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Editor's Introduction

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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Honors educators are used to organizing and teaching interdisciplinary courses and so are familiar with the paradox that faculty in different academic departments are typically unaware of what goes on in disciplines other than their own despite quickly recognizing that they have mutual interests, methodologies, and challenges. They inevitably learn about and from the work of colleagues in different fields, discovering opportunities to strengthen their scholarly and pedagogical work. They typically want and ask to teach other interdisciplinary courses and wonder why they haven't thought to do so before.

The same paradox exists in the scholarship on gifted and honors education. The two fields each have a long history of tackling many of the same challenges and coming up with creative solutions that would be invaluable to each other. While some theorists and practitioners of honors education have a history of working with their counterparts in gifted education, most are peripherally—if at all—aware of the field of gifted education even though some of the problems that perplex honors teachers have long been studied and understood by professionals in gifted education. Now, at last, formal connections between the two fields are becoming primary to the agenda of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) as it undertakes serious collaboration with the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC).

The Forum on “Gifted Education and Honors” in this issue of *JNCHC* is one of the steps toward creating understanding and connection between the two fields. Appropriately, the Forum has two lead essays, the first by a member of NAGC and the other by a member of NCHC. The following Call for Papers went out via the NCHC website, listserv, and e-newsletter inviting members to contribute to the Forum:

[This issue will] 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>

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. 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 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.

Seven essays were submitted, four of which are included in the Forum.

The first respondent, Jonathan D. Kotinek of Texas A&M University, has worked on connecting honors to gifted education since 2004 and has also worked with the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Commission on High-Achieving Students on establishing connections between the two fields. In his essay "Are You Gifted-Friendly? Understanding How Honors Contexts (Can) Serve Gifted Young Adults," he argues for "adopting an understanding of giftedness as *psychological difference* to help realize Colangelo's vision for future collaboration." He uses this concept "to address Guzy's concerns about the fit between honors programs and gifted learners by suggesting a policy and practice that is friendly to gifted learners and other students who may not fit the traditional profile of an honors student." Based on a review of the relevant scholarship on giftedness since 1971, Kotinek suggests strategies that will open honors not just to gifted students but to "other students whose academic backgrounds may not match our previous expectations but who can demonstrate the ability to benefit from and contribute to the learner-directed environment and philosophy in honors through motivation, curiosity, creativity, imagination, and intellectual exchange."

Betsy Greenleaf Yarrison of the University of Baltimore has also been long involved in the field of giftedness as well as honors and currently chairs NCHC's Special Interest Section on Education of the Gifted. In "If Not Us, Who? If Not Now, When?" Yarrison argues that gifted students are often "a marginalized minority because they are not always high achievers, their behavior is hard to predict or measure, and extrinsic motivators don't work well with them. . . ." Like Kotinek, she provides a useful overview of relevant scholarship on giftedness, leading to her argument that gifted students "are the ones who desperately want small, discussion-based classes, a chance to tackle complex, difficult problems, and opportunities for collaborative research with working scholars and undergraduate research of their own. Everything about our curricula is designed for them." Strategies like holistic admissions policies and recruiting for students in lower grades, where giftedness is detected as early as elementary school, can benefit not only these gifted students who need intellectual challenge but also honors education. When honors programs recruit and welcome gifted students, they receive the gift of students "who have demonstrated themselves to be high achievers at a point in the educational system when high achievement meant creativity,

intellectual initiative, and a sophisticated understanding of complex topics”; they thus “enhance the likelihood of admitting students who will create new knowledge rather than repackaging what is already known.”

Like Kotinek and Yarrison, the two authors of the next essay have a long history of combining honors and gifted education in their careers. Currently working in the University of Connecticut Honors Program, Jaclyn M. Chancey and Jennifer Lease Butts both wrote dissertations that “used gifted education theories as lenses into the honors student experience” and subsequently have focused their research and administrative interests on “the shared space between gifted students and honors programs.” In their essay “Gifted Students, Honors Students, and an Honors Education,” they describe the theoretical background and framework of their strategies for accommodating individualized student needs, including “academic skill development, assistance with taking creative risks, and the self-discovery of one’s interests and values.” These strategies include, among others, multiple points of entry into the honors program, eportfolios, self-determined leadership projects, and community building. The authors stress the importance of institutional context as well as the wide range of potential definitions of “giftedness,” but they offer UConn’s collaborative model as one way to adapt honors to the needs of gifted students.

In “Ways We Can Do Better: Bridging the Gap Between Gifted Education and Honors Colleges,” Angie L. Miller of Indiana University Bloomington notes the gap that she has experienced between honors and gifted education during her decade of spanning both fields. Based on her experience, she offers three suggestions for addressing the disconnection. First, she suggests a Venn diagram to determine where the characteristics and experiences of gifted honors students, non-gifted honors students, and gifted non-honors students do and do not overlap; such a diagram might well suggest ways to help different groups participate and succeed in honors. Next, she suggests that honors educators replicate the findings of research on K–12 gifted students so that “programming can be better adapted to serve them.” Finally, she advocates developing a way to compare honors with non-honors students in the same way that gifted and non-gifted students are compared in grades K–12, which can be accomplished through partnership with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which the NCHC has recently undertaken.

Each of the Forum essays emphasizes the importance of collaboration with other organizations in order best to serve students in honors. The NCHC is now undertaking just such collaboration, which promises to enrich research, teaching, and learning in honors.

In the first of four research essays, A. Musu Davis of Rutgers University provides a different context and set of issues for the terminology of “gifted” and “high-achieving,” labels that often make African American women students uncomfortable. In “Not So Gifted: Academic Identity for Black Women in Honors,” Davis addresses the misperceptions about African American women in honors at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) “that their experiences are the same as students with similar intellectual and ethnic identities and that their academic talent precludes them from needing resources to be successful.” Davis reports on her study to determine “how students in this population make meaning around their academic identity or high-achieving label.” Based on two sets of individual interviews, each roughly an hour in length, with sixteen African American women in honors at PWIs, Davis examined their responses to labels that included “smart,” “high-achieving,” “gifted,” and “academically talented.” Davis finds that these students are reluctant to define themselves with these labels despite how apt they are, having been “socialized not to talk about how intelligent or accomplished they are, particularly as Black women.” Davis describes some of the reasons for this reluctance, which include not wanting to appear “show off” or to make their peers uncomfortable, as well as the stereotype that “Black women are not commonly associated with intelligence.” Among the other implications of her study, Davis suggests “reexamination of admissions practices that exclude students who demonstrate academic talent beyond test scores as well as those who may be qualified but do not self-identify as high-achieving.”

Also arguing for reexamination of admissions policies and other honors practices is Patrick Bahls of the University of North Carolina, Asheville. In “Opening Doors: Facilitating Transfer Students’ Participation in Honors,” Bahls cites a National Student Clearinghouse report that nearly half of all four-year college graduates have attended a two-year college during the ten years before they graduated. The students “tend to represent greater ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and age diversity than students who complete their four-year degrees at one institution uninterruptedly. . . .” Taking commitment to diversity beyond simple rhetoric would include countering “the non-honors self-identification of members of traditionally underrepresented groups,” as described by Davis; advertising articulation agreements prominently on the program’s website; and eliminating “overly rigid course requirements, unrealistic ‘good-standing’ requirements, and time-consuming extra- and co-curricular expectations.” Bahls examined the honors websites of twenty-two institutions that are members of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges and describes the barriers he found for transfer students. If honors educators

are serious about their commitment to equity and diversity, they need to reduce these barriers and welcome transfer students as important contributors to their programs.

While honors educators are virtually unanimous in proclaiming their commitment to diversity and equity, a topic that has been controversial in the past two decades is the value of online learning. In “Social Media for Honors Colleges: Swipe Right or Left?” Corinne R. Green of Purdue University argues that no matter where honors educators stand on such issues, they need to “consider the likelihood of incoming classes of students who identify as digital natives.” This topic is one of many on which honors scholars can turn to research on gifted students for insights, one of which echoes Davis’s point about African American women students rejecting the label “smart”: some high school students “reported altering their online profiles for fear of being judged for certain intellectual or nontraditional interests.” Green’s study examines the social media behavior of honors students, how it compares to the behavior of non-honors students, and how programs can use social media effectively. Green adapted a survey from consumer brand research, which she administered to 600 non-honors and 400 honors freshmen at Purdue, with 36 honors and 75 non-honors students responding. Among her findings were that “honors students interact less with their college online than their non-honors counterparts” and that honors students were less likely to use Facebook and more likely to use email. Among the possible causes, again echoing Davis, Green suggests “the fear of looking too intelligent in front of classmates.” Honors educators should be aware that “if honors students avoid technology for fear of ostracism, they may miss out on learning critical technology skill sets that are required for new careers.”

The final essay in this issue of *JNCHC*, “The Value of Honors: A Study of Alumni Perspectives on Skills Gained Through Honors Education,” presents the results of a survey distributed to graduates of the South Dakota State University (SDSU) Honors College. The authors—Christopher M. Kotschegar and Rebecca C. Bott-Knutson of SDSU and Surachat Ngorsuraches of Auburn University—designed the survey “to fill a gap in honors research by identifying what skills honors graduates value from their honors education and determining whether post-graduation value aligns with the SDSU Honors College’s student learning outcomes.” The survey identified eleven skills and asked the participants, all of whom graduated between 2003 and 2017, whether they had gained these skills through their experience in the SDSU Honors College and whether the skills had affected them “personally,

professionally, in both ways, or in neither way.” At least half of the graduates responded positively about each of the skills. Another seventeen items focused on the desired outcomes of the SDSU Honors College and asked respondents to indicate whether they had achieved these outcomes; all responses had a mean score of over three on a Likert scale. The framework of this study is applicable to the self-assessment of any honors program or college. Further, the findings help “point toward the justification of an honors education and demonstrate that while there is room for improvement, the current value of honors goes beyond undergraduate education by actively contributing to the lives of honors alumni both professionally and personally.”

