diverse spectrum of students who both benefit from and enrich our honors community.

High-quality, experientially based education for high-ability and highly motivated students from diverse backgrounds is an academic mix that not only improves our institutions but can improve our world, globally and locally. Diversity is important as more than an abstract, theoretical concept. Honors can play a powerful role in teaching justice. Inclusive excellence helps situate learning in a meaningful context that enriches students’ understanding of complex social issues ranging from economic and health disparities to LGBT rights and cultural sensitivity. In this way, honors education can and should be a vehicle for promoting the public good, a cause that requires no justification.

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In her lead forum essay, Naomi Yavneh Klos thoughtfully encourages us to reexamine our admissions practices in honors. She argues,

We need a more nuanced reevaluation of standards that recognizes the role of systemic bias in traditional metrics of academic excellence and that holistically evaluates each student’s strengths and challenges in the context of individual and cultural experience. Such practices strengthen honors by identifying a diverse spectrum of students who both benefit from and enrich our honors community. (8)

I would like to take that call for reevaluation one step further by asking members of the honors community to interrogate the way we narratively frame honors experiences so that these constructs are as inclusive as possible. Employing admissions practices that do not disadvantage students from underrepresented backgrounds is crucial, but also essential is that we do not unintentionally turn away such students even before they might consider
applying to honors. The way we discuss honors and the stories we tell about it can signal to underrepresented students that they do not belong. One way to think about this issue is to pose a question, with apologies to Raymond Carver: What do we talk about when we talk about honors? Ultimately, I want to think about how success narratives are structured in honors education; ask how open or available these narratives are to students from underrepresented backgrounds; and make sure we are not simply reinforcing privilege when our narratives make promises to students about what it means to join the honors community.

Sara Ahmed’s thrilling book, *The Promise of Happiness*, provides a useful framework for this discussion. Writing from the perspective of a queer, feminist woman of color, Ahmed interrogates the way that particular groups are “alienated” from what she calls “happiness scripts . . . a set of instructions for what women and men must do to be happy” (59). A typical normative happiness script, for example, might involve a marriage between a man and a woman and the children that follow. Ahmed argues that we become “orientated” by particular “objects” that establish an expectation for happiness because of the positive affective value attached to the objects, as when a bride might imagine her wedding as “the happiest day” of her life, one of many examples Ahmed cites (34, 41). She observes that while this configuration creates a set of promises around happiness, certain marginalized groups are structurally isolated from those promises, groups like “feminist killjoys,” “melancholic migrants,” and “unhappy queers,” the titles of the three chapters that follow the introduction to *The Promise of Happiness*.

In slightly tweaking Ahmed’s frame, I am suggesting that in higher education we have constructed a set of what I’ll call “success scripts,” scripts or narratives that propose what success looks like for students; that (over)determine who has access to success; and that are reinforced structurally by our institutional practices, from our admissions procedures to pedagogical methods to allocation of financial support. The honors community is not immune to this tendency. The key issue I am raising is how honors students from underrepresented groups are positioned against and within these success scripts and whether we are unwittingly alienating such students from these scripts, whether we are doing everything in our power to ensure that success narratives are as available to disadvantaged students as they are to students from more privileged backgrounds.

Consider one obvious example of how this signaling around success operates. A high school student investigating honors programs is liable to visit
a program website and see within the first few minutes a minimum score for applying to the program. (The mean minimum ACT requirement among surveyed NCHC member schools in the 2015 membership survey was 26.12.) We know that standardized test scores correlate most positively with family income, and most honors programs that have explored the relationship between ACT and success in their programs have found little correlation, yet our community continues to over-depend on such scores, thus overdetermining what entering cohorts look like. Think about the success narrative that is being communicated by using the ACT as a gatekeeper and the manner in which it excludes. The University of Wisconsin’s honors program found this situation so troubling a number of years ago that it abolished standardized test scores as a criterion for application, and the next year their first-year retention rate went up. While such moves take courage and may conflict with university administrators’ concern with rankings and metrics, think of the way that deemphasizing scores changes the narrative around what constitutes success in high school and how much it expands our welcome to various populations.

Sticking to admissions practices, think how essay questions that ask high school students about volunteer service implicitly favor students from privileged backgrounds who have the luxury to help others for free (or even pay for that privilege) instead of, say, supporting a family by working for a wage. Such questions implicitly announce to the latter group of students that their “service” is somehow of lesser value, less welcome, or less appropriate for an honors applicant. A program that identifies such biases and wishes to expand success scripts might consider employing more open-ended essays that turn on thought experiments or that allow applicants to draw on their lived experience in, for example, an essay recounting a powerful conversation. The two-year college community has thought more carefully about these questions because of the diversity of populations it works with; we in the four-year community could learn much from their experience.

The term “honors” by itself carries an enormous amount of baggage around questions of privilege, elitism, and separateness. We don’t help our cause when we reinforce the weight of such baggage by calling for special treatment like priority enrollment or segregate our student populations in posh honors-dedicated residence halls, practices I have criticized elsewhere (Badenhausen). A further issue is the terminology we use about honors, including how and why we name programs and offices associated with our work. Fellowship advising offices, for example, are often housed in honors colleges: 45%
of NCHC-surveysed honors colleges had such offices in their unit, including the office at my own institution. Many have impressive names like Office of Distinguished Awards or National Competitive Scholarships Program, yet this impressiveness can bleed into intimidation. While such terminology intimates prestige and accomplishment, it also makes it harder for students from underrepresented groups to walk through those doors and situate themselves within that success narrative. For that reason, among others, at Westminster we use the more neutral “Office of Fellowship Advising” for the new office in our honors college. To remind those working in this space that we take the mission of inclusive excellence seriously, we have drafted a strategic plan that calls for the number of fellowship applicants by students from underrepresented groups to exceed the percentage of those students on campus; this is an aspirational outcome but one that will continue to guide us in terms of our practices.

Where success scripts get reinforced most powerfully is in our classrooms, and so we especially need to interrogate our pedagogies to ensure that we are using inclusive approaches to teaching and learning. Libby Roderick explores this topic in her essay “ Culturally Responsive Teaching” and warns us not to “perpetuate [society’s] unequal power relations between and among various groups . . . within our own classrooms” (117). Such an approach calls on teachers to be especially responsive, nimble, and flexible, qualities that are particularly suitable for the student-centered focus of most honors classrooms even though that connection between honors pedagogy and inclusivity is not often made explicitly. What I am arguing is that the honors classroom is especially hospitable to inclusive and equitable teaching practices like allowing learners to demonstrate their mastery of material in numerous ways, varying one’s teaching strategies, and helping students connect issues from the classroom to their own lives, three culturally responsive strategies highlighted by Roderick. Asking such questions about our practices can reveal some surprising findings, such as the fact that the default mode of instruction in most writing centers—“nondirective instruction, in which tutors prompt students to come up with the right answers themselves; and a resistance to focusing on grammatical errors”—tends to best serve the needs of privileged students but to “poorly serve . . . female students, minority students, those with low academic standing, and those who grew up speaking a language other than English at home” (Jacobs). Steering students from underrepresented groups to resources that may covertly thwart or frustrate their learning is hardly a habit we want to continue.
I offer one final wrinkle to my challenge. Not only do students from underrepresented groups often feel alienated from success scripts but competing scripts complicate their journeys through our institutions. These include narratives that see college as an abandonment of family; scripts that restrict students’ choices of majors to pre-professional disciplines that seemingly promise the assurance of a job; or scripts that implicitly position underrepresented students as “guests in someone else’s house,” to quote the title of one essay on the unwelcoming climate in universities for students of color (Turner). Such students are bound to feel like guests or even intruders given the work we still have to do in the honors community in addressing the fact that nationally “students enrolled in honors are more likely to come from backgrounds that are more privileged” (Dziesinski, Camarena, and Homrich-Knieling 83), a feature Yavneh Klos notes of her own program. Indeed, I have conducted program reviews at institutions where roughly a third of students are people of color while over 90% of the honors population is white; such a situation is simply unacceptable.

I conclude by returning to Sara Ahmed, who notes how often those alienated from conventional happiness scripts find shame in “hiding” underneath these scripts (101); in other words, they are suppressing their authentic identities as a way of finding a place for themselves in these normative narratives. I am certain some of our students are feeling a similar sort of discomfort because we have yet to expand what success looks like on our campuses, a realization that pains me although it is a pain that pales in comparison to the struggle so many of our students experience when trying to negotiate these narratives. In response to that struggle, I am asking us to rise to the challenge of Lisa Coleman’s call to action in her recent introduction to *Occupy Honors Education*, where she claims we are being “naïve if we believe that honors does not have to change integrally, significantly, if we are to be productive players on the world stage as well as on the campuses of our home institutions” (xiv). Putting aside global concerns for a moment, I ask you to evaluate what messages you are sending locally to students who deserve a clear, accessible, and recognizable pathway to success in the language we use to discuss academic achievement in honors.

**NOTE**

An early draft of this essay was presented at the 2018 meeting of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).
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In “Thinking Critically, Acting Justly,” Naomi Yavneh Klos suggests that the key questions for honors education and social justice are first “how to engage our highest-ability and most motivated students in questions of justice” and second “how honors can be a place of access, equity, and excellence in higher education.” These goals are both important and complementary; achieving the latter helps achieve the former. Honors education creates a fruitful space for inclusion where the knowledge and experience of diverse students develop skills oriented toward justice for the whole community. Making honors a place of access and equity prompts deeper engagement in questions of justice for all. Particularly in its emphasis on interdisciplinary and experiential learning, honors education creates, as Yavneh Klos writes, opportunities to “develop an understanding of the world in its complexities [and to] listen and engage [across difference].” Honors also prompts students to learn from the intersections of experience, recognize assumptions based in
privilege, and challenge the notion that justice is about helping distant others. Through these practices, honors education is particularly well-positioned to cultivate empathy, a necessary foundation of social justice education.

We base our conclusions about building empathy in honors education on our experience team-teaching an experiential, interdisciplinary course focused on mass incarceration in the University of New Mexico Honors College. Titled “Locked Up: Incarceration in Question,” the two-semester course integrated methodologies and approaches from sociology and art, fostering interdisciplinary inquiry into the historic roots and contemporary practices of incarceration. The aim of the class was to cultivate empathetic and engaged citizens, both caring about the world around them and prepared to create change in their communities. During the fall semester, students examined mass incarceration as a civil rights issue and explored how art allows us to both construct meaning and communicate knowledge about injustice. This class prepared students for service learning projects during the spring semester, when student groups worked with community partners to provide requested services. During the activities of both semesters, students came to destabilize the false dichotomy between themselves—often relatively privileged students in their state’s flagship university—and individuals directly impacted by the injustices of the carceral apparatus. Students found such complexities also mirrored in their own lives.

The course applied “depth of field” as a metaphor for addressing the concept of incarceration personally or universally. We started with a shallow depth of field by looking at the example of one voice, one person’s experience of incarceration, in reading the poet Jimmy Santiago Baca’s memoir, A Place to Stand. The memoir recalls Baca’s childhood poverty and neglect, his subsequent involvement in drug trafficking, his time in prison, and the freedom he found through literacy and poetry. We hosted Mr. Baca, a native of New Mexico, in our class, where he spoke candidly about the critical role that poetry played in coping with his own incarceration and maintaining a sense of his own identity. This initial text and interaction laid the groundwork for what we hoped to do in the class: examine mass incarceration as a sociological problem and civil rights issue through the lens of the fine arts.

As the class progressed, our scope grew wider and wider. Throughout the course, we asked students to complete weekly blog observations regarding the class readings, discussions, and visiting scholars. These observations served two purposes: 1) to provide a platform for student reflection, a hallmark of service learning that was a key component of the spring portion of
the course, and 2) to chart real-time observations of the students and hold
them accountable for completing the work of the class. These words from one
student, Kaitlin, following Jimmy Santiago Baca’s visit embody the depth and
thoughtfulness of these reflections:

As I listened to Mr. Baca share stories of others who hold his same his-
tory, I quickly realized that the greatest problem plaguing the prison
system in the United States is the absence of empathy. We are quick to
place judgment and slow to listen. Therefore, we rapidly seek punish-
ment inside our prisons and ignore the blaring need for rehabilitation.
Incarcerated persons are quickly stripped of their humanity and only
seen for their crimes. Past actions swiftly transform into future identi-
ties. If an individual is constantly labeled as a “convict” and placed in
an environment that “tortures and lobotomizes the soul” it will slowly
leak into one’s own perception of selfhood.

Affording students the opportunity to engage firsthand with scholars and
artists of diverse backgrounds can foster these kinds of deep analytical and
personal reflections, the kinds of seismic shifts that we sought to provide for
our students throughout the course.

We created projects that merged sociology and art, such as an infographic
project in which students gathered data from academic journals, analyzed it,
and created an infographic, using aesthetics of design such as hierarchy, pro-
ximity, unity, color, and typography. Students developed a thesis statement
that was forged from their research and generated a design to represent it visu-
ally. We intentionally constructed opportunities for students to think in an
interdisciplinary manner as a means to put a face on the quantitative research
about mass incarceration, thereby cultivating empathy. One must dig deep
and consider varying points of view in trying to visually represent quantita-
tive research on issues related to incarceration: the cycle of violence, race and
drug convictions, or the relationship between mental illness and incarcer-
ation. (See Figure 1 for an example of a student infographic from this project.)

By pairing sociological readings with creative art works, we fostered
opportunities to bridge the universal and personal, opening a window for
students to share how their own experiences mapped onto what they were
learning in the class. This interdisciplinary interaction created opportunities
for intersectional engagement, which emerged spontaneously. We studied
the artwork of and hosted a workshop with the award-winning photographer
Richard Ross, whose work explores the efficacy and ethics of the treatment of
American juveniles in detention centers. His books *Juvenile in Justice* and *Girls in Justice*, explore the intersection of photography and sociological research as not only a powerful “catalyst for change” but a model of interdisciplinarity for our students. Ross’s work served as a springboard for an interdisciplinary approach.

**Figure 1. An Example of a Student infographic**

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**The Cycle of Violence in Indigenous Communities**

*American Indian Communities suffer from uniquely high rates of violence and violent crime.*

- The rate of violence for American Indians is more than 2x that of the United States population.

- 1 violent crime for every ten residents.
- 75% of suspects investigated in Indian Country involved a violent crime.

- 1 violent crime for every 24 U.S. residents.
- 5% of suspects investigated nationwide involved a violent crime.

**Federal Prisoners Serving a Sentence for Violent Crime**

- 55% of American Indians
- 14% of Blacks
- 5% of Asians
- 4% of Whites

From the NPSI Project: Simon Child and Alethea Hernandez

project in which students interviewed and photographed someone involved in the criminal justice system using sociological and artistic methods, providing a platform for students to share personal experiences. Students exhibited a diptych pairing a quotation from the interview with a photographic portrait. During the critique of this project, two diptychs viscerally stood out, opening a window into the intimate lives of class members; they were the work of two students who had familial experiences with incarceration that the class, including the instructors, had been unaware of. Joshua’s image (Figure 2) simulated his personal experience of growing up with an incarcerated father.

The close-up photograph of a father holding his child’s hand, as if during visitation hours, illustrated the strain of having an incarcerated family member. Ruby’s diptych depicted family members clutching one another with a quotation (Figure 3) that contextualized the strain on their family as their father was incarcerated. The quotation goes on to explain how the absence of their father led to a search for familial closeness, including the interviewee’s decision to have her own children at a young age. This quotation echoes and makes tangible the scholarship we read about the destructive effects of incarceration on children and families (Comfort; Goffman).

The images and reflections led to a recognition of the intersections of privilege and exclusion within our own classroom, breaking down what Yavneh

**Figure 2. The Image from Joshua’s Diptych**
Klos calls the “false dichotomy between ‘high ability’ and ‘high need’ that is based on an assumption that all highly engaged and creative students come from affluent backgrounds.” This theme emerged as a key point throughout the class: the distinction between “us” (as elite college students) and “them” (individuals caught up in the criminal justice system) was not nearly as stark as some students or professors would have presumed.

In preparation for the spring service learning projects and prompted by the techniques emphasized in “Service Learning as a Pedagogy of Whiteness” by Tania D. Mitchell and colleagues, the class worked together to examine our privilege in relation to the populations we would be serving. These experiences prompted us to “interrupt the patterns and privileges of whiteness that too often are normalized in service learning” (Mitchell et al. 1) and to continue our critical reflection about the distribution of privilege and oppression within our classroom. Activities in class brought these ideas into clearer focus. Adapted from exercises by Brenda J. Allen at the University of Colorado-Denver and Thomas E. Walker at the University of Denver, the

**Figure 3. The Quotation from Ruby’s Diptych**

It was so sad seeing my baby sister trying to touch him through the glass [during visitation hours]. [She] took off her shoe and she had her little feet in the window, and my dad got close and said “fushi” like if her foot stinked but he couldn’t actually smell it . . . and [she] started laughing and laughing because she thought he was actually smelling her feet. My dad wanted to start crying, he said, “I wish I could hug her” . . . it took him almost a year to actually hold her, like he was so desesperado to actually hold his daughter, like he’s just been seeing her grow up through a window.

Maybe I wouldn’t have gotten pregnant so young [if her father was not away] . . . when I met him [father of her children] I felt that I was actually going to have the family I always wanted.

—E.S., Age 23
privilege beads exercise created an experiential way to recognize the intersection of one’s privilege and oppression. Placards with statements about aspects of one’s identity—such as sexuality, ability, gender, race, and religion—were placed around the room next to a bowl of multicolored beads. The statements ranged in scope from “I can assume that I will easily have physical access to any building” to “I can look at the mainstream media and find people of my race represented fairly and in a wide range of roles.” Students were instructed to read the statements and, if they could answer yes, they would place a bead in their bowl and later, if they wanted, string them into a necklace. The experience yielded a process in which students had to consider their own experiences of privilege and oppression. The multicolored beads lent privacy to each of the students; others in the class knew that their fellow students had some form of privilege but not the specific nature of that privilege. After concluding the exercise, students collaboratively discussed the process, and an organic conversation arose in which students felt empowered to share aspects of their identities with their peers. A turning point in the class, this discussion led to mutual trust and a willingness to share personal experiences that related to social justice and that became a tool to extend student education and create empathy.

The class focused on service learning as means for students to extend the academic work they did in the fall through projects to assist at-risk youth in partnership with Outcomes, Inc. and Desert Hills. Outcomes, Inc. is a New Mexico-based, nonprofit organization that provides professional guidance and support to individuals and families. The Conflict Resolution Division assists juveniles who are in the justice system as a result of violence and/or conflict. Honors students, under supervision of Outcomes, Inc. staff, created curricula and taught students in the program’s Alternative to Violence Program. Desert Hills is a residential treatment center that provides behavioral and mental health care for children, adolescents, and their families. Two groups of honors students taught classes at Desert Hills: one group developed curricula drawing on Baca’s Feeding the Roots to engage and empower students through poetry and the performing arts; the other group worked with youth, over a span of eight weeks, to create a zine comprising their poetry and photographic works. Student service-learners developed a greater understanding of the criminal justice system but more importantly developed a deep recognition of the institutional and structural apparatus that shuttles some students to college and others into the criminal justice system.
Their emergent empathy extended into students’ final interdisciplinary projects, which again coupled sociological research with creative output. One successful project was a photographic installation, *What Makes Them So Different?*, which indiscriminately coupled public mug shots of incarcerated youth with visually similar images of college students. The student artist, drawing from her service learning experiences, began to break down the “us” versus “them” mentality; her artist’s statement indicated that the work was “intended to bring light [to] the similarities and differences between college students and incarcerated youth,” a sentiment that captures the transformational nature of the class. A key part of the lessons learned in the course was the recognition of the complexities regarding who ends up incarcerated. People, especially youth, become ensnared in the criminal justice system often for reasons outside their control, including class, race, and family background (Cannon et al.). The creative projects demonstrated that students developed the skills to grapple with these issues in both conceptual and physical ways, and the public display of artworks expanded the lessons to the broader community.

The interdisciplinarity and experiential focus of the honors classroom creates unique opportunities to develop empathy across difference. Diversity in the classroom furthers these opportunities, opening space for peer-based learning that destabilizes dichotomies. Our experience teaching this class showed the deep learning that can come about through Yavneh Klos’s two pillars of honors education: social justice education and inclusion. We also saw that these goals are synergistic: in order to do the former, we must commit to the latter.

**NOTE**

As required by the Institutional Review Board at the University of New Mexico, student names have been changed or excluded. An emergent tension of interdisciplinary work is that social science research requires institutional review for ethical reasons while working with human subjects whereas the fine arts do not. Although we wanted to give students credit for their creative work, the requirements of institutional review for human subjects prevented us from doing so. We would nevertheless like to acknowledge the profound creative contributions made by the three student-artists mentioned here as well as the rest of the students in the class.
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Socioeconomic Equity in Honors Education: Increasing Numbers of First-Generation and Low-Income Students

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Many honors administrators can cite the numbers and percentages of students of color and statistics on the male to female ratio. Public institutions might cite in-state to out-of-state comparisons. For most, however, socioeconomic status is low on their list, if there at all, even though it is an important measure of diversity. First-generation college students, neither of whose parents has a baccalaureate degree, make up 58% of college enrollments (Redford & Hoyer). Students with a Pell Grant, which qualifies them as having a low-income background, compose 33% of the American higher education population (Baum et al.). Approximately 24% of college students are both first-generation and low-income (Engle & Tinto). In honors, first-generation college students make up 28.6% of honors college and program enrollments (National Collegiate Honors Council’s Admissions, Retention, and Completion Survey).
Research from the third (2012) follow-up to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Longitudinal Study of 2002 has provided more specific details about first-generation college students. The NCES found that 24% of college students come from families where neither parent has any college experience while an additional 34% are from families where parents may have some college experience but no bachelor’s degree. The final 42% of students have at least one parent with a bachelor’s degree (Redford & Hoyer). Most research has reached the consensus that a first-generation college student (FGCS) is a student for whom neither parent has a bachelor’s degree (Davis). Using this definition, 58% of college students can be considered first-generation.

No one definition of a low-income college student is sufficient given the variation depending on the location. A student may be considered low-income if attending a private institution in a location with a high cost of living but reasonably well-off at a public institution in a low cost-of-living area. Most institutions use Pell Grant eligibility as a proxy for income levels, but this is an imperfect metric. Not all students file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for a variety of reasons, such as having uncertain immigrant status or having a family member who is an undocumented immigrant. Other students are unable to file the FAFSA because their parents refuse to share financial or tax information with them out of embarrassment or fear of being audited. The NCES estimates that approximately 20% of students do not file the FAFSA, but it is impossible to tell who may have qualified for a Pell Grant.

In the 2015–2016 academic year, 7.6 million students received $39.1 billion in Pell Grants, or 33% of all undergraduate students (Baum et al.). In 2011–2012, 38% of undergraduates under the age of 24 received a Pell Grant (Baum). The maximum Pell Grant award covered approximately 60% of tuition and fees at the average public institution in 2016–2017 (Baum et al.).

Students from both first-generation and low-income student populations are also more likely to be older; be female; have a disability; be of a minority ethnicity; be non-native English speakers; and have dependent children (Engle & Tinto). First-generation and low-income students may also include students with other types of diverse background experiences.

Although recruiting such students may require greater effort, the social justice payoff is well worth the time. Providing these students with the opportunity for an honors education allows them the opportunity to move into careers with higher income expectation and greater social mobility.
First-generation college students have made a first step for their families and can serve as guides for future family members. The difference in earnings for low-income students can be immense over a lifetime. Education can be a lifeline into a new standard of living for students coming from a background of poverty. Honors educators should not simply teach justice in the classroom but lead the way in filling their classrooms with students from all backgrounds. Both in the classroom and outside it, honors can change these students’ lives and offer them insights and opportunities beyond anything they have imagined.

The first problem to overcome is knowing which students are first-generation or come from a low-income household. Often the data already exist somewhere in the complex computer information system, but reports must be created to present this information in a usable format. Data from the FAFSA can identify who is Pell-eligible or who is at the local threshold for poverty. Admissions questionnaires can be adapted to ask about parents’ or guardians’ highest level of education.

Once we have the data, we need to adjust our practices, beginning with the admissions cycle. Admissions representatives and recruiters should reach out to first-generation and low-income college students, who may not think that honors is for them, and encourage them to apply. Each institution will have different needs, but the admissions unit can often help.

Honors programs and colleges have a wide variety of admissions requirements and processes, from time-intensive holistic review (Smith & Zagurski) to computer-automated decisions, a model used at my current institution until ten years ago. When decisions are based primarily on standardized test scores, many first-generation and/or low-income students may be excluded. Smith and Zagurski found that setting a minimum ACT score for admission “resulted in limited diversity of the honors student population” (58).

The College Board’s 2016 College-Bound Seniors Total Group Report indicates that mean scores increased in tandem with the students’ household income and parental education levels. First-generation and lower-income students scored, on average, much lower than their more socioeconomically advantaged peers. Students from the lowest level of parental education, less than high school graduation, scored almost 300 points lower on average cumulatively across the three test sections than students who had a parent with a bachelor’s degree and more than 400 points lower than students who had a parent with a graduate degree. The discrepancy between income levels was also stark, with an over 400-point difference across the three sections.
between students from households earning less than $20,000 and those earning more than $200,000.

A review of the last hundred years of admissions tests found that “family income and parents’ education, for example, are correlated both with SAT scores and also with college outcomes, so that much of the apparent predictive power of the SAT actually reflects the ‘proxy’ effects of socioeconomic status” (Atkinson & Geiser 3). Reliance on ACT or SAT scores in admissions decisions can thus be detrimental to those students from first-generation or low-income backgrounds who are statistically less likely to receive high scores.

Admissions decisions should take into account the challenges that such students may also face in their daily life. First-generation or low-income students may be working, or they may have familial caregiver roles to allow their parents time to work. These tasks are often large time commitments that can limit students’ time to spend on classwork or test preparation. Programs that help prepare students to excel on the ACT or the SAT are also often very expensive and may take place on weekends or in the evening when first-generation or low-income students may have other obligations. The tests themselves are costly to a low-income student, and test waivers, if a student knows to apply and is eligible, cover only two test sessions.

Admissions decision makers should also consider employment and family obligations when reviewing résumés. Students who work after school do not have the opportunity to participate in as many extracurricular activities or join as many organizations. Their community service or volunteer activities may pale in comparison to their more advantaged peers as their focus is on their economic realities rather than developing an impressive résumé.

First-generation college students typically do not have parents who can remind them of the importance of a varied and well-rounded résumé, and they may not be getting that advice from an overburdened and overextended high school guidance counselor. Low-income students may lack the financial resources to participate in expensive activities such as sports, fine arts, or travel, and they may not be able to commit time away from paid activities for extracurricular options. We also cannot assume that all students have the transportation options to participate in activities; they rarely own a car, and often their parents must work or live too far from school to pick them up. If they lack transportation other than the school bus, they typically cannot stay after school to participate in club meetings.

An admissions process that takes into account a student’s background—including all the variables that can affect their test scores, grade point average,
class rank, and résumé—should result in more first-generation and low-income college students receiving an invitation to join an honors program or college. Once admitted, these students then need recruiters and honors staff who are available to answer questions and help encourage enrollment. Current honors students who are themselves first-generation or low-income may be able to ease fears about fitting in or handling the academic expectations.

Once students have made it to campus and are enrolled in honors, then the challenge switches to providing a supportive yet challenging environment. This support should be initiated from the very beginning since research has shown that these students are at higher risk of leaving the institution before their second year (Adelman). A thoughtful, cohesive honors curriculum, an engaged honors community, academic advising and mentoring, and support from honors faculty and staff can provide an academic home for these diverse students, a place where they can go to find answers to questions they may not yet know they have.

I know how important education is in breaking the cycle of poverty because I have been there. I grew up as a low-income, first-generation college student in the foothills of North Carolina. My father, a single parent, worked in the furniture manufacturing industry as this field was mostly moving production overseas. Neither of my parents graduated from high school. Most adults worked in furniture or textile plants in labor-intensive and tiring positions. When the plants went on reduced operations, we struggled to make ends meet. I knew that education was my only way out of factory work. Today, most of those factories are closed, and most people work in retail or service positions, many for near-minimum wage. I attended college and then graduate school, staying in school far past the point where my relatives understood my reasoning. I am sure they gave up all hope of my eventual graduation, though it did come in (much) time. Today, I have the privilege of working with honors students as a professional thanks to the education I sought and the many faculty and staff members who helped me along the way.

By expanding admissions processes to carefully consider students from first-generation and low-income backgrounds, honors programs and colleges not only increase the diversity of their programs and add richness and depth to their classes, but they also make a significant difference in the individual lives of the students who enroll. Reviewing applications takes more time, but it pays dividends to honors as well as, most importantly, to individual students.
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Social Justice Education in Honors:
Political but Non-Partisan

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In Why Are Professors Liberal and Why Do Conservatives Care?, Neil Gross introduces research that suggests fifty to sixty percent of college professors are leftist or liberal, a much higher proportion than the seventeen percent of Americans in general (7). He posits the conservative fear that “bias” in higher education is a “very serious” problem (Gross 5). April Kelly-Woessner and Matthew Woessner examine studies that also show that college students are more ideologically diverse than the professoriate (498) and, further, that students tend to discredit information presented by biased professors and consider them untrustworthy sources (499). If the majority of faculty placing emphasis on social justice education (SJE) are liberal, how do we nullify the apparent conflict with the essential honors mission, as defined by the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), to develop critical-thinking skills? The answer lies in the fallacy that correlation equals causation. The fact that faculty are liberal does not mean that SJE must be taught with an ideological agenda. I contend that we can and must teach social justice from
a non-partisan perspective and will offer recommendations for best practices for SJE in the context of an honors program.

To the question of appropriateness of SJE for honors, the NCHC goals of helping students explore “enduring questions” and teaching skills for “leadership” and “engaged citizenship” parallel objectives of SJE. Also, the LEAP Initiative of the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), a “national public advocacy and campus action initiative,” suggests nine principles of excellence for universities, at least three of which are relevant to SJE: “to engage students in the ‘big questions,’” “to foster civic, intercultural, and ethical learning,” and to “connect knowledge with action.” Teaching SJE is thus in line with recommendations for best practices from two recognized pedagogical authorities.

The University of New Mexico wants to make social justice a “pillar” of the program partially because we are a minority majority university in a soon-to-be minority majority state, and social justice issues of minority students are especially prevalent on our campus. A clear definition of social justice is thus vital to the future of the college, but, of course, definitions of SJE are numerous and diverse. Lauren Bialystok offers an overview stemming from a survey of definitions, concluding that they promote “anti-oppression politics, anti-colonialism, environmentalism, and a critique of corporate globalization, with more or less overt sympathy of the welfare state” (418). SJE scholar Heather Hackman explains, “to be most effective, social justice education requires an examination of systems of power and oppression combined with a prolonged emphasis on social change and student agency in and outside of the classroom” (104). The NCHC’s definition and recommended “modes of learning” are less involved than the definitions for SJE, but the two agendas have significant overlap, especially with Hackman’s definition of SJE. Although the NCHC does not elaborate on what is meant by “engaged citizenship,” it surely includes developing enough knowledge of social systems and advocacy tactics for addressing the real-world problems that it cites as essential to an honors education.

In “Theory and Resistance in Honors Education,” Aaron Stoller argues that infusing an honors program with SJE requires a “creative resistance” to the standard curriculum (10). He implies that educators must consciously challenge a university that has been “seduced and co-opted by a kind of technocratic and utilitarian rationality devoid of concern for the human condition” (14). I take issue with Stoller’s argument in that many of us are already teaching topics of social justice and concern for the human condition, but we
might still need to become more critical of our methods. We must first teach the facts of social injustice and then engage students in exploration about the causes of and possible solutions to injustices in all their complexity and nuance.

Some aspects of teaching are necessarily political. For example, some syllabi in the humanities, social sciences, and fine arts are political in that they explore in the classroom political issues that faculty deem important for students, e.g., the ugly realities of inequality and human wrongdoing, but the presentation need not and should not be partisan. My hope is that faculty members are guided by the desire to expose students to important topics and not just to sway opinions on topics they find personally compelling.

The Oxford dictionary defines a “partisan” as an “unreasoning supporter of a cause” (572). Educators should not be this kind of partisan in the classroom; they should never present only one perspective, even on matters of clear injustice. Teaching students the facts of a judicial system that imprisons Blacks at a much higher rate than Whites or the facts of the Bush administration’s policy of torture leading up to and during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars is not partisan; it would only become so if faculty exposed students only to opinions and perspectives they personally endorse.

An example from my own classroom might further elucidate my argument. My Solutions to Human Rights Problems class analyzes the major actors in human rights, such as the U.S. government, the United Nations, NGOs, and multinational corporations. Every entity we examine is responsible for acts of both human rights protection and violation. To achieve a rich and balanced understanding of the government’s role in human rights, we first analyze U.S. leadership in democracy and individual rights since the country’s founding, including leadership in the creation of the United Nations and the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We then examine the rights violations that have taken place since the country’s inception, from treatment of indigenous peoples to chattel slavery to torture of foreigners by the U.S. military during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Students are reminded of 9/11 and the fear and anger Americans felt, and they consider arguments justifying enhanced interrogation. Many students sympathize or identify with a substantial portion of citizens who supported torture in a 2011 poll (Bradley 233). We also study the Convention Against Torture and the Geneva Conventions, which are international laws the U.S. has ratified. The students learn about the numerous innocent people who were tortured at the hands of Americans because of poor military leadership and inexperienced
interrogators. We discuss torture in particular contexts, and I do not push
them to come to the same conclusions that I have about torture in general. I
do not teach it from an ideological perspective.

Students learn the fact that torture is now illegal, but they struggle with
the question of whether it is ever justified. My job is not to tell them what to
think; learning does not work that way. As Woessner observes, students “do
not passively accept . . . political messages” (24). Moreover, I agree with the
NCHC enjoinder that faculty should encourage students to “dig deep with-
out a prescribed result.” My goal is to teach them how to think, not what to
think.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To avoid teaching from their own bias, faculty members can center the
normative values of our nation as embodied in the United States Constitu-
tion, the Bill of Rights, and the human rights treaties and declarations that the
U.S. government has supported. This approach avoids partisanship because
these documents constitute the binding agreements of our society. Under-
standing the controversies surrounding our laws, including the difference
between the rhetoric of equal justice for all and the reality of injustices, for
instance, and analysis of these phenomena are critical to SJE.

I adapted this strategy for my classes from the work of Lauren Bialystok,
who writes about teaching social justice in Canada, but obviously her advice
is applicable to any democratic society. She also suggests that faculty avoid
requiring classroom activities rooted “in partisan politics or political activism
that students do not choose” (415). An example counter to this recommen-
dation occurred after the 2016 election when a fine arts faculty member at
my university wanted to create for display—in a window facing a busy bou-
levard—a visual arts class project proclaiming “RESIST!” Because of the
ideological diversity in any class and because we want to avoid hegemony,
 instructors should not require whole classes to engage in any single activist
initiative. Faculty must also take care to avoid the pitfall of group-think that
can occur when students who hold similar political positions are the loudest
voices in the room, especially because students with minority points of view
often just remain quiet, rendering helpful diversity of thought invisible.

Other brief suggestions for teaching SJE include Hackman’s argument for
“five essential components of a social justice education,” which I maintain are
perfectly suited to the mission of honors programs: “content mastery, tools
for critical analysis, tools for social change, tools for personal reflection,” and
“awareness of multicultural group dynamics” (104). She provides a clear set of objectives for faculty who are committed to teaching the skills prized in honors—critical thinking and critical analysis—while preventing a partisan ideological agenda from dominating or controlling the classroom dynamics.

Just as we can improve students’ thinking skills, we can also influence empathy for others, which is an arguably important objective in the promotion of social justice. Having empathy for those suffering injustice helps motivate action. The research of David Kidd and Emanuele Castano demonstrates that empathy can be nurtured through stories. No one text evokes the same reaction in all students, so we cannot dictate or manipulate how and what students will feel, but we can create the conditions for getting them to understand some of the injustices others suffer through the activation of neural circuits that occurs when experiencing the emotions of others (Jackson et al.).

According to a new study by Parissa Ballard, Lindsay Hoyt, and Mark Pachucki, civic engagement is another aspect of SJE that has many benefits for young people, including improved health and well-being, in addition to being a powerful teaching tool. We should encourage it, but we cannot dictate when and for what cause our students engage. Considering all of the potential good SJE can offer students and society, we should be teaching it, but we must adopt best practices for the way we guide students through the material, embracing the normative rather than the partisan or ideological. Social justice education in this way becomes an unquestionably suitable agenda for honors education.

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What Makes a Curriculum Significant?  
Tracing the Taxonomy of Significant Learning in Jesuit Honors Programs  

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, I have sat in the opening sessions of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) conference and felt equal parts concern and conviction. In 2015 and 2016, opening speakers enumerated the challenges and opportunities that confront honors educators in a rapidly changing higher education landscape. I sympathized with their concerns in an institutional and cultural context marked by what Schwehn called the “Weberian ethos” of education—an instrumental, and less charitable, attitude toward academic inquiry. Yet, even as I acknowledged the veracity of their arguments, I was buoyed by belief in the Jesuit mission that animates my institution, particularly its emphases on social justice and care for the whole person. When NCHC leadership revealed the “just” honors theme for the 2017 conference, I felt affirmed in my optimism about the future of honors education.
This optimism occasioned my inquiry here on the curricular design and academic practices of Jesuit honors programs. As a way of tying this curricular review to recent trends in pedagogy and the wider literature on the science of teaching and learning, I used Dee Fink’s significant learning taxonomy as a heuristic device to examine eight honors programs at Jesuit institutions. Fink, whose work has gained widespread appeal in teaching circles over the last fifteen years, promotes dynamic and student-centered pedagogy that leads to substantive and enduring learning outcomes. Many of the tenets Fink emphasizes in his model reflect honors pedagogy as defined by the NCHC and various educators and administrators within the honors community. One might thus expect honors programs to reflect significant learning principles in their curricula.

Jesuit honors programs, however, are marked not only by their adherence to principles of honors education but also by what the Honors Consortium of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) calls “essential characteristics of a Jesuit Honors Program.” These characteristics include integrative learning, reflection and discernment, and commitment to social justice in the spirit of the “intellectual apostolate” (Honors Consortium, n.d.). Recent work by Kraus, Wildes and Yavneh Klos, and Yavneh Klos et al. makes important connections between these Jesuit ideals and the larger honors community, where reflective learning and service to society often thrive in non-Jesuit contexts. I follow their lead here by suggesting a Jesuit-inspired curricular paradigm but one that is ultimately applicable to all programs interested in promoting a just curricular model for the twenty-first century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dee Fink’s 2013 significant learning taxonomy provides a framework for designing high-impact, student-centered learning experiences. Inspired by Benjamin Bloom’ 1956 taxonomy of educational objectives, a hierarchical model that stresses lower- and higher-order cognitive operations, Fink advances a “relational and even interactive” model for learning (37). The significant learning taxonomy comprises six cognitive and affective dimensions that, Fink believes, colleges must promote: foundational knowledge, application, integration, the human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn (39–40). Fink believes that properly designed learning experiences shed strict adherence to content coverage in favor of student-centered approaches that emphasize all dimensions simultaneously (38). He argues that such experiences, when properly planned and executed, enhance students’ lives.
by imbuing them with a “more thoughtful philosophy on life,” improve their social interactions with others, cultivate a more thoughtful and informed sense of citizenship, and prepare them adequately for a complex and ever-changing world (8–9). Ultimately, he suggests that significant learning “requires that there be some kind of lasting change that is important in terms of the learner’s life” (34).

Although Fink’s nomenclature and conceptual framework bear his distinctive imprint, many of the principles he espouses reflect concepts like active learning and student-centered instructional design, both of which have gained widespread currency in teaching circles over the last few decades. In his revised and updated text on significant learning, Fink enumerates the influences on his work, including learner-centered design (Barr and Tagg), backwards design (Wiggins and McTigh), and the science of teaching and learning (Ambrose et al.).

University honors programs provide a rich context in which to trace the principles of Fink’s taxonomy. The NCHC suggests that “honors experiences include a distinctive learner-directed environment and philosophy, provide opportunities that are appropriately tailored to fit the institution’s culture and mission, and frequently occur within a close community of students and faculty” (National Collegiate Honors Council Board of Directors). The NCHC also recommends experiences that are “measurably broader, deeper, or more complex” than non-honors alternatives in higher education (About NCHC). This definition’s broadness is intentional. Honors educators often invoke the analogy of a laboratory to describe a system that is constantly adapting to new challenges and opportunities based on the innate curiosity and diverse interests of students and teachers (National Collegiate Honors Council, Basic Characteristics; Wolfensberger).

The similarity between honors education and Fink’s taxonomy, e.g., student-centered pedagogy and a focus on complex or higher-order inquiry, suggests that an honors program provides a framework to extend Fink’s model beyond the classroom level. I began from this foundational idea as a means of imagining new directions for honors curricula and pedagogy in the twenty-first century. Given the preoccupation with the “future of honors education” at the 2015 and 2016 national conferences in Chicago and Seattle and in recent publications (Scott & Frana), these lines of inquiry add to an already vibrant discussion.

Beyond a general analysis of significant learning in an honors setting, I am particularly interested in the distinctive pedagogy and curricular design of
honors programs at Jesuit institutions. Jesuit education, like Fink’s taxonomy, shares many characteristics with honors pedagogy. Mitchell, for example, identifies broad-based, humanistic learning as essential to a Jesuit education. The Jesuit General Congregation echoes this sentiment and suggests that Jesuits “attempt to discover, shape, renew, or promote human wisdom, while at the same time respecting the integrity of disciplined scholarship” (133). These descriptions are reminiscent of honors curricula, which often emphasize core areas of knowledge and discipline-specific knowledge (Gabelnick).

The Jesuit General Congregation similarly promotes “interdisciplinary work” that can foster “new perspectives and new areas for research, teaching, and university extension services” in service of “justice and freedom” (136). Mitchell’s definition of a Jesuit education also stresses that it is “person-centered” and focused on each student’s development (112). Bennett and Dreyer extend this person-centered notion and promote the virtue of hospitality at Jesuit universities. “Hospitality,” they write, is a form of “openness—welcoming, receiving from, and sharing with the other” that “ought to be conspicuous” in an educational institution (117). In these statements on the value of community, openness, and reciprocity, one sees connections to the NCHC’s Board of Directors emphasis on a “close community of students and faculty.”

Thus, a substantive connection exists between Jesuit educational principles and honors education. What is less clear, however, is how an honors program at a Jesuit institution might support or complicate the pursuit of significant learning experiences. Specifically, it is worth considering whether the transformative elements of Jesuit curricula and pedagogy, especially their call to action in the spirit of social justice, separate an honors program formed in this tradition from Fink’s model. Additionally, we might wonder how this call to altruism extends our understanding of honors education to encompass how we study, research, behave, and live honorably, i.e., honestly, responsibly, and equitably.

Many of these principles, of course, have been adopted more broadly in higher education. The call for “special courses, seminars, colloquia, experiential learning opportunities, undergraduate research opportunities, or other independent-study options” (National Collegiate Honors Council, Basic Characteristics), for instance, aligns with many of the high-impact learning experiences articulated by Kuh. Similarly, the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) promotes personal and social responsibility in higher education through their widely embraced VALUE rubrics.
(Rhodes). Therefore, this study on curricular-level applications of these ideas has implications beyond a narrow Jesuit framework.

With these ideas in mind, I offer a response to various scholars within the honors community regarding the dearth of empirical research on honors education (Hébert & McBee; Long; Jones). By examining honors programs through the lens of Fink’s significant learning taxonomy, I hope to advance the cause of research on honors education, particularly as it concerns curricular development and assessment.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to use Fink’s taxonomy of significant learning as a lens through which to examine the curricular structure and academic practices of honors programs at Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States. I was especially interested in principles of Jesuit education in this analysis to determine if honors programs crafted in this mold accommodated or challenged Fink’s model in meaningful ways.

Two research questions guided this study:

1. In what ways do university honors programs exhibit characteristics of Fink’s taxonomy of significant learning in terms of their curricular structure and academic practices?

2. What distinctive demands outside of Fink’s taxonomy of significant learning, if any, does a program’s Jesuit mission introduce in terms of curricular structure and academic practices?

METHODS

Research Design

In this study, I used a multisite case study to examine the curricular structure and academic practices of Jesuit honors programs in various institutional contexts. The goal of case study research is to produce “a rich, ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam 43). To achieve this descriptive depth, I employed two primary forms of data collection: analysis of curricular and programmatic documents and interviews with program directors. The combination of document analysis and interviews provided a more nuanced lens through which to observe the operation of Jesuit honors programs than could be achieved with a single data source.
Participants

There are 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, 27 of which feature an honors program of some kind. I chose a purposive sample of eight cases that exhibited “maximum variation” (Creswell 156–57). My goal was to differentiate in terms of Carnegie classification (e.g., doctoral universities with highest/higher research activity, master’s colleges and universities, baccalaureate colleges), undergraduate population size, and net price point. These variables were determined using data from the Institute of Educational Sciences National Center for Education Statistics and the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

Aside from their institutional context, I used additional program-level qualifiers to determine eligibility. Eligible honors programs had to be exclusive in some way, e.g., driven by invitation, competitive application, or another form of criteria-based selection that limits the number of participants in the program. Programs also had to exhibit an extra-departmental curricular model. Many colleges and universities offer departmental honors programs that require rigorous intellectual inquiry within a particular field. I was not interested in studying these specialty programs; instead, this study focused on honors programs that feature cross-disciplinary, integrative learning experiences and welcome students from all academic majors.

Complete parity among the various qualities was impossible to achieve. However, the distribution is roughly proportional to the overall population of Jesuit institutions, e.g., Carnegie classification type, geographic diversity, and net price point variance. The programs selected for the study are listed below (complete information is available in the Appendix):

- Boston College
- Fordham University (Rose Hill)
- Gonzaga University
- Loyola Marymount University
- Loyola University Chicago
- Loyola University New Orleans
- Saint Louis University
- Spring Hill College

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this study began with resources acquired from Jesuit honors program websites. I examined documents related to program design
and requirements and created an initial set of codes to describe curricular philosophy, influences of the Jesuit mission, and other ideas that were “responsive to [the] research questions” for this study (Merriam 176). This initial coding process followed Creswell’s philosophy of “lean coding,” or the designation of a few main categories that guide subsequent data analysis (184).

After initial document analysis, I conducted telephone interviews with directors for each selected program according to a semi-structured interview protocol. Prior to conducting interviews, I received approval from the Saint Louis University Institutional Review Board (IRB #28219) to conduct interviews with human subjects. I then secured consent from all participants to publish results in which their institutions would be named. The goals of the structured interview questions were to determine program history, to confirm requirements for program completion, to understand any pedagogical or curricular philosophies that informed the program’s organization, and to identify the extent to which the Jesuit mission of the institution influenced the program’s structure or curriculum. In addition, I asked specific questions based on the earlier review of curriculum documents. Therefore, while interviews were guided by a common set of questions, each interview differed based on context. These interactions were recorded and later transcribed. The final transcripts of interviews were then coded to identify major themes for each program. The codes and themes identified as part of document analysis were compared to those found in the interview transcripts with the goal of “saturation,” or “the point at which you realize no new information, insights, or understandings are forthcoming” (Merriam 183).

RESULTS

Response to Research Questions

After analyzing all available data and organizing emergent themes, I returned to the guiding research questions for this study. The responses to the research questions are presented in order below. Although interview and document analysis yielded compelling results for each program, I have chosen to present the aggregate results without individually identifiable references in order to depict the state of Jesuit honors education more broadly.

1. In what ways do university honors programs exhibit characteristics of Fink’s taxonomy of significant learning in terms of their curricular structure and academic practices?
Fink’s taxonomy of significant learning stresses learner-centered pedagogical approaches that promote application of foundational knowledge and integrative thinking. At the outset of this study, I theorized that this taxonomy shared much in common with the style of teaching and learning that occurs in honors programs. A thorough review of the eight programs selected for this study confirmed this relationship.

Although Fink deliberately rejects a hierarchical organization for his taxonomy, the analysis below begins with what is often considered the basis of the learning experience, foundational knowledge. By foundational knowledge, Fink means the “basic understanding that is necessary for other kinds of learning” (34). Foundational courses (or course sequences) are a common feature of most of the programs selected for this study. Whether in the form of first-year seminars, colloquia, or retreats, these experiences tend to focus on exposure to humanistic texts as a basis for future work in the program. Other programs include rigorous composition requirements to introduce students to the conventions of collegiate writing. In some cases, the foundational coursework or set of experiences constitutes the sole honors-only, specialized experience a student might have, underscoring the importance these honors programs placed on a foundational experience for students. Overall, directors noted in the interviews an interest in introducing students to the nomenclature, processes, and skills necessary to succeed in a curriculum that demands close reading, thoughtful observation, and rigorous research experiences.

First-year seminars are a common practice at colleges and universities around the country (whether in honors programs or as part of a standard core curriculum), but one distinguishing quality in the examples above is the way that the courses encourage students how to learn for future success in the program, not to master any particular skill or knowledge content area. The curricula tend to collapse two significant learning categories, foundational knowledge and learning how to learn, which is consistent with Fink’s contention that significant learning experiences promote growth along all dimensions of the taxonomy simultaneously (38).

At other points in their curricula, programs explicitly stress the goal of learning how to learn in the form of critical self-reflection exercises in the Jesuit tradition and colloquia on research and grant writing. The goal here is to teach students how to participate in the academic culture of the program and more broadly of the institution. Several directors, for example, noted that their course sequences aim to introduce students to a process of intellectual inquiry, sometimes with an explicit emphasis on social justice, to prepare them for ongoing scholarship in the program.
Fink also elevates the importance of both integration and application as part of a significant learning experience. Integration requires students to perform a more sophisticated intellectual task by making connections between ideas, learning experiences, or contexts (Fink 36). As students apply and integrate their knowledge, they may perceive the “personal and social implications of what they’ve learned,” which can result in a more robust self-image or a better understanding of others (Fink 36).

Most programs selected for this study require a senior research project of some kind for honors students to complete the curriculum. These culminating research projects represent a highly integrative task as students are required to synthesize their disciplinary knowledge into an original project or to approach a highly technical topic from a humanistic or interdisciplinary angle. Programs are also integrative in the sense that they often weave in certain themes, e.g., social justice and Western philosophy, over time as a part of multiple courses.

The honors programs selected for this study include various curricular components that advance the goal of application. Most often, students are required to make connections between their own educational ventures and other contexts. For example, students might be encouraged to apply insights from their humanities-based foundational courses to questions of scientific importance, e.g., through a course on “Philosophy of Technology” or a “Science and Society” course.

Other programs emphasize application of course material in a spirit of social justice. One program offers a social justice seminar that requires students to synthesize their personal passions, intellectual training, and research acumen in response to social justice issues in their community. Another program aims to expand students’ “social consciousness” and then direct them toward community-engaged research and advocacy projects in surrounding communities.

In these latter examples, the ways that honors programs encourage application of knowledge or of intellectual passion call to mind Fink’s human dimension of learning. Fink contends that significant learning experiences result in a more robust self-image or a better understanding of others (36). Particularly in these community-engaged activities, honors programs encourage growth within the “human dimension” of learning. Other programs attend to the human dimension by introducing global themes or activities into their curriculum, e.g., area studies courses and international partnerships.

The final dimension of Fink’s taxonomy, caring, is evident when students’ “feelings, interests, or values” change because of a learning experience (36).
This dimension might also be described as the intellectual curiosity or affinity a student has for learning. All programs have selection criteria that guarantee them students of high intellectual caliber from the moment they arrive. From this perspective, a certain measure of “caring” might predate their enrollment. Nevertheless, several of the programs provide experiences and structures that encourage growth along this “caring” dimension. All program directors described the important roles that faculty play in students’ intellectual formation: they serve as sponsors for research, supervise capstone projects, or simply teach courses with greater depth and in more intimate settings.

In summary, the honors programs selected for this study exhibit characteristics of Fink’s taxonomy in interesting and varied ways. They often do so by exemplifying Fink’s central thesis that elements of the taxonomy can be pursued simultaneously, e.g., foundational knowledge and learning how to learn or application and the human dimension.

2. What distinctive demands outside of Fink’s taxonomy of significant learning, if any, does a program’s Jesuit mission introduce in terms of curricular structure and academic practices?

Based on the response to the first research question, Fink’s taxonomy serves as a useful lens through which to examine the curricular structure and academic practices of honors programs. However, the research also revealed ways that Jesuit honors programs challenge and extend Fink’s work.

One of Fink’s six elements of the significant learning taxonomy is the “human dimension,” which he describes prosaically in terms of a student’s widened worldview and increased capacity to interact with others. He says, “when students learn something important about themselves or others, it enables them to function more effectively” (36). Fink’s human dimension is a worthy learning goal, but it stops short of identifying how students act upon this newfound knowledge of self and others.

In several of the programs selected for this study, the curricula encourage students to “learn something important . . . about others,” to borrow from Fink (36). To be sure, several of the programs feature curricula that are heavily steeped in the Western intellectual tradition, which can contribute to a limited understanding about the diversity of knowledge in the world. However, these courses are often complemented by other courses that broaden students’ worldview, such as area studies courses about different regions of the world, social justice seminars, or conversation partnerships that place students in sustained dialogue with English as a second language (ESL) learners.
The curricula are often designed such that they are likely to increase students’ awareness of other cultural beliefs and practices.

In the Jesuit honors programs selected for this study, the curricula often extend the requirement beyond mere awareness. Students also carry out service projects for marginalized populations and conduct scholarship in response to social justice issues in their communities. The emphasis in these scenarios is not merely on awareness of “others” or even on developing one’s capacity to act on their behalf. Instead, these programs require students to engage directly and to serve others in their community. They promote knowledge not only for students’ advancement but also for the advancement of the poor and disadvantaged. To the extent they are successful, they also promote “a learning experience [that] changes the degree to which students care about something,” to borrow again from Fink and his definition of the caring dimension of learning (36). In this way, the programs emulate Fr. Peter-Hanz S. Kolvenbach’s call to “go beyond a disincarnate spiritualism or a secular social activism, so as to renew the educational apostolate in word and in action at the service of the church in a world of unbelief and injustice” (151).

The other primary way that the programs selected for this study challenge Fink’s model is similarly related to the human dimension. Although these programs tend to emphasize service to others, they also promote the value of personal appropriation or discernment—that is, an honest assessment of one’s abilities in relation to intellectual/spiritual inquiry and the needs of the world. Fink does account for self-knowledge in his human dimension, describing how a significant learning experience “gives students a new understanding of themselves (self-image), a new vision of what they want to become (self-ideal), or greater confidence that they can do something important to them” (36). Honors programs at the institutions selected for this study deliberately promote self-knowledge. Courses on professional development and vocational discernment, colloquia on research interests and post-baccalaureate fellowships, mentor programs that guide students to value-added professional opportunities and original research, and upper-level seminars on moral responsibility are a few of the ways the programs develop students’ self-knowledge.

The key difference in these programs is the level of intentionality with which Jesuit honors programs in this study guide students toward knowledge of self. The acquisition of knowledge is, itself, the aim of many of the courses mentioned above. To be fair, Fink’s “learning how to learn” dimension accounts for metacognition and the ways in which students can be “better
student[s]” or more “self-directed learner[s]” (36). However, this explanation is more instrumental and focused on intellectual or cognitive development. What is notable about the programs selected for this study is the way they promote self-understanding as an end in itself. Once again, they collapse the significant learning taxonomy by conflating one’s personal sense of self with the “learning how to learn” dimension.

The extension of the human dimension and learning-to-learn dimensions found in Jesuit honors curricula fuse together elements of Fink’s taxonomy. In both cases, the Jesuit identity of the program vitally informs the curricular design, suggesting that Fink’s model might be enriched in important ways in Jesuit honors programs.

DISCUSSION

Based on analysis of the findings relative to the research questions above, I offer two interpretations below. The first relates to the capacity for honors programs to infuse their curricular design with Fink’s largely course-level design principles, and the second considers the potential for Jesuit-inspired ideals of reflection, discernment, and social justice to enrich and differentiate a program’s curriculum and academic practices.

A Significant Curriculum

Fink’s significant learning taxonomy provides “a language and set of concepts” for the design of learner-centered, transformative educational experiences (67). His work, however, is primarily on the thoughtful and deliberate design of individual courses. Lattuca and Stark view individual courses as the structural building blocks of a curriculum. It stands to reason that courses designed according to a significant learning taxonomy interact to form a more robust curriculum, yet I am aware of only one study (Kolar, Sabatini, & Muraleetharan) that applies Fink’s model explicitly to a curriculum design context. The honors programs selected for this study demonstrate the possibilities of creating a significant curriculum in this vein.

Foundational knowledge is one of six dimensions to Fink’s taxonomy, but he does not intend for it to be subordinate to the others. The foundational courses in several honors programs exhibit this spirit. Instead of focusing on base-level knowledge acquisition, they tend to promote modes of inquiry that prepare students for other courses in the curriculum. In some cases, they foster knowledge of and experience with humanities scholarship or research
methods more broadly. In others, the foundational courses build writing skills that lay the groundwork for future success in the program. The important feature here is that the foundational knowledge fostered in the program is about learning how to engage in the kind of intellectual inquiry expected of an honors student. In other words, foundational knowledge and learning how to learn (two of Fink’s six dimensions of the taxonomy) operate in tandem.

Application and integration also feature prominently in the honors curricula analyzed in this study. In foundational courses, for instance, honors students apply knowledge about social justice to their service work in the community; they use their newly honed writing skills to examine questions from various disciplinary standpoints; and they begin to develop original research questions by drawing on colloquia that teach foundational research methods. As they progress in the curricula, students often build toward a culminating research project that, in several cases, features an interdisciplinary component. This task of synthesizing one’s accumulated knowledge, surveying the existing state of scholarship on a given topic, and generating new knowledge are all indicative of an integrative effort encouraged by a program’s curricular design.

These research projects typically proceed under the guidance of faculty members, who participate in the honors experience either by choice or via formal programmatic structures. Honors directors reported that, because of the intellectual caliber of students made possible by selective admissions criteria, faculty members can engage more deeply with subject matter and potentially pique students’ interest beyond a general level through, for instance, specialized courses and writing-intensive assignments. The curricular and extracurricular mentor relationships are indicative of Fink’s caring dimension, which refers to how learning experiences change a student’s “feelings, interests, or values” (36). Honors programs promote this kind of growth or transformation through close contact with faculty who take a personal interest in students’ well-being and intellectual growth.

As they promote deeper engagement with material, programs often widen students’ understanding of themselves and others. That is, they promote a sense of care about the human dimension of learning, another of Fink’s six dimensions of learning. Students participate in highly reflective seminars and colloquia that require them to consider their own interests and talents, often beginning in the first year and repeating in an iterative fashion throughout the curriculum as students gain more context for the choices they will make beyond graduation. In addition, programs tend to include coursework on social justice issues and global themes that acquaint students with cultures
and lifestyles unlike their own. Moreover, they often place students in direct contact with these populations or at least compel them to consider seriously their ability and responsibility to act on their behalf. In this way, the programs build toward a richer understanding of the human condition, one that reflects the transformative element of Fink’s caring dimension.

Perhaps the most important element of programs examined for this study is curricular coherence. Whether the program features a rich exploration of the Western intellectual tradition, includes a series of more advanced colloquia, or highlights different areas of students’ personal and professional growth, several of the programs provide a logical, sequential pathway to completion of the honors program. In general, students do not merely complete an aleatory set of courses as part of an exhaustive list of requirements; instead, they proceed through a series of thoughtfully designed and clearly integrated in-class and out-of-class experiences.

Not all the programs selected for this study perfectly exhibit an integrated curricular design; some excel in one dimension more than others, e.g., strong in promoting application of foundational knowledge but weak in the human dimension of learning, but examined collectively, they draw on the best practices that Fink elucidates in his study, providing a rich educational experience that unfolds over the course of a student’s undergraduate career.

A Jesuit-Inspired Influence

The second main insight gleaned from this study is the distinctive influence of an institution’s Jesuit mission on the curricular structure and academic practices of the honors program. To be sure, the Jesuit mission exerts only a nominal influence on some programs, affecting the humanistic tenor of the core curriculum or the composition of the participating students. For other programs, however, the Jesuit influence is explicit and intentional, leading to a compelling extension of Fink’s taxonomy.

The Jesuit mission is especially pronounced in programs that emphasize sustained service to campus and community partners. In these programs, students have opportunities within the curriculum not only to learn about underrepresented or underserved communities but also to work alongside them in a spirit of social justice. In these cases, the focus is not merely on creating awareness of others but rather on creating care for and solidarity with these populations. In this way, an explicit Jesuit focus on social justice and action can enrich a student’s experience by combining three elements of Fink’s taxonomy: the human dimension, application, and caring.
Other programs excel by requiring students to reflect critically about their individual calling(s) in the world. Courses on professional development and vocational discernment, colloquia on developing research interests, mentor programs exclusively for honors students, and upper-level seminars on moral responsibility are a few of the ways that this reflective component gets put into practice. These programs do not take for granted that students will address these issues of personal passion or calling on their own time. They treat the acquisition of self-knowledge as an end in itself and thus promote students’ personal growth alongside their intellectual development. The intentional focus on discernment reflects principles found in the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius’s guide for close communion with God, who would “lead men and women to decisions about how they would live their lives, employ their talents, and direct their resources” (Gray 65).

The ways programs enacted Jesuit principles, e.g., reflective seminars and a focus on social justice, are not exclusive to Jesuit institutions. Many of these practices have been widely embraced in other faith-based and secular institutions, thus suggesting how the results of this study might be extrapolated to fit other contexts. In addition, Jesuit institutions have their blemishes with respect to social justice, as recent revelations about Georgetown University’s history of slavery reveals (Swarms). Nevertheless, Jesuit institutions are well positioned by virtue of their history—or are at least potentially more mature in their dedication to social justice concerns than their secular counterparts—to address issues of personal discernment and social justice. They can, therefore, serve as a model for other institutions interested in similar outcomes.

LIMITATIONS

As in any qualitative research, this study exhibits various limitations that affect the reliability of the conclusions. These limitations include the scope of the participants, the means of data collection, and the changing nature of honors curricula and leadership within the selected programs.

The participants in this study were recruited from the twenty-eight member institutions of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU). Although I attempted to execute a “maximum variation” sampling strategy that differentiated institutions across various dimensions (Creswell 156–57), not all directors of targeted institutions agreed to participate because of time constraints or a perception that they lacked adequate information to contribute to the study. The resulting eight institutions, while mostly varied, do not
exhibit the full range of possible curricula and academic practices that might have been evident with a full review of the honors programs at all twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities. Then again, such a large sample would have been inappropriate for the purposes of a qualitative study that relies on “a rich, ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam 43). In addition, because of the specialized nature of my interest in Jesuit honors programs, the insights gained might only be applicable to a small population of honors programs overall.

Another limitation was the method by which data were collected for the study. I examined publicly available documents related to program structure as well as documents that directors were willing to share. To the extent these documents were unavailable or incomplete, the research represents only a partial view of the program in question.

Another limitation of this study is the dynamic and shifting nature of honors program curricula and leadership. During the study, one program was undergoing a complete curriculum overhaul, and two others were in the midst of changing leadership. Such changes to leadership influence the reliability of the data and the ongoing relevance of the conclusions drawn from interviews with these directors since new leadership could easily take programs in new curricular directions.

Finally, although this study revealed interesting data about the curricular design of various honors programs, it did not address the lived experience of students in the program or the postgraduate outcomes associated with a so-called significant curriculum. The general impression given by directors of programs selected for this study was that graduates enjoyed a variety of post-graduate opportunities in the form of graduate/professional school acceptances to top-tier schools, employment opportunities with reputable companies, or placement with prestigious fellowship or service organizations. Program directors also had a sense that their honors students were among the most active leaders within their campus communities and that these students possessed a broader, more inclusive worldview by the time they completed their education. Some of these impressions were supported by additional data furnished by participants such as exit surveys for recently graduated students, but most feedback was anecdotal in nature. A few honors directors lamented the lack of data about the effect of the honors experience, noting that more assessment needed to be done. In so doing, they added their voices to a chorus of honors stakeholders who perceive a dearth of empirical research on honors education (Hébert & McBee; Long; Jones).
IMPLICATIONS

The six dimensions of Fink’s significant learning were evident to varying degrees in the programs selected for this study, suggesting a compelling overlap between Fink’s ideas and the language often used to describe the honors experience. Although I limited my analysis to Jesuit honors programs, I contend results can easily extend to all honors programs that share a commitment to just curricular models and academic practices.

This overlap has implications for institutions that seek to create or revise an honors strategy. Honors administrators might turn to Fink’s model for inspiration regarding sequencing courses, building coherent themes across four years of study, and incorporating measures that produce collegial relationships among students and faculty. The programs in this study demonstrated the value of foundational experiences that inculcate modes of inquiry for future coursework, the importance of fostering a broad understanding of the human condition through service learning courses and area studies requirements, and the benefit of extracurricular community-building events that place students in close contact with faculty members and with one another.

The conclusions of this study also have implications for existing programs that seek new or different means of assessing student learning in their programs. The National Collegiate Honors Council’s Basic Characteristics document espouses many of the same active-learning, community-oriented, and academically enriched principles found in Fink’s discourse. By examining an honors program through the lens of the taxonomy, we can gain new insights that demonstrate the value or, perhaps, the shortcomings of the curricular and extracurricular experiences promoted by a program.

In addition to this qualitative strategy, programs might also consider the need for more outcomes assessment. In the coming years, the NCHC will create a consortium with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to examine more closely the effects of honors education. As the NCHC’s Research Committee devises questions for its NSSE consortium, attention to the curricular elements enumerated above could be helpful. Lanier suggests that honors programs in a contemporary context are marked not by careful, incremental change, but rather by quantum jumps in resources. Such funding increases might be hastened by attention to graduate outcomes that demonstrate the added value of an honors experience. Partnerships with well-established survey instruments like the NSSE will assist in this effort.
CONCLUSION

Frank Aydellote pioneered honors education at Swarthmore College in the 1920s as a challenge to conventional pedagogy at the time (Rinn; Wolfensberger). As honors education in the United States nears its centennial moment, stakeholders within this community need to emulate his innovative spirit by examining their practices with an eye toward improving student experiences and postgraduate outcomes. This study represents a critical analysis of one segment of the honors community. I suggest that Jesuit institutions enact the honors mission in distinctive ways that align well with Fink’s significant learning taxonomy but also extend its boundaries in terms of personal discernment and service to others. These practices are not the exclusive purview of Jesuit colleges and universities, as many institutions similarly promote these high-impact practices of critical self-reflection and civic engagement. The insights from this study can sustain a broader movement toward these laudable aims through significant curricula that fulfill the NCHC’s vision to promote justice among students and within the communities they serve.

REFERENCES


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robert.pampel@slu.edu.
## APPENDIX

### List of Jesuit Institutions Selected for Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Carnegie Classification</th>
<th>Net Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>8855</td>
<td>Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1352</td>
<td>Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts &amp; Sciences Focus</td>
<td>$20,376</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data were compiled using data from the Institute of Educational Sciences National Center for Education Statistics (2016) and the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research (2015). According to the Institute of Educational Sciences National Center for Education Statistics (2016), the “average net price is generated by subtracting the average amount of federal, state/local government, or institutional grant or scholarship aid from the total cost of attendance.”

*The unit of analysis for Boston College was the Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program (GPSP) at Boston College. Although Boston College has an Arts and Sciences Honors Program that provides an integrated approach to core subjects (Boston College Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, 2016), it is exclusive to members of the College of Arts and Sciences. It does not, therefore, exhibit the extra-departmental qualities preferred for this study. The GPSP, on the other hand, welcomes students from all majors and is designed to help highly talented students discern their intellectual gifts and to work toward the common good in their society (Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program, 2017). All GPSP members (roughly 15 per class) complete a culminating capstone in their degree program, and many belong to the honors program of their home school or college. For all other programs, the interdisciplinary honors program was used for study.*
Linking Academic Excellence and Social Justice through Community-Based Participatory Research

Lydia Voigt
Loyola University New Orleans

Naomi Yavneh Klos poses two questions for the NCHC community in her essay, “Thinking Critically, Acting Justly,” which appears in this issue of JNCHC: (1) how honors pedagogy/curriculum can engage the highest-ability and most motivated students in questions of social justice; and (2) how the honors curriculum can serve as a place of access, equity, and excellence in higher education. The University Honors Program (UHP) at Loyola University New Orleans has recently implemented several honors social justice seminars that have been experimenting with various approaches to these pedagogical, curricular, and programmatic questions. Violence and Democracy, an honors sociology/criminology seminar, not only focuses on social justice thematically but adopts social justice pedagogy (Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Pedagogy of Hope; Adams, “Social” and “Pedagogical”; Bell). Accordingly, social justice is both a goal and a process, representing the integration of disciplinary theoretical knowledge and analytical tools.
with experiential learning and applications that involve students, faculty, and community partners doing justice work together. The premise for this holistic approach is that students, particularly high-ability and highly motivated students, personally engage in questions of social justice when they are challenged by real-life social injustices and that they realize the relevance of their knowledge and skills in a learning environment that models social justice values and principles.

**DISCIPLINARY AND THEMATIC FOCUS**

Using the perspective and analytical tools of social science, Violence and Democracy, from here on referred to as the seminar, provides a broad, interdisciplinary understanding of the complexities and controversies surrounding the problem of violence in democratic societies, with special emphasis on the antithetical relationship between violence and democracy (Keane). The seminar engages students in an examination of the overarching relationship between violence and the violation of democratic principles and also in deliberating the possibility of effectively reducing violence through a greater commitment to democratic values (Perrin) that would include equality, freedom, social justice, the preservation of human rights, and a demonstrative preference for non-violence.

The purpose of the seminar is not only to serve as a vehicle for imparting disciplinary skills and knowledge about expressions of violence but also to engage its students, faculty, and community partners in collaborative justice work. The collaborative work fosters a critical understanding of social justice issues, calls for responsible social action, and serves as a catalyst in the development or reinforcement of students’ commitment to lifelong learning and lifelong service.

A thematically relevant community-based participatory research project is the main seminar activity. The project focuses on a particular form of structural violence and injustice such that faculty and students work alongside community partners to address the actual research needs of a community service provider. The project suggests the potential role of social science in reducing violence (Dvoskin et al.) and plays a facilitative role in making students more aware of social justice issues in real-life contexts and of their own potential to contribute to the community by assisting a service agency with its justice work.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

To maximize individual and collective engagement in the process of learning, the seminar is experiential and collaborative, representing a community of learners/scholars among whom information and experiences are shared, assertions questioned, hypotheses tested, issues debated, conclusions analyzed, cultural critical analysis practiced, and reflection encouraged both individually and collectively. Members of the seminar work together as a team on in-class activities as well as an off-campus, community-based, participatory research project.

The seminar is organized around four sets of student learning objectives (SLOs):

1. Enhance understanding and appreciation of social science perspectives and scientifically constructed knowledge, including the ability to critically analyze data/information, apply learned research skills in a real-life setting, and transport applications to other thematic/subject areas and social contexts;

2. Encourage professionalism and teamwork in synthesizing and producing social science information by developing the ability to (a) conduct comprehensive literature searches and critical reviews; (b) articulate orally and in writing the strengths and weaknesses of theories/research related to violence, social injustice, and human rights violations; (c) work collaboratively and empathetically with community partners as co-investigators, designing and conducting research following the scientific method and ethical principles; (d) document actual cases of structural violence and injustices; (e) perform quantitative/qualitative analyses and draw conclusions; and (f) effectively communicate orally and in writing the findings/results of the research project.

3. Advance meta-level thinking concepts and skills including cultural critical consciousness (awareness of structural violence in society, patterns of inequality, and violations of human rights); cultural literacy (ability to identify community needs as well as recognize community capacity to address problems); enhanced self-awareness (ability to critically reflect on one’s own understandings of social justice issues with seminar materials and community applications); and community-based critical participatory inquiry (ability to collaborate with seminar members and community partners with humility and mutual
respect for diversity, equality, and inclusivity as well as to engage in critical dialogue and participatory analysis).

4. Increase engagement with social justice issues and foster hope in effecting change (recognize the importance of critical awareness, knowledge, skills, and community-based participatory practice in realizing change); heighten appreciation of the relevance of educational experience to other areas of study (draw connections between seminar materials and experiences with other courses across the honors curriculum tying educational excellence with social justice); and enhance students’ self efficacy (expand their self-confidence as researchers who know how to achieve social justice and social change through collaborative social justice/social action research).

SOCIAL JUSTICE PEDAGOGY

The seminar’s set of values and methods for teaching/learning about poverty, oppression, and social justice has been inspired by the Ignatian vision of education (Loyola; Kammer), Paulo Freire’s articulation of critical pedagogy, and the principles and values associated with social justice education including social justice pedagogy (e.g., Adams, “Social” and “Pedagogical”; Bell; Brookfield & Holst; Young; Zajda et al.; Goodman; Sandoval). These three influences share a number of conceptual elements and underpinnings.

The Ignatian vision of education represents a 500-year global educational tradition that welcomes students of diverse backgrounds and prepares them to lead meaningful lives with and for others, to pursue truth, wisdom, and virtue, and to work for a more just world. A key tenet of the Ignatian vision of education is “cura personalis” or care of the whole person (intellectual, moral, spiritual, physical, and social); forming competence, conscience, and compassion; and fostering lifelong learning and lifelong service (Loyola Core). Among its educational ideals are the pursuit of excellence; respect for the world, its history and mystery; learning from experience; contemplative vision formed by hope; development of personal potential; critical thinking and effective communication; commitment to service; special concern for the poor and oppressed; linking faith with justice; and discerning mindset (Loyola University; Kammer).

Paulo Freire’s vision of liberation education or critical pedagogy (also referred to as Freirean pedagogy), which overlaps with a number of the Ignatian ideals, is more process-oriented with a focus on the formation of critical
consciousness through student-centered dialogue rooted in everyday life as well as academic and disciplinary subject matter. The following descriptive values may encapsulate Freirean pedagogy: participatory (interactive and co-operative); situated (personally related to a student’s thoughts, language, and social conditions); critically conscious (focused on awakening students’ critical consciousness and encouraging critical reflection on their own knowledge and language, subject matter, quality of the learning environment, and the relationship of knowledge to society); democratic (accessible to students, encouraging participation, expression of ideas, and the right to negotiate curriculum and evaluate curriculum); dialogic (based on problem-oriented dialogue); desocializing (desocializing students from passive roles and authority dependence as well as desocializing teachers from domineering roles and teacher-talk); activist (interactive, co-operative and participatory, seeking action outcomes from inquiries and raising question from actions); affective (involving the mind, heart, and emotions); and research-oriented (engaging in community research where students are critical researchers inquiring into routine experiences, society and social patterns, social justice issues, and the interplay of academic material) (Shor). Even though Freire is generally critical of the notion of value-neutral education and research, which often reproduce and reinforce structural domination patterns and inequalities, he does leave open the possibility for democratic knowledge production and the radical potential emanating from participatory social-action research or public research. In his Pedagogy of Oppression, Freire writes:

For apart from inquiry, apart from praxis, individuals can not be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other. (10)

Social justice pedagogy (SJP) is premised on the idea that optimal learning is “experiential, participant-centered, inclusive, collaborative, and democratic” (Adams, Pedagogical 29). SJP forms learning communities in class and off-campus where participants share and learn from one another, engage in inquiry-based dialogue among equals, and collaborate in community justice work, leading to greater critical self-awareness and deeper understanding of lived experiences. Awareness of the patterns of violence, oppression, and social injustice generate new meanings of self and society and ultimately new hope in community efficacy and the possibility of improvement.
In the framework of SJP, providing opportunities for developing cultural critical consciousness in and out of class and facilitating collective- and self-reflection (Gay; Gay & Kirkland; Morley) are pedagogically essential. For instance, routine collective- and self-reflections help students process what they have learned, how their knowledge and skills have been applied, and what value the seminar has had on their ability to identify community needs and engage with social justice issues (e.g., Diejarz; Gibbs). Realizing the relevancy of knowledge/skills applications in the context of working with and for others in solidarity with the community (Honors Consortium) is important in enhancing learning and strengthening commitment to a continuous process of improvement (Gee; Kolb; Eyler).

SJP integrates learning goals with holistic pedagogical processes that bring together theoretical and experiential domains to make a real difference in the world. According to social justice pedagogy, the goal is “to affirm, model, and sustain socially just learning environments for all participants and, by so modeling, to offer hope that equitable relations and social structures can be achieved in the broader society” (Bell 3). To achieve this goal, the pedagogical process must be “democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity and group differences, inclusive and affirmative of human agency and capacity for working collaboratively with others to create change” (Bell 3). In the context of SJP, what students learn and how they learn must be integrated, coherent, and compatible.

SEMINAR STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

The seminar is designed to model social justice pedagogy, and it incorporates five main components: 1. participant presentations/lectures and inquiry-based dialogue/discussions, 2. planned readings and in-class activities, 3. planned off-campus community-based participatory research project, 4. seminar resources, and 5. assessment.

Component 1—Participant Presentations/Lectures and Inquiry-Based Dialogue/Discussions

Participant presentations/lectures and associated inquiry-led dialogues and discussions primarily function to communicate disciplinary content and foundational social science skills as well as necessary information and a tool kit to inform the community-based research project. Typically, the seminar enrolls ten to fifteen student participants, who represent various disciplinary
majors. As a result, the introductory foundation-building component of the seminar engenders a learning environment that gives everyone in the class equal access to relevant new knowledge and tools as well as opportunities for class members to share their own experiences and areas of strengths. The disciplinary diversity of class members contributes a positive, synergistic effect that enlivens discussions and demonstrates how students’ different areas of study may inform seminar discussions. Furthermore, the broad diversity represented by the participants—e.g., multi-social identities based on race, ethnicity, family income levels, gender, and residence—creates a base of common knowledge, shared concepts, vocabulary, critical analysis, and research skills that facilitates dialogue, encouraging all participants to take ownership of seminar content.

Seminar content is organized in seven units:

- Definition of key concepts of violence and democracy, including the democratic values of equality and the preservation of social justice and human rights;
- Social construction of violence, oppression, and social injustice;
- Mediated patterns of violence and justice: public perceptions and common myths vs. scientific evidence;
- Official measurement and the scientific study of violence and justice;
- Review of levels and types of interpersonal, institutional, and structural violence and associated social responses;
- Major theoretical paradigms, associated research evidence, and critical analysis of strengths and weaknesses; and
- Community justice advocacy and responsible social action: making a difference through social action research.

Information related to the community-based research project and consideration of social justice issues run across all units, which expose underlying assumptions of stock knowledge, conscious and unconscious influences on mainstream constructions of social reality, and why social justice matters (Barry). The critical discourse facilitates development of new knowledge and skills that challenge the common understandings of violence and the patterns of oppression and injustice, giving hope for meaningful change.

Even though all class members have some prior knowledge related to violence in society, what they know is typically based on mediated perceptions
and myths, not necessarily on scientific information (Voigt et al.; Iadicola & Shupe). Seminar presentations and critical dialogue debunk popular myths and demonstrate the cultural and scientific ambiguity surrounding violence and justice. For example, the term “violence” typically refers to legal violations as defined by the criminal law, such as homicide, rape, robbery, and assault, which are stereotypically represented as interpersonal or individual problems found in homes, workplaces, schools, places of worship, and communities. What is less commonly understood is how violence is associated with institutional- or structural-level harms and evidence of patterns of social injustices and violation of human rights (Keane). People often ignore, rationalize, and accept social injustices related to public policies, homelessness, mass incarceration, or forced migration that lead to human rights violations based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, and social class and that affect the health and wellbeing of many generations of people. Class discussions of such difficult issues develop critical thinking skills and create a “troubled common sense” in the class (Fine). With students’ realization of the complexity and often contradictory forms of violence, in contrast to social myths and responses, comes discomfort, which provides a powerful motivation to engage with social justice issues and get involved in responsible social activism.

Instructional materials and discussions lead students to analyze and reflect on uncomfortable everyday realities and to see how the concept of violence is used to categorize certain behaviors, types of people, and communities rather than to describe concrete phenomena. Reflecting on how the concept of violence contributes to pejorative labeling, serving mainly as an intensifier of emotions or judgments, students see how the concept leads to mistrust and fear of others. Given its conceptual lack of specificity and function as a symbolic intensifier, students see that the concept of violence has lent itself to being politically exploited, and they are challenged to consider the ways that violence labels are applied based on class, race, ethnicity, and gender identity and lead to human rights violations such as restricting people from certain zones in the city or denial of voting rights.

By challenging students to go beyond narrow depictions of violence to a broader study of violence, especially in the context of democratic values, their understanding extends beyond criminal violence at the interpersonal level to institutional and structural forms of violence (Iadicola & Shupe; Bufacchi; Keane). In-class discussions about these issues play a vital role in preparing students for their community-based research project as well as preparing them to be more critically aware of their own values, perceptions, interactions, and interpretations of social reality. In the process of questioning
taken-for-granted social constructions of reality, such as stereotypical representations of social justice in terms of “normalized injustice” (Fine), the seminar examines official public responses such as legislative acts or public policies that fail to acknowledge social injustices and human rights violations.

**Component 2—Planned Readings and In-Class Activities**

The required readings include journal articles and books associated with disciplinary content, e.g., *Why Violence?* by Voigt et al. and Perrin's *American Democracy*), as well as journal articles, national reports, and books related to the community-based project. For instance, if the theme of the research project is homelessness, the required readings include Beckett & Herbert’s *Banished*; Desmond’s *Evicted*; *Housing First* by Padgett et al., and *The State of Homelessness in America* published by the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

Each assignment aligns with particular learning objectives and corresponds with a learning/performance/process/evaluation rubric. A sample set of in-class seminar assignments (using homelessness as the theme for illustrative purposes where appropriate) includes the following:

- **Participation in a class debate and completion of a position paper.** Predicated on an assigned reading, each class member is responsible for submitting a position paper (5–8 pages) in addition to participating in a class debate on a selected structural violence/social justice topic. For instance, based on a critical analysis of a book related to the community-based research project (e.g., Padgett et al.), students produce individual position papers following a set of questions and guidelines. On the assignment due date, students come to class prepared to participate on a randomly assigned team to debate the advantages and disadvantages of the Housing First approach to end homelessness.

- **Critical book review.** Following a list of questions and guidelines, students submit a written critical review (5–8 pages) of a selected book that is relevant to the specific community-based research project, e.g., Beckett & Herbert or Desmond. On the day the book reviews are due, class members discuss the relative scientific merits of the books’ key arguments and how they might help inform the students’ community work.

- **In-class presentations.** Teams of two or three students are assigned to consider the individual, institutional, and structural levels of a specific
topic, e.g., homelessness and mental illness, homelessness and substance abuse, the criminalization of homelessness, homeless children and families, homelessness among military veterans, and homelessness among college students. Team members work together in conducting a comprehensive literature review on the topic and in preparing a class presentation, using presentation software, that follows a pre-set outline and list of questions to facilitate discussions. Class presentations are approximately twenty minutes long. In addition, students post presentation slides with citations, notes, and a bibliography on the class Blackboard site. All presentations are followed by a Q&A session and class discussion.

Component 3—Planned Community-Based Participatory Research Project

A semester prior to the seminar, the Office of Community Engaged Learning, Teaching and Scholarship (CELTS) emails, on behalf of the seminar professor, a request for proposals (RFP) along with the seminar syllabus to a list of social service agencies working with victims of violence or problems related to structural violence. The RFP specifically focuses on agency research needs. Proposal submissions are evaluated with respect to their appropriateness for a semester-long research project, relevance to the seminar’s social justice learning goals and objectives, and mutual benefits for all participants.

Students then engage in a semester-long research project that supports the selected social service agency’s justice work. Students work collaboratively with community partners to plan the steps of the project, determine the deliverables and projected timetable, and implement the project. As part of the activities, students visit the partner agency and share progress reports and reflections on their experiences. At the end of the semester, students collectively prepare a written report of 10–12 pages and PowerPoint presentation of 30–45 minutes on their project, including a literature review, research methods, findings, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations. The presentations occur at an end-of-year gathering with all community partners, campus partners, and other guests in attendance. In addition, each student submits a written summative reflective analysis (approximately 3–5 pages) linking relevant seminar content and materials with community experiences. See Box 1 for an illustration of a community-based participatory research project conducted in the fall of 2015.
Box 1. Community-Based Participatory Research Project: An Illustration

**Project Title:** Comparative Study of the Cost of Chronic Homelessness vs. the Cost of Permanent Supportive Housing

**Seminar Date:** Fall 2015

**Community Partner:** Harry Tompsoon Center (HTC), a community resource center serving the homeless population in New Orleans, LA

**HTC/Loyola Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):** Developed collaboratively including members from HTC, seminar students and faculty, and the Office of Community Engaged Learning, Teaching and Scholarship (CE LTS)

1. Conduct a comprehensive research literature search on Housing First or the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) program initiatives, including related national standard metrics for estimating program costs, program evaluation and success measures, and best practices;
2. Code and input inventory data results in a Google spreadsheet file based on the Vulnerability Index Services Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT), which was administered by the Loyola Poverty Law Center to a random sample of approximately 250 homeless people in New Orleans;
3. Based on results gathered from the VI-SPDAT inventory, identify the chronic homeless population and the occasional homeless population;
4. Using selected items on VI-SPDAT (agreed on by seminar members including faculty, students, and community partners) calculate the costs associated with the consequences related to ignoring the needs of chronic and occasional homeless individuals (based on respondents’ self-reported crisis incidents such as police arrests and detainment, court appearances, imprisonment, drug rehabilitation, ambulance trips, emergency care, and hospitalization); and calculate the costs associated with the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) program (i.e., standard costs related to providing a stable residence paired with services that address individual needs);
5. Conduct a cost efficiency study considering the following: (a) average cost of PSH (i.e., rental assistance and case management services) for one homeless person and the total cost for 250 people over a six month period; (b) the average cost of unassisted street homelessness for one person and for 250 persons for the same time period; and (c) compare total PSH costs with total unassisted street homelessness costs.

**Project Results:** The cost efficiency study related to a comparison of the costs of the PSH program vs. ignoring the needs of the homeless strongly suggests that the PSH program is far less expensive and a great deal more humanitarian. As a follow-up, the HTC has successfully used the students’ research project findings in several proposal requests for funding, which subsequently have impacted the expansion of the PSH approach and a significant reduction of homelessness in New Orleans.
Component 4—Seminar Resources

In addition to seminar students and the faculty member, community partners and campus partners represent critical resources in the learning process and play essential supportive roles:

- Community partners work collaboratively with members of the seminar to develop the project description, i.e., memorandum of understanding (MOU). They also come to class to discuss elements of the project; host agency visits for students; provide relevant background data/information; give access to agency information, personnel, and resources; and make themselves available to respond to class needs and questions. Typically, only one agency is involved, but occasionally two or more agencies work collaboratively.

- Campus partners typically include the office of community engaged learning and research; the university library; the university honors program (UHP); and other campus offices and experts when needed.
  - The office of community engaged learning and research provides general support of the community-based participatory research project: e.g., identifying community agencies/partners; facilitating partner meetings and development of MOUs; ensuring compliance with the university risk management policy; arranging transportation to and from the community agency; troubleshooting problems; tracking community service hours; and making sure that students get transcript credit/notations for their community service work.
  - A university library liaison ensures that students and partners have access to all library resources and maximum support related to the use of information technologies. For example, the library liaison offers instructional demonstrations on setting-up project spreadsheets on Google, tracking data, and running summary statistics and graphic representations of results. The library liaison also assists in literature and document searches.
  - The university honors program (UHP) supports Social Justice Seminars by organizing and hosting topically oriented co-curricular special events, guest lectures, roundtable discussions, and field trips. The UHP also plays a valuable facilitative role in identifying resources, providing training opportunities, bringing in experts,
and assisting with networking in the community both on and off campus. The UHP director demonstrates support of the SJ seminars by attending invited class and community meetings.

- Other participants include campus offices, classes, and faculty/staff experts across campus and relevant other off-campus agencies. For instance, in a project that involved a partnership with a community organization’s efforts to address public safety concerns within the Latino/a community in a New Orleans neighborhood, students collaborated with members of the organization to develop a survey of residents’ satisfaction with police performance and to ascertain their ability to voice safety concerns. To ensure a representative inventory sample, this project necessitated partnering with faculty/students in a Spanish language class so that interview questions could be translated and administered in Spanish and then, after the results were gathered, translated back into English. In support of the project, the class members also met with a campus faculty expert on public opinion polling and visited a local police agency in order to learn how public opinion poll results are used to inform police strategies.

At the end of the semester, all participants come together to share highlights of the project, to express thanks for everyone’s contributions, and to celebrate accomplishments.

The learning resources include materials such as content-related and skills-related PowerPoint slides and written reports/notes associated with faculty presentations; student and partner presentations; special tutorials on, for instance, the social science research process and guidelines for data collection and analysis; class handouts; extended bibliographies; and numerous internet and library links to national reports, key studies, and e-journal articles posted on Blackboard. The Blackboard site also includes a seminar discussion board, which provides space for seminar members to coordinate activities and for all partners to post resources and draft documents as well as share their ideas and concerns.

**Component 5—Assessment**

Based on the idea that we must measure what we treasure, assessment plays a key role in the educational process, particularly in the context of social justice pedagogy. Accordingly, assessment is instrumental in establishing
clarity and communicating what content knowledge, skills, processes, practices, and cultural and personal awareness are considered valuable (Adams, “Pedagogical”; Eberly Center; McNiff).

Noted higher education expert Alexander Astin observes that “good assessment is really good research, and the ultimate aim of such research should be to help us make better choices and better decisions in running our educational programs and institutions” (xii). To this end, all the seminar’s planned assignments and activities align with the social justice learning objectives and the comprehensive, multi-level assessment plan that informs future improvement. Four levels of assessment are built into the seminar:

- **Individual-level assessment** of student learning/performance includes a clear statement of purpose, detailed description and guidelines, grading rubric, and a point system associated with each assignment/activity. Students’ self-reflections and self-assessments of learning for each assignment/activity represent important elements of the individual-level process. Assignments that have a team component include collective reflections and evaluations of collaborative effectiveness in completing tasks as well as reflective evaluation of inclusiveness, fairness, and justice relationships.

- **Seminar-level assessment** includes gathering and analyzing aggregated-level data based on all seminar input/output with emphasis on social justice learning and process objectives:
  - Review of the results of periodic polls administered by the professor, asking students to provide their opinions of the effectiveness and value of various elements of the seminar including presentations/lectures and learning materials;
  - Review of students’ overall performance on assignments, i.e., aggregated outcomes;
  - Review of students’ aggregated summation of the seminar based on self-assessments, team assessments, and reflective reports; and
  - Review of qualitative interaction indicators gathered during the semester, i.e., record of both positive interactions and problems.

These results are holistically evaluated in order to implement improvements. Moreover, CELTS conducts end-of-term student
course evaluations that provide aggregated information regarding what worked and what did not in the context of the community-engaged project, which also informs seminar-level modifications and improvements.

- **Community partner-level assessment** is based on a survey, administered by CELTS, designed to gather information from community partners, students, and faculty on seminar effectiveness in meeting the conditions of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) and general level of satisfaction of all participants.

- **Curricular-level assessment** is conducted by the university honors program (UHP) based on data gathered from all honors courses and includes both student and faculty input. This level of assessment is mainly focused on measuring programmatic congruence and success with respect to the mission and goals of the UHP. The assessment comprises information and data obtained in annual electronic surveys and senior exit interviews.

### CHALLENGES:

#### RECONCILING THE IDEAL WITH THE MESSY

No matter how well designed and organized, the social justice seminar presents some challenges due to its participatory nature and its emphasis on community engagement. Simply put, things do not always work out the way they were planned and can get messy. It helps to get all participants to agree to a memorandum of understanding in which expectations for everyone’s responsibilities, deliverables, and timeline are clearly delineated. The unexpected, however, is always possible, and in this event, engaging all participants in creative problem-solving is important. Learning takes place during times of adversity, and such teaching moments can turn out to be valuable.

One example of the unexpected occurred in a recent seminar that focused on mass incarceration with special emphasis on the process of post-prison community re-entry. The community-based project got off to a late start due to problems on the community partner’s side. To accommodate this partner, the class schedule shuffled around some activities. Over halfway into the seminar but well before students’ observations and collection of data were completed, the partner informed the class that funding for his re-entry service agency had been discontinued and that the agency had been shuttered;
further, he indicated that he would be unable to continue with the community-based research project. Disappointment loomed over the class. The first response of seminar members was to meet with the community partner to thank him and to express genuine concern over the difficult situation. During the meeting with the community partner, the class explored alternative options and developed a list of other agencies and key contacts.

Then class members began a process of considering what they most needed to know about the process of re-entry and the experiences of re-entry clients. Based on newly formed learning goals, class members brainstormed together and planned outreach strategies and data-gathering field trips. The first step was designing an exploratory study that would capture the early experiences and paths of re-entry clients. Second, the class partnered with another class and traveled to the state penitentiary in Angola, Louisiana. At the prison, members of the class met with prisoners who were preparing for release and re-entry. Third, class members contacted a re-entry judge and got authorization to visit several re-entry court sessions. Fourth, they followed up with other community agencies that provide re-entry services and explored the possibility of attending focus group meetings with some re-entry clients, promising that they would share the results of the project.

In the presence of adversity, the students did not give up but rather persevered and exhibited a high level of enthusiasm and resourcefulness. All participants—students, faculty, community partner, and campus partners—assisted in making the seminar experience unforgettable. The final assessment results turned out to be among the best. After sharing the project results with recent re-entry clients, the students shared a list of community resources that they had prepared based on needs that they perceived during their attendance at focus group meetings and in information gathering. The re-entry clients expressed great appreciation to the students for their insightful, helpful report and resource brochure, which from all accounts is still used by new re-entry clients.

**CONCLUSION**

Social justice education is most effective in an educational environment where social justice learning goals and processes are consistently modeled across institutional, programmatic, and curricular levels. Reflecting Loyola’s and the UHP’s mission, the honors seminar Violence and Democracy attempts to connect educational excellence with social justice through
engagement with the community, solidarity with the needs of community members, and advocacy of social justice and human rights.

Beyond the seminar, these honors students are given the option to participate in full-circle experiential, professional, learning, and research opportunities. For instance, seminar students have been invited to develop presentation proposals based on their community-based research project for conferences of national organizations such as the American Society of Criminology, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, and the Southern Social Science History Association. The opportunity to participate in professional conferences gives undergraduate honors students a unique glimpse into the development and sharing of knowledge at a professional level.

In the fall of 2016, for instance, a student cohort that worked with the Harry Thompson Center (HTC) participated in a national conference where they described their research project (see Box 1 above). They provided an overview of their experience, including a brief description of their literature review, research methods and results, and error analysis; they also showed that the results of their comparative cost efficiency study of unassisted homelessness versus the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) approach contributed to the expansion of the PSH program and ultimately a reduction of homelessness in New Orleans. They then discussed the pedagogical elements of their seminar, including student learning outcomes, and finally they discussed how their seminar experience enhanced their self-efficacy as social action researchers and expanded their understanding of ways to achieve social change, particularly the value of teaming up with community partners.

In a follow-up study, a new cohort of seminar participants two years later partnered again with the Harry Thompson Center to conduct a study on the effectiveness of the PSH program two years out as indicated by the retention rate and the vulnerability index, especially with respect to the incidence of crisis events such as medical emergencies and law enforcement interactions. The evaluation project results, which are included in grant renewal reports, provide evidence that the PSH program is working: a 97% retention rate, a homeless veteran rate of zero, a significantly lower rate of crisis events, and a generally higher level of client satisfaction.

Recent evidence indicates the seminar’s pathway into capstone projects and honors theses on related topics as well as, based on alumni survey results, continuing post-baccalaureate commitment to learning and service related to the seminar experience. The seminar illustrates that learning can transform lives when knowledge and community-based applications are relevant to the
real world and when student work makes a positive difference in addressing social injustices in the community.

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Drug overdoses are the leading cause of death for Americans under fifty years of age, having surpassed deaths from guns, HIV, and even car crashes. Clearly driving this trend is prescription drug misuse, especially of opioids. Of the over 62,000 drug overdose deaths in 2016 alone, a full third resulted from the misuse of prescription opioids such as Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, Vicodin, and Morphine (Katz; NIDA; see also DHS). Evidence indicates that college students are among those losing their lives each year to prescription drug misuse (Spencer), but many facets of prescription drug misuse, including types, prevalence, and especially explanations, are understudied among college students and especially among honors students. We aim to help fill this void with the current investigation of prescription drug misuse among honors students in the context of the strains of college life. We turn first to a review of what is known about prescription drug use among college students and the few attempts to explain it using extant theories of crime.
Prescription Drug Misuse

Prescription drug misuse, defined as a nonmedical use of prescription drugs either with or without a prescription (Blanchard et al.) can be challenging to identify because, unlike illicit drugs, they are prescribed by a doctor presumably for a legitimate medical issue. Quinones gives a thorough and engaging history of the factors underlying the current opioid epidemic; briefly, these include intense direct marketing of prescription painkillers (especially Oxycodone) to prescribing doctors, loose laws that have permitted the operation of pill mills with little oversight, the change in the position among doctors acknowledging that pain is a true condition that demands treatment, and insurers’ willingness to cover prescriptions for painkillers. Among the general population in the United States, it is estimated that over eleven million people—about four percent of the population—misused prescription painkillers in one recent year (Ahrnsbrak et al.). Among college students, the rate appears to be higher. Using data from a nationally representative survey of college students in the United States, McCabe et al. found that twelve percent of college students had ever misused prescription painkillers and seven percent had misused them in the past year. Given how dated the McCabe et al. study is, we can assume that the prevalence has increased significantly since then.

Criminological Theories

Several criminological theories have been applied in the few studies to date on prescription drug misuse among college students; these include social bond, social learning, and general strain.

Social Bond Theory

As devised by Hirschi, social bond theory begins with the notion that most people do not commit crimes and questions why that is the case. His answer lies in the social bond: most people refrain from crime, especially serious crime, in order not to put at risk the bond they have with others, including family, friends, teachers, and co-workers. The social bond comprises four elements: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. People do not typically engage in crime if they are attached to social institutions and the people in them, are committed to those institutions and their people, are involved in conventional activities, and hold a normative, law-abiding belief system.

Empirical research has found support for the social bond theory of crime (see Frailing & Harper for a list of supportive studies). This theory also has
support in explaining alcohol and drug use. For example, Han, Kim, and Ma found that attachment to teachers, educational aspirations, and internalization of school rules were associated with lower levels of substance use among students. Most relevant to the current study, both Ford, in “Nonmedical Prescription Drug Use,” and Schroeder & Ford found that strong attachment to both parents and teachers was associated with lower levels of prescription drug use among students.

**Social Learning Theory**

As devised by Akers in *Criminological Theories* and “A Social Learning Theory of Crime,” social learning theory holds that people learn to commit crime the same way they learn anything else in life. While Edwin Sutherland was the first to propose that people learn crime, Akers took the next step and tried to explain how that learning happens and how it produces crime. Social learning theory comprises four components, the first of which is differential association, which simply refers to the group of people with whom one spends the most time and that provides the context in which learning occurs. The second is definitions, which are attitudes about specific behaviors. The third is differential reinforcement, which refers to the rewards or punishments that are expected to follow certain behaviors. The fourth and final concept of social learning theory is imitation: in other words, engaging in the same or similar behavior as another upon witnessing that behavior. While social learning is complex, it posits that a typical process is involved in the production of criminal behavior. Learned definitions from the group with whom one differentially associates, imitation of the behaviors in that group, and anticipated reinforcement produce the initial criminal act. Whether this act is repeated depends on the rewards or punishments experienced. Upon repetition of criminal acts, definitions may become stronger, as might differential association with delinquent peers (Akers, *Social Learning*; Akers & Sellers).

Dozens if not hundreds of studies find empirical support for social learning as an explanatory theory of crime (see Frailing & Harper for a long but still partial list), and social learning is considered among the best criminological theories in terms of its ability to explain crime. The theory is commonly employed in empirical tests of the reasons for alcohol and drug use; ever since Akers & Cochran found strong support for social learning in explaining marijuana use, other researchers have followed suit in testing the theory. Most relevant to the current study is the support for social learning theory’s ability to explain prescription drug misuse among adolescents (Ford & Schroeder;
Schroeder & Ford), among young adults (Higgins et al.), and among college students (Peralta & Steele; Watkins). However, the support is qualified; as Higgins et al. report: “nonsocial reinforcement is a more important internal reward than the social gratification that comes from associating with peers that are perceived to produce this behavior” (958). In other words, the internal thrill or high that comes from misusing prescription drugs strongly associates with their use and, unlike with alcohol and other drugs, friends’ use of these substances is not as important. In line with this idea, Quintero, Peterson, & Young find that college students perceive prescription drugs as less dangerous than illicit drugs, as more socially acceptable, and as helpful in improving physical and academic productivity, suggesting social learning explanations would be incomplete.

**General Strain Theory**

As devised by Agnew in “Stability and Change in Crime over the Life-Course” and “Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime,” general strain theory identifies three categories of strain that can lead to crime. The first and the most in line with Merton’s 1938 classic strain theory is the inability to achieve positively valued goals, such as achieving monetary success. The second category of strains is the loss of positively valued stimuli caused by, for instance, breaking up with a significant other. The third category is the introduction of negatively valued stimuli, such as victimization by crime. Strains can lead to a negative view of others and in turn result in negative emotions, especially anger, that can then lead to criminal coping, including crime and substance use. Thousands of strains can fall into each of these categories, and Agnew, in “Building on the Foundation of General Strain Theory” and “A General Strain Theory of Terrorism,” identifies a number of strains as more likely to lead to crime; these include failure to achieve goals when these goals can be easily met with crime, abusive or neglectful parenting, negative experiences in school, abuse or rejection by peers, abuse by significant others, unemployment, poverty, and homelessness.

Empirical research supports general strain as an explanatory theory for a variety of criminal and other deviant behaviors, from bullying to terrorism (see Frailing & Harper for a list of supportive studies). General strain theory has also been useful in explaining substance abuse as a response to the strains of victimization (Cudmore et al.; McNulty-Eitle et al.), of other traumatic experiences (Ham et al.), and of the dissolution of a romantic relationship (Larson & Sweeten). Most relevant to the current study, Ford and Schroeder found that academic strains among college students were associated with
prescription stimulant misuse. No matter the theory explaining prescription drug misuse, though, honors students are never a focus of these studies.

**RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES**

The current study takes its cue directly from Ford and Schroeder’s work, which found that a certain type of college-life strain was associated with a certain type of prescription drug misuse. We broadened their examination to include other strains and other prescription drugs, so our research question is: Are different strains of college life associated with misuse of different kinds of prescription drugs among honors students? We hypothesized that academic strains would be associated with prescription stimulant misuse and that relationship strains would be associated with prescription painkiller misuse.

**METHODOLOGY**

We received IRB approval from our university to conduct a paper-and-pencil survey about strains of college life and alcohol and drug misuse. We reached out to all professors teaching honors classes at our small Jesuit university and administered the survey in the classes where professors permitted us to do so in the spring of 2017. Ultimately, 93 honors students completed the survey, which is about a quarter of the honors population at our university.

**Independent Variables**

In accord with Ford and Schroeder’s study, we operationalized academic strain as three variables: scholarship, high self-expectations, and high GPA. The latter two were measured at the interval level on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 indicated strongly disagree and 5 indicated strongly agree. The first, on scholarship was measured at the nominal level as a yes or no answer.

Having little guidance for relationship strains save for that from Larson and Sweeten, who found that breaking up with a partner was associated with alcohol and drug use, we largely created our own relationship strains, operationalizing these variables as: fighting with friends a lot, a recent stressful breakup, and a good relationship with parents. These were all measured at the interval level on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 indicated strongly disagree and 5 indicated strongly agree.

In accord with previous studies on prescription drug misuse, we also included a number of control variables that are consistent with both social bond and social learning theories. The control variables for social bond theory
were: spending a lot of time studying, spending a lot of time in extracurricular activities, and believing that religion is really important. The control variables for social learning theory were: friends using drugs and alcohol and spending a lot of time with friends. All of the control variables measured at the interval level on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 indicated strongly disagree and 5 indicated strongly agree.

Finally, we included demographic variables measuring age, race, ethnicity, gender, and year in school of the survey respondents.

**Dependent Variables**

Our dependent variables of interest were prescription stimulant misuse and prescription painkiller misuse. For the prescription stimulant misuse variable, we asked respondents if they had ever, in the past six months, and in the past month “used a prescription stimulant (such as Ritalin, Cylert, Dexedrine, Adderall) without a prescription, in order to study, or in order to get high.” For the prescription painkiller misuse variable, we asked respondents if they had ever, in the past six months, and in the past month “used a prescription painkiller (such as Darvocet, Tylenol with Codeine, Percocet, Vicodin, Hydrocodone, OxyContin) without a prescription or in order to get high;” the phrasing of these questions is consistent with previous studies on prescription drug misuse among college students. These variables were measured at the nominal level as a yes or no answer.

Largely to contextualize our findings on prescription drug misuse, we also asked respondents if they had ever, in the past six months, or the past month, engaged in binge drinking, in marijuana use, and in illicit drug misuse, including use of cocaine, crack cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, ecstasy, LSD, psychedelics, or hallucinogens. These variables were also measured at the nominal level as a yes or no answer. (The full survey is available on request.)

**RESULTS**

Table 1 provides descriptive data on the respondents. In terms of gender, the sample is representative of the undergraduate population as a whole at the university, but the sample is both younger and whiter than the undergraduate population as a whole and than the honors population.

Table 2 provides descriptive data on the independent variables. Nearly all respondents were on scholarship and rated both expectations of themselves and their GPAs as high. Ratings on relationship strains were mixed; few
respondents agreed that they fought with friends or were under stress from a recent breakup, but they rated a good relationship with parents high. Bond variables were rated about average, with religion as important rated lower than time studying or time in extracurricular activities. Learning variables—both friends using drugs and alcohol and time spent with friends—were rated high.

Table 3 provides descriptive data on the dependent variables. The most prevalent form of substance use among the respondents was binge drinking, followed by marijuana, then illicit drugs, then prescription stimulant misuse, and finally, prescription painkiller misuse. The prevalence of binge drinking ever, in the past six months, and in the past month is similar to (though slightly higher than) the prevalence of marijuana use in the three time periods. Illicit drug use is less prevalent among the respondents; just about a quarter reported ever using these drugs, which is similar to (but slightly higher than) the percent that reported ever misusing prescription stimulants. The prevalence of prescription painkiller misuse is low, with less than 10 percent of respondents reporting ever misusing prescription painkillers.

Table 4 provides the results of our first logistic regression analysis, where we examined each independent variable’s ability to predict prescription

**TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS (N=93)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number (Percent)</th>
<th>Ethnicity¹</th>
<th>Number (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32 (34.3)</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>8 (8.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56 (60)</td>
<td>Not Hispanic</td>
<td>85 (91.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonconforming</td>
<td>4 (4.3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Average Age    | 19.5 (SD: 1.27) |
| Race²          | Number (Percent) |
| White          | 78 (83.8)        |
| Black          | 3 (3.2)          |
| Asian          | 6 (6.5)          |
| Other          | 6 (6.5)          |
| Year in School | Number (Percent) |
| First Year     | 44 (47.3)        |
| Second Year    | 14 (15.1)        |
| Third Year     | 19 (20.4)        |
| Fourth Year    | 16 (17.2)        |

1. The question in the survey on ethnicity was modeled after the university’s demographic data gathering protocol, which uses the categories seen in the table and is largely consistent with U.S. Bureau of the Census’ definitions.

2. The question in the survey on race was modeled after the university’s demographic data gathering protocol, which uses the categories seen in the table and is fairly consistent with the U.S. Bureau of the Census definitions. Respondents were asked to identify as Other if they did not identify as White, Black, or Asian, or if they identified as more than one race.
stimulant misuse and prescription painkiller misuse. Just two independent variables, one strain and one learning, significantly predicted prescription drug misuse of any kind at the .05 level. The lower the expectations respondents

**Table 2. Ratings on Independent Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Strains</th>
<th>Mean and SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On scholarship (Y/N)</td>
<td>Yes 92 (98.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations of self</td>
<td>4.49, .716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High GPA</td>
<td>4.39, .822</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Strains</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fight with friends</td>
<td>1.63, .074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakup really stressful</td>
<td>1.86, .167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good relationship with parents</td>
<td>4.23, .113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Variables</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time studying (bond)</td>
<td>3.38, .113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in extracurriculars (bond)</td>
<td>3.62, .122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion is important (bond)</td>
<td>2.50, .157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends drink/use drugs (learning)</td>
<td>4.35, .089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time with friends (learning)</td>
<td>3.98, .100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Ratings on Dependent Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Binge Drink</th>
<th>Number (Percent) Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever</td>
<td>63 (67.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>57 (61.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>39 (41.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marijuana</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever</td>
<td>61 (65.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>50 (53.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>34 (36.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illicit Drugs</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever</td>
<td>24 (25.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>18 (19.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>11 (11.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prescription Stimulant Misuse</th>
<th>Number (Percent) Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever</td>
<td>18 (19.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>14 (15.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>8 (8.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prescription Painkiller Misuse</th>
<th>Number (Percent) Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever</td>
<td>8 (8.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 month</td>
<td>4 (4.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>3 (3.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Logistic Regression: Prescription Drug Misuse*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stimulant Ever</th>
<th>Stimulant 6 Months</th>
<th>Stimulant 1 Month</th>
<th>Painkiller Ever</th>
<th>Painkiller 6 Months</th>
<th>Painkiller 1 Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Scholarship</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Expectations</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>B=-2.855</td>
<td>SE=1.129</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wald=6.393</td>
<td>Exp(B)=0.058</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High GPA</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight Friends</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakup Stress</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Relationship Parents</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Studying</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Extracurriculars</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends Drink/Use</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Friends</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>B=3.785</td>
<td>SE=1.70</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wald=4.956</td>
<td>Exp(B)=44.017</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N/S = independent variable did not significantly predict the dependent variable.*
had of themselves, the more likely they were to report prescription stimulant misuse in the past six months. The more time respondents reported spending with friends, the more likely they were to report prescription stimulant misuse, also in the past six months.

Table 5 provides the results of our second logistic regression analysis, where we examined each independent variable’s ability to predict binge drinking, marijuana use, and illicit drug use. Sixteen independent variables significantly predicted drinking, marijuana, and illicit drug use at the .05 level. Two of these were strain variables: expectations of self and fighting with friends. The lower the expectations respondents had of themselves, the more likely they were to report illicit drug use in the past six months. The more respondents reported fighting with their friends, the more likely they were to report marijuana use in the past six months. Four of these predictive variables were bond variables, time studying, time in extracurricular activities, and the importance of religion. The more time respondents reported studying, the more likely they were to report illicit drug use in the past six months, and the more time they spent in extracurricular activities, the less likely they were to report illicit drug use in the past six months. The more important that respondents said religion was to them, the less likely they were to report marijuana use ever and in the past six months.

Ten of the explanatory variables were learning variables. The more time respondents reported spending with friends, the more likely they were to report binge drinking ever, in the past six months, and in the past month, as well as marijuana use ever and illicit drug use ever. The more respondents reported that their friends drank and used drugs, the more likely they were to report binge drinking in the past month, as well as marijuana use ever and in the past six months, and illicit drug use in the past six months and the past one month.

**DISCUSSION**

We set out to examine whether different types of college strains could predict different types of prescription drug misuse among honors students. We predicted that academic strains would be associated with prescription stimulant misuse and that relationship strains would be associated with prescription painkiller misuse.

We found limited support for our first hypothesis, that academic strains are associated with prescription stimulant misuse, but our findings are in an unexpected direction. The lower respondents’ expectations of themselves, the
more likely they were to report prescription stimulant misuse. Based largely on Ford and Schroeder’s research, we expected that respondents who had the highest expectations of themselves might misuse prescription stimulants in order to study more or to be more productive in order to continue to live up to those expectations. The sample who participated in this research may help explain these unexpected findings. Nearly half were in their first year of college when they took the survey, so they were relatively new to the college setting and likely still adjusting to the change from high school. Because the data were collected in the spring semester, this adjustment may have been compounded by receiving their first-semester grades. After excelling, often easily, in high school, they may have faced challenges to their self-expectations in college, spurring them on to take more drastic measures such as misusing prescription stimulants to excel in the new setting. Expectations of self also predicted illicit drug use in the past six months in the same direction, and greater time spent studying predicted illicit drug misuse; the illicit drugs were likely to have been stimulant in nature.

We found no support for our second hypothesis, that relationship strains are associated with prescription painkiller misuse. In fact, the only relationship strain that predicted drug use was fighting with friends: those who reported more fighting were more likely to report using marijuana in the past six months. Moreover, as Table 5 indicates, bond and especially learning variables were far more important in explaining drug and alcohol use than were strain variables. This result is consistent with prior criminological research, which finds that social learning theory is almost always the strongest explanation for criminal behavior, including drug and alcohol use (e.g., Hwang & Akers; Neff & Waite). However, it would be unwise to dismiss all other theories to explain prescription drug misuse, given previous findings (e.g., Schroeder & Ford) and the results of the present study, which do not show much overlap between the independent variables that predict prescription drug misuse and those that predict binge drinking, marijuana use, and illicit drug misuse. Different variables that are central to a number of criminological theories are possibly associated with different types of alcohol and drug use.

**LIMITATIONS**

As with any research, this study has limitations. The first is our small sample size. Although we did survey about a quarter of the honors students at our university, our sample may not be representative enough of the honors population to draw firm conclusions. A larger sample would have likely matched
### Table 5. Logistic Regression: Drinking and Drug Use*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Binge Drink Ever</th>
<th>Binge Drink 6 Months</th>
<th>Binge Drink 1 Month</th>
<th>Marijuana Ever</th>
<th>Marijuana 6 Months</th>
<th>Marijuana 1 Month</th>
<th>Illicit Ever</th>
<th>Illicit 6 Month</th>
<th>Illicit 1 Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Expectations</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>B=-1.444</td>
<td>SE=.664</td>
<td>Wald=4.736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exp(B)~.236</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High GPA</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight Friends</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>B=.935</td>
<td>SE=.440</td>
<td>Wald=4.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exp(B)~2.547</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakup Stress</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Relationship Parents</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Studying</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>N/S</td>
<td>B=.953</td>
<td>SE=.424</td>
<td>Wald=5.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exp(B)~2.594</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                      | N/S | N/S | N/S | N/S | N/S | N/S | B=-.697  
|                      |     |     |     |     |     |     | SE=.344  
|                      |     |     |     |     |     |     | Wald=4.091  
|                      |     |     |     |     |     |     | Exp(B)=.498  
| **Time Extracurriculars** |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |  
| **Religion**         | N/S | N/S | N/S | B=-.526  
|                      |     |     |     | SE=.191  
|                      |     |     |     | Wald=7.610  
|                      |     |     |     | Exp(B)=.591  
|                      |     |     | B=-.568  
|                      |     |     |     | SE=.198  
|                      |     |     |     | Wald=8.225  
|                      |     |     |     | Exp(B)=.567  
| **Friends Drink/Use** | N/S | N/S | N/S | B=1.278  
|                      |     |     |     | SE=.512  
|                      |     |     |     | Wald=6.230  
|                      |     |     |     | Exp(B)=3.590  
|                      |     |     | B=1.921  
|                      |     |     |     | SE=.426  
|                      |     |     |     | Wald=4.669  
|                      |     |     |     | Exp(B)=2.513  
| **Time Friends**     | B=1.019  
|                      |     |     |     | SE=.321  
|                      |     |     |     | Wald=10.092  
|                      |     |     |     | Exp(B)=2.770  
|                      |     | B=.832  
|                      |     |     |     | SE=.298  
|                      |     |     |     | Wald=7.789  
|                      |     |     |     | Exp(B)=.001  
|                      |     | B=1.176  
|                      |     |     |     | SE=.359  
|                      |     |     |     | Wald=10.739  
|                      |     |     |     | Exp(B)=3.243  
|                      |     | B=.705  
|                      |     |     |     | SE=.314  
|                      |     |     |     | Wald=5.052  
|                      |     |     |     | Exp(B)=2.023  
| **Friends Drink/Use** | N/S | N/S | B=.847  
|                      |     |     |     | SE=.387  
|                      |     |     |     | Wald=4.786  
|                      |     |     |     | Exp(B)=2.333  
|                      | N/S | N/S | B=2.374  
|                      |     |     |     | SE=1.194  
|                      |     |     |     | Wald=3.957  
|                      |     |     |     | Exp(B)=10.743  

* N/S= independent variable did not significantly predict the dependent variable.
the honors population as a whole more closely on key demographic variables. The second limitation is the cross-sectional nature of our work. Because we collected the data at one point in time, we cannot definitively say that the independent variables produced the dependent variables. The firmest conclusion we are able to draw at this point is that they are associated with one another as described above.

The third limitation is the timeframe in which the data were collected. The university where the study was conducted is in New Orleans, and in the spring semester the university and the city celebrate Mardi Gras. Consistent with typical impressions, Mardi Gras is a weeks-long celebration during which revelers, some of whom were very likely in our sample, engage in drinking and drug use. The prevalence of drinking and drug use may be higher and therefore less representative of the sample's (and of the population's) true substance use behavior because of when the data were collected.

The fourth and probably most important limitation is our operationalization of strains. As noted above, literally thousands of strains can fall into each of the three categories of strain, and we selected a total of six strains, three academic and three relationship-related. Probably more strains affect honors students, including but not limited to financial strains and mental health challenges, that we did not inquire about. Understanding the impact that strains have on prescription drug misuse probably requires the incorporation of more actual and potential strains into future work.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Limitations notwithstanding, we believe our findings have some important implications for supporting honors students as they navigate the challenges of college life. Because lower self-expectations predicted more prescription stimulant misuse, it follows that honors students, particularly in their first year, may benefit from assistance with setting and managing expectations. This assistance could come from faculty and staff, but it may be most meaningful and effective if it comes from honors students who are further along in college. Upper-level students have very likely faced the same or similar challenges and can share their experience with beneficial and maladaptive coping mechanisms. Improving the ability to cope with strain is also a goal set forth by Agnew in “Controlling Crime.”

The bond and learning variables that significantly predict alcohol and drug use, including prescription stimulant misuse in the case of learning variables, also have implications for honors students. Consistent with social
bond theory, opportunities for engagement in prosocial groups, programs, and events should have the effect of keeping honors students bonded to the university and reducing drug and alcohol use as a result. These opportunities must be known to and of interest to honors students, though; simply having opportunities would likely be fruitless otherwise. Regular surveys with honors students about their interests and ability to commit to (probably additional) extracurricular activities could help reveal gaps in what is offered.

Finally, and consistent with social learning theory, opportunities to spend time with prosocial peers should have the effect of reorienting the group with which honors students differentially associate and, by extension, their definitions around alcohol and drug use, their expected reinforcement as the result of use, and the models they have to imitate. Research on programs that provide prosocial peers, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, has shown that they are effective at reducing antisocial behavior (Greenwood & Turner). Ensuring that honors students, particularly when they first start college, can find and engage with prosocial peers should reduce alcohol and drug use, and while faculty and staff should take the steps they can to make sure this is happening, the importance of involving honors students, especially those who are further along in college, cannot be overstated.

CONCLUSION

While we believe that our research is solid and our implications worth employing in honors programs, the limitations of our work demand additional study on this topic. In order to discover the particular strains of college life that are important in producing drinking and illicit drug use as well as prescription drug misuse among honors students, we urge replication of this study at larger public universities with sizeable honors programs and colleges. Larger sample sizes, as well as fewer potential confounds from data collection around Mardi Gras time, would provide an opportunity to more thoroughly operationalize academic and relationship strains and to add new, potentially important ones such as financial or mental health strains. Continuing this line of investigation will help uncover the specific reasons for drinking and drug use and provide theory-based approaches that encourage responsible use of these substances as well as prosocial coping skills for honors students dealing with the inevitable strains of college life.
REFERENCES


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Perceptions of Advisors Who Work with High-Achieving Students

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BACKGROUND

Honors programs in higher education are designed to optimize high-achieving students’ potential by addressing their particular academic and developmental needs and common characteristics. Gerrity, Lawrence, and Sedlacek suggested that high-achieving students can be “best served by course work, living environments, and activities that differ from the usual college offerings” (43). Schuman, in his handbook Beginning in Honors, noted:

An important point to keep in mind as regards honors advising is that honors students can be expected to have as many, and as complicated,
problems as other students. It is sometimes tempting to envision all honors students as especially well rounded, balanced, thoughtful, mature, and self-possessed. This vision does not seem particularly accurate or helpful despite its attractiveness and allure. (63)

Accordingly, specialized academic advising for honors students is an important component of maximizing their potential as well as addressing myriad needs of this population.

Many honors students place importance on success or appearing successful, including a concern for maintaining a perfect GPA. High-achieving students can be cautious about their choices, a characteristic that may stem from a fear of failure (Huggett). At the same time, honors students value being self-critical, and, more often than non-honors students, preparing for class, getting involved in various campus organizations and student groups, asking questions, and seeking academic discussions with professors (Achterberg; Cuevas; McDonald; Seifert et al.). Honors students tend to think critically, openly share their opinions, value contributions of others, demonstrate openness to new ideas, and place great importance on the social construction of knowledge (Kaczvinsky; Kem & Navan; Shushok).

Gerrity et al. identified a common characteristic of perfectionism in high-achieving students, who often put themselves under great pressure as well as feeling pressure from family, peers, faculty and staff, and society (McDonald). High-achieving students often report having higher expectations for themselves than other students (Achterberg; Kem & Navan), which can result in competition and comparisons with peers (Cooke et al.) and provoke stress and anxiety (McDonald; Spurrier). Honors students may hesitate to seek assistance in academic areas in which they are challenged in order to avoid the appearance of seeming unsuccessful (Gerrity et al.). They are future-oriented in their focus on careers, even upon entering college (Harding; Moon).

High-achieving students also demonstrate an affinity for campus and community involvement, commonly seeking leadership roles in student organizations related to their future career goals (Cuevas), but they generally will not sacrifice academics in favor of involvement (Pindar). They may feel behind if they are perceived as less involved or successful than their peers outside of the classroom (McDonald). Honors students may also become more concerned with the quantity than the quality of experiences in an effort to fill their résumés, resulting in over-commitment and difficulty balancing academic and extracurricular activities (McDonald).
This population can face interpersonal challenges as well. For example, Kem & Navan found that high-achieving students faced difficulty relating to others on campus, particularly non-honors students, potentially leading to perceived feelings of isolation and a sense that others do not understand them. Finally, they often expect advisors to be at their disposal, expecting immediate responses to communication and open-ended availability to meet along with the ability to address both academic and personal concerns (Ger- rity et al.).

THE CURRENT STUDY

Purpose

To better understand the needs of honors students, this study aims to describe the culture of advising high-achieving students through the lens of the academic advisors who work with them. Through this description, we hope to better situate honors advising within the greater field of academic advising. With limited research available on advising honors students, we aim to extend the literature in this area.

Method

Our study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. How do honors advisors describe their work with high-achieving students?

2. How does the phenomenon of honors advising fit into the greater context of the academic advising profession?

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by a phenomenological framework as described by Moustakas: to “reveal more fully the essences and meanings of human experience” (105). According to Patton, there is not one single approach or perspective in phenomenology, in which qualitative research can include, but is not limited to, transcendental, existential, and hermeneutic traditions. Champlin-Scharff encouraged academic advisors to consider the hermeneu- tic traditions in their work with students given its focus on meaning-making through a historical context. That same philosophy, as further detailed by van Manen, guides the research approach to this study.
Participants

Following approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were recruited via the email listservs of both the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) and the NACADA Commission for Advising High Achieving Students, as well as a newsletter affiliated with Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education (NASPA). Our study used Patton’s criterion sampling to find faculty or professional staff affiliated with an honors program or college who spent a significant amount of time advising honors students in a variety of matters. Non-honors advisors who advised a significant load of honors students as part of their duties were also eligible to participate.

Twenty-eight academic advisors expressed an interest in participating in the study, with 22 completing the informed consent to participate in an interview. Of the participants, 19 (86.36%) reported as Caucasian, one (4.55%) as Hispanic/Latino, and one (4.55%) as Black or African American. One did not provide race/ethnicity. Seventeen (77.27%) identified as female while five (22.73%) identified as male. The 22 participants represented 6 honors colleges, 13 honors programs, and 3 other academic units across 20 different institutions in the United States. The size of the honors college, program, and other academic unit ranged from 14 to 2,200 honors students, with an average size of 694. Examples of job titles included associate professor, director, associate/assistant director, advisor/counselor, and student services coordinator.

Data Collection

Each advisor participated in one individual, semi-structured phone interview. Interviews ranged from 19 to 57 minutes, with an average length of 37 minutes. Interviews took place by phone because it would have been too costly to conduct interviews across the United States in person, but they were recorded digitally for accuracy in transcription.

Interviews provided the primary data collection method because they gave an understanding of the “lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman 9). The protocol questions were developed to elicit in-depth descriptions of the participants’ experiences advising honors students as well as the context of honors advising at each participant’s institution. See Table 1.
Data Analysis

Data were analyzed according to van Manen’s phenomenological approach in concert with Creswell’s process for analyzing phenomenological interviews. According to van Manen, there are five methods of analyzing text in the phenomenological tradition: (a) thematically, (b) analytically, (c) exemplificatively, (d) exegetically, and (e) existentially.

Our study analyzed the data thematically. Van Manen described the thematic approach as a way to “elaborate on an essential aspect of the phenomenon under study” (168). The systematic investigation of the phenomenon is supported by relevant anecdotes. Through this approach, themes across all participants’ interviews emerged speaking to the experience of advising honors students.

Van Manen’s approach was layered over Creswell’s recommendations for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data (185–190):

1. Organizing and preparing the data.
2. Reading through the data to get a sense of the participants’ experiences.
3. Coding and organizing the data into meaningful units.
4. Formulating data into themes.
5. Transforming themes into a descriptive narrative.
6. Interpreting and making meaning of data.

Methods of Rigor

Lincoln and Guba described several methods to demonstrate the rigor of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this study, credibility was demonstrated through peer debriefing, where multiple authors analyzed data together. Transferability was demonstrated through

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<th>Table 1. Interview Protocol</th>
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<td>1. Tell me about your experience as an honors advisor.</td>
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<td>2. Why would an honors student come to you for advising?</td>
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<td>3. How would you describe your approach to honors advising?</td>
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<td>4. How does honors advising fit into the bigger picture of academic advising at your institution?</td>
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<td>5. How does honors advising fit into the bigger picture of academic advising at the national level?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Are there other aspects of honors advising that you wish to share?</td>
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the use of thick description, which includes crafting a detailed account of the experiences as developed through the interview process. Dependability and confirmability, the final methods of rigor used in this study, were established through an audit trail, a clear and detailed description of all of the research steps taken throughout the research process.

Limitations

This study has several limitations, particularly related to participation. Participation was limited to academic advisors who had access to the NCHC or NACADA email listservs or the NASPA newsletter, and thus some potential participants were missed during the recruitment process. Also, participants did not represent every institutional type, so the experiences of advisors working at institutions such as two-year or community colleges or institutions outside of the United States were missed. The findings also represent the experiences of advisors only; the experiences of students who have participated in honors advising are beyond the scope of this study.

Given the significant variation in honors programs and colleges across the United States (England; Singell & Tang), each participant’s experience advising honors students no doubt depends on the context of that individual’s honors structure. As in all qualitative studies, transferability of the findings may be limited. Readers should determine applicability to their own situations.

FINDINGS

The themes that emerged in our study address the many ways that academic advisors of honors students described their work, both directly with students (RQ1) and in the greater context of advising at their institutions (RQ2). The results include descriptions of various philosophical and practical approaches advisors use in working with honors students as well as the logistical functions they serve in their capacity as advisors. Finally, many participants described the differences they perceived in advising honors students versus non-honors students. The research questions addressed by each theme are included in parentheses.

Theme 1: Providing a One-Stop Shop (RQ1 and RQ2)

Participants described a variety of reasons why honors students would see them for advising. In some cases, the advising relationship was long-term,
starting with recruitment in high school and ending at college graduation. Advisors often saw themselves as a “one-stop shop” for their students, a place where an advising appointment could be “however the student wants the appointment to be.” Some students might come in with a set agenda or a rigid checklist of questions, according to one participant, while other students might be more flexible, interested more in chatting with the advisor. Conversations might flow from study skills to scholarships to interview preparation to academic requirements.

Honors students frequently saw their advisors to discuss honors opportunities and program requirements. One participant asked her students how they were incorporating the honors experience into their lives. Nine participants mentioned a focus on addressing honors contracts, protocols, and various requirements with their students. Advisors met with their students on a regular basis to check their “progress . . . to fulfill specific honors requirements,” starting as early as their first semester in college. One participant was concerned that students might be misadvised about completing honors requirements: “Although it says plainly in black and white in the catalog if these honors classes fulfill these general education requirements, people don’t notice that.” He often checked his students’ course schedules to ensure they were completing requirements appropriately.

Aside from honors requirements, advisors frequently discussed course schedules with students, with ten of the participants mentioning advising about registration. The participants were clear, however, that they were “not here just to give a list of classes” and that they wanted to “get the class part done quickly.” Advisors expected that students had done their research about classes to take prior to their meetings so they could discuss other areas of interest. A participant commented that students could “very easily go through the catalog and just pick their classes with no trouble. . . . they can read the course plans just like I can.”

In many cases, advisors were looking ahead in the area of degree planning with students. Given that most honors students entered their institutions with incoming credits from Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment coursework (as many as 30–60 credits in the case of one participant), “pushing ahead” formed the basis of an important conversation. Only two participants mentioned discussing general education requirements with students. Instead, they spent a significant amount of time with students on degree planning and progress toward graduation.

In only six instances, participants mentioned that advising about students’ majors took place outside of the honors office. Even then, a participant
remarked that “students were still coming to us, even though they really should be seeing their major advisor.” Several advisors commented that they had to understand the nuances of all majors because their students would come to them with questions rather than to their major advisor. Aside from discussing major requirements and degree plans, students often came to honors advisors to deliberate double majors, minors, and combined degrees where they could receive a bachelor’s and graduate degree concurrently. Students also consulted honors advisors about changes of major, particularly when they were questioning their majors or were unhappy with their choice.

Writing an honors or senior thesis was also a topic of discussion. For some honors students, writing a thesis was a requirement; for others, it was strongly encouraged. Students inquired about thesis work even as early as orientation. Participants described helping students get started with thesis work by going “step-by-step so students feel confident” about the requirements and by looking up theses so students would have examples.

Finally, participants approached their students with the “assumption that they [would] prep for graduate school.” In working with honors students, advisors “investigated possibilities for the future” and discussed test preparation for the MCAT and GRE. One participant noted that she handled “a lot of post-grad advising” with her students.

Theme 2: Building Connections and Referral Networks (RQ1 and RQ2)

Participants remarked that their meetings with honors students were “not necessarily going to be about academics.” Instead, advisors focused many conversations on campus resources and on referring students to various opportunities. One participant was determined that she have “as wide a reference as students do” so that she could link students to an expansive network of people and options. Participants were adamant about helping their students build connections, particularly to “challenging,” “interesting,” and “out-of-the-box” opportunities. For those students who might be nervous about making such connections, the advisor frequently helped the student set up a meeting or rehearse a conversation in advance.

Getting to know faculty and seeking out research projects were the two most common resources that participants mentioned. Seven discussed helping their students find faculty mentors or advisors, whether for academic advising, career guidance, or thesis mentoring. Nine communicated the importance of getting involved with undergraduate research, integrating research into their
academic plans, and taking their research “to a broader public.” Often the conversations about research began as early as the student’s first semester.

Ten of the participants either advised their students about or referred them to study abroad resources. In some cases, the honors requirements included an international component. One participant talked to students about “how to make the overseas experience make sense because of who they are and what their goals are.” Another made sure to look at his students’ study abroad photographs after their experiences as a means of supporting their activities.

While two participants mentioned referring their students to the career center, others worked directly with their students about career matters. Two advisors provided résumé assistance for their students while another said she did “a little bit of career advising.” Participants encouraged students to explore opportunities for work, shadowing, co-ops, and internships.

Participants regularly questioned their students about involvement in student activities provided by the honors program or by the institution at large. Advisors promoted campus activities by asking students “Are you getting involved? Are you coming to activities?” as well as asking how they wanted to get involved. Advisors also recommended volunteering and community service as worthwhile pursuits.

Students often used their advisors to seek resources for more personal concerns such as roommate issues and housing matters. Participants encouraged students to seek out campus tutoring, which could provide “for the best grade possible, and for the best understanding of your content,” when high-achieving students might otherwise shy away from it. Other participants referred students to counseling centers and financial aid as appropriate.

**Theme 3: Indulging a Future Orientation (RQ1)**

Helping students plan, set goals, and make key decisions about their futures was a major focus of advising appointments, according to participants. The setting of goals—academic, career, or even life goals—was a common topic of conversation between fourteen of the participants and their students. One participant helped students develop long-term goals and then worked backward to plan how to achieve them while another used visual tools to help students picture their goals. Several participants met with their students on at least an annual basis to revisit goals and revise plans as needed.
Participants aimed to help students strike a balance between coursework and their longer-term goals. One participant focused on how to help students make the best use of their time when they entered the institution with 30–60 hours of incoming credit. One asked students “if the coursework that they’re taking is going to allow them to achieve those goals” while another pondered that “there’s a need to make sure that they understand that being career-focused, to be really successful in that, it’s a very different venture than they see it as.” Finding ways to integrate all interests, courses beyond the major, and long-term goals was a focus of several advisors.

Participants asked many questions designed to help students clarify their goals and develop action plans to achieve them. Advisors discussed when and why students needed to take advantage of opportunities. They asked clarifying questions to help students understand their options. They asked what students had accomplished to this point and what avenues they had gone through. They encouraged practical applications of the students’ ideas and helped brainstorm additional ideas. Advisors also helped students determine how they could leverage their strengths to accomplish their goals as well as how “best [to] position themselves to be competitive applicants” for a variety of positions.

Participants also asked more philosophical questions to help students think critically about decision-making with regard to their future. One participant said her focus was to “find what’s interesting to you about life and what are your interest areas and then trying to find something that will match that.” Similarly, another participant asked “What lens will make you into the kind of person you want to be?” when helping students develop their plans. Several participants commented that they wanted to help students “broaden” their focus, “make the most of their education,” and try new perspectives and approaches.

Many of the participants noted that goal setting and planning with honors students was different from working with non-honors students. One participant started long-term planning with her honors students from the very beginning, even at orientation. Another found that planning with honors students was more “careful” with “more complex issues.” Participants worked to help “bright folks figure out how to kind of take charge of their own intelligence” and looked for opportunities to help the “highest achieving students on campus challenge themselves in new ways.” Finally, one participant understood that honors students might be able to do “something different” with their plans and could do an “unusual combination of things.”
She focused on discussing possibilities with students to achieve more than the average student.

While helping students translate their goals into actions, many participants ultimately placed the onus on students to make decisions and expected students to take charge of their plans. Advisors provided tools for their students to “assist in making decisions for themselves” and taught them “how to find and use information appropriately” to aid in decision-making. Despite a tendency for students to “triple-check” with their advisors, participants were clear that their role was not to “spoon-feed” students, be the “answer man,” or “do it for them.” As one participant summarized, “As adults and as college students and as honors students, I’m going to trust that they can figure out how to do it for themselves.” Self-responsibility was emphasized in many appointments with students.

**Theme 4: Cultivating a Support System (RQ1)**

Participants described the extra layer of support they provided to their students through advising appointments. Nine of the participants discussed the types of environments they tried to create to help students feel more comfortable. One forged a “very protective environment” where students might be more willing to share difficult issues with her. A participant also attempted to create a “safe” environment for students, showing students that he was a resource who could help “in any way I can.” Participants developed a helpful space by “removing as many obstacles as possible” for students who were having difficulty navigating bureaucratic processes, and they developed a community atmosphere “where they’re all honors students together” and where students know that “they do matter.”

Many participants provided support to students regarding their academic concerns. One emphasized that students were “going to work here” and so should not be surprised by academic challenges. On the other hand, advisors wanted students to learn that academics were not the “end all” and often tried to push students to think beyond their grades. Participants questioned students about their lives outside of the classroom: how they spent their free time and with whom. Together they discussed roommate issues, challenges with parents, and involvement concerns.

Participants were particularly concerned about students’ ability to balance various responsibilities. As one participant found, advisors need to “always be mindful that these students are vulnerable to over-commitment.”
Other advisors helped students manage multiple activities, tried to “focus energy and enthusiasm more realistically,” and discussed the importance of balance in life. At the same time, advisors knew when to push students to do more or “raise the bar.” Another participant discovered that her role was to “nurture the passion” students shared with her.

At the same time, participants served as an initial resource when students approached them with personal concerns. As one observed, “I’m not sure if I’m seeing more students that have mental health concerns or if more students are comfortable talking to me about it.” Mental health and wellness check-ins were common during honors advising sessions. They aimed to “help students trying to navigate those life challenges” as well as to learn “how to make things less stressful for themselves because it’s not going to go away.”

**Theme 5:**
**Making Explicit Distinctions Between Honors and Non-Honors Advising (RQ2)**

Participants noted the special features of honors advising sessions, with particular emphasis on their time-intensive nature. Several participants observed that the needs of honors students were not necessarily the same as those of non-honors students. Because non-honors advisors did not always understand those needs, the work of honors advisors was especially important to assist their students.

One participant found that non-honors advisors, when advising honors students, did not understand students’ needs to the extent that the honors advisors did, although they “recognize that honors students are a different type of student.” Another participant agreed that he didn’t “expect [non-honors] advisors to show any special sensitivity to the needs of the honors students.” Many participants agreed that honors students had unique needs and talents and that they, as honors advisors, not only understood their students’ needs but could advise and mentor them to take advantage of their talents.

Several participants commented that non-honors advising took a “lowest common denominator approach,” “advised to the norm or middle of the pack,” or told students, “here are the opportunities, do this, see you soon.” Participants spent more time with honors students because they understood the individual needs each student had and wanted to provide breadth and depth to the students’ experiences.

Most advisors found that a major difference in honors advising sessions compared to advising non-honors students was the amount of time they
spent working with each student. Appointments were “time-consuming,” “intensive,” “complicated,” and “in-depth.” One advisor commented that “it can’t be efficient” from an organizational standpoint because honors advising appointments often were scheduled for longer periods of time than for other students.

Advisors felt not only that they needed more time with their students but that their students demanded that time. Honors students took advantage of the accessibility and availability of their advisors. As one participant put it, students discovered that he “will spend time with me.” Two participants believed that the amount of time they spent with honors students helped their institutions’ efforts with retention. As one of them commented, “If we could have more advising of the type that honors colleges and honors programs offer, our retention rates would be significantly higher. . . . I really think that’s the bottom line that more people would stay at universities if we could offer advising at this level.”

Several of the participants had experience advising non-honors students and contrasted their experiences. One noticed that the “general student often-times is thinking ‘I might want to co-op,’ but they’re not interested in anything else. You don’t have to go through the whole process with everything they may want to do”; honors students, however, wanted to talk about everything in-depth. Another participant said that he never got to know his non-honors students when he advised them and that it “felt like a factory” environment. By contrast, advisors of honors students focused on building a “strong community feeling” where they could “see them grow over four years.” Forming “personal connections” and developing continuity through their advising relationships with students were important to most participants.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Through this study, academic advisors of honors students shared their perceptions and experiences of their roles, focusing on the dynamic relationship between advisor and honors student. Within a hermeneutic phenomenological framework, these experiences combine to form the essence (van Manen) of what it means to advise undergraduate honors students. This essence of honors advising adds an important component to understanding the unique needs of honors students in an academic setting and serves as the launching point for further discussion in both research and practice.

Participants employed a variety of techniques in advising honors students, as evidenced by the findings. Providing a one-stop shop, building connections
and referral networks, indulging a future orientation, and cultivating a support system all can be traced back to theoretical and philosophical academic advising approaches. Participants referenced many of these approaches in their descriptions of their work, including appreciative advising (Bloom, Hutton, & He), strengths-based approaches (Schreiner & Anderson), intrusive advising (Earl), developmental advising (Crookston), challenge and support (Sanford), and other student development-focused perspectives.

Overall, participants discussed the importance of individualized, specialized, and personalized advising appointments based on the needs of each student. One participant remarked that you “can’t put them all in one box” while another wanted to “let them kind of lead their own parade, lead their own team.” Understanding each student’s unique needs and interests was felt to be a sign of respect, and advisors needed to take such differences into account when working with honors students.

A focus on the “big picture” within a holistic approach was also very important in advising honors students. One participant wanted to help students “develop the best of their whole self” while another ensured that she was “taking all of the issues that the student is working around into consideration.” Another stated that the “goal is to do more than the typical ‘here’s your classes’ and sign up,” with students needing to see how their education fit together, not just the individual classes. Advisors saw their role as one that went beyond just discussing classes. One clarified that advisors “cannot separate advising from just the check mark of what class to take compared to all of the other things including internships, classes, research, service learning, and education abroad…. [I]t’s really forcing them to think beyond just the basics.” Integration of activities was an important component of honors advising.

Both Crookston and Lowenstein (“If Advising”) have distilled the nature of advising as teaching, either through a developmental (Crookston) or learning-centered (Lowenstein) lens. Advising as teaching encompasses much of a holistic honors advising approach while also demonstrating the perceived differences between honors and non-honors advising. Lowenstein (“If Advising”) in particular presents a compelling view of the academic advisor as a partner in student learning, where excellent advisors help students design meaningful connections throughout their education much as excellent teachers might do in a single course. He continues to describe excellent advisors as those who can pique the intellectual interests of their students through powerful conversations as well as those who have honed pedagogical skills of the sort faculty use in the classroom (Lowenstein, “Envisioning”).
If advising is teaching, is honors advising akin to honors teaching? Edman and Zubizarreta provide some insight into honors teaching. Edman found that honors faculty covered course material differently than they might in non-honors courses, focusing more in-depth on topics, creating more connections between them, and exploring a deeper understanding of the material. Rather than focusing solely on lecturing, honors faculty served more as educational guides or mentors in the classroom. Students also played a more active role in the classroom, taking greater responsibility for their education, teaching themselves and others through meaningful dialogue, and questioning content with greater sophistication. Zubizarreta also described honors teaching as “close intellectual mentoring” employing “individualized, constructivist approaches” (147).

Honors advising, then, if we follow the advising-as-teaching model, should focus on guiding and mentoring students across their entire honors curriculum. Honors students should play a more active role in their advising and planning and take responsibility for learning while consulting with their advisors about the nuanced complexities they face. Gerrity et al. and Cuevas noted the holistic and strengths-based approaches to honors advising while Jordan & Blevins discussed the coaching aspects of working with honors students. Advisors working with this population should be able to quickly adapt their advising approaches based on the needs of the student, understanding that those approaches may differ even when seeing the same student on subsequent occasions.

According to the results of our study, honors advising does indeed fit this model. Participants tailored their advising to the intricate needs of each individual student. Whether the student needed more holistic advising to focus on the big picture or very specific and intrusive advising to pinpoint a particular concern, participants recognized that an intentional, customized approach was best for honors students.

In line with Zubizarreta’s constructivist pedagogical approach, which calls attention to experiential and problem-based learning along with other active learning strategies in the honors classroom, participants in this study used their connections across campus and in the community to provide constructivist learning opportunities outside of the classroom. Participants also steered their honors students toward internships, undergraduate research, and global engagement in order to gain real-world experience, which Jordan & Blevins as well as McDonald identified as the kind of special mentoring and involvement that honors students need; thus, advisors must be familiar
with the high-impact, experiential practices on their campuses that honors students seek (Amar et al.; Cuevas; Robinson; Seifert et al.).

In the honors classroom, the instructor assumes that the student will want to dive more deeply into content and that students will come prepared with questions to learn more. Participants found that their students often arrived for advising prepared to discuss more than just their course schedule for the next semester. Their future-orientation, in particular, led to more in-depth discussions beyond a typical scheduling appointment. As in classrooms in which honors students want to appear successful through their grades, honors students want to appear successful in advising appointments by demonstrating their broad interests and long-range planning abilities.

The focus on success has a shadow side, identified by Hugget as caution in decision-making through fear of failure or by McDonald as over-commitment through fear of letting something drop. Jordan & Blevins explored the need for students to grieve over not being able to do everything they wanted to do, and assisting with that grieving process was a type of dialogue that many participants engaged in. The competing sides to success led participants to spend a significant amount of time serving as support systems to their honors students. Just as dialogue among students and between the student and instructor was, as noted by Edman, a feature in the honors classroom, dialogue was also a necessary component of honors advising according to our participants.

A final comparison between honors teaching and advising concerns the extensive dedication of resources to meeting student needs. Zubizarreta recognized the financial costs of teaching smaller, more personalized honors courses but questioned whether those costs were a drain on the institution or an investment in the intellectual capital of high-achieving students. Likewise, participants noted in their experiences that honors advising was much more time-intensive than non-honors advising. While some participants believed that the time spent could be seen as an inefficient use of resources, at the same time they believed, as did Zubizarreta, that the time spent was an investment in retention and in the future of these students beyond their undergraduate careers.

**CONCLUSION**

The parallels between honors advising-as-teaching and honors teaching form the essence of advising undergraduate honors students. Honors advising
takes a constructivist approach, where the advisor challenges students to tackle complex, real-world problems both in and out of the classroom; mentors students while connecting them to opportunities for tackling these problems; and supports students through engaging dialogues about their goals and interests. The dedication of resources for such an approach should be seen as an investment in both the present and future of honors students. Further exploration of honors advising in this context can provide greater insight both for academic advisors and for honors faculty seeking to better understand the nature of this complex partnership.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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REFERENCES


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INTRODUCTION

For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them. —Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*

Honors graduates have much to learn when transitioning into their first position after college. For instance, workplaces have an entirely different culture and set of expectations from undergraduate honors classrooms (Wendlandt & Rochlen). Furthermore, the skills they need to become successful employees or graduate students are different from those required of successful honors college students, with a greater emphasis on communication skills (Stevens) as one example.
Honors students are bright, curious, and hard-working (Achterberg), and honors programs give them the opportunity to foster accelerated academic success and access to extensive resources. Although honors programs are extremely beneficial to students intellectually and academically, many honors students graduate without adequate knowledge of the skills and capabilities that they are expected to have in the workplace. Thus, these recent graduates are often intellectually but not organizationally prepared.

At the Pennsylvania State University’s Schreyer Honors College, we have found a way to mitigate this gap in skills and understanding by operating an assessment center, a work simulation program designed to allow students to experience organizational life while also receiving crucial feedback from those with experience in the workforce. The value of assessment centers lies in enhancing scholars’ educational and career development, and successful implementation requires important considerations, processes, and resources. The detailed story of Schreyer Honors College’s Leadership Assessment Center elaborates on the factors that have been crucial to the team’s success in providing this opportunity to Penn State’s honors students over the past ten years and might inspire other academic institutions to consider creating assessment centers for their scholars’ education.

Although the Assessment Center’s enhanced educational experience for honors college students is its primary goal, the benefits extend to all involved in the center, including graduate students, alumni, and the undergraduate students and faculty who serve as administrators for the center. A successful assessment center can also benefit the college itself as a tool for recruiting future students. As a former dean of Schreyer pointed out early on, “This gives me an edge when talking to prospective parents and students who are considering Penn State versus other institutions. The progressive nature of our overall program is enhanced by offering unique opportunities like the assessment center.”

DEFINING AND DIFFERENTIATING WORKPLACE SUCCESS: BARTRAM’S GREAT EIGHT COMPETENCIES

Delineating the skills and abilities that lead to workplace success is essential to knowing what we need to teach our students. Fortunately, work-oriented psychologists, or industrial/organizational (IO) psychologists, have been addressing questions specific to workplace skills for some time. That knowledge base has culminated in numerous taxonomies of what it takes
to achieve effective workplace performance. In the world of IO psychology, these lists are known as competency models.

In the early 2000s, IO psychologist Dave Bartram began examining organizations’ workplace competency models to look for common themes. Although researchers and theorists initially thought of leadership ability as a trait, or something that is stable and difficult to change in a person, time brought realizations that other factors crucially affect one’s ability to lead (Lord et al.). In short, researchers realized that people can work on their leadership skills to improve their organizational effectiveness. Many organizations began to develop lists not only of characteristics required by leaders but, more importantly, the behaviors that leaders engage in that make them effective. Although organizations often create unique sets of competencies, Bartram recognized similarities and themes across organizational models, which eventually culminated in the Great Eight competency model. The competency names and definitions of the Great Eight workplace competencies can be found in Table 1.

Bartram’s work is especially useful for honors students transitioning into the workplace for several reasons. First, it was derived scientifically and is held in high esteem. In consultation with our colleagues in IO psychology regarding the most useful competency model for honors students, one consistent piece of feedback was the suggestion to use the Great Eight, in large part because it was developed through sound scientific methods. Second, the Great Eight is broad and captures the many attributes representing the essence of workplace performance, an important consideration for advanced honors students given the wide array of leadership positions they may encounter in their future careers. Although corporations often use competency models that are specific to the demands of specific jobs, honors scholars require a model that captures the essence of leadership effectiveness across a variety of industries. Third, Bartram’s competency model is not proprietary and was not developed for an existing organization, so anyone can use it without ownership considerations. Finally, as honors students span many schools and programs within a university setting, a general competency model is better than one created for honors scholars or one academic college.

Research suggests that employers’ expectations regarding these general competencies are not being met by students transitioning into the workforce. Most prominently, many employers state that recent college graduates lack both oral and written communication skills (e.g., Stevens) despite a heavy emphasis placed on such skills in the workplace (National Association of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Competency Domain</th>
<th>Definition of Competency Domain</th>
<th>Hypothesized Big Five, Motivation, and Ability Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leading &amp; Deciding</td>
<td>Taking control, exercising leadership, initiating action, giving direction, and taking responsibility</td>
<td>Need for power and control, extraversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Supporting &amp; Cooperating</td>
<td>Supporting others, showing respect and positive regard in social situations, putting people first, working effectively with individuals and teams, clients, and staff, and behaving consistently with clear personal values that complement those of the organization</td>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interacting &amp; Presenting</td>
<td>Communicating and networking effectively, successfully persuading and influencing others, relating to others in a confident, relaxed manner</td>
<td>Extraversion, general mental ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Analyzing &amp; Interpreting</td>
<td>Showing evidence of clear analytical thinking, getting to the heart of complex problems and issues, applying own expertise effectively, taking on new technology, and communicating well in writing</td>
<td>General mental ability, openness to new experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Creating &amp; Conceptualizing</td>
<td>Working well in situations requiring openness to new ideas and experiences, seeking out learning opportunities, handling situations and problems with innovation and creativity, thinking broadly and strategically, and supporting and driving organizational change</td>
<td>General mental ability, openness to new experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Organizing &amp; Executing</td>
<td>Planning ahead and working in a systematic and organized way, following directions and procedures, focusing on customer satisfaction, and delivering a quality service or product to the agreed standards</td>
<td>Conscientiousness, general mental ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptation &amp; Coping</td>
<td>Adapting and responding well to change, managing pressure effectively, and coping well with setbacks</td>
<td>Emotional stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Enterprising &amp; Performing</td>
<td>Focusing on results and achieving personal work objectives, showing an understanding of business, commerce, and finance, and seeking opportunities for self-development and career advancement</td>
<td>Need for achievement, negative agreeableness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Colleges and Employers). What is more, Wendlandt and Rochlen report gaps in expected levels of experience and other skills for recent graduates and feelings of culture shock upon leaving college. These differences in expectations lead to disappointment for both recent graduates and employers. Assessment centers are one potential solution for shrinking gaps in both skills and expectations for college students and employers.

AN INTRODUCTION AND GUIDE TO ASSESSMENT CENTERS

Preparing students for the transition into working life requires understanding their current skill level and giving them a plan of action for developing areas of weakness and effectively using their strengths. IO psychologists, trained in assessing the skills of potential employees, have developed a program that not only helps determine areas of strength and development but also gives students exposure to typical organizational culture through work simulations called assessment centers.

Thornton & Rupp define assessment centers as “a procedure used by human resource management (HRM) to evaluate and develop personnel in terms of attributes or abilities relevant to organizational effectiveness” (1). Many organizations use assessment centers for purposes that include spy selection in the military, supervisor promotions in public safety organizations, and identifying managers and executives in private industry (Thornton & Gibbons). In addition to finding and selecting people who will likely perform well in leadership positions, assessment centers can help provide a developmental roadmap by identifying strengths and areas that need improvement (Spychalski et al.). The underlying framework of an assessment center is the competency model, making it a direct way to understand a person’s level of ability in each competency.

Assessment centers seek to recreate a typical workday by including activities characteristic of an office environment, e.g., presentations, meetings, and email. These activities, or exercises, provide samples of work from which observers can evaluate participant performance in terms of quality and effectiveness. Someone who performs well on such exercises is likely to perform well in a job that requires similar activities, and someone who struggles in such situations would likely have difficulties. In addition, assessment centers often require participants to complete personality inventories, take various ability tests, and respond to interview questions that signal future work performance. People who score higher on such measures are likely to perform well in the workplace while those who score lower are not.
Since the early 1960s, research from the field of IO psychology has shown that assessment centers can serve as excellent vehicles for identifying the strengths and developmental opportunities of their participants (Thornton & Rupp). For organizations that implement assessment centers, the process has proven to be an important tool in understanding, developing, and managing talent (Sackett, Shewach, & Keiser). Assessments centers have numerous benefits to organizations and offer great potential to the world of higher education.

In assessment centers, activities put participants in the shoes of typical organizational members at work by assigning tasks such as giving presentations, conducting one-on-one and small-group meetings, and producing written correspondence. The end result of an assessment center, when used for developmental purposes, is feedback in the form of scores reflecting the participants’ strengths and weaknesses as well as specific and detailed qualitative feedback that highlights particularly effective and ineffective behaviors leading to each of those scores. Participants leave the program not only with a glimpse into the realities of the working world and an idea of their strengths and weaknesses but also specific and actionable behaviors they can improve and a comprehensive developmental plan for moving forward.

For these reasons, two of us, Jacobs and Loviscky, decided to design and implement an assessment center for the students of Schreyer Honors College at Penn State. As the Leadership Assessment Center celebrates its tenth year, we can say that the project has experienced overwhelming success, so much so that we have expanded the operation to other areas of our school, building an assessment process for graduate students in the Huck Life Sciences Institute as well as expanding to other universities such as Bryn Mawr College and Northeastern University.

ASSESSMENT CENTERS FOR EVERYONE:
BUILDING ASSESSMENT CENTERS IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Before detailing how we have come to run a successful and well-regarded assessment center in our honors college, we hope to turn the reader’s attention to the variability in what a successful assessment center might look like. All share two basic components: (1) work simulations in which participant performance is evaluated on several competencies, culminating in feedback designed to help participants develop their level of competence, and (2) fictitious organizations and scenarios based on either the Great Eight
competencies or a parallel competency model. We touch on four examples of assessment centers that we have built, showcasing the adaptability of the assessment center model.

**Penn State Schreyer Honors College**

We start with our first project, the Schreyer Honors College Leadership Assessment Center, which is the most traditional of all of them. The assessment takes place during an eight-hour span of time during which twelve honors students are assessed by 28 graduate students and professionals on Bartram’s Great Eight competencies. Our first assessment center may have been the most challenging simply because we were starting from scratch, and it required just as much if not more resources than any of our subsequent centers. However, the opportunity to first build a traditional assessment center and run it was enough to better understand where we could change and adapt it to ensure the success of subsequent centers.

The circumstances of building this assessment center were ideal. We had access to the perfect space, which included individual offices for each of our participants and assessors; we had leaders experienced with assessment centers in both research and practice; and we had a group of enthusiastic graduate students to help create the materials. One of the most important lessons we have learned since building the Schreyer Honors College Leadership Assessment Center, though, is that there are many more ways to build and run an assessment center.

**Northeastern University**

The second leadership assessment center build began in 2013 for the International Business program at Northeastern University in Boston. Self-described as a global, experiential, research university, Northeastern aims to give students real-world experiences and strives for global impact through the university’s research focus and through students’ co-ops and semesters abroad. Given the program’s international business and leadership emphasis, we worked with Northeastern to build an assessment center that was tailored to assess abilities associated with global leadership. We used the expertise of Allen Bird, who spearheaded the project, along with critical incident reports written by international business students to create and develop exercises. In line with the international business focus, we mapped Bartram’s Great Eight leadership competencies onto the global leadership competencies created by
Northeastern’s international business program, culminating in the Assessment Center for Global Effectiveness, or “Global ACE” for Northeastern. We also adapted the assessment center to accommodate a larger number of students by migrating the paper-based rater guidelines and rating forms onto Qualtrics surveys that could be filled out electronically by assessors for every participant. Seeing the benefits of using more technology-based methods helped inspire the sophisticated online process we have today at the Penn State assessment center using Google Docs and Google Sheets.

**Bryn Mawr College**

Our third leadership assessment center was developed in conjunction with Bryn Mawr College and began in the fall of 2014. Bryn Mawr was another special case since it is an all-women’s college with a focus on social justice and creation of supportive environments. Bryn Mawr’s program is run by Katie Krimmel, who serves as associate dean of the Leadership, Innovation and the Liberal Arts Center (LILAC). The assessment center is known as the Leadership Learning Laboratory or “L³,” and it has been an important addition to the process of leadership development on that campus.

The competency modeling component was particularly interesting in this case because Bryn Mawr had put a lot of work into developing their own competency model in the previous year. Their model included reflective practice, social responsibility, and cultural competence—competencies not typically found in the world of assessment centers. To accommodate the client, we reviewed the literature for relevant academic support and used their conceptual definitions to create behavioral ones.

Another challenge at Bryn Mawr was accessing a suitable personality assessment tool. In our in-house center, we use the WAVE from Saville Consulting, a personality-based self-assessment tool, to supplement the in-person assessment, and we advise our clients to do likewise as much as possible. As the WAVE was over budget, we directed Bryn Mawr to the IPIP, which is a free but well-validated personality assessment tool. The Bryn Mawr assessment center has now been running for four years, and we often hear of their continued success and excitement about the assessment center from their team.

**Penn State Huck Life Sciences Institute**

The context of our most recent build was especially unique. The Huck Life Sciences Institute at Penn State prepares world-class, graduate-level scholars
with extensive expertise in their chosen scientific disciplines; however, the Huck leadership recognized that some of their graduate students were not as proficient at communicating and presenting their research, a necessary skill for those going on the job market. To develop their students into successful scholars and practitioners, leaders in the program reached out to our team to create a process whereby students could develop practical organizational skills before leaving the university to obtain academic or applied jobs.

Although the Great Eight was a close fit for the needs of the Huck assessment center, interviews with professors, current students, recent graduates, and human resources professionals at organizations that hire Huck graduates suggested the need for minor adaptations to the model. With those adaptations in place, the main challenge of the Huck assessment center was to fit it into the time needs of the graduate students, which did not allow for a full day of work simulation. To accommodate their busy schedules, we reformatted the assessment center from a full day of assessments with twelve participants to one two-hour session with a single participant. Further, we encouraged participants to use materials with which they were already familiar. For example, we encouraged students to use a presentation that they had already made for a class or lab and adapt it to fit the context of our assessment process, a mixed-audience conference. Overall, we have received positive feedback from both the students who have completed the assessment and the faculty leadership within Huck. We have now completed the fourth year at Huck.

Penn State Psychology of Leadership Master’s Program

Currently in the works is one of our most exciting challenges yet: a virtual assessment center. Penn State recently launched an online master’s program for organizational leadership, a perfect opportunity to adapt the assessment center to changing times. Pursuing this type of assessment center presents us with new and exciting challenges. For example, we will have to grapple with new questions: “Will our current exercises translate appropriately to an online environment?” “What technology do we need?” “How can we incorporate the center activities into the ongoing master’s program?” We are excited about this work and look forward to taking advantage of the creativity and technological savvy that we have on our team.

We hope that the review of our involvement in creating these four different assessment programs highlights an important point: With well-thought-out processes and evidence-based competency models at the core, an assessment center can be adapted to fit a variety of circumstances, needs,
and resource constraints. Because the Schreyer Honors College assessment center is the most developed of these, we will now explain how our assessment center came about and demonstrate why we have enjoyed ten years of positive outcomes. We provide this illustrative example of the considerations and results of our efforts for the Schreyer Honors College in hopes that the details are informative for those who might consider the development of an assessment center at their own institutions.

HOW TO BUILD AN ASSESSMENT CENTER: 
THE SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE EXAMPLE

The idea for an assessment center at Penn State came from members of our Penn State IO psychology program who had extensive experience with assessment centers in both research and practice. The first step was to create a value proposition for a student-based assessment center and to discuss the feasibility of developing and operating such a program, which was no small endeavor in several ways: it would involve acquiring a large amount of resources in the form of buildings, personnel, and funding; it would require creativity in generating high-quality exercises; it would depend on diligence and focus on details in designing the logistics of the program; and we would need to carefully consider the scholars’ development throughout the process.

The ideas that flowed from the early meetings included discussions of the gaps between the skills and abilities emphasized in a college versus an organizational setting as well as the ability of an assessment center to identify the extent of these gaps for specific students. Our university was well-positioned to provide these opportunities for our students in terms of expertise and of human as well as physical and human resources. Further, the program had the potential to engage alumni as assessors and as points of contact for future student employment. Overall, the driving philosophy was “What’s good for the business community can also be good for the academic world when it comes to preparing honors students for the next step in their careers; it’s time to migrate a good business practice to the educational arena.”

Building the Foundation: 
Attaining Resources

Although effective, assessment centers require large expenditures of time. In addition, they require high levels of expertise in order to develop the underlying competency model, the exercises used to assess students, the recruiting
and training of assessors, and the implementation of the entire process. Additionally, one must have the physical space conducive to running such an operation. This hurdle alone sometimes requires organizations to lease hotels or other multiple-room sites, adding substantially to the cost and feasibility of such an assessment method. For many organizations, this requirement exceeds capabilities, becomes cost prohibitive, or both. While this hurdle has often seemed insurmountable in the past, however, we have found creative ways to overcome it. For example, many campuses have buildings that go unused during the weekends that are perfect for running a traditional assessment center, as was the case at Penn State and Bryn Mawr. The Huck Life Sciences assessment center format rendered this challenge obsolete, as only one room is needed during an assessment, and a virtual assessment center would need no physical space.

Fortunately, Penn State had a substantial amount of potential waiting to be unwrapped, with all the pieces of the puzzle to build the assessment center either present or within reach. All that was necessary was assembling the right team of experts and contacting the various units on and off campus that could contribute to developing the tools necessary to assess the students.

**Designing and Developing Assessment Tools**

Once the resources are in place for the assessment center, the first step of developing the content is selecting a competency model to work towards. For the many reasons previously listed, we chose Bartram’s Great Eight competency model and would highly recommend it to those pursuing an assessment center in their own honors college. It is possible to create a unique set of competencies that fit each university’s specific mission and students, as was the case with the Bryn Mawr assessment center. It takes a great deal of time and contemplation, however—the Bryn Mawr competency model took a year to develop and polish—and thus is only advisable for those whose needs are quite different from the Great Eight and those who have the time and enthusiasm to create an effective and comprehensive competency model.

Once the competency model is selected, the real creativity begins. Challenges in this step of the process include (1) creating fictitious organizations and scenarios, (2) developing exercises to give participants opportunities to demonstrate the competencies, (3) providing evaluation tools for our assessors to make ratings, and (4) proposing a process for delivering feedback to participants. The Penn State team was fortunate to have had teams of PhD students and undergraduate research assistants (URAs) who were and
still are able to provide thoughtful ideas and work to implement them. The original ideas for the fictitious organizations and activities came from PhD seminars on training and development, the founders of the center, and individual members of the assessment center volunteer team.

All the discussion in the beginning led to the creation of our first fictitious scenario, Crazy Bean, which centers on two local coffee chains that must work together to combat competition from an incoming nationwide coffee chain similar to Starbucks. Each fictitious scenario includes the organization that the participant “works” for throughout the assessment center session, a description of problems that the organization is currently facing, and the materials that the participant needs to help solve these problems. The scenarios need to ensure that undergraduate scholars can realistically relate to them, that they put everyone on an equal playing field, and that they do not risk becoming obsolete in the near future. In addition to Crazy Bean, we have developed scenarios based on a movie theater looking to partner with an existing restaurant in town to avoid closing, a summer camp for underprivileged children that is experiencing funding and employee turnover issues, a non-profit organization that pairs school-aged children with college-aged role models experiencing similar issues, and a non-profit that focuses on job placement for the unemployed that is having trouble getting enough prospective employees.

No singular formula or process for this part of the assessment center development guarantees success; however, team brainstorming sessions in environments that are conducive to open discussion and that include URAs have been helpful. The URAs play an especially useful part during this portion of the creative process because they not only contribute unique ideas but also their perspective on whether their peers would be able to relate to the organization and situation.

As we continue to develop more scenarios and improve on old ones, students—undergraduates and graduates alike—have also helped the center leverage technological advances in file-sharing and online website creation, enabling us to make our materials more realistic and create a more efficient rating and feedback process. Recognizing the unique contributions that all team members can make, we have strived to create a welcoming environment in which all have a voice in the creative process.

The information about the fictitious organization and situation, which we call the “background information,” typically includes both qualitative and quantitative data; each is an important component that is highly valued in
organizational life. For example, in the Crazy Bean scenario, we include data on the financial performance of each store, performance evaluations of the managers, and store inspection forms, among other data. Participants use this information to complete a case study, which asks them to identify the top three managers and provide ideas for improving store performance.

After specifying the background information, we consider the various exercises that our participants will engage in during their day-long experience. We have found that providing the background materials in advance, along with the case-study exercise requiring each participant to write and submit a two-page executive summary of the materials, has been effective for several reasons. First, participants will be familiar with the organization and situation before they arrive for their day at the center. Second, we can assess their ability to communicate effectively in writing and evaluate how they summarize a large amount of information into a brief report. Third, it indicates whether individuals have taken the necessary preparation seriously and are committed to putting in the effort to make the experience useful. We require that scholars submit their responses to the case study three days in advance of the assessment date. If they fail to do so, they lose their spot to someone on the waiting list. Originally, we did not require scholars to submit their work in advance, but several of them either showed up for the day at the center without having written responses to the case study or wrote substandard responses that indicated a lack of effort.

Beyond the case study exercise, we also include written exercises for scholars during the assessment center day to represent writing assignments that are more spontaneous and have tighter deadlines. For instance, scholars may be asked to respond to an email from an unhappy customer or inform an applicant that he or she was not selected for a position. Such exercises enable us to evaluate scholars’ competencies in writing, which can often be different from their ability to communicate in person. We often use the written exercises to assess the Supporting and Cooperating competency since students who may be supportive, encouraging, and understanding in face-to-face conversation are sometimes blunt and inflexible in writing. Many times, the opposite is true.

To assess the in-person skills, we include interactive exercises: e.g., a business-based presentation, during which participants present their solutions to the core problem of the scenario to an executive from the company; a role-play, which typically takes the form of a meeting with a disgruntled employee or upset parent; and a leaderless group discussion (LGD), which brings up
to six participants together to solve a new problem or make an important organizational decision as a group. For some scenarios, we also include a mini-presentation, which is a surprise meeting in which one of the executives stops into the participant’s office unannounced to get a quick update on something; this can be one opportunity to assess Adapting and Coping, which can also be accomplished through pointed questions after the participant has delivered his or her presentation.

We assign competencies to each of these exercises based on the problems they must solve and the skills they must use. For example, the LGD is often an opportunity to assess Creating and Conceptualizing because the team members present potential solutions to a problem, and it can also assess Organizing and Executing because team members must keep each other on track to complete all required tasks within the time limit of the exercise. An example of a competency coverage matrix for one of our scenarios can be found in Figure 1, which demonstrates the competencies assessed in each of the exercises.

Some of the challenge involved in creating these exercises is engendering a natural fit with the initial background information provided about the organization and situation. Often, we need to generate additional background information to make the exercises more involved and realistic, which typically renders the materials development process nonlinear.

After the background information and exercises have been developed, the next step is to develop tools for our assessors to provide ratings of participants on the Great Eight competencies. An important aspect of this step is making clear to assessors which behaviors and aspects of participants’ responses represent each of the competencies that are being assessed by the exercise. Landy & Farr and Jacobs, Kafry, & Zedeck concluded that having behavior-based rating scales tends to produce more reliable and valid ratings of performance. These behaviorally anchored rating scales (BARS) or behavioral observation scales (BOS) assist raters in providing accurate assessments that convey important behavioral information for participants during the feedback process. We refer to our rating tools as rater guidelines and have a separate set for each exercise, each containing desired and inappropriate behaviors linked to each competency. Figure 2 provides an example of one of our rater guidelines.

To prevent their being overwhelmed by the number of behaviors for each competency in each exercise, we train our assessors in how to use the rater guidelines by teaching them to follow a series of steps. First, assessors take notes of the behaviors that each participant exhibits as the exercise takes
### Figure 1. Exercises Capturing Competency Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency Domain</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Mini-Presentation</th>
<th>Role-Play</th>
<th>Leaderless Group Discussion</th>
<th>Written Assessment</th>
<th>Case Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading &amp; Deciding</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting &amp; Cooperating</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Interacting &amp; Presenting</td>
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<td>Creating &amp; Conceptualizing</td>
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place. After the participant finishes, the assessors leave the room and return to their own offices. At that time, raters fill out their rater guidelines individually by consulting their handwritten notes, considering how effectively the participant performed each relevant behavior. The assessor then selects the behavioral example most representative of the participant. After considering all the behaviors listed for a given competency, the assessor then examines the holistic pattern of effectiveness ratings to provide an overall rating for that competency, repeating this process for each competency before meeting as a team to decide the participant’s final ratings and the feedback to be provided.

In the case of our Leadership Assessment Center, we are fortunate to have experience with what scholars are likely to do in each type of exercise—a starting point that we can modify and adapt based on our graduate students’ suggestions. All our PhD students have experience as assessors, so their input in the development of rater guidelines is invaluable. Our first attempt at developing the guidelines required us to run pilot sessions and observe and record the behaviors of participants during each exercise without providing any ratings. That early pilot study provided information about what behaviors we should include for each competency, and we constantly learn more and revise our rating tools based on feedback from our assessors. To remain effective and valuable for scholar development, an assessment center must focus on continuous improvement, and the team must be willing to adapt the process and content as technology and the student population change. The team needs to acknowledge that none of the materials will ever be perfect, and we strive to make updates after each of our assessment center sessions. While the creation of the materials for both participants and volunteer assessors involves ample time and energy, the efforts come to fruition four times a year when we run the assessment center. Despite the almost eight-hour commitment on a Saturday, nearly all those involved comment on how the day seems to fly by.

**The Feedback Process**

Critical to the success of any assessment center is the process used to communicate the assessors’ evaluations to the participants. At our center, we spend a great deal of time making sure the observations of the assessors not only accurately summarize their evaluations using quantitative rating scales but also provide rich qualitative behavioral feedback. Of equal if not greater importance to the numerical scores is the assessors’ documentation of specific behaviors they observed that highlight scholars’ strengths and areas for future development. While a numerical score helps scholars gauge their current level
**Figure 2. Example Interacting & Presenting Rater Guidelines for a Presentation Exercise**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interacting &amp; Presenting</th>
<th>Communicates and networks effectively. Successfully persuades and influences others.</th>
<th>Relates to others in a confident, relaxed manner.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highly Ineffective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Moderately Effective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Highly Effective</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Failed to state purpose of meeting.</td>
<td>☐ Provided a vague or misleading purpose for the meeting.</td>
<td>☐ Stated the purpose and overview of the meeting clearly and accurately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ The order of topics seemed <strong>haphazard</strong> and did not make sense.</td>
<td>☐ Many topics flowed logically from one to the next.</td>
<td>☐ Structured the meeting so that the presentation flowed logically from one topic to the next.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Made <strong>few/no attempts</strong> to transition from one topic to the next.</td>
<td>☐ Made some attempts to transition from one topic to the next.</td>
<td>☐ Transitioned smoothly when changing topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Provided <strong>no conclusion</strong> or one that did not re-cap the presentation very well.</td>
<td>☐ Provided an overly brief/long conclusion for the presentation.</td>
<td>☐ Provided a conclusion that effectively re-capped the presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Spoke too quickly/slowly/softly/loudly throughout the presentation.</td>
<td>☐ Spoke too quickly/slowly/softly/loudly at times.</td>
<td>☐ Spoke at an appropriate pace and volume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Stammered and hesitated throughout.</td>
<td>☐ Stammered and hesitated at times.</td>
<td>☐ Spoke fluently and confidently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Visual aids were confusing and hindered the spoken messages throughout.</td>
<td>☐ Visual aids sometimes helped sometimes hindered the spoken messages.</td>
<td>☐ Incorporated visual aids that enhanced the spoken messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Rarely, if ever, made eye contact.</td>
<td>☐ Made eye contact for much of the talk.</td>
<td>☐ Maintained eye contact throughout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Non-verbal communication was <strong>distracting</strong> throughout the presentation.</td>
<td>☐ Non-verbal communication was distracting at times.</td>
<td>☐ Non-verbal communication effectively complemented his/her spoken messages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made inappropriate attempts at humor.</td>
<td>Made no attempts at humor.</td>
<td>Interjected humor appropriately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made <strong>no attempts</strong> to explain ideas or thought process, or was very confusing when attempting to do so.</td>
<td>Was inconsistent in how well he/she explained ideas and thought process.</td>
<td>Explained ideas and thought process well throughout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did <strong>not</strong> use examples to illustrate ideas.</td>
<td>Used <strong>some</strong> examples that helped illustrate <strong>some</strong> ideas.</td>
<td>Used clear examples and facts to illustrate many ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finished presentation <strong>early</strong> with several minutes remaining, <strong>or ran out of time</strong> before covering all information.</td>
<td><strong>Rushed</strong> to finish on-time, or stretched to fill the time.</td>
<td>Managed time effectively by finishing the presentation without having to rush or without more than 1 minute left.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes & Observations:**
of competence, the contextualization of the numbers with behavioral examples assists them in more deeply understanding their performance, enabling them to take concrete actions toward improving their behavior.

To obtain the most accurate behavioral feedback, we ask our assessors to reflect on specific positive and negative behaviors they observed during each participant interaction within the context of each focal competency for that interaction. Each assessor works with one or two other assessors throughout the day to rate and document participant behaviors. Immediately following each interaction, assessor teams record their behavioral observations in an online document.

Once all exercises are complete, the assessor teams come together to discuss each participant’s performance and what it means for his or her development, including any behavioral trends that emerged across exercises, across competencies, or in any other pattern. These types of behavioral patterns typically provide useful feedback to participants. For example, some individuals who remain calm and composed during activities that they can prepare for, e.g., the presentation, become fidgety and nervous during more impromptu activities like the role play or LGD. Noting such trends provides context for the different scores that they receive and facilitates decisions about where to focus their development efforts. After the assessors finish discussing their feedback for each participant, a graduate assessor who interacted with that participant captures the details to generate a comprehensive report for the participant. Over the next week, the graduate student customizes a fifteen-to twenty-page report detailing the scholar’s scores for each exercise and each competency as well as summarizing the behavioral feedback from each. The report includes important information for creating a development plan, including resources on and off campus that the scholars can use for developing each competency.

Within ten days of the assessment, the graduate student assessors meet face-to-face with their designated participant to go over the feedback in the report. This one-on-one meeting is an important component of the feedback process. Since many of the scholars are receiving critical developmental feedback for the first time, the in-person meeting enables the feedback session to be interactive and developmental rather than seeming critical. The graduate students who provide this feedback are trained on effective strategies for introducing the report and ways of presenting the information. At the start of the hour-long session, the graduate student probes the undergraduate scholar for more information regarding the extracurricular activities and hobbies they
engage in outside of the classroom. This conversation not only builds rapport between the individuals but also enables the graduate student to provide recommendations later with respect to developmental opportunities that might be part of the scholar’s preferred activities. Further, the graduate student integrates feedback from personality and other leadership survey tools that the participant has completed as part of the assessment. After reviewing the feedback section of the report, the graduate student introduces the concept of developmental planning to the scholar. Although some participants are shy during their feedback session, some ask many questions. Sessions typically run from forty-five to sixty minutes, but at least one enthusiastic student asked so many questions that the session lasted two hours.

The development plan included at the end of the report is a recent process change that our team implemented. Previously, we helped scholars create goals and requested that they sign a goal contract pledging to work toward the goals that were set. To facilitate student development and behavior change, our team decided to reformat this section to be less contract-focused and more process-focused. First, graduate student assessors review at a high level what a development plan consists of, including an explanation that development means not only improving on weaknesses but leveraging strengths. Graduate students assist scholars in picking two or three competencies that were strengths and two or three that represent potential areas for growth, then helping to create a plan by guiding them through questions: How are you going to learn/demonstrate this skill? Who and/or what resources can help you? How will you track your progress? What is your target follow-up evaluation date? Walking scholars through this process helps to ensure that their goals are SMART—specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, and time-bound—and to educate them on how appropriate goal setting can enable growth.

Although the creation and management of an assessment center is no small feat, the developmental benefits for the students we have assessed make it well worth the time, energy, and expenditures involved. We hear time and time again of the significant impact it has had on students’ lives and careers, as well as enthusiastic feedback from the professionals who have volunteered as assessors and from the graduate students who have worked on the content of the assessment center and served as assessors.
TEN-YEAR RESULTS OF THE LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT CENTER

The Numbers Tell All: Quantifying Success

Over the past ten years, we have assessed over 400 scholars, the majority of whom were members of the Schreyer Honors College but with occasional participation from two other high-performing undergraduate groups: Bunton-Waller scholars, a fellowship program aimed at enhancing the racial and ethnic diversity at Penn State, and members of the Presidential Leadership Academy, a ninety-student, select organization focused on careers in leadership across a wide range of disciplines. Students have participated from all of the university’s academic colleges, as seen in Table 2.

Approximately two-thirds of our participants come from the Smeal College of Business (18%), the College of Engineering (20%), and the College of the Liberal Arts (28%). As our goal is to provide students with developmental feedback before entering the workforce, preference is given to juniors although we have seen all levels of students, including freshmen and fifth-year seniors. The average GPA of participants is 3.8. We are also pleased to attract a group of participants that is diverse in gender and nationality. Our sample is 46% female and consists of individuals from multiple countries.

In addition to coming from a variety of academic colleges and majors, the scholars who participate in the assessment center maintain a diverse set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Percent of Student Participants by Academic College</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College of Arts &amp; Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Earth &amp; Mineral Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smeal College of Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Health &amp; Human Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Liberal Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Information Science &amp; Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elberly College of Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Agricultural Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n = 236
of extracurricular activities, such as the Debate Society, the Student Red Cross Club, the Liberal Arts Mentorship program, the Club soccer team, and the Penn State Dance Marathon. Beyond these extracurricular activities, the scholars often have part-time jobs within the community and participate in internships during the summer. In sum, they represent a variety of backgrounds and involvements that is beneficial in fostering learning and development during the day of the assessment.

Individual growth and development are the ultimate goals of this experience. Although development is hard to quantify, one indicator of developmental potential is self-awareness regarding areas of strength and weakness. By comparing participants’ self-ratings of their competence prior to and immediately following the assessment with the scores provided by raters, we can quantify self-awareness. The results of these computations are in Table 3.

Overall, our analyses show that across six of the seven competencies we assess, the average participant tends to overrate his or her competence by almost a full point on a seven-point scale before participating in the assessment center and to become more accurate in assessing competencies following participation, evidenced by the difference of about half a point post-assessment for most competencies. This change in self-awareness comes prior to any knowledge of how they actually performed or their individualized feedback session. In other words, our results indicate that merely participating in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Participant Self-Awareness Scores by Competency Before and After Participating in the Assessment Center</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Pre-Assessment Self-Awareness Score</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading &amp; Deciding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting &amp; Cooperating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting &amp; Presenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing &amp; Interpreting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating &amp; Conceptualizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing &amp; Executing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting &amp; Coping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 236–316 pre-assessment scores; n = 190–246 post-assessment scores. Scores represent the difference between the participants self-rating and the rating given by assessors during the assessment center. Positive scores represent an over-estimation of competence, and negative scores represent an under-estimation of competence. A score of zero represents accurate self-awareness.*
assessment day can serve to increase scholars’ self-awareness—a promising sign for the future developmental efforts of these individuals.

Beyond indications of growth, the data show variability in scores across each assessment—indicated by both the range of ratings and standard deviations found in Table 4. The average score for each competency is between 4.1 and 5.3, suggesting that our scholars are “moderately effective” in each competency area. These data combine to indicate that while the students are demonstrating competence, we can still provide them with feedback for improvement in the various attributes that we assess. Finally, we have run additional analyses that have helped us determine no significant differences in average competency scores based on the scenario that the participants go through, giving us confidence that our scenarios are equally challenging and can be used interchangeably as vehicles for providing meaningful feedback.

On the Other Side: Reactions After the Assessment Day

The reactions to our assessment center have been very positive not only from the scholars we assess but also from the assessors and the administrative team. Everyone involved in the center takes away valuable information and lessons learned.

At the end of each session, participants share their thoughts on the events of the day, including what they liked and what could be improved. The scholars remark time and again on the realism of the assessment center. In addition to exercises that reflect real-world leadership positions, the physical environment resembles that of a typical organization: all participants have their own offices, and all involved are asked to dress in business casual to enhance the professional environment. Participants have a schedule to follow but also free-time to converse with colleagues, assessors, and the staff. One scholar commented, “My assessment center experience gave me the opportunity to get acquainted with professional standards and expectations in a low-stakes, developmental environment,” suggesting that the experience helps scholars take risks as they try to understand appropriate office behavior and expectations before they enter the workforce. At the end of the assessment day, the participating scholars often express their gratitude for the opportunity and their enthusiasm, as well as some nervousness as they look forward to their feedback sessions.

Although the experience of the day is generally positive, we are also making an effort to better understand the extent of the assessment center’s impact.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing &amp; Interpreting</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating &amp; Conceptualizing</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting &amp; Presenting</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading &amp; Deciding</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing &amp; Executing</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting &amp; Cooperating</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting &amp; Coping</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages in each column represent the percent of total students assessed who received that score on the competency of interest.
further down the scholars’ career paths. We have had positive feedback from many of the scholars who took part in the early days and have now been in the workforce for several years. These individuals have expressed that the center not only helped them develop competencies important for success in their careers but also enabled them to better understand the importance of feedback in the career development process. Perhaps the most positive behavioral feedback we have received about the center is having several participants come back as URAs and/or as volunteer assessors years later.

From an assessor’s standpoint, participating in the Leadership Assessment Center is just as gratifying. The overwhelming majority love being a part of the day, especially interacting with bright students and the assessment center team. The assessors we recruit are impressed and enthusiastic about the opportunity for honors students as well as their performance: “This center is a great rehearsal for case interviewing, which is now so common even in technical fields as an employment hiring tool,” commented one of our recent assessors.

Assessors also appreciate the experience as a developmental opportunity for themselves, indicating how much they learn through the experience of assessing. For example, one assessor stated: “I found the PNC LAC team to be among the better teachers I’ve experienced as they taught me how to do this work. I am very grateful for this experience and plan to serve again as an assessor.” The assessors who volunteer multiple times love watching the assessment center evolve, as mentioned in one repeat assessor’s comments: “From the beginning, the center has been a powerful source of leadership development for students, and through constant refinement they continue to raise the bar.”

The positive reactions do not end with scholars and assessors; the assessment center team has been the source of development and learning for the graduate and undergraduate students who make up the center’s staff. Graduate student assessors can develop their mentorship and feedback skills, providing valuable experience for both teaching and managing later in their careers. “Although the center’s purpose is to develop the students being assessed, I can safely say that participating as an assessor has been an incredible developmental opportunity for me as well,” said one graduate student. Past center directors have loved running the assessment center, and it has given them a springboard into their careers; all those who have graduated have gone on to work in prestigious careers that enable them to apply what they have learned. A common theme among the former directors is the attribution of their career success to their experiences running the center.
Undergraduate assistants, too, are better prepared for the workforce thanks to helping with the assessment center. Most of them were assessed themselves, and their continued work with the center allows them to further develop their understanding of leadership and assessment center design as well as administrative and teamwork skills; they usually stay with us until they graduate. Many are interested in IO psychology and gain experience that will help them in applying to graduate schools. The assessment center recently helped one URA get a job as an assessment coordinator for a fitness company as they hire and train fitness instructors.

These positive reactions from all who help run and participate in our assessment center are our greatest indicator of success for these last ten years. The opportunity to provide actionable feedback, coupled with the development of our own graduate students and the sense of community that the assessment center builds, gives us a strong foundation for launching into the next ten years of operation.

THE FUTURE OF THE SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT CENTER

We always have our eye on future success and ensuring that we, as well as others who consider building assessment centers, are aware of the possibilities for adapting to technological and cultural change. To that end, we have ideas for adapting and improving our own assessment center.

Most recently, we have made efforts to focus our participants’ attention on the ongoing process of leadership development. We are starting to develop curricula that can extend the effects of the one-day assessment into the months and years following. We began by facilitating the creation of a development plan during the feedback session. We have also recently begun to offer follow-up with the scholars in the subsequent semester to check on the progress they have made toward completion of the steps identified in their plans. Looking to the future, we are considering possibilities such as a mentorship program, leadership workshops, and creating a blog in order to keep the alumni of the program engaged and interested in leadership development initiatives.

Other future directions for our center include improvements grounded in empirical research, currently ongoing by members of our team. One of our goals is to use the extensive assessment data we have collected on scholars to better understand differences in developmental needs based on majors, allowing us to provide more targeted developmental resources to individuals as well as units on campus. Others interested in building assessment centers
for honors students may want to consider building these components in from the beginning, collecting data to assess trends over time. Putting as many of the materials online also makes running an assessment center more efficient in addition to creating a more accurate representation of current workplace trends in technology.

CONCLUSION

Implementing change or building a new program is always a break from business as usual and is never easy. Creating an assessment center requires a great deal of support from a variety of constituencies. What we have found in our decade of work in this area, though, is that the concept of an assessment center makes sense to a variety of audiences, e.g., administrators and corporate sponsors who are called upon to provide funding; faculty and other professionals required to be part of the creation and ongoing implementation; and, most importantly, honors student participants who must volunteer for the process but ultimately are recipients of its benefits.

In our work with the PNC LAC at Penn State and subsequently with Northeastern, Bryn Mawr, the Huck Institutes, and online possibilities, we have discovered multiple paths for implementing a process to prepare student scholars for their next career step. We see assessment centers as an important way to broaden the educational experiences we bring to our scholars by engaging them in a real-world simulation and providing them with valuable feedback from those who have walked down many of the same halls of education and are now well into their professional careers.

Although not all students will go on to careers in business, a business simulation does provide participants with an experience unlike anything else they encounter in classes or extracurricular activities. Through the day-long set of exercises, students get a chance to exercise their leadership skills and receive structured feedback on the effectiveness of their actions by knowledgeable individuals. This type of process benefits students whether they are moving toward a career in business, government, or graduate education, and it orient students toward the need for receiving feedback and taking steps toward future development. We have found that our assessment center builds skills and abilities in all who participate, regardless of their role. The assessment center has also been an excellent calling card for Penn State in informing our alumni base and donors—past, present and future—of the work we are doing to enhance our educational programs.
Building an assessment center has been a challenging but rewarding experience for our team, and the benefits to our students and our community have been substantial. We hope that other honors programs will consider the benefits of an assessment center to their students and their community.

REFERENCES


The authors may be contacted at

rrj@psu.edu.
Small wonder that students in both honors and the humanities are less satisfied by the shallow stream of entertainment media when they have dipped into the Pierian Spring.


A little learning is a dang’rous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.

—Alexander Pope, “An Essay in Criticism” (1711)

Honors educators frequently engage in conversations about the decline of interest in and funding for the liberal arts and humanities. Larry Andrews’s essay “The Humanities are Dead! Long Live the Humanities!” is
one of several that contributes to a metanarrative about the liberal arts and humanities, playing out along the following lines: workforce-minded politicians, short-sighted university administrators, STEM-related programs, and market-driven students no longer understand the true value of the liberal arts and humanities because they cannot be easily measured in dollars and cents; consequently, higher education today typically narrows students’ perspectives, facilitates short-term and uncritical thinking, and fails to adequately enable student growth and development—that is, growth and development of the fully formed person, of the well-rounded individual, and of the caring soul. (For other articles that tie honors education to this narrative, see Blaich and Ditzler; Dooley; Martino; Salas; and Wintrol.)

This familiar narrative offers some truths, no doubt, but its simplicity is troubling. It quickly papers over many complexities related both to workplaces and to the liberal arts and humanities, and, followed to its logical conclusion, it becomes less a narrative about education and more a narrative about limits, about who and what provide limits as opposed to who and what provide freedoms, about who and what open minds and who and what close them. Those in higher education who focus too much on careers, as this narrative goes, are in the business of setting limits on what students receive from a college education, which stunts their personal, professional, and intellectual growth; conversely, proponents of the liberal arts and humanities are interested in developing fully formed minds, expanding horizons, and unshackling students from career-based chains that keep them from becoming critical thinkers, strong and empathetic communicators, and seekers of truth.

This narrative warrants critique, however, particularly in how honors educators tap into it and further its pervasiveness in ways that treat the liberal arts and humanities too broadly, too uncritically, and too heroically. The goal here is not to argue against the liberal arts and humanities per se. As someone whose academic background is English, who teaches humanities courses every semester, and who understands, sees, and viscerally feels the value of the liberal arts and humanities, I am a strong proponent; however, I seek to explore the dangers that arise when liberal arts and humanities education is offered as a remedy to current educational woes. Two particular dangers arise: the first is that in advocating for the benefits of the liberal arts and humanities, proponents end up not necessarily offering any particular kind of knowledge or wisdom but often reinforce the development of skill sets that the liberal arts and humanities just happen to be good at producing in students; the second danger is that honors educators frequently paint the liberal arts and humanities in a way that reinforces the narrative of limits rather than freedoms.
arts and humanities as a homogenous entity whose purpose and value would be crystal clear if more people would simply take their eyes off the money and turn them instead toward the larger truth. This approach neglects to account for the relationship between the liberal arts and humanities and liberalism itself as a pervasive ideology that saturates all social and political institutions, including higher education, in the twenty-first century. Liberalism and the liberal arts, in short, are not as compatible as most would assume or like, and liberalism’s push for individual freedoms and autonomy sometimes exacerbates many of the exact problems that liberal arts and humanities proponents seek to end. I want to work toward offering thoughts about the liberal arts and humanities that do not pit them against career-centered programs and people but instead offers ways for honors educators to further explore and perhaps reconcile the contradictory need to impose limits and boundaries in the context of institutions and programs that continually seek their removal.

**WISDOMS AND APPETITES**

The benefits of the liberal arts and humanities often appear ethereal. This alone should not make them suspect or subject to the vast criticisms they unduly receive, but it should give honors educators pause about their messaging. In “Defending the Traditions by Preserving the Classics,” for example, Kevin L. Dooley asserts that “Honors students should understand that learning is a life-long process and that the pursuit of truth will provide greater happiness and success than more contemporary, profit-driven models of education” (57). He continues this line of argument:

> A traditional, classical liberal arts education is not only vital to the well-functioning of the United States but to the future of democracy and its variants around the world. As honors administrators and faculty, we must impart this wisdom to our students and show them that they are both heirs to and beneficiaries of this legacy and that hope for the future lies not in the immediate gains of the present but in the lessons of the past. (57)

That the pursuit of truth is messy and complicated and that happiness and success do not reside solely in money are important lessons. Students “should understand” this, no doubt, and I suspect that many already do, even if their educational choices appear extrinsically motivated.

Of greater concern is the notion that honors educators, through the liberal arts and great books, have some deep-seated wisdom to impart to
students that makes pursuit of truth and concern for the future of democracy independent of and more desirable than the pursuit of income. While Dooley’s points may be true, what exactly this wisdom entails and how it is imparted is unclear. The classical liberal arts can provide students a usable past to help propel them forward as human beings who seek meaning and truth, but too frequently arguments for the liberal arts and humanities (and, in Dooley’s case, the classics) fall back on an undefined wisdom and knowledge that students gain, seemingly, by mere exposure to certain texts and wise educators. Nothing seems to stand in the way of this exchange except one’s desire to maximize earnings.

In “Creating a Common Voice for Liberal Arts Education,” Charles F. Blaich and Maura A. Ditzler provide another example of describing the liberal arts as valuable even when that value is not manifest:

The character and outcomes of a liberal arts education are more relevant now than ever before. The timeless nature of the liberal arts is the perfect antidote to the diminishing shelf life of information. An education that transcends specific content and culture is crucial in a time when we must find a way to educate an increasingly diverse student body. An education that promotes understanding of self and others is invaluable as we strive to create a global village. An education that goes beyond disciplinary boundaries remains valuable as we tackle those problems that have resisted the best efforts of our scientists and philosophers. (27)

For Blaich and Ditzler, the liberal arts are relevant and important in how they escape being tied to anything specific, including content, disciplines, locations, and even time. Students, then, benefit from the liberal arts in the end because they make gains in areas related to innovation, problem solving, and inquiry. Similar to Dooley’s take on the classics, Blaich and Ditzler employ the liberal arts as a means to advocate transcendent skills that seem to hover above those practical skills that can be employed directly and obviously in workplaces. Unlike, say, computer programming skills that require the ability to know specifics related to coding or nursing skills that require one to diagnose and treat a specific illness, these liberal arts skills (perhaps they should be called metaskills) are broadly transferable and applicable in a range of situations because they are cast as free-floating entities. They cannot be easily defined and understood because they lack the detailed contours and applicability one gains in jobs-based training.
This argument makes liberal arts and humanities skills somewhat eccentric but also makes them malleable enough, perhaps even amorphous enough, that they can be shaped to fit into diverse conversations about student learning and professional development. At the same time, though, honors advocates for the liberal arts and humanities frequently circle back to the realm of the practical. As a case in point, Larry Andrews’s “The Humanities are Dead! Long Live the Humanities!” laments that universities are “tout[ing] the professional majors and the pragmatic value of a college education,” that “liberal arts colleges are adding master’s programs in professional fields in order to stay afloat,” and that higher education “is more and more run as a big business, and boards of trustees hiring a president or even a provost look to the CEO as a model” (4). Later in the article, however, Andrews celebrates the liberal arts in a moment of optimism about their application to workplaces:

English, history, philosophy, and language majors are finding all sorts of interesting and useful employment in law, government work, environmental organizations, international business, fundraising, public relations, human resources, and management generally. As CEOs keep telling us, employees with excellent communication skills—including writing—and a good work ethic are in high demand. Enlightened thinking about the human condition feeds everything from the spread of recycling and organic farming to the celebration of diverse cultures and new forms of architecture and water wells for the poor. (7)

In this iteration, a liberal arts education is valuable in its direct application to employment in various “useful” fields, some of which, like management, are often decried exactly because of their disconnect from the liberal arts, and the liberal arts are valuable as well for certain broad skills that seem inherent in them: communication, work ethic, and enlightened thinking. This argument for the value and importance of liberal arts and humanities skills in workplaces and marketplaces is increasingly circulated far and wide in both scholarly and trade publications (see, for instance, Nussbaum; Stross; and Zakaria). I do not necessarily find it problematic that none of these statements is verifiable. Perhaps English and history majors are more enlightened thinkers and better communicators than electrical engineering and accounting majors although I doubt this is true across the board. In suggesting earlier that the arguments for the liberal arts and humanities taken by honors educators like Dooley, Blaich and Ditzler, Andrews, and others are dangerous, however, I mean that
these arguments often end up proving exactly what they set out to disprove. Despite the disdain for and lamentations about higher education turning into a training ground for job seekers, the liberal arts and humanities can sustain only so much pressure to rise above the fray and represent access to universal truth and wisdom before they must be brought back down to terra firma and the realm of workplaces and job skills. This observation does not fault the liberal arts and humanities in the least—in most ways, they have always sought to provide skills to students, even as far back as Ancient Greece and Rome—but rather speaks to the ways the liberal arts and humanities are employed to make and sustain arguments against modern changes in higher education and the politics, publics, and economics behind them.

In “The Endless Appetite”: Honors Education and the Spirit of the Humanities,” Andrew Martino writes, “Honors programs are a model for what the humanities can teach us. An honors curriculum promotes a willingness to push the boundaries of how we think about educational value, moving us beyond use value and toward exploring epistemological questions” (28). Honors educators, I assert, should not move beyond use value in order to engage instead in larger epistemological questions. The use value of an honors education grounded in the liberal arts is precisely the epistemological question at hand. Use value here is not to be confused with the exchange value that honors and non-honors educators alike frequently condemn when it comes to swapping academic credentials for jobs and paychecks. Rather, how we know what we mean when we say that the partnership between honors and the liberal arts and humanities is valuable and useful to students is a question of paramount importance.

WHY LIBERALISM MATTERS

Honors conversations about the liberal arts and humanities would open themselves up to richer dialogue if they considered more deeply what version of “liberty” or philosophy of liberalism underwrites them at any given moment. I am not suggesting that the liberal arts and humanities always have something directly to say about liberty or liberalism, and vice versa, even if the words “liberty,” “liberalism,” and “liberal” are cognates. However, outlining even basic contours of and connections between these terms provides important ways to better understand how and what we mean when we use the phrase “liberal arts” as well as how these conversations do or do not integrate with the modern project of liberalism. The implications of this question are much greater than they appear on the surface, especially given all the
ways liberalism is now being called into question (see, for instance, Deneen; Losurdo; and Luce).

In Why Liberalism Failed, Patrick J. Deneen’s critique of liberalism does not, rightly so, include a focus on improvements in civil liberties and individual freedoms that have worked to create greater equality, dignity, and fairness among all people. Rather, his critique is pointed at four overlapping systemic areas that have actually compromised freedoms: politics and government, economics, education, and science and technology. In each, Deenen argues, “liberalism has transformed human institutions in the name of expanding liberty and increasing our mastery and control of our fates. In each case, widespread anger and deepening discontent have arisen from the spreading realization that the vehicles of our liberation have become iron cages of our captivity” (6). In discussing education, for example, he writes,

The rising generation is indoctrinated to embrace an economic and political system they distinctly fear, filling them with cynicism toward their future and their participation in maintaining an order they neither believe in nor trust. Far from feeling themselves to constitute the most liberated generation in history, young people believe less in their task at hand than Sisyphus rolling the boulder up the mountainside. (11)

Deneen quotes one of his students at the University of Notre Dame:

We are meritocrats out of a survivalist instinct. If we do not race to the very top, the only remaining option is a bottomless pit of failure. To simply work hard and get decent grades doesn’t cut it anymore if you believe there are only two options: the very top or rock bottom. It is a classic prisoner’s dilemma: to sit around for 2–3 hours at the dining hall “shooting the breeze,” or to spend time engaged in intellectual conversation in moral and philosophical issues, or to go on a date all detract from time we could be spending getting to the top and, thus, will leave us worse off relative to everyone else. . . . Because we view humanity—and thus its institutions—as corrupt and selfish, the only person we can rely upon is our self. The only way we can avoid failure, being let down, and ultimately succumbing to the chaotic world around us, therefore, is to have the means (financial security) to rely only upon ourselves. (12)
Educational institutions rest on grand philosophical mottos, usually in Latin, that typically include terms like “truth,” “light,” “wisdom,” “justice,” “virtue,” “citizenship,” and “liberty,” among others, yet as institutions now implicitly tasked with the charge to sort winners and losers, higher education creates prison-like structures where a sense of success, freedom, and autonomy feel more like a personal escape from life at the bottom of the social heap than the kind of growth and self-actualization implied in a phrase like “Knowledge is Liberty” (James Madison University’s motto). Deneen makes a distinction between modern and ancient conceptions of liberty by exploring the advance of liberalism as a political philosophy and ideology beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries up to the present. Liberalism is not simply a “narrowly political project of constitutional government and juridical defense of rights. Rather, it seeks to transform all of human life and the world. Its two revolutions—its anthropological individualism and the voluntarist conception of choice, and its insistence on the human separation from and opposition to nature—created its distinctive and new understanding of liberty as the most extensive possible expansion of the human sphere of autonomous activity” (Why Liberalism Failed 37). Modern liberalism’s version of liberty, Deneen argues, contradicts the ancient conception of liberty that, instead of extending spheres of individual choice and activity, involves a “condition of self-governance of both city and soul, drawing closely together the individual cultivation and practice of virtue and the shared activities of self-legislation” (37). Unlike modern liberty’s focus on self-autonomy and expansion of freedom, the ancient version centers on self-imposed limits as both a virtue and an art.

Honors programs, as often noted, grew out of liberal arts and humanities traditions, and most still require students to take coursework that revolves around these traditions in one way or another. The National Collegiate Honors Council’s “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program” document, for example, recommends that honors curricula be designed so that honors requirements can be met through general education requirements, and general education is where most students encounter the liberal arts and humanities. Honors curricula typically expose students to texts by writers such as Aristotle, Cicero, Aquinas, and Milton, those who, among many others, advocate the ancient conception of liberty as the learned capacity and cultivation of self-restraint and virtue. Most honors programs and colleges also seek to instill in their students various virtues related to the public good, community building, citizenship, and personal responsibility. While
such aims are important and admirable, honors typically promotes them as a series of activities and learning moments rather than the core of its being, its raison d’être; the biggest sales pitch to potential honors students is based not on a portrait of limits, restraints, and responsibilities but instead on perks, freedoms, advanced opportunities, and, frequently, access to the proverbial big dream or mountaintop, which, perhaps, indirectly supports the fear mindset of Deneen’s student.

“No matter the political program of today’s leaders,” Deneen writes, “more is the incontestable program. Liberalism can function only by constant increase of available and consumable material goods, and thus with the constant expansion of nature’s conquest and mastery. No person can aspire to a position of political leadership by calling for limits and self-command” (41). Today’s leaders in honors education, I would argue, by similar political and economic necessities refrain from calling for limits and instead promote honors as an educational component that is largely additive: it is bigger, deeper, stronger, and more expansive than a non-honors education, which is the language of Deneen’s more. Honors education, in short, is caught in liberalism’s maelstrom and cannot help but make appeals to its stakeholders through the language of better, usually meaning more. Modern liberalism’s larger ideological frameworks saturate institutions and the vast and powerful repercussions cannot be adequately explored, addressed, or challenged with only arguments about liberal education’s foundation on traditions, classics, and the pursuit of truth.

While Larry Andrews in “The Humanities are Dead! Long Live the Humanities!” laments the state of higher education today, he also celebrates various achievements of the humanities and explains how and why honors education and the humanities make for good partners. They “share core values, including the importance of deep, sustained reading” (8); they both emphasize studying primary texts, high levels of reading ability, critical responses to texts, broad and integrative knowledge, and the development of wisdom. Additionally, both honors and the humanities value “questing and questioning minds,” students who “wrestle with universal problems of human experience,” and those who hold a “tolerance for ambiguity and a recognition of complexity and context” (8). These certainly are the types of (meta) skills described above by Dooley, Martino, and Blaich and Ditzler. More importantly, though, Andrews further develops his argument about this relationship through the language of more:
Understanding global economics and politics requires seeing the big picture, including the historical background behind the current particular. Sorting out moral conflicts, including conflicts between two goods, calls for serious mental energy. Immersion in imaginative literature helps students grow large inside with the participation in the boundless range of human characters and experience. Small wonder that students in both honors and the humanities are less satisfied by the shallow stream of entertainment media when they have dipped into the Pierian Spring.

Finally, I suspect that humanities faculty bring to honors programs an overweening intellectual ambition. English professors are notorious for dipping into other fields and thinking that their ken stretches over the whole intellectual domain. Expressed in a more kindly fashion, they (we, I) suffer from an endless appetite for exploration. They are less condemned to specialization than many of their colleagues in other fields. (9–10)

The goals and values that Andrews espouses appear admirable and uncontroversial. It makes little sense to suggest otherwise, to argue, for example, that honors programs and faculty should strive to serve students who are intellectually lazy and unambitious. However, what I question here is how to cultivate in students an “overweening intellectual ambition” and “endless appetite for exploration” without any recognizable end or limits in mind. Put a bit differently: I question what connection exists between these goals and the specific types of people, citizens, and professionals that honors educators seek to develop and send out into the world. This language of more appears valuable here for its own sake, but it lacks a larger framework of understanding, a theory, a wisdom, a series of boundaries to capture its aim. Faustian allusions aside, it begs questions about the location of a line between a good and responsible more and a bad and damaging more, about the location of lines between an endless appetite for exploration and an endless appetite for self-reliance that directs Deneen’s student’s drive to avoid the “bottomless pit of failure” rather than work to eradicate that pit altogether. If honors educators engage in the language of more, the metaphor of endless appetites, the rhetoric of big quests, big questions, and ultimately honors students’ big dreams, we do harbor some responsibility to help students navigate, define, and understand these lines, to help them establish and rewrite boundaries rather than always assume that pushing on them and breaking them is, by default, a good thing for themselves and for others.
One can readily assume that Andrews is advocating for the good kind of more, the endless appetite for knowledge that is responsible and ethical. However, the boundaries between the good and the bad easily become blurred, particularly in honors education that frequently fixates on student excellence, prestige, competitiveness, ambition, and exploration of new terrains both physical and intellectual. Honors students are more likely to study abroad, participate in exchange programs, apply for and win nationally competitive scholarships, and attend graduate and professional programs in regions far flung from where they began. Consequently, honors education contributes to liberalism's push for the version of liberty that frees individuals from any constraints they seek to discard. Deneen discusses this version of liberty not specifically in the context of honors education but generally in the context of elite educational institutions that engage in the educational equivalent of strip mining: identifying economically viable raw materials in every city, town, and hamlet, they strip off that valuable commodity, process it in a distant location, and render the products economically useful for productivity elsewhere. The places that supplied the raw materials are left much like depressed coal towns whose mineral wealth has been long since mined and exported. Such students embrace “identity” politics and “diversity” to serve their economic interests, perpetual “potentiality” and permanent placelessness. The identities and diversity thus secured are globally homogenous, the precondition for a fungible global elite who readily identify other members capable of living in a cultureless and placeless world defined above all by liberal norms of globalized indifference toward shared fates of actual neighbors and communities. (132).

What many often refer to simply as the “brain drain,” which occurs when talented students leave a particular region or state, Deneen sees as much more pernicious. The “brain drain” metaphor looks only at what happens to the places left behind. Deneen, however, also looks carefully at what happens to the individuals who leave, what type of individuals get created by this “strip mining” effect: ones who become placeless, cultureless, and communityless. These individuals become liberal—free, autonomous, detached—in ways that disconnect them from and make them potentially dangerous to economies and to social and political institutions.
As one example, Deneen remarks that elite educational institutions are quick to take credit for students who win prestigious awards like Rhodes and Fulbright Scholarships or move cross-country to attend an elite medical school, but they fail to note whether or how their institutions helped cultivate the greed and irresponsibility that produced disasters like the 2008 economic crisis. It is a good bet, Deneen implies, that many of the major players in these types of crises received degrees from institutions that put a premium on educating students in liberal arts and humanities traditions (Why Liberalism Failed 127). Approaches to honors education that involve endless appetites for exploration and overweening intellectual ambitions without tangible frameworks dedicated to defining limits risk producing individuals whose sense of autonomy and freedom unburdens them from commitments and responsibilities to other people, places, and institutions.

I am not suggesting that honors education's partnership with the liberal arts and humanities is somehow a corrupt enterprise. However, the extent to which honors education traffics in the language and rhetoric of more—asking and expecting more from students, expecting them to dig deeper, go farther, explore broadly, and form endless appetites for knowledge—necessitates a responsibility to spend as much effort producing a language and rhetoric of limits and boundaries. Surrounding students with the muses and offering them a dip in the Pierian Spring are likely not alone sufficient to build these structures.

A LITTLE LEARNING IS A DANG’ROUS THING

My argument does not derive from a conservative position and is not a suggestion that honors students should shut down their brains and stop plucking fruit from the trees of knowledge; nor does it suggest that honors students should not pursue big dreams and mountaintops or resign themselves to structures of oppression that too many already face too often. Rather, it explores the dangers of putting the liberal arts and humanities in the service of combating problems for which they are not entirely equipped, especially when the liberal arts and humanities are frequently presented holistically and homogenously, transcendentally and ethereally, and ahistorically and indefinably. In short, my call is for limits, of sorts: it is a call for understanding the limits of the liberal arts and humanities to tackle and solve the problems now endemic to higher education generally and honors education specifically; it is a call for placing limits on the language of honors education, for limits on escalating the language of more, intentionally or unintentionally, without a
thorough understanding of its implications. I am not sure that we as honors educators have discovered the wisdom yet to determine how much is too much, nor am I sure if current political climates surrounding higher education allow for this wisdom to develop within us—another epistemological question, to be sure.

It is critical, however, not to confuse a call for limits with a call for confinement. Wendell Berry eloquently clarifies this confusion in “Faustian Economics: Hell Hath No Limits.” He writes that

our human and earthly limits, properly understood, are not confinements but rather inducements to formal elaboration and elegance, to fullness of relationship and meaning. . . . We must learn again to ask how we can make the most of what we are, what we have, what we have been given. If we always have a theoretically better substitute available from somebody or someplace else, we will never make the most of anything. It is hard to make the most of one life. If we each had two lives, we would not make much of either. (41)

Liberalism is not wont to support this philosophy, nor are institutions of higher education that seek to propel elite students farther, faster, and higher than ever before. Honors educators and their embrace of the liberal arts and humanities, however, can try to pivot, to place less emphasis on imparting wisdom and traditions and greater emphasis on exploring with students directly and candidly the implications of attaining an elite education with its explicit and implicit calls for more (despite how much we try to convince ourselves and our students that honors is not more work but smarter or deeper work). As Deneen shows, the cultivation of more now frequently leads to the growth of less: fewer bonds and connections to places, people, communities, and institutions. Students need and deserve to understand what they potentially lose, or give up, if and when they become one of the global elite. This potential loss is not simply a matter to be taken up by calls for wisdom, traditions, and great books to be found in the liberal arts and humanities; rather, it is a matter of showing—across the range of our institutions’ disciplines and curricula—the impacts of liberalism’s version of liberty in sociological, psychological, cultural, environmental, historical, economic, literary, and political terms, among many others. Honors education needs to partner with liberal arts and humanities allies that worry less about fighting career-focused programs and students and more about the personal, communal, social, and political bonds that modern liberalism increasingly destroys in the name of freedom from limits and constraints.
References to the Pierian Spring in Larry Andrews’s article and Alexander Pope’s “Essay on Criticism” open this essay—and close it as well. Andrews suggests that a full “dip” in the spring is eye-opening for honors students, enough to make them dissatisfied with the kind of knowledge available through modern media forms. Pope would likely agree with this assessment to some extent, though the Pierian Spring for him yields a fundamentally different perspective than what Andrews suggests. Pope would probably be uninterested in pitting some qualitatively better knowledge gained from the Pierian Spring against the inferior knowledge gained from other popular and ordinary sources. The rest of the passage from Pope’s “Essay on Criticism” that began in the epigraph above continues like this:

A little learning is a dang’rous thing;  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:  
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,  
And drinking largely sobers us again.  
Fir’d at first sight with what the Muse imparts, 
In fearless youth we tempt the heights of Arts, 
While from the bounded level of our mind 
Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;  
But more advanc’d, behold with strange surprise 
New distant scenes of endless science rise!  
So pleas’d at first the towering Alps we try,  
Mount o’er the vales, and seem to tread the sky,  
Th’ eternal snows appear already past,  
And the first clouds and mountains seem the last;  
But, those attain’d, we tremble to survey  
The growing labours of the lengthen’d way,  
Th’ increasing prospects tire our wand’ring eyes,  
Hills peep o’er hills, and Alps on Alps arise! (ll. 215–32)

For Pope, then, the Pierian Spring offers a knowledge in limits: the more one drinks, the deeper one drinks, the more one comes to recognize the unattainable heights and breadth of learning’s terrain—these Alps increasingly stack upon Alps. In short, the more one learns, the more one understands how much he or she does not know. If honors education advocates a *more*, this is the kind of more that is needed: not a more that simply seeks to liberate from social, cultural, and economic constraints but a more that makes us and our students tremble, makes us feel that our ways are always lengthening,
and makes our wandering eyes tire when we spend too much time staring at
the mountaintops. It’s okay to live among the lower hills and valleys. These
provide fullness and elegance too.

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Creating a National Readership for

*Harper’s Weekly* in a Time of Sectional Crisis

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**INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the 1840s and '50s, localized and specialized periodicals serving specific regions, religions, pastimes, and vocations inundated the American magazine market (Lupfer 249). The vast majority of these publications were short-lived; Heather A. Haveman, a sociologist who in 2015 conducted a quantitative analysis of historical American magazines, estimates that the average lifespan of a magazine between 1840 and 1860 was a mere 1.9 years (29). As book historian Eric Lupfer says, “most were risky ventures—undercapitalized, poorly advertised, haphazardly managed, and with limited circulation” (249).

However, magazines with the stability and capital of a sponsoring publishing house, as opposed to independent upstarts, could withstand the challenges to the fragile and rapidly changing publishing industry:
After 1840 the production of magazines became ever more bound up with the production and promotion of books, newspapers, and other printed materials. Book publishers began issuing their own house magazines, magazines printed advertisements for newspapers and books, and the text generated by editors and contributors flowed freely between them all. (Lupfer 250)

One publishing house thrived by implementing this business model: Harper & Brothers. The New York City-based giant grew to be the largest publishing house in the world by 1853. It spent the 1850s producing books written by English authors and then serializing these same stories in their periodical *Harper’s Monthly* (Harper 91). The magazine was successful not only because of the desirable content that circulated though the Harper & Brothers publishing house but also because of the way the content was curated and marketed; unlike most of its localized competitors, *Harper’s Monthly* aimed to have something for every reader across the country (“A Word”). The publishing house had the capital to push the periodical nationwide through newly established transportation and distribution networks, and it had the content to intrigue subscribers.

By 1857, the Harper & Brothers books and magazine were doing so well that the Harpers launched an additional periodical entitled “Harper’s Weekly: A Journal of Civilization.” The Harper brothers strove for *Harper’s Weekly* to be a general-interest, news-driven periodical for the entire nation. Unlike previous special-interest periodicals that relied on small but loyal pockets of homogenous readers, *Harper’s Weekly* was designed to attract the widest swath of readers possible by presenting content for the center of the partisan spectrum instead of one extreme end. Consequently, the $3/year subscription fee from a pro-slavery housewife in Savannah was worth the same as $3 from a well-to-do, anti-slavery mother in Amherst, and the publication had to find a way to attract both.

When they launched the periodical on January 3, 1857, the Harper Brothers did not know that their aim of being “national” was about to become even more difficult as the United States faced first the sectional crisis and then a Civil War. Four occasions from this trying period demonstrate how *Harper’s Weekly* covered contentious political events for readers across the country: the Dred Scott trial of 1857, John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry in 1859, the fallout of the 1860 election, and the buildup to the firing on Fort Sumter in 1861. The editors of *Harper’s Weekly* chose to build a national readership in the face of this ongoing controversy by alienating as few readers as possible,
continually crafting only the necessary news content and sidestepping points of contention in their articles and images as often as possible. Usually, the magazine only engaged in the debate surrounding a controversial event when readers agreed on how it should be interpreted. Such tepid content did not capture how the majority of the nation felt, but readers did not need to see their own opinion reflected in *Harper’s Weekly* so long as they were not angered or repelled by the content.

The policy of *Harper’s Weekly* just prior to the Civil War, then, was more to identify and advance the fleeting middle ground than to represent differing opinions on issues that split its readership. As an advertisement for Harper publications stated in April 1858, “[t]he object of the magazine will be to unite rather than to separate the views and feelings of the different sections of our common country” (“Harper’s Monthly” 271). Even when the catastrophe of secession struck in 1860, the editors continued to publish content that attracted the broadest swath of readers although these readers were now living in a fractured nation that was nearing war. The goal of reaching as many readers as possible—and thus collecting their subscription fees—continued to guide the periodical through the upheaval of the late 1850s and chaos of the early 1860s.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Scholars from history and literature frequently draw on *Harper’s Weekly* for rich primary source material. The publication’s fifty-nine-year run provides consistent, high-quality examples of every genre from serial fiction by Charles Dickens to political cartoons by Thomas Nast—excellent material for scholars across the humanities. Several literary scholars rely on *Harper’s Weekly* for its serialized literature, a medium that flourished in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century before monographs became affordable and widely available. Other scholars grapple with the fiction in *Harper’s Weekly* directly: for example, Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge together study how Wilkie Collins’s illustrated serial *The Moonstone* landed in *Harper’s Weekly* in the late 1860s, and Valerie DeBrava considers the *Harper’s Weekly* short stories that portrayed Civil War veteran amputees.

Literary scholars are not the only researchers drawn to the content in *Harper’s Weekly*. Celebrated magazine historian Francis Luther Mott claims that “[f]rom the literary point of view, *Harper’s Weekly* must be conceded to have enjoyed a certain importance; but it was as a vigorous political journal of conservative tendencies that it was most noteworthy” (486). Historians
like Karin L. Zipf, Gib Prettyman, Deidre Murphy, and Cynthia Empen cite the publication’s nonfiction and eye-catching illustrations as examples of how periodicals represented contemporary society, culture, and events.

Scholars from both literature and history analyze the content of Harper’s Weekly not only to understand the world it represented but also to understand its own world: the publishing industry in the nineteenth century. A group of literary scholars including Ronald Weber and Sharon M. Harris and Ellen Gruber Garvey examines Harper’s Weekly to understand the growth in the career of professional writing that occurred in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Text is not the only element of the periodicals that receives attention; researchers like Jo Ann Early Levin take special interest in the burgeoning use of illustration in periodicals, a lively art form that would soon be replaced by photographs.

In addition to authorship and literary production, historians look to Harper’s Weekly as a source that sheds light on the business of publishing in the nineteenth century. Lupfer relies on Harper’s Weekly to explain the ideal business model of a profitable periodical from the time period, and Susan Belasco uses it to illustrate how periodicals aspired to the status of books during their coming-of-age in the mid-nineteenth century. In addition, Mott’s seminal series A History of American Magazines as well as Haveman’s Magazines and the Making of America emphasizes the importance of Harper’s Weekly (and Harper publications more generally) in the broad historical context of the American magazine industry.

Harper’s Weekly is an especially rich source for historians looking to study how periodicals covered the Civil War. Several anthologies that focus on journalism and publications from the Civil War era draw on Harper’s Weekly for poignant examples, including Fighting Words by Andrew S. Coopersmith and The Civil War and the Press, edited by David B. Sachsman, S. Kittrell Rushing, and Debra Reddin van Tuyl. Alice Fahs serves as a leader in the field, writing extensively about popular presses during the Civil War by liberally pulling from Harper’s Weekly.

Finally, historians often use Harper’s Weekly to understand the public’s reaction to specific events. Mott says that the periodical’s “record in text and picture of the events of sixty years make it a contemporaneous history of the highest value” (487). The periodical’s claim to be national makes it especially attractive, for it can act as a stand-in for national opinion—a sentiment that is hard to measure in an era without opinion polls or a wide array of publications claiming to speak for the whole nation.
Though many historians and literary scholars rely on *Harper’s Weekly* as a primary source, few have asked historical and literary questions about the periodical itself, perhaps because of a dearth of editorial notes and records from the nineteenth century or a perception of its middle-brow literary quality. John Gray Laird Dowgray, Jr.’s 1956 dissertation surveyed multiple Harper periodicals, but it seems no scholar has studied *Harper’s Weekly* specifically in the same deliberate manner that others have studied periodicals like *The Atlantic, The Century*, or even *Harper’s Monthly*. Existing scholarship on nineteenth-century publishing can thus benefit from the backstory of this publication, revealing the constraints that make *Harper’s Weekly* and its label as national problematic. An attempt to fill the full deficit of research on *Harper’s Weekly* is too ambitious for my current project, however, which instead generates meaningful analysis by focusing on the strategies that *Harper’s Weekly* used to navigate its earliest years, from its inception in 1857 through the start of the Civil War in 1861. Investigation of how a fluctuating national readership constrained *Harper’s Weekly* reveals both the complexity and the importance of the periodical within the mid-nineteenth century’s publishing scene.

**THE DRED SCOTT DECISION**

A mere three months after the first issue of *Harper’s Weekly* hit newsstands, the periodical’s editors faced a conflict that threatened to split their national readership in two. The clash at hand was the divisive Dred Scott v. Sanford Supreme Court decision, which was settled after ten years in the courts when majority opinions were delivered orally on March 6 and 7, 1857. The Dred Scott decision was the first controversial political story the new publication confronted, and the news left the staff scrambling to determine how *Harper’s Weekly* should react to such events. The ruling forced the team to establish what kind of publication *Harper’s Weekly* would be for its readers during times of political debate—remarkably high stakes for a periodical just beginning to solidify its identity within its publishing house and larger publishing market.

The Dred Scott decision was a defining moment not only for *Harper’s Weekly* but also for the greater sectional conflict in which the publication operated. The ruling reignited controversy about how a nation with both free and slave territories could carry on, brought to attention by none other than an enslaved man by the name of Dred Scott. Scott’s slaveholder, John Sanford, had taken Scott and his wife, Harriet, to live in the free state of Illinois and in the free part of the Louisiana Territory in 1833. When Scott returned to the slave state of Missouri in 1843, he sued Sanford (with the help of
abolitionists) based on the idea that his prior residence in free areas made him permanently free. He won the initial suit, but appeals pushed the case to the Supreme Court. In a decision that enraged many Northerners, the ruling was overturned by a 7-2 margin, with Chief Justice Roger B. Taney delivering the majority opinion.

Taney’s decision both ruled against Scott and overreached to settle other debates about slavery. The ruling declared that no African American was a citizen of the United States and that Congress lacked the authority to ban slavery in the Territories. The latter claim gave slaveholders the opportunity to move their slaves into Western Territories, thus defying the current *modus operandi* of popular sovereignty deciding whether a territory was slaveholding or free. The decision electrified both its supporters and opponents. Historian Paul Finkelman says that “the sweeping political opinion in Dred Scott pleased southern whites of all political stripes,” but that Northerners were less unified about the decision due to the political affiliations, business interests, and racist sentiments of some citizens (128). Presented with a divided nation, the *Harper’s Weekly* staff faced a contentious and consequential question: How could it cover the Dred Scott decision for its entire readership? The coverage from the spring of 1857 reveals that the periodical avoided covering the decision as much as possible. Rather than openly agreeing or disagreeing with the ruling, which would have led many readers to oppose the periodical’s interpretation, *Harper’s Weekly* published a bare minimum—a single full-length article, in fact.

The first and only substantive mention of the Dred Scott ruling filled two columns on the front page of the March 28 issue. Both the author’s justification for covering the ruling and his strategies for crafting coverage for a diverse audience play out in this article, entitled “The Dred Scott Case.” The unnamed author, whose piece thus represents the periodical and not just himself, begins the article by claiming that the only sources available were “one or two of the dissenting opinions [that] have leaked out somewhat irregularly” (“The Dred Scott Case” 193). He uses this alleged information deficit as an excuse to avoid evaluating the Dred Scott decision. Instead, the article focuses on the decision’s potential effects: “It may not be amiss to consider what is likely to be the practical effect of the decision which is, in certain quarters, producing such a fervid heat” (“The Dred Scott Case” 193). With this statement, the author explains why he chose to write about the Dred Scott decision even if he couldn’t critique it: the story was too popular in the public discourse to skip. Focusing on the effects is an attempt to satisfy the readers
who demanded content about the top story of the spring without dividing those readers.

Shifting the dialogue toward the “practical effect” of the decision rather than its validity pushes the piece to consider a hypothetical situation that is difficult to challenge or disprove. The author’s speculation is merely an idea posited to readers about a potential event, not a report or editorial about something that has already occurred. Moving toward his own theories allows the author to deliver content about the ruling while maintaining full control of what will and what will not be shown as results of the Dred Scott decision. Even if the speculations are grounded in current events, the analysis is ultimately a fiction about the future. The author can shape the narrative in a way that makes it palatable to the readers of Harper’s Weekly.

It is soon clear that the Harper’s Weekly narrative about the Dred Scott decision will be one of appeasement and assurance that the ruling is not the catastrophe it has so far been made out to be. The author describes the sentiment he is up against when he writes that

when half a dozen old lawyers at Washington, after racking their heads for two years over a question that has bothered the Robe for half a century, announce as their decision that free blacks are not citizens of the United States, and as such not permitted to sue . . . we fume, and fret, and bubble, and squeak, as if some dreadful injustice and oppression were committed. (“The Dred Scott Case” 193)

For the author and, implicitly, the readers he speaks to, this anxiety is unnecessary. He finishes the paragraph by writing, “It really does not seem to us that this part of the Dred Scott decision is likely to produce any very serious practical results” (“The Dred Scott Case” 193).

To dispel any concern about “practical results” of the Dred Scott decision is to silence the human beings who were central to the case, particularly Scott and his wife, Harriet (“The Dred Scott Case” 193). Even if the effects on the nation were confined to the future, unclear and speculative, the fate of these two people was fully in the present, determined without a doubt. Yet Scott receives no mention in the article. Instead of dwelling on Scott or others affected by the Dred Scott ruling, the author appeals directly to his readers by making the case that they will go unscathed. If he can claim that his audience will not be affected by the ruling, he must conceptualize them as white and living in a society that places them above another group that will be affected by the loss of citizenship. He even names the readers’ whiteness by saying,
“We daily arrogate to ourselves of the Caucasian stock a complete and absolute superiority,” and he continues by underscoring the social segregation of whites and African Americans (“The Dred Scott Case” 193). This remark establishes a “we” that the author uses throughout the rest of the piece—a “we” that groups the author and readers together and sets them in opposition to African Americans.

The author’s “we” is not only hierarchically above African Americans but is also granted ownership of the society the latter group occupies. The author writes, “Nor does it appear that the question of the citizenship of our free black population is a question likely to take any practical shape capable of profoundly agitating the public mind” (“The Dred Scott Case” 193). Calling African Americans both “our[s]” and “free” is oxymoronic but perfectly reflects the fact that Northern African Americans existed as technically free but only within the bounds of society controlled by the free population that wasn’t black. The white Americans’ opinions and experiences dominate the “public mind” because, after all, if African Americans’ experiences were included, the discourse would be a lot more than “agitated.”

After working to dismantle the fears surrounding the loss of citizenship for free African Americans, the author transitions to his concluding thought:

The only result, therefore, that we can arrive at is, that however repugnant the Dred Scott decision may be to the feelings of a portion of the Northern States, it can have no practical effects injurious to our tranquillity [sic], or to our institutions. The subject of slavery will be left to be decided, as it ultimately must be, by the laws which govern labor and production. (“The Dred Scott Case” 193)

The author’s statement relegates dissatisfaction with the decision to a minority of the nation and limits its damages to an emotional bruise. He further the impersonal stance by striking a final compromise: that the states must consider the institution of slavery from an economic point of view. The author sweeps aside moral sentiments or appeals to tradition in favor of an argument that can be presented as based on logic and fact. He neither celebrates nor condemns the institution of slavery—a middle ground for the large number of readers who stood between the extreme ends of praise and abhorrence.

When compared to other periodicals’ coverage of the Dred Scott decision, the Harper’s Weekly reporting is noticeably light. Historian Don E. Fehrenbacher explains that “Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune set the pace with editorials almost every day [beginning March 7] denouncing this ‘atrocious,'
this ‘wicked,’ this ‘abnormal’ judgement” (417). The New York Times echoed Greeley’s concern when it published an analysis that claimed the court decision “completes the nationalization of Slavery” (Finkleman 145). Northern religious papers, too, weighed in, exemplified by the weekly New York Independent’s article titled “Wickedness of the Decision in the Supreme Court against the African Race” (Finkleman 149). Of course, not all Northern papers opposed the decision. New York’s weekly Journal of Commerce, for example, said that “by the great masses of people who prefer truth to error, light to darkness . . . the decision will be respected and honored” (Finkleman 138). Southern papers, too, lauded the courts—such as the semiweekly Richmond Enquirer, which praised the “learned, impartial and unprejudiced” court for handing the South a “prize” (Finkleman 130).

Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, the weekly publication that Harper’s Weekly most resembled at the time, was even quieter than Harper’s Weekly in that fateful March, suggesting that Harper’s Weekly might have adhered to the hybrid-genre conventions of emerging weekly newspaper-magazines in largely ignoring the initial news about the decision. However, Frank Leslie’s revisited the topic in late June with a remarkable spread entitled “Visit to Dred Scott—his family—incidents of his life—decision of the Supreme Court” (see Figure 1). According to Fehrenbacher, this coverage occurred during “a new surge of public interest in Dred Scott’s case” that arose once news of his manumission broke and the official version of the decision was published (421).

Whether as part of a trend or by coincidence as the article claims, the Frank Leslie’s author presents Scott favorably to readers, dubbing him “a real hero” (“Visit to Dred Scott” 49). Characterizing Scott as a hero moves Frank Leslie’s well beyond the tight, neutral confines that editors of Harper’s Weekly drew for their own periodical. Perhaps Frank Leslie’s aimed to be more provocative than Harper’s Weekly, the latter earning the nickname the “Weakly Journal of Civilization” from the New York Tribune (Williams 230). While Harper’s Weekly profited by avoiding controversy, Frank Leslie’s didn’t fear publishing a more “vivid and lively picture of the American scene” (Williams 465) in an article that allows Scott to speak for himself with his own experiences and quotations. The editors also included illustrations of Scott, his wife, and his daughters, Eliza and Lizzie. The humanizing portrayal in both image and word, both first- and third-person, could not be more different from the Harper’s Weekly coverage, which left out Scott the man and covered his trial only minimally.
Furthermore, the level of coverage that *Harper’s Weekly* gave the Dred Scott decision is not consistent with how *Harper’s Weekly* grappled with other

**Figure 1. “Visit to Dred Scott—His Family—Incidents of his Life—Decision of the Supreme Court”**

political stories. For example, Buchanan’s inauguration—an equally political but far less electrifying moment—inundated the periodical just two issues before the March 28 edition. The center spread included an astonishing six illustrations laid out in near-perfect symmetry; such heavily illustrated pieces were rare this early in the periodical’s history, which only makes the complete lack of illustration about Dred Scott—arguably the more consequential political event—starker in contrast. Clearly it was the controversy, not the political nature, of the Dred Scott piece that made the coverage so scant.

The Dred Scott trial did not make for as compelling a narrative as other news stories in Harper’s Weekly. The event’s timeline did not make it particularly appealing to readers; it was sustained over several months, made slow-moving by complicated and specialized legal happenings rather than coalescing around one flashpoint moment. Such timing could have been especially taxing for a new periodical trying to develop a system for covering weekly news. Just as the narrative timeline was complicated, so were its characters. With a divided nation, the decision of who was the true hero and who was the villain was also up for debate. Identifying characters was especially problematic once the ruling was known, for the court decided that Scott wasn’t really a person at all but rather private property. Recognizing the humanity of an African American by making him a character, let alone making him a hero or martyr of a narrative, would have been profoundly risky for a periodical trying to reach Southern readers. Offering a textual or illustrated portrait of Scott, then, would have been even more daring, especially at a time in the periodical’s development when illustrations drew more attention.

The scant Dred Scott coverage does not just reflect narrative constraints, though; it also reveals a Harper’s Weekly that was still finding its footing in the quagmire of the national political arena that deteriorated each year in the late 1850s. In these early days, the periodical went a route that risked losing only readers who would be dissatisfied with a lack of political coverage—likely a much smaller minority than readers who would take issue with the perspective used to cover such political events. With its light coverage of the Dred Scott decision, Harper’s Weekly announced that although it would not stay silent about the largest news issue of the spring, it would attempt to appeal to a broad swath of readers by not taking a side.

JOHN BROWN’S RAID ON HARPER’S FERRY

A second political crisis, fundamentally different from the Dred Scott decision, arose on October 16, 1859, when John Brown arrived at the Harper’s
Ferry federal arsenal ready to enact his plan for a slave insurrection. Brown and his eighteen loyal followers seized the armory from unsuspecting night guards but lost it to a contingent of U.S. Marines led by Colonel Robert E. Lee just thirty-six hours later—too soon for the action to inspire the desired insurrection. The raid did not meet Brown’s initial hopes but nonetheless made for a story that captivated the nation. Two weeks after the events, *Harper’s Weekly* began delivering the enthralling tale to its readers.

The raid could not have been more unlike the events of the Dred Scott decision that had rocked the publication two and a half years earlier. Whereas the ruling was drawn out and weighed down by legal affairs, the raid presented a condensed drama full of guns, plots, violence, and perhaps insanity. The trial had a ten-year history, while the two-day raid concentrated action into a spectacle. While the former led to lasting jural upheaval, the latter was a momentary crisis that drew its significance from the electric atmosphere it created rather than its nonexistent legal consequences. The former elicited minimal coverage in *Harper’s Weekly* that catered to a split readership while the latter resulted in abundant, openly one-sided coverage. The striking increase in content reveals an evolved *Harper’s Weekly*, a periodical with nearly three years under its belt, that no longer avoided dramatic current events as it had when covering the Dred Scott decision.

In understanding why these two political events, both culminating in trials, received such uneven treatment in *Harper’s Weekly*, one must consider how audience reactions to the two events differed since the diverse audience of *Harper’s Weekly* guided the publication’s content. Different political, socio-economic, and geographical groups varied in their reaction to the Dred Scott decision. The public response to the John Brown raid, though, was much more uniform. Publications across the nation agreed that the raid was “the work of a madman,” as the anti-slavery *New York Tribune* put it on October 19 (Daigh 176). Brown’s actions were not without controversy—some groups tried to frame him as a Republican to harm the party’s already troubled image—but even if readers disagreed on his motives, they did not disagree on naming him a villain. The *Harper’s Weekly* team appears to have believed that nearly all readers could agree that he was a malicious madman, and the editors consequently presented him as such at every turn. Once again, the publication focused on common ground and avoided the deep sectional divides that caused readers to interpret the event differently.

Because the editors could present stories about the raid that appealed to all readers, they included every ounce of intrigue in order to attract new
readers and satisfy their existing base. Subscriptions had steadily climbed from 60,000 in May of its first year to 75,000 in November 1858 to 90,000 in October 1859, and this story was another opportunity to push those numbers higher still (Mott 473). The great number of articles targeting Brown gave the periodical several opportunities to appeal to the readers across the nation who supported a blatant indictment of him.

Coverage of the raid begins in the October 29 issue. In the Domestic Intelligence section, the short paragraphs work together to provide a play-by-play of the raid, which is dubbed “one of the most extraordinary events that ever occurred in our history” (“Extraordinary Insurrection” 694). *Harper's Weekly* draws on an array of sources to share the story with its readers, such as the description of what Brown and two of his followers looked like as they were captured according to a *Baltimore Exchange* reporter and snippets of dialogue from an interview Brown did with Senator Mason that ran in the *Herald* (“Extraordinary Insurrection” 694). The coverage also uses lists to quickly inform readers of who was involved in the raid and of the resulting casualties. The narrative, interviews, and lists only provide facts for the readers—not analysis and interpretation—but give nearly every detail available. Acting as an in-depth news source was new for *Harper's Weekly*; because of the raid, the periodical temporarily moved from an entertainment-driven publication that included news to a publication that prized its news content and its role of informing the public about political events. The publication's identity took on a new dimension once nearly the entire national readership could support a specific interpretation of a flashy news story.

The October 29 issue also features the article “Insurrection at Harper’s Ferry,” which speaks to the unified readership that holds contempt for Brown. The author ties Brown's actions to his unforgivable desire for a slave insurrection, something the author says “all are unanimous against,” no matter the “opinions a man may hold in reference to the slavery controversies which are agitated in this country” (“Insurrection” 690). Such a claim turns away anyone who does support Brown or his ideology, but that fringe minority is sacrificed for bold coverage that appeals more strongly to the readers who are appalled by Brown.

The author rails against Brown first by calling him, among other insults, “a half-crazed white, whose views and aims were, to say the least, extremely vague and indefinite” (“Insurrection” 690). In just the first paragraph of the first article, Brown is mentioned more than the man Dred Scott ever was in the coverage about the latter's trial. While Scott only existed as an unseen,
intangible figure who launched a trial, Brown is almost immediately labeled a crazed villain and therefore granted a sizable role in his coverage. Furthermore, while the importance of the Dred Scott decision was muffled in Harper’s Weekly, the importance of the raid is foregrounded when the author writes, “It is hardly necessary to add that the event will possess marked political significance at the present time” (“Insurrection” 690). Whereas it was too soon to accurately assess what would happen after the Dred Scott decision—and any of the hypothetical effects were written off as inconsequential—the author of the John Brown piece claims that the raid will “cost the Republicans many thousand votes” in the next election (“Insurrection” 690). In stark contrast to the Dred Scott piece, the first John Brown article is unafraid to make Brown a character in a narrative, evaluate his actions, and elevate their significance.

In the November 5 issue, the text of “The late invasion at Harper’s Ferry” spans the center spread before spilling onto the following page (Strother 712–14). In all, the article totals about 5,500 words and includes four illustrations, all created by “artist correspondent” D. H. Strother, who illustrated under the popular pseudonym Porte Crayon. Strother adds the context, assessment, and interpretation that was largely absent from the Domestic Intelligence coverage of the previous week. Strother’s first-person account caters to readers’ desires for information when no new details could be crammed into a report on such short notice.

When Strother sees Brown held as captive, he first employs animalistic language to describe him: “His speech was frequently interrupted by deep groans, not awakening sympathy like those of a young soldier dying in the adjacent office, but reminding one of the agonized growl of a ferocious beast” (714). When Strother does describe Brown as a person, he does so with deep reproach:

Any man who has heretofore imagined that he has sounded the depths of human folly and human wickedness will be amazed when he considers the affair at Harper’s Ferry. It is generally regarded as the insane attempt of a monomaniac; an act which, as it is without precedent, and is likely to remain without parallel, whose intense silliness is only equaled by its atrocity, would be ludicrous had not the blood of some of our best citizens made it tragic. (714)

Both the description of Brown as an animal and as an invested criminal succeed in putting him outside the bounds of societal sympathy. The opinionated coverage suggests that the editors behind Harper’s Weekly believed its base would accept a one-sided, villainous portrayal of Brown. In fact, the
editors could believe that they stood to gain readers from this harsh treatment of Brown. Perhaps those most riled up by the failed insurrection would be drawn to a publication that criticized him so harshly.

Four illustrations accompany Strother’s verbose account, two of Brown himself. The first image shows Brown weak and broken, with only his head poking out of a large blanket. His lip is curled into a snarl; paired with a sharp nose, Brown looks to be the epitome of disgust. This bedridden criminal is nevertheless better off in the first image than in his next portrayal. On the second page, Brown writhes on the floor alongside his son and “another of the outlaws” (Strother 713). The two sketches of Brown afford readers the opportunity they were never given with the Dred Scott ruling. *Harper’s Weekly* had failed to include a portrait of the human beings central to Scott’s court case but now has no problem illustrating the people involved in the John Brown raid. In this piece, the (sub)humanity is front and center, and the reader can judge specific characters instead of reading through nebulous hypothetical explanations bereft of a villain and victor. Putting Brown’s face in the article signals that he, a specific human being and not a larger social condition or political climate, is responsible for the chaos.

John Brown once again dominates the front page of *Harper’s Weekly* on November 12, this time in the form of two large illustrations. In both these drawings and the coverage found in the rest of the issue, the scene has shifted from the makeshift prison of the prior issue to the courtroom in Virginia where Brown would ultimately be sentenced to death. While *Harper’s Weekly* devoted little coverage to the consequential Dred Scott trial (certainly no dramatic courtroom illustrations), John Brown’s trial earned three pages in one issue alone. The disparity could result from the narrative arc; for Dred Scott, the trial was the narrative in its entirety whereas for John Brown the trial was simply the conclusion to a string of dramatic events. More likely, though, the John Brown trial receives ample coverage because few readers doubt what the rightful verdict should be, unlike in the contentious and confusing Dred Scott trial. If *Harper’s Weekly* based its coverage on the significance of a story—how many people it affected and in what ways—Dred Scott would undoubtedly receive more space in the periodical, but significance is not the indicator of how much attention a story receives; its attractiveness to a wide readership is. The captivating tale of John Brown speaks to more readers than a murky court case and its polarizing decision. Once again, the desire for a national readership guided the team behind *Harper’s Weekly*, this time as it filled the periodical with clips about Brown.
The captions for the front-page images encourage readers to “see page 729,” steering their attention over a brief trial article on the second page toward a full-page illustrated article entitled “The Trial of the Conspirators” (Porte Crayon 721). Thanks to the captions, those reading Harper’s Weekly just for the most vivid John Brown coverage need not flip through the rest of the issue but can instead skip to the meaty content they most desire. Writing as Porte Crayon, Strother offers another literary first-person account in this article, detailing his visit with the prisoners before the trial and then narrating the trial itself. He is just as comfortable condemning Brown and his followers in this article as he was in previous ones, crafting insults like “They have a cowed and haggard look that would excite pity, were such a feeling possible under the circumstances” (Porte Crayon 729). Porte Crayon writes extensively about the African American co-conspirators of Brown in this article, giving attention to their characters that Scott did not receive two years earlier. Covering these three African Americans is not as risky as covering Scott was, though, for the editors likely believe that the readers will agree that they are undisputed rabble-rousers.

The editors also employ strategies to extend the lifespan of Porte Crayon’s images beyond the week’s news cycle. A small sidebar on the first page demonstrates that the role of Harper’s Weekly was not just to report on the news but to preserve it. “We continue in this number our illustrations of the Harper’s Ferry outbreak, drawn by our special artist, Porte Crayon,” the blurb reads, followed by a list of previous illustrations (“Our Illustrations” 721). Such a notice marks the November 12 illustration as part of a set. The coverage is not only relevant in this particular issue but is also part of a longer arc that a reader can use to retrace the entire story of the raid. The blurb functions as an advertisement, selling other recent issues of Harper’s Weekly and encouraging readers to preserve them as a record of the event as the tale winds down. Harper’s Weekly makes the switch from a timely news source about John Brown to a reliable record of his exploits; posterity becomes an added goal of a periodical that heretofore succeeded because of its timeliness.

Even though the trial sealed the fate of Brown, Harper’s Weekly continued to cover the aftermath of the raid through mid-December. The coverage took on two functions: first, finishing the narrative by reporting on Brown’s eventual execution and, second, evaluating the legacy of the raid by depicting what slaves would do after the failed insurrection. The news coverage vacated prominent positions in the periodical and instead returned to the Domestic Intelligence section once the trial ended. The November 26 issue includes
four bulletins updating readers about Brown’s condition based on an interview “a lady,” whose name is intentionally omitted, conducted with him while he was in prison. The bulletins give Brown a chance to share his thoughts and feelings with readers. For example, he tells the interviewer:

I am not conscious of ever having had a feeling of revenge: no, not in all the wrong done to me and my family in Kansas. But I can see that a thing is wrong and wicked, and can help to right it, and can even hope that those who do the wrong may be punished, and still have no feeling of revenge. (“His Principles” 758)

Here, Brown is more than the maniacal villain who dominated Porte Crayon’s narratives. He is a person with motivations who is capable of reflection and remembering his family members—an opportunity no people in the Dred Scott decision were granted. The article gives readers the chance to know Brown only after the debates about his crimes were settled in court. Still, readers can hear his voice before he meets his end as opposed to continuing to see him as a one-dimensional villain.

The story of his execution, which occurred on December 2, 1859, does not appear in the periodical until the December 10 edition, when the Domestic Intelligence section dedicates just over a column to relate the story of his death, a space allotment similar to the initial account of the raid. The bulletins include the words of both Brown and his wife, continuing the trend of making Brown seem like more than just a criminal in his death. To finish the news narrative, the bulletins also offer a graphic depiction of John Brown’s demise: “He was swung off at fifteen minutes past eleven. A slight grasping of the hands and twitching of the muscles were seen, and then all was quiet” (“On the Gallows” 794).

Next, Harper’s Weekly explored the ramifications of the raid in a much less speculative way than it did with the Dred Scott decision. Rather than say what slaves might do after learning of the failed insurrection, the editors instead included illustrations purporting to show how slaves would behave. The November 19 issue was the first to depict this slave reaction, with a front page entitled “Effect of John Brown’s Invasion at the South” (see Figure 2) (737). The captions of the first two illustrations are quotations from the slaves pictured, written in the eye dialect whites often used to portray African-American speech.

The first individual, a male slave carrying a basket and spear says, “Much obliged to dar ar possum Wattomie for dise pikes he gin us—det’s turrible
handy to dig taters wid” (“Effect” 737). The second slave, a woman, says, “What’s dem fool niggers fraid on? I’d like ter see one o’ dem folks undertake to carry me off, I would!” (“Effect” 737). These two depictions suggest that the slave population was either not intelligent or not motivated enough to use Brown’s efforts to break out of slavery. The final illustration, too, shows slaves using the weapons provided by their slave owner “to resist invasion” (“Effect” 737). Even if Brown’s followers came to lead another insurrection, the slaves the illustrator imagines would stay loyal to their slave owners instead of seeking freedom. Porte Crayon uses this racist portrayal to allay readers’ fears and assure them that African Americans were too childlike to revolt.

**Figure 2. “Effect of John Brown’s Invasion at the South”**

The last piece of John Brown coverage attached significance to the raid by considering how its aftermath affected sectional sentiments. In the editorial, titled “North and South,” the unnamed author expresses concern about the brewing “misunderstandings” that falsely divide Northerners and Southerners: “The South imagines that the Northern people sympathize with John Brown[,] but . . . The bulk of Northern people have no sympathy whatever with John Brown” (802). Northerners are also mistaken: “apt to be misled by the vapor of Southern newspapers and Southern politicians, clamoring for disunion” (“North and South” 802). The editors of Harper’s Weekly believed that the bulk of their national readership saw Brown as a villain and consequently portrayed him as such, but this editorial shows that they realized not all periodicals employed the same tactic. The author closes with a foreboding prediction: if left uncorrected, he says, the growing misunderstanding could “plunge a peaceful and contented people into the horrors of civil war” (“North and South” 802). In closing the John Brown raid story, the editors of Harper’s Weekly called on their audience’s common ground for fear of “exacerbating sectional divisions” and losing the national audience they were working to build (Kennedy 73).

FROM ELECTION TO SECESSION

Abraham Lincoln responded to John Brown’s raid in his famous Cooper Union address in the fall of 1859, but the speech earned no coverage in Harper’s Weekly. In fact, the periodical hardly mentioned Lincoln’s unforeseen rise to political prominence throughout the following months. Lincoln’s unexpected triumph over Seward in the Republican primary earned him some coverage in May of 1860, but the periodical stayed mostly mum about the rest of the campaign even as the Democrats split along geographic lines and talks of secession swirled. The first post-election issue of Harper’s Weekly debuted on November 10 with a full front-page illustration of Lincoln and a caption that reads, “Hon. Abraham Lincoln, born in Kentucky, February 12, 1809” (705). Newspapers had already named Lincoln as the victor, but Harper’s Weekly did not yet grant him the explicit win.

The following week, lists of results took the prime page two position, residing in the center two columns. The article states in a removed, impartial tone:

At least half the returns of the popular vote for President have yet to come in, and no reliable statement of the work of 6th November can
yet be made. It is certain, however, that Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois, and Hannibal Hamlin, of Maine, have been elected by the people President and Vice-President of the United States respectively. . . . According to the returns which have thus far come to hand, Lincoln has carried fifteen States, . . . casting together 169 out of the 303 votes which are cast in the electoral college. ("The Presidential Election" 722)

The news report, different from the editorials or discussions that typically dominated the nonfiction in Harper's Weekly, situates the periodical as a source on the political news it had thus far kept at arm's length. The unnamed author does not offer analysis or interpretation of the election as it had for both the Dred Scott decision and the John Brown raid, instead conveying just enough information to appease readers who were eager for news. Dwelling on the subject—or, worse, celebrating or condemning it—posed the risk of alienating a sizable minority that might not agree and might take issue with the analysis at a high-stakes political moment.

Regardless of what Harper's Weekly chose to publish or not, the greater political sphere was shifting toward splitting its readership into citizens of the Confederacy and the Union. With Lincoln's election formally recognized, Southerners' threats of secession that Harper's Weekly had avoided all summer moved front and center in a divisive political discourse. The periodical no longer had the luxury of deciding if the magazine should cover secession and instead had to determine how to frame the coverage. The editors began incorporating an abundance of content about the South, especially illustrated content that focused on South Carolina. Perhaps they hoped that that the sheer quantity of largely impartial Southern-centric content would offer a new way into the news that appealed to both Southern and Northern readers. In Harper's Weekly, South Carolina is venerated for its rich history and prized for its magnificent cities, but the periodical's South Carolina is a state that is firmly part of the Union. Its heroes, architecture, and cities are continually discussed in relation to the entire United States—fitting for a magazine that tried to secure South Carolinians as part of its national readership even though the state was rapidly proceeding toward secession.

South Carolina's first illustrated appearance came in the same November 17 issue that announced Lincoln's win. A full-page illustration of the view of Charleston from Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island ran near the front of the issue. The extended caption was penned by "an eminent Southern writer" who describes the city as if entering from the sea ("Fort Moultrie" 723). He
dubs Charleston “the ancient city” and compares it to Venice, with its “verandas, balconies, piazzas, . . . [and] ample gardens” (“Fort Moultrie” 723). At the same time, the author takes note of the Union military presence when he says Fort Moultrie is “distinguished in American history as the scene of one of the first and best-fought battles of the Revolution” (“Fort Moultrie” 723). The illustration brings the literary description to life, looking onto Charleston from the islands (see Figure 3).

On the left side of the image, steam from the ships mingles with storm clouds, but, on the right, sunbeams break through to grant a heavenly glow to Charleston. The sunshine also backlights the largest object in the illustration: the fort’s American flag, crumpled and twirling lackadaisically near the pole. Like the author, this illustrator portrays Charleston as an attractive and powerful place, but only when framed and protected by the Union.

While the illustration draws a connection between Charleston and the Union, it also hints at how tense the relationship was. Visitors seem more interested in the harbor or the ships sailing into it than in the flag; in fact, many have their backs turned to the banner. The most prominent people, elegantly dressed in the lower left corner of the illustration, ignore not only the flag but also the boy sitting near them. This boy, who appears to be African

**Figure 3. “Fort Moultrie (Sullivan’s Island), Charleston, South Carolina, in the Distance”**

_Harper’s Weekly._ November 17, 1860.
American and could be the rich family’s slave, stares out toward the water instead of towards Charleston or the flag. Perhaps he knows that neither welcomes people like him. A keen eye might notice that only eleven stars are visible on the flag thanks to its furled droop—the same number of Southern states that seceded just a month after the illustration ran.

The following week, South Carolina was once again in the spotlight but in an image harkening back to the Revolutionary War hero Sergeant William Jasper (“Patriots” 744). The dead and dying collapse in clouds of cannon smoke around the fatally wounded Jasper, who musters his last bit of strength to plant the flag during the battle of Savannah in 1779. Sarah J. Purcell explains that “public memory of the Revolutionary War, particularly praise for Revolutionary martyrs and heroes, had been an important part of American national identity since the time of the Revolution itself” (282). By the eve of the Civil War, the memory that had once created a unified national identity was, like so many other facets of American life, split along sectional lines. Both Northerners and Southerners “looked back to the opening days of the Revolutionary War and concluded that historic sacrifice both hallowed their own cause and delegitimated their opponents as they took up arms” (Purcell 283).

Because the artist of this Harper’s Weekly illustration is not credited, it is difficult to know if he was a Southerner using Jasper “as a symbol of Southern resistance” or a Northerner claiming the war hero as a fighter for the Union (Purcell 283). This uncertainty works in the favor of Harper’s Weekly: both Southerners and Northerners could draw inspiration from the dramatic portrait without the publication being accused of heralding Jasper as an icon for the Secessionists or the Unionists. As in the image of Fort Moultrie, the flag is central here, but it is a tattered regimental banner rather than the stately stars and stripes. This illustration, like the previous one, conveys an undertone of South Carolinian discontent; after all, Jasper places his own State’s flag, not the Union’s. However, portraying a South Carolinian war hero sacrificing himself for the new nation is also a not-so-subtle reminder to the Southern readers that their prized ancestors fought for the same nation that some now planned to abandon as well as a reminder to Northern readers that Southerners, too, share a history of sacrifice for the nation.

The nod to history continues on the following page with an illustration of American soldier and spy Nathan Hale walking toward his execution by British troops (“Patriots” 745). Together, the two images form a powerful and cohesive spread: on the left, a sacrifice by a Southerner; on the right, a sacrifice by a Northerner for the same new nation. The two images’ captions fall under the same headline, “Patriots of the Olden Time,” on the following
The images “will stir the patriotic blood in every true heart,” the caption claims, intentionally speaking to readers from both regions (“Patriots” 746). The images remind readers that Sergeant Jasper was from South Carolina and Nathan Hale from Connecticut, showing that men from both regions fought for the Union.

By the December 15 issue, South Carolina was mere days away from leaving the Union. Amid the chaos, *Harper’s Weekly* strengthened its commitment to using illustrations. The best example, shown in Figure 4, is the haunting “A Record of the Day,” which uses classical imagery to depict an American story—namely, the chaotic end to the Union (“A Record” 792). All the characters are clad in cloaks or togas and are gathered in a room with grand archways and pillars. Palm fronds and what could be disheveled palmetto trees in the background evoke a Southern, if not explicitly South Carolinian, setting.

In the center sits a bearded man holding both a book with the word “law” inscribed on its spine and a scroll with the words “Constitution of the United States.” A male figure faces the man, leaving his bare back to the viewer, and appears to be finishing a swing at the Constitution. With his left hand, he grabs a stick from the bundle of stakes that comprises the focal point of the image. The stakes within the bundle each bear the name of a State and are

**FIGURE 4. “A RECORD OF THE DAY”**

bound with “E. Pluribus [Unum],” though one appears already to be pulled out and broken off. The bundle is protected by Columbia, who falls to the steps to use her full weight against the bundle’s assailants. Another man tries to topple the stakes although Columbia does her best to stop him.

On the left, two women representing peace and justice, bearing broken scales and a small olive branch, evacuate the scene. The peace figure looks forward with a dazed expression as if she knows she is no longer welcome in this arena, but the justice figure looks backward at the fighting with grave irritation as if she will not forgive the aggressors for cracking her scales. Finally, the right-hand side of the picture casts a darkness over the frenzied scene. Additional characters forecast not just the end of the Union, but violent anarchy. A demon enters from the upper right corner, bearing a torch and sword. His eyes are glued to either the book of laws or the stakes, and he looks ready to strike. In stark contrast to his grey features and black wings stands the traditional figure of a revolutionary chained to a pillar. The woman has a pike topped with a cap as well as a cap on her own bowed head, eyes closed in what appears to be either grief or defeat. Ultimately, Columbia is left to do her work—the work of the nation—alone. In this cartoon, only the nation can save itself from the impending struggle.

**Figure 5. “Assembling of Congress, Hall of Representatives, Washington City, December 3, 1860”**

Opposite the classical image is a realistic illustration (Figure 5) captioned “Assembling of Congress, Hall of Representatives, Washington City, December 3, 1860” (793). Crowds of men dominate both the foreground and the background, gathered in small groups centered around conversations or newspapers. The two images do not form a coherent spread but are nonetheless in conversation with one another. The right image shows, factually, what happened at the assembly: well-dressed men gathered, spoke, and listened. The photo-like image allows Harper’s Weekly to represent what occurred without evaluating the action and thus stay impartial, but the left image reveals what the right image cannot: what such a meeting meant. Certain well-dressed men acted as the assailants did in the symbolic image, attacking the Union and its Constitution. The seemingly innocuous conversations lead to utter chaos—a loss of peace and justice and the start of destruction to the Union’s laws. The symbolic image, then, reveals more about governmental proceedings than an impartial snapshot of what the House looked like, though that interpretation also loses its impartial credibility by taking a stance and labelling heroes and villains. The loss of impartiality in “A Record of the Day” cartoon signals that the work of remaining neutral was about to become not just taxing but in fact impossible. South Carolina seceded just five days later, launching a spiral that finalized the split within the national audience of Harper’s Weekly.

FROM SECESSION TO THE CIVIL WAR:
THE FINAL ATTEMPTS TO APPEAL TO SOUTHERNERS

By 1861, coverage of the chaotic and uncertain political climate was too important to omit from Harper’s Weekly. The publication continued to cover controversial events with as little opinion as possible, but the events became increasingly frequent and urgent. Before 1861, political content seemed to intrude on the rest of the news, fiction, and illustration found in each issue. Once secession edged the nation toward war, though, political content dominated the publication. The January 26 issue, for example, featured a front-page story and illustration discussing Fort Sumter, another two full pages of Sumter illustrations and text, an editorial about the Union capital, a full-page illustration and lengthy article about the Star of the West (a Union merchant ship that was fired upon at Fort Sumter on January 9, 1861, marking the first time the North and South exchanged fire), a full-page and a half-page illustration of Fort Moultrie, a full-page illustration of Charleston, and a Domestic Intelligence section full of secession- and crisis-related news. Scant room was
available for the fiction and other small news items that once comprised the periodical.

In order to maintain readers on both sides of the conflict, the editors did not take “a strong political stand against secession” (Fahs 44). They refused to indict Confederate sympathizers for as long as they could hope to retain their Southern readership—an effort that lasted well into the spring of 1861. Fahs says that the publication “assumed during the secession crisis . . . that they could continue to appeal to a Southern as well as a Northern audience” (46). In “Let Us Be Friends,” which ran as late as March 30, an unnamed author pleads with readers directly, asking that “Heaven conduct us to happier ends / And keep us like brothers for ever and ever” (195). The poem is not of exceptional literary merit, but its politics are clear: this author is willing to let the seceding states leave the Union in the name of peace. He writes, “If you must go, let us part like good friends— / It’s hard on the heart that our Union should sever!” (Let Us Be Friends” 195).

The publication’s conciliatory effort was cut short in mid-April when the conflict outgrew the editors’ hopes for peace. Confederates fired on Fort Sumter on April 12, causing a whirlwind of armament, secession, and blockades. The April 27 issue positioned Lincoln’s Proclamation of War as the lead editorial and included a two-page center-spread illustration of the “Bombardment of Fort Sumter by the Batteries of the Confederate States, April 13, 1861” (260). Civil War was now a reality, and Harper’s Weekly had to decide not just how much country but what country at all a national periodical was supposed to serve. This identity question could not be dodged by hypothetical situations or by catering to both sides of an ever-widening gap.

By the following week, May 4, Harper’s Weekly made its choice to include war coverage “that explicitly aligned itself with the Union” (Fahs 47). On that date, its lead editorial was boldly titled “The War.” The daring editorial declared:

It is not now a question of slavery or anti-slavery. It is not even a question of Union or disunion. The question simply is whether Northern men will fight. Southerners have rebelled and dragged our flag in the dirt, in the belief that, because we won’t fight duels or engage in street brawls, therefore we are cowards. The question now is whether or no [sic] they are right. (“The War” 274)

Such a statement first condemns the actions of Southerners—not rebels or Confederates, but the entire geographic bloc. It then insults the region
by implying that their people engage in lowly fights and assess courage by
the same measly measure. In this editorial, Southerners are no longer worth
accommodating; instead, they are the villains that brave Northern men must
vanquish. “The rebels have appealed to the sword, and by the sword they must
be punished,” the unnamed writer says (“The War” 274). Calling Norther-
ers to fight was a complete reversal from the tepid acceptance of “The Great
Southern Movement” that graced the periodical a month prior (Fahs 46).

The brazen editorial continues by giving Lincoln tactical advice about
what to prioritize. The author says that if men show up for Lincoln, the war
will be over by January 1862. The piece ends by positing “three consider-
atations,” the second of which incited the most controversy:

The Government troops will not march into the Southern States
under an Abolition banner. But . . . wherever the United States Army
goes, local, municipal, and State laws will be superseded by martial
law; and the Fugitive Slave Act is not to be found in the Army Reg-
ulations. Whatever may be the intentions of the Government, the
practical effect of a war in the Southern States, waged by Northern
against Southern men, must be to liberate the slaves. (“The War” 274)

The editorial blatantly “foregrounds” slavery in connection to the war in a way
readers of Harper’s Weekly would likely not expect (Fahs 49). Just a few weeks
earlier, the periodical had shunned discussion of slavery for fear of this very
controversy; now the publication initiated the debate.

Harper’s Weekly received so much backlash for this comment that a fol-
low-up editorial titled “To Our Southern Readers” graced the pages of the
periodical three weeks later. “We have received a number of letters from
Maryland, Kentucky, Tennessee, and other Southern States, complaining bit-
terly of the tone of the editorial article” from May 4, the article begins (“To
Our Southern Readers” 322). Rather than quiet the controversy or explain
that the partisan statement was not representative of the publication, the
renewed pro-Union Harper’s Weekly held firm. The editorial neither revised
nor tempered its previous controversial stance even though the author mens-
tions that it had cost the periodical subscribers. The editorial’s most indignant
parting words for Southern readers were the following:

We calculate to produce such a paper that it shall be in every man’s
interest to buy it. If we fulfill our aim, our Southern friends merely
cut off their own noses when they stop our circulation among them.
It is purely their affair. If they think they can do without an illustrated
record of the war we will not object. We have work enough to supply the Northern demand for Harper’s Weekly. (“To Our Southern Readers” 322)

This comment demotes Southern readers and elevates Northern ones. Southerners were welcome to read Harper’s Weekly but were no longer integral; instead, attention, energy, and ultimately content went to Northern readers. The geopolitical split was finalized by the end of 1861, when the federal mail service was suspended and the Southern ports were blockaded. Southern readers were left no way to continue to subscribe to the periodical that had shunned them (Fahs 22).

Losing access to the Southern market freed Harper’s Weekly from balancing Northern and Southern readers. However, becoming a publication for the new Union was not as easy as ceasing shipment of papers to Atlanta. The identity of Harper’s Weekly as a national publication had been torn asunder along with the nation. The publication that had served a national audience for four years could no longer exist because that nation no longer existed. Buoyed by significant capital, the editors chose to become a periodical for a new, uncertain nation of Northerners.

Though the heterogeneous mishmash of Northerners did not always have much in common, its members did share one trait: they were citizens of a nation that was engaged in war. Harper’s Weekly capitalized on the unifying experience by producing an enormous amount of war content for its new audience: short stories about soldiers, illustrations of battles, reports from the front lines, and poetry about generals inundated the periodical. The increase in war content was not only an attempt to exploit common ground but also a response to changes in demand. As Fahs explains, news content had renewed importance as Northerners yearned to know what was happening to their loved ones, soldiers or civilians, in the South. “War changed what people read, what was available to read, and how, where, and with what expectations they read it,” Fahs writes (18). The war crippled smaller book publishing houses, but large firms like Harper & Brothers, publishing multiple media, benefitted from the increased demand for information (Fahs 19–20). Despite the loss of Southern readership, the circulation numbers of Harper’s Weekly grew from 90,000 in October 1859 to 120,000 by the end of 1861 (Mott 473, 475), and it remained above 100,000 for most of the war, which Mott calls “a very unusual circulation for that time” (476). The editors’ strategy of increased war coverage thus maintained the publication’s existing Northern readership and attracted new subscribers to make up for the loss of Southern readers.
The war coverage in Harper’s Weekly spread across genres until no corner of the so-called “general interest” periodical was left untouched by the conflict.

The second change that the editors of Harper’s Weekly made to the publication involved the timing of all the new war content. Since the publication’s debut, the editors had aspired to be more than an ephemeral newspaper by encouraging readers to collect and bind issues into volumes that were larger than, but not unlike, the books the publishing house produced (“Harper’s Weekly” 32). This desire to serve as a historical record continued, even deepened, when the war began; Harper’s Weekly saw itself as the place to collect stories—both fictional and nonfictional—about the war and wanted that collection to last beyond the week’s news cycle. However, the war increased the competing impulse to be as timely as possible. Getting news out quickly suddenly mattered more than ever when in the balance of each update from the front lines hung news about the lives of soldiers and the state of the nation. A quality record takes time to construct and is enhanced by keeping the long view in mind rather than the most recent report; it takes the time to sort through multiple accounts of an event and throw out incomplete or erroneous pieces while synthesizing the true reports into a compelling story. Readers, though, demanded prompt updates about their sons, fathers, husbands, and brothers on the battlefield. News was in high demand and, as Fahs says, “Newspapers suddenly became an urgent necessity of life” (19).

This dual aim of timelessness and timeliness is perhaps manifested most clearly on the title page of the bound journals from the war years. Each year’s issues could be bound into a large book with its own front matter, table of contents, and index. The title page (see Figure 6) included an image that in 1861 became an elaborate, full-page illustration of the role of Harper’s Weekly in the war (“Title Page” i).

A war-clad Columbia stands in the center with a helmet and sword in hand for the battles that rage in the background. The Union flag stands tall behind Columbia, but a man who carries what appears to be the “Stars and Bars” (the first Confederate battle flag) advances toward the Union’s defensive line. Two women in gowns sit near Columbia’s feet, writing on tablets with quills. One paper spills over the tablet to reveal the document title “History of the War.” Clearly, the women are on the scene to write up-to-the-minute accounts, but they are also fashioning a history of the entire conflict. As this illustration shows, the war coverage that dominated the periodical—content about battles, generals, and soldiers—challenged the editors to strike a balance between being prompt and being a chronicle.
Most of the time, the role of record beat out the role of informant within the periodical’s pages. This decision seems counterintuitive when the greatest demand was for timely updates. Understanding the choice requires knowledge of the larger print culture of the 1860s. Harper’s Weekly subscribers likely

**Figure 6. “Title Page”**

had access to several other publications, including various local newspapers. Many of these papers, especially in bigger cities, were released each day. These daily periodicals could get updates from telegrams and publish their contents almost immediately so that news was disseminated much more quickly than the Saturday updates Harper’s Weekly offered. The weekly production timeline meant that the news was dated, and the way that the editors chose to cover the news—through detailed illustrations—slowed the production even further. By the time the engravers could produce illustrations for the periodical, the battle that the sketches depicted had likely been over for a week or two.

Harper’s Weekly turned this disadvantage into an advantage by marketing itself as more than a newspaper and instead as a record of the war events. The publication aspired to be a chronicle that would make sense to readers seeking to remember the war in later years. They curated their content not to be as current as possible but to be as complete and comprehensive—as deserving of a place in a definitive record—as possible. The role of “record” marks a specific choice the editors made to differentiate their periodical from competitors in the field and to create a demand for the kind of periodical they could produce. The publishers likely saw little financial benefit from people ordering back issues and building a record, but the periodical’s image as a long-lasting publication could have enticed readers to subscribe at the present because it elevated the content as belonging to the prized realm of history instead of simply the passing present. That is, the status of Harper’s Weekly increased by being a record; their brand improved in the present by marketing for the future.

The aspiration of being timeless could have arisen because Harper’s Weekly was part of a publishing empire portfolio that included media that were much more durable: books. The goal to endure in a bound, permanent record echoes the novels already published by the Harper brothers. Furthermore, content was shared between Harper’s Weekly, Harper’s Monthly, and monographs published by Harper & Brothers. Finally, the connection to a bustling book publishing house likely helped Harper’s Weekly to be seen as a serious publication. After all, Frank Leslie ran several newspapers, much as the Harpers did, but produced no books, and his publications demonstrate no intention of lasting longer than the current news cycle.

Producing content for a record and not just an eager weekly readership put separate strains on the periodical. To be a reliable source, editors first needed to collect detailed information about each of the war’s many twists and turns. Next, editors had to evaluate which events would be of greatest
consequence not just to readers on Saturday but to readers looking back on Harper’s Weekly in the future. A quick word about how many men died would not suffice; instead, the writer had to attach significance to each battle to justify its place in the record of the war. Providing a complete and comprehensive picture, then, one that took time to construct accurately, was the strength of the weekly periodical as opposed to timely daily newspapers. The audience Harper’s Weekly served had shifted from being national to being Northern, and the periodical responded by crafting a periodical that served present-day Northerners and future ones.

CONCLUSION

As publishing pioneers, the editors of Harper’s Weekly not only had to define what a national periodical was but also had to engineer ways to make the new genre popular, profitable, and sustainable. Harper’s Weekly primed readers to have certain expectations about what the genre would include and what that content would be like in terms of quality, reach, and posterity. The periodical was as much selling the idea of a national publication as it was selling the content within its pages; the editors were not attempting to woo a preexisting audience but were instead creating a new one that desired a national periodical. The team had to convince readers across the country that a national periodical was worth adding to their reading lists and did so by producing content that attracted the widest base of readers possible.

The editors were in the early stages of sorting out how to reach a national audience when the sectional crisis increased in intensity until the nation itself threatened to break apart. Without surviving editorial notes and records, it is difficult to know exactly how the editors of Harper’s Weekly planned to grow their periodical in the face of this challenge, but analyzing articles and illustrations reveals that creating and serving a national audience guided the Harper’s Weekly content. First, the Dred Scott decision of 1857 shows a time when an untested, tentative Harper’s Weekly remained largely aloof from the decision, attempting to avoid the controversy as much as possible. It is unclear if omitting Dred Scott resulted more from the fact that the periodical did not yet know how to cover such controversial events or from a conscious decision not to cover the ruling, but the effect was the same: by leaving out the prolonged and complicated trial, the magazine signaled to readers that Harper’s Weekly would not juxtapose weighty, complex legal cases with flashy current events.

Staying outside of a conversation, however, was sometimes too risky since readers expected a stance from what became a leading news periodical.
The coverage of John Brown’s 1859 raid on Harper’s Ferry shows a time when *Harper’s Weekly* engaged in controversy, echoing the dominant opinion that John Brown was a villainous invader. The damning language reflected the majority opinion of their readers while writing off the small contingent of his abolitionist supporters who might have subscribed to *Harper’s Weekly*. The coverage showed readers that moments of visible violence and tangible drama that occurred on the national stage would be integral to the publication. The difference between John Brown’s raid and Dred Scott’s trial in part resulted from the enticing narrative structure of the raid, but more important was the fact that the nation could largely agree that John Brown was a crazed scoundrel.

Just a year later, Lincoln’s election amplified Southerners’ threats of disunion. The editors worked to secure South Carolinians as part of their national readership even as the state rapidly marched towards secession. They flooded the periodical with content about South Carolina that underscored the state’s contributions to and relationship with the Union without explicitly incriminating the Southern leaders working to secede. In these articles, the editors made liberal use of illustrated content. Images rather than words gave the periodical the chance to express complex ideas in a palatable way, allowing both realistic depictions and symbolism to do the work of explaining the country’s conditions rather than the words of the *Harper’s Weekly* team.

Despite the editors’ attempts to show the value of the Union, a drastic shift in circumstances—secession, the start of the war, and the subsequent loss of Southern readers—caused the editors to change the way they covered the nation. Their goal of having the greatest number of readers possible remained the same, but now these readers were only in the Union and were engaged in a war effort. All the small tweaks the editors made are part of one larger change: prioritizing record-keeping. Valuing timelessness over timeliness was an especially odd choice for a period when exigencies of war made timely news a high priority, but the maneuver allowed the periodical to capitalize on its comparatively slow print schedule and continue to position their publication as more than an ephemeral newspaper. The periodical constructed a narrative of the war by placing stories—both fictional and nonfictional—about the war in a collection built to last beyond the week’s news cycle. The editors again altered readers’ expectations, this time encouraging them to value comprehensive coverage of battles molded into a stable, reliable record from a weekly publication instead of hasty news updates.
Harper’s Weekly, part of the “magazine mania” of the mid-nineteenth century, represents the early stages of regular, timely, and powerful national media in the United States (Lupfer 249). With each issue, the editors of Harper’s Weekly conditioned readers to have certain expectations about what a national weekly periodical would and would not cover, making them true arbiters of the genre. Their content shaped the audience for national publications, paving the way for a thriving magazine market in the 1870s and eventually mass-market national periodicals in the 1890s. Reading Harper’s Weekly with a full understanding of these commercial dynamics—the national aspirations and economic realities—is crucial. Such a perspective allows a researcher to look beyond the eye-catching cartoons and sappy serial fiction and fully appreciate the periodical as the complex but “rich treasury for the historical investigator” that it is (Mott 469).

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Lydia Voigt is Distinguished University Professor Emeritus at Loyola University New Orleans. She has taught honors seminars and has served on Loyola’s Honors Advisory Board. Recent co-authored books include Preventing Lethal Violence in New Orleans and Why Violence? Leading Questions Regarding the Conceptualization and Reality of Violence in Society.

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Naomi Yavneh Klos is Director of the University Honors Program at Loyola University New Orleans and President of the National Collegiate Honors Council. She is also Chair of the Honors Consortium of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities.
ABOUT THE NCHC MONOGRAPH SERIES

The Publications Board of the National Collegiate Honors Council typically publishes two to three monographs a year. The subject matter and style range widely: from handbooks on nuts-and-bolts practices and discussions of honors pedagogy to anthologies on diverse topics addressing honors education and issues relevant to higher education.

The Publications Board encourages people with expertise interested in writing such a monograph to submit a prospectus. Prospective authors or editors of an anthology should submit a proposal discussing the purpose or scope of the manuscript; a prospectus that includes a chapter by chapter summary; a brief writing sample, preferably a draft of the introduction or an early chapter; and a curriculum vitae. All monograph proposals will be reviewed by the NCHC Publications Board.

Direct all proposals, manuscripts, and inquiries about submitting a proposal to the General Editor of the Monograph Series:

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Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook by Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurnier (2005, 98pp). This monograph includes an overview of assessment and evaluation practices and strategies. It explores the process for conducting self-studies and discusses the differences between using consultants and external reviewers. It provides a guide to conducting external reviews along with information about how to become an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor. A dozen appendices provide examples of “best practices.”


A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges by Theresa James (2006, 136pp). A useful handbook for two-year schools contemplating beginning or redesigning their honors program and for four-year schools doing likewise or wanting to increase awareness about two-year programs and articulation agreements. Contains extensive appendices about honors contracts and a comprehensive bibliography on honors education.

The Honors College Phenomenon edited by Peter C. Sederberg (2008, 172pp). This monograph examines the growth of honors colleges since 1990: historical and descriptive characterizations of the trend, alternative models that include determining whether becoming a college is appropriate, and stories of creation and recreation. Leaders whose institutions are contemplating or taking this step as well as those directing established colleges should find these essays valuable.

Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices by Annmarie Guzy (2003, 182pp). Parallel historical developments in honors and composition studies; contemporary honors writing projects ranging from admission essays to theses as reported by over 300 NCHC members.

Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges by Samuel Schuman (Third Edition, 2011, 80pp). Practical and comprehensive advice on creating and managing honors programs with particular emphasis on colleges with fewer than 4,000 students.

The Honors Thesis: A Handbook for Honors Directors, Deans, and Faculty Advisors by Mark Anderson, Karen Lyons, and Norman Weiner (2014, 176pp). To all those who design, administer, and implement an honors thesis program, this handbook offers a range of options, models, best practices, and philosophies that illustrate how to evaluate an honors thesis program, solve pressing problems, select effective requirements and procedures, or introduce a new honors thesis program.

Housing Honors edited by Linda Frost, Lisa W. Kay, and Rachael Poe (2015, 352pp). This collection of essays addresses the issues of where honors lives and how honors space influences educators and students. This volume includes the results of a survey of over 400 institutions; essays on the acquisition, construction, renovation, development, and even the loss of honors space; a forum offering a range of perspectives on residential space for honors students; and a section featuring student perspectives.

If Honors Students Were People: Holistic Honors Education by Samuel Schuman (2013, 256pp). What if honors students were people? What if they were not disembodied intellects but whole persons with physical bodies and questing spirits? Of course . . . they are. This monograph examines the spiritual yearnings of college students and the relationship between exercise and learning.

Inspiring Exemplary Teaching and Learning: Perspectives on Teaching Academically Talented College Students edited by Larry Clark and John Zubizarreta (2008, 216pp). This rich collection of essays offers valuable insights into innovative teaching and significant learning in the context of academically challenging classrooms and programs. The volume provides theoretical, descriptive, and practical resources, including models of effective instructional practices, examples of successful courses designed for enhanced learning, and a list of online links to teaching and learning centers and educational databases worldwide.

Occupy Honors Education edited by Lisa L. Coleman, Jonathan D. Kotinek, and Alan Y. Oda (2017, 394pp). This collection of essays issues a call to honors to make diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence its central mission and ongoing state of mind. Echoing the AAC&U declaration “without inclusion there is no true excellence,” the authors discuss transformational diversity, why it is essential, and how to achieve it.
NCHC Monographs & Journals

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 (First Edition, 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.

Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks edited by Heather Thiessen-Reily and Joan Digby (Second Edition, 2016, 268pp). This collection of recent photographs and essays by students, faculty, and National Park Service rangers reflects upon PITP experiential-learning projects in new NPS locations, offers significant refinements in programming and curriculum for revisited projects, and provides strategies and tools for assessing PITP adventures.

Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning edited by Bernice Braid and Ada Long (Second Edition, 2010, 128pp). Updated theory, information, and advice on experiential pedagogies developed within NCHC during the past 35 years, including Honors Semesters and City as Text™, along with suggested adaptations to multiple educational contexts.

Preparing Tomorrow’s Global Leaders: Honors International Education edited by Mary Kay Mulvaney and Kim Klein (2013, 400pp). A valuable resource for initiating or expanding honors study abroad programs, these essays examine theoretical issues, curricular and faculty development, assessment, funding, and security. The monograph also provides models of successful programs that incorporate high-impact educational practices, including City as Text™ pedagogy, service learning, and undergraduate research.

Setting the Table for Diversity edited by Lisa L. Coleman and Jonathan D. Kotnik (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, Latinx, international, and first-generation students as well as students with disabilities. Other issues include experiential and service learning, the politics of diversity, and the psychological resistance to it. Appendices relating to NCHC member institutions contain diversity statements and a structural diversity survey.

Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education edited by Peter A. Machonis (2008, 160pp). A companion piece to Place as Text, focusing on recent, innovative applications of City as Text™ teaching strategies. Chapters on campus as text, local neighborhoods, study abroad, science courses, writing exercises, and philosophical considerations, with practical materials for instituting this pedagogy.

Teaching and Learning in Honors edited by Cheryl L. Fuiks and Larry Clark (2000, 128pp). Presents a variety of perspectives on teaching and learning useful to anyone developing new or renovating established honors curricula.

Writing on Your Feet: Reflective Practices in City as Text™ edited by Ada Long (2014, 160pp). A sequel to the NCHC monographs Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning and Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education, this volume explores the role of reflective writing in the process of active learning while also paying homage to the City as Text™ approach to experiential education that has been pioneered by Bernice Braid and sponsored by NCHC during the past four decades.

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

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

UReCA, The NCHC Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity, is a web-based, peer-reviewed journal edited by honors students that fosters the exchange of intellectual and creative work among undergraduates, providing a platform where all students can engage with and contribute to the advancement of their individual fields. To learn more, visit <http://www.nchc-ureca.com>.
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