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CURRENT CHALLENGES TO HONORS EDUCATION

JOURNAL EDITOR
Ada Long
University of Alabama at Birmingham

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The next issue of *JNCHC* (deadline: September 1, 2019) invites research essays on any topic of interest to the honors community.

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

The lead essay for the Forum, which is posted on the NCHC website <https://www.nchchonors.org/uploaded/NCHC_FILES/Pubs/Risky_Honors.pdf?1552674194168>, is by Andrew Cognard-Black. In his essay, “Risky Honors,” he surmises that honors educators almost all encourage their students to take risks. Starting with Joseph Cohen in 1966, a recurrent honors mantra has been that honors students “want to be ‘threatened,’ i.e., compelled to question and to reexamine”; they need and want to question their values and the values of their community. This mandate is now subsumed in the “critical thinking” movement. Cognard-Black challenges us to formulate strategies for implementing this mandate when we know that students have to weigh it against the importance of grades: “higher education is clearly a high-stakes enterprise, and grades are the most visible currency in that enterprise.” The motivation for students to play it safe is real and compelling, so honors educators need to come up with strategies to encourage their students to take risks while at the same time acknowledging the forces that discourage them from doing so. Cognard-Black suggests one method for resolving this tension and dares honors educators to come up with others.

In addition to meeting Cognard-Black’s challenge, Forum contributors might consider other questions such as the following:

- What might be the benefits and liabilities of the “automatic A” policy that Cognard-Black describes, and how could it be modified?
- If teachers reward students for risky behavior, is it really risky?
- Do teachers model risk aversion when they adopt grading or assessment policies that are required by their institution but that they find counter to their values?
- Tenure, promotion, and salary raises are the currency of academic employment in a way similar to the status of grades for students; are faculty members hypocritical when they preach risk-taking to students but play it safe in placing their personal advancement above, say, long-term research projects or commitments to teaching that do not yield such rewards?
- Is critical thinking so fully the lingua franca of the academic world now that it is the safe route for students rather than the risky path of stubbornly holding onto their cultural, intellectual, religious, or political beliefs?
Information about *JNCHC*—including the editorial policy, submission guidelines, guidelines for abstracts and keywords, and a style sheet—are also available on the NCHC website: <http://www.nchchonors.org/resources/nchc-publications/editorial-policies>.

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

### EDITORIAL POLICY

*Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)* 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, discussions of problems common to honors programs and colleges, items on the national higher education agenda, research on assessment, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education. Bibliographies of *JNCHC*, *HIP*, and the NCHC Monograph Series on the NCHC website provide past treatments of topics that an author should consider.

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 e-mail 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.), employing internal citation to a list of references (bibliography).

All submissions to the journals must include an abstract of no more than 250 words and a list of no more than five keywords.

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.
What Most People Know about Linda

A Professor of English, Linda Frost has been active in honors since 2004, first as Associate Director at the University of Alabama Birmingham, then as Director at Eastern Kentucky University, and now as Dean of the Honors College at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Linda is a member of the NCHC Board of Directors, co-chair of the Publications Board, and a member of the Conference Planning Committee. For six years, she ran the NCHC Newsletter Contest, and she has served in the gamut of offices, including president, of the Southern Regional Honors Council.

In honors, Linda has published four articles in JNCHC; co-edited the monograph Housing Honors in which she also has a chapter; took the lead in founding UReCA: The NCHC Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity in 2017; and at latest count has given nineteen presentations at NCHC conferences.

What distinguishes Linda is the combination of versatility, energy, integrity, and respect with which she approaches all her work. She exercises this combination of traits in her approach to texts, colleagues, fellow scholars, and
students at every level of capability. She is open to new ideologies and personalities while at the same time passionately standing up for her own clearly articulated standards and theoretical perspectives. She has brought all these talents to the NCHC and become an essential contributor to the organization’s success.

What Few People Know about Linda

In her field of American Studies, she has also published numerous articles, given countless presentations, and published two books with the tantalizing titles *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, 1850–1877* and *Conjoined Twins in Black and White: The Lives of Millie-Christine McKoy and Daisy and Violet Hilton*. She also founded and edited for seven years *PMS poemmemoirstory*, a journal of women’s literature that became a nationally recognized, award-winning publication, and she has published twenty-four of her own poems in other literary journals.

What Everybody Knows about Linda

She is a human whirlwind. One minute, she’s three inches from your face, waving her arms in excitement about some new idea she has for an honors project, the next minute she is running off to hug a former student, and then she is ducking into a conference room to give a presentation. Linda Frost is the Road Runner of NCHC, with Wile E. Coyote never able to catch up, but we hope she stops long enough to accept our collective hug for all she has contributed to NCHC.
Academics are proficient in the art of complaining. Behind closed doors or in faculty senate meetings, the well-honed quibble can be a portal into instant respect and in-group status. From freshman composition through the dissertation defense, critical thinking has nurtured in us the rhetoric of grievance, sharpening its edges until it gleams with a fine luster, enchanting the listener almost as much as the practitioner.

Nevertheless, Richard Badenhausen, despite his impeccable academic credentials, brazenly invited us to abandon the enchantments of grousing and to pursue practical fixes for our problems in honors. His invitation was issued in this Call for Papers:

The next issue of *JNCHC* (deadline: March 1, 2019) invites research essays on any topic of interest to the honors community.

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

The lead essay for the Forum, which is posted on the NCHC website <https://www.nchchonors.org/uploaded/NCHC_FILES/Pubs/Shunning_Complaint.pdf?15413823235179>, is by Richard Badenhausen of Westminster College. In his essay, “Shunning Complaint: A Call for Solutions from the Honors Community,” Badenhausen asks readers to consider the weightiest problems currently facing honors education and then home in on one of them, not just to complain about the problem but to “lay out the path” toward a solution.

Badenhausen’s essay is itself a Call for Papers, clearly explaining the kinds of essays he hopes to elicit, ones that take on “intractable, sticky problems that have no easy answers and require complex solutions, strategic thinking, long-term effort, and collaboration with multiple units.” Examples he provides include the need for pathways into honors for underrepresented groups; the prevalence of mental, domestic, and economic challenges faced by our students; the increasing number of AP and IB credits that students bring with them into honors;
legislative agendas that threaten to compromise or undermine honors education; the fact that honors innovations are often coopted by and credited to other organizations; the need to place honors at the center of our campus cultures; and the growing disrespect for the written word. None of these challenges has an easy answer, and many other obstacles in the path of honors also merit substantial consideration in the quest for creative solutions. The hard part is not defining the problems but imagining ways through them.

Of the many responses to Badenhausen’s call, nine are included in the Forum on “Current Challenges to Honors Education.” The Forum is followed by four research essays on honors topics.

Four of the Forum essays address primarily “the need for pathways into honors for underrepresented groups,” the first among Badenhausen’s list of challenges and a priority for the NCHC. Badenhausen’s predecessor as president of the NCHC, Naomi Yavneh Klos of Loyola University New Orleans, devoted her presidential year to promoting diversity, mutual respect, and a shared sense of belonging in honors and in the organization. Her essay, “Congregational Honors: A Model for Inclusive Excellence,” is aptly the first response to Badenhausen’s call for solutions. Her response draws on Ron Wolfson’s book *Relational Judaism* to suggest that honors programs have much in common with communities of faith, where, in Wolfson’s words, “What really matters is that we care about the people we seek to engage.” Yavneh Klos argues that we need to engage a diverse range of students not as guests, who are required to be on their best behavior and who know that they are not fully part of the family or congregation, but as people who belong. In order to make all students part of an in-group, we need to learn, acknowledge, and respect who they are; the responsibility belongs to the congregation of honors to welcome all its members and to respect their individual integrity and dignity. Yavneh Klos offers a range of practical measures that can make a program welcoming, from admissions policies to “grace periods,” but the precondition of all student-centered policies, she writes, is a community of caring and respect.

Like Yavneh Klos, Kathryn M. MacDonald of Monroe College provides specific strategies for meeting the challenge of implementing not just a diverse but a welcoming and accommodating honors program. In “Taking on the Challenges of Diversity and Visibility: Thoughts from a Small Honors Program,” MacDonald emphasizes that solutions to the challenges that honors programs face include, above all, acknowledging the challenges that
students face when they do not come from privileged backgrounds. Monroe is a small college with two campuses—one in the Bronx and the other in New Rochelle—that attract large numbers of Hispanic and Black students, among other minority populations, who lack the support, free time, and resources that traditional students often take for granted. The key to their success, as Yavneh Klos also noted, is getting to know the students personally, so Monroe has developed mentoring and support systems to meet individual needs as well as flexible curricular and extracurricular scheduling. MacDonald also offers strategies for making the program and its students visible across campus.

Sharing the values and goals of both Yavneh Klos and MacDonald, Betsy Greenleaf Yarrison of the University of Baltimore offers in “The Case for Heterodoxy” an interesting trio of strategies for achieving these goals: “radical hospitality, asset-based thinking, and heterodoxy.” She makes the case that European education stressed rationality and an “adversarial model of advancing erudition” that was designed by and for privileged white men, effectively excluding, for instance, women and African Americans. Women, she contends, have adopted the combat model in the knowledge that it is necessary to academic success in higher education and in honors programs, but minority groups have found this model a bad fit and have either been excluded from honors or allowed in only through a back door. “Radical hospitality” would welcome these groups in through the front door by adopting “asset-based rather than deficit-based” thinking, looking not at low test scores, for instance, but at what makes these students unique and what they have accomplished in areas that may not be academic at all. We need to reconsider the orthodoxy of our thinking about honors, much of which is codified in the Basic Characteristics. Instead, Yarrison contends, we should imagine “standards of academic excellence that are not derived from the patriarchal Athenian and Talmudic models” and that welcome a diverse community of students.

Jennie Woodard provides one detailed example of an honors project at the University of Maine that encourages diversity and social justice such as Yavneh Klos, MacDonald, and Yarrison would likely admire. In “The Power of Creation: Critical Imagination in the Honors Classroom,” Woodard describes the challenge of finding a way to “make space for all students to work on a problem of their own choosing and use their imagination to solve the problem while at the same time maintaining structure within the classroom”; her solution is to have “each student imagine and design a television pilot that addresses issues of diversity and social justice.” One student came up with a
sci fi TV series starring an African American deaf woman. Another created a series about working women of “various races and ages, with at least one transgender woman.” The project engaged both creativity and critical thinking in the opportunity “to find and practice agency” as students brought their own interests and voices to the creation of a project.

Addressing a different but related challenge, Anne Dotter of the University of Kansas takes on Badenhausen’s question about how we should “situate honors education in a culture that devalues the written word, has little time or patience for reflection and critical thinking, valorizes violence against those among us with the least amount of power, and imagines the truth itself as something of little consequence[.]” In “With Great Privilege Comes Great Responsibility,” Dotter advocates accommodating a diverse range of students such as the previous authors proposed, focusing also on the professional necessity of understanding and connecting to people different from ourselves. Dotter focuses not on increasing the diversity of our honors programs but on sensitizing our students to the bigotry and oppression that “others” have experienced in our culture in order to better grasp who they are. She argues that in encouraging the goals of cultural understanding and social justice, honors educators should “intentionally expos[e] our students to the history of violence and horrors perpetrated against the most vulnerable, thereby helping to interrupt patterns of oppression.” She concludes: “Our willingness to introduce our students to histories of the horrors on which our collective privileges rest and to inspire our students to become change agents may bring us closer to a more just university and more just society.”

Linda Frost of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga takes on the more practical challenge posed by Badenhausen’s question “How should we manage external headwinds created by the dual beasts of concurrent enrollment and equivalency credit awarded for performance on AP or IB exams?” Badenhausen also poses the related challenge of government funding that is limited to courses in a major or leading to a degree, directly threatening funding for honors curricula. In “No Complaints, Please; Just Time to Rethink Honors,” Frost argues that “we cannot simply pretend that these truths don’t apply to our students.” She argues that we need to adapt to these inexorable headwinds by changing the NCHC’s mandate that an honors program or college have a minimum percentage of coursework in honors. We need to stop defining honors as course credits and to see the AP/IB tide as an opportunity to define what we do in new ways and with new structures. We also need to accept that major innovations developed within the NCHC (experiential
education and undergraduate research, for instance) have now been coopted by other segments of our institutions and by national organizations such as NCUR and AAC&U, so we need to get to work on a new set of innovations to define honors. Frost suggests some ways we might get started.

While Frost suggests ways to adapt positively to the rising tide of encroachments on traditional honors curricula such as the prevalence of AP and IB credit for college requirements, Jodi J. Meadows argues for standing firm against this trend even though, paradoxically, her desired outcomes are similar to Frost’s. In “Resisting Commodification in Honors Education,” Meadows argues that in honors we can and should “unpack this transactional model of education and uncover the inherent joy of learning.” Using her honors program at Southwest Baptist University as a model, she addresses ways that we can counteract the goals of good grades, good jobs, and good pay with “joyful, self-directed learning.” We can help students “develop language to distinguish between education as a credential and learning as an opportunity for growth.” Having been trained throughout their pre-college education to see learning as “grades, behavior management, and competition between students,” students experience a new curiosity and pleasure in learning when honors encourages them to choose their own path through college and indulge their own passions and interests. When students have power over their learning, starting with admissions and including their curricular and extracurricular choices, their natural curiosity displaces the transactional model, making them eager to learn, and we should not sacrifice this eagerness by succumbing to new trends toward commodification.

Shifting to another of Badenhausen’s challenges, the essay “Honors and the Curiouser University” by Kristine A. Miller of Utah State University addresses this question: “How do we put honors programs and colleges at the center of the institutional lives of our colleges and universities . . . as units to which institutions look for leadership and on which the institutions depend?” Miller’s answer is “curiosity”: “Through cross-disciplinary programming, innovative reward systems, campus-wide messaging, and broad partnership development, honors programs and colleges can and should lead their institutions in curious collaboration.” Curiosity and collaboration, she argues, are the core of the liberal arts tradition, as evidenced in the frequency of their appearance in liberal arts colleges’ mission statements. She describes numerous specific programs and strategies through which the Utah State University Honors Program “incentivizes and operationalizes a ‘curiouser’ institutional culture” and which can serve as models for other honors programs and
colleges. She contends, “When honors students, staff, faculty, and administrators consider what we can do with and for other entities on campus—rather than what those entities can do for us—we become indispensable institutional leaders.”

Annmarie Guzy of the University of South Alabama takes a step further than Miller and argues that not only should honors programs be leaders of their institutions but the NCHC, through the medium of well-informed faculties, should be institutional leaders throughout the country. In “Faculty as Honors Problem Solvers,” Guzy argues that the NCHC has fruitfully addressed many of the challenges that Badenhausen lists. Honors administrators experience high turnover, however, so the accumulated wisdom about solutions to honors problems tends to get lost. While honors directors and deans come and go in the NCHC and in their administrative roles on campus, honors teachers are more permanent “keepers of institutional honors memory.” The problem is that faculty at member institutions have often not been privy to the discussions and potential solutions that the NCHC has produced through its publications, conferences, online messaging, and faculty development workshops. In addition to developing a strong cadre of dedicated honors faculty, administrators should make sure that teachers have access to the wisdom accrued by the NCHC. Guzy cites monographs and journal articles and other NCHC resources that should be a focus of faculty retreats and study groups. In this way, faculty can be an active part of honors problem solving and leadership on their own campus and beyond.

Moving now into a collection of four research essays, we first encounter suggestions for solving another challenge to diversity in honors: how to welcome transfer students. Going beyond welcoming to supporting transfers students is the subject of “Being Honors Worthy: Lessons in Supporting Transfer Students” by Carolyn Thomas, Eddy A. Ruiz, Heidi van Beek, J. David Furlow, and Jennifer Sedell. At the University of California, Davis, the honors program has provided numerous forms of support: “visible entry portals for transfer students”; “[s]hared course experiences among cohorts of transfer students”; a “clear curriculum that recognizes the distinct requirements for transfer students and their aims within our institutions”; “connections between transfer students and faculty who can open doors to research and success within and beyond the institution”; and “strategies to prevent transfer students from feeling that they do not belong at our institutions.” The authors first present the results of a statistical self-assessment they conducted on the honors program’s success in supporting transfer students,
focusing on admissions, academic performance, and research engagement. Then, they present the results of qualitative assessment through focus groups and the adjustments they made in the program based on the results of this assessment, such as revising their website and changing the GPA requirement. The authors argue and demonstrate that honors educators need to build “a sense of belonging into all elements of our programs if we want our transfer students to feel at home.”

Carolyn Thomas et al. stressed that an important support for transfer students was faculty/student mentor relationships, and the next essay describes how best to develop such relationships between all honors students and faculty members. In “Understanding the Development of Honors Students’ Connections with Faculty,” Shannon R. Dean describes her study at Texas State University that determined the two most important influences on such connections are the “approachability of faculty and motivation of students.” The study used “a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach” in which “the participants reflected back on their first year of college and described their connection with a faculty member.” The study reinforced the validity of previous research indicating that faculty/student interactions are one of the key factors in retention of first-year students and in overall student satisfaction.

We conclude this issue of *JNCHC* with two important research papers based on recent national survey data. The first is “Creating a Profile of an Honors Student: A Comparison of Honors and Non-Honors Students at Public Research Universities in the United States” by Andrew J. Cognard-Black of St. Mary’s College of Maryland and Art L. Spisak of the University of Iowa. The authors analyze the results of the 2018 *Student Experience in the Research University* (SERU) Survey of 19 research universities with almost 119,000 undergraduate students, 15,280 of whom reported current participation in or completion of an honors program. Following an account of previous related research studies based on much smaller samples of students, Cognard-Black and Spisak present and analyze “side-by-side comparisons of honors and non-honors students on selected indicators in the SERU data set.” Among their interesting findings is that while racial and ethnic disparities are common among research universities, which are “already fairly racially homogenous,” honors programs have significantly greater disparities, and the same is true for lower-income and first-generation students. By contrast, honors programs reflect the general student population in gender, sexual orientation, mental health concerns, and differently-abled students. Other comparisons show
that honors students matriculate with roughly equivalent high school GPAs but significantly higher national test scores than non-honors students, and they subsequently report a higher level of satisfaction, but they express similar motivations for choosing a major. As seniors, the honors students have substantially higher GPAs than their non-honors peers and higher averages for positive “high-impact practices and other meaningful undergraduate experiences.” The authors include in their essay suggestions of how their numerous and detailed comparisons can be useful to honors educators.

The second national-survey-based essay is “Disciplinary Affiliation and Administrators’ Reported Perception and Use of Assessment” by Patricia J. Smith of the University of Central Arkansas and Andrew J. Cognard-Black of St. Mary’s College. Analyzing a survey of 269 participants from among the NCHC’s members, the authors first examine any changes that might have occurred in the disciplinary affiliations of honors administrators during the past twenty years, and then they explore associations between current honors administrators’ academic disciplines and their uses of, as well as attitudes toward, outcomes assessment. The study showed that no significant change in the disciplinary affiliations of honors administrators has occurred in the past twenty years, with roughly 45% in the traditional humanities and another 30% or so in the social sciences. The authors’ primary conclusion about assessment is that “those in the arts and humanities or social sciences were more likely to think that too much importance is placed on assessment and that they would be less likely than those in education to participate in outcomes assessment if it were not required.” Smith and Cognard-Black offer some nuanced discussion of this and other conclusions they drew from their studies, leading them to propose more support and training from the NCHC in the area of outcomes assessment.
CURRENT CHALLENGES TO HONORS EDUCATION
Shunning Complaint: 
A Call for Solutions from the Honors Community

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Abstract: While members of the academy are particularly adept at complaining and poking holes in most proposals that cross their paths, we are less comfortable with offering solutions. This essay asks members of the honors community to consider some of the major challenges facing honors education today and propose solutions that might be adapted on a variety of campuses. Rather than asking respondents to take up rather straightforward issues that commonly face honors program and colleges, this piece urges readers to dig into more intractable problems like access, mental health, innovation, and the position of honors on campus.

Keywords: honors, challenges, administration, innovation, liberal education

Academics are really good at complaining. We poke holes in proposals, tear away at suggestions, and like nothing more than bringing down a project with which we disagree. These tendencies are partly habitual, and we are also falling back on our training, having spent many years sifting through arguments, exposing the weak underbelly of positions, and burying opponents in counterarguments. We often call this behavior “critical thinking” although sometimes the word “critical” can cut a few different ways. Among the many reasons it is hard to enact change in colleges and universities, our habit of criticizing proposals surely plays a role in slowing things down.

Such conduct should not surprise: the academy has always been grounded in this kind of rigorous, aggressive, critical reflection that often highlights objection and refutation. From Plato’s account of Socrates playing the gadfly and peppering his companions with challenging questions to Zadie Smith's portrayal of feuding professors in her delightful novel On Beauty, we have many models of intellectual disputation from which to choose. The very
academic air we breathe seems infused with complaint. When an NCHC committee asked me to write a brief Forum piece on challenges faced by the honors community, I encountered no shortage of voices listing the ways our industry is beset by dire circumstances. When it came time to discuss solutions, though, the room grew quiet.

To counter that silence, I would like to generate a Forum discussion around solutions. My plan is to enumerate significant challenges faced by those of us in honors and encourage respondents to pick one or another weighty problem and lay out the path through that challenge. I invite writers to provide a map that helps us navigate particularly significant challenges in the belief that such guidance will benefit our honors colleagues throughout the country and around the globe. Because so many of us face common problems, I am asking us to put aside our critical lens for a moment in this discussion, identify a challenge, and unfold a solution, which Emerson personified in his poem “Solution” as a “muse” who can “lead / Bards to speak what nations need” (173–74).

In the last decade, I have served as a visiting consultant or reviewer at sixteen campuses with honors programs or honors colleges. The task is fun and interesting but also difficult, for it combines the relational work of getting strangers to open up about their everyday professional lives with the strategic work of sifting through dozens of pages of interview notes to pull out the handful of key areas the institution should focus on. The interview subjects—students, faculty, staff, and administrators—are always particularly good at identifying problems. Sometimes I feel more like a therapist than a program reviewer. The problems can typically be divided into two categories: 1) granular, tangible, manageable problems that have clear, relatively easy solutions, which thus provide the opportunity for “quick wins” in administrative parlance; and 2) larger, more intractable, sticky problems that have no easy answers and require complex solutions, strategic thinking, long-term effort, and collaboration with multiple units. Most of our institutions are resistant to this type of work, and many administrators, including those in honors, who first trained as teachers do not naturally possess the skillsets necessary to navigate such challenges.

In that first category of manageable problems that often surface during peer reviews, I include a lack of community among students, a stale curriculum, an absent or incoherent mission, uninspiring programming, bad advising, and poor leadership. These self-inflicted wounds have internal causes and can be worked on directly. Such issues surface repeatedly as topics of interest in the program of our annual conference, where sessions provide excellent playbooks for how to overcome the challenges.
Other issues have more external sources—lack of appropriate resources; administrative neglect or, its other extreme, administrative meddling; incompetent admissions offices or enrollment management outfits that play too large a role in determining the size and makeup of an honors cohort—but they have similarly tangible solutions. These solutions are a little harder because they require engagement and negotiation with external constituencies, but they are not intractable problems and are often addressed in NCHC’s “Basic Characteristics.” Some are simply a matter of degree: living on the extreme edges of problems (with a program that possesses too many or too few students, for example), many of us search for a Goldilocks situation of getting things “just right,” or in more academic terms, we hope to follow Aristotle’s path in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he proposes famously that “virtue aims at the median” (43). Just as moral qualities can be destroyed by deficiencies or over-abundance, so too can our programs suffer from extremities of degree.

For this Forum, though, I ask writers to take up our larger collective challenges and dig into a conversation about how we can go at them as individuals, as programs, as institutions, and as a membership organization. Here are some examples:

- How do we create pathways into our honors programs and colleges for students from underrepresented groups when faced with the reality that honors programs and colleges are still predominantly white? In what ways do our practices ignore the monumental demographic shifts taking place in our country and universities, and how might we better serve all members of our communities? The statistics indicate that we seem to be ignoring the significant shifts taking place in our country and universities while also indicating that our programs are not serving all members of our communities.

- How do we directly address the fact that many of the students sitting in our classrooms are overwhelmed by mental health problems, difficult family responsibilities, and economic challenges? It is hard for students to unpack the meaning of a sonnet with a group of peers or study for a difficult physics exam when they are beset by anxiety, holding down two part-time jobs, and plagued by food insecurity.

- How should we manage external headwinds created by the dual beasts of concurrent enrollment and equivalency credit awarded for performance on AP or IB exams? This trend shows no sign of abating and threatens to make some honors programs—particularly those in which
the curriculum satisfies general education requirements—superfluous or redundant, given that the most likely consumers of these transfer equivalency credits will be the high-achieving students who typically get funneled toward honors.

- On a related matter, how should those of us in public institutions that are beholden to legislatures respond to legislators’ ignorance or indifference to the value of honors education? For example, in some cases federal aid dollars may not be applied to coursework that is outside the major or does not apply directly to a degree. Should we adapt our programs to align with these constraints, or should we push back aggressively against such limitations? What would such resistance look like?

- How should we innovate inside and outside our classrooms in a world that claims to reward innovation but defines that term in narrow ways, often in ways that emphasize minimizing costs and eroding quality? If we are to innovate, how does the honors community do a better job of taking credit for and owning the innovation, given our mixed track record in that regard? While we have often been leaders in areas like experiential and place-based learning, interdisciplinary education, and civic engagement, we have not typically been directly associated with those practices in the higher education industry and have been left behind by groups like AAC&U, which have done a far better job of branding work like “high-impact learning practices” that have been a staple of honors education for decades.

- How do we put honors programs and colleges at the center of the institutional lives of our colleges and universities, not simply as a “laboratory” where faculty might “experiment” with new ways of teaching that might eventually drift “across campus,” to use the language of NCHC’s “Basic Characteristics,” but as essential and central units to which institutions look for leadership and on which the institutions depend?

- How should we situate honors education in a culture that devalues the written word, has little time or patience for reflection and critical thinking, valorizes violence against those among us with the least amount of power, and imagines that truth itself as something of little consequence? What responsibility do we have to orient our work with students toward these horrors?

Many other conundrums are worth identifying, and I am asking colleagues to wrestle with the hard problems that possess no clean, easy, obvious solutions.
How should the honors community respond to these challenges? What is an honors director or dean to do?

I realize that solutions to complex, sometimes intractable problems are not easy. The word “solution” does not appear in any of Shakespeare’s works, not even once. Certainly his characters are beset by many problems, so we would assume someone would eventually show up on stage to trot out a couple of solutions. While the plays have no shortage of Polonius-like characters proposing fixes that end up making matters worse, no one actually uses the specific word, as if Shakespeare realized that the world we inhabit is so complex and vexing and the human beings within that “great globe” so imperfect that he could not stomach writing the word “solutions.” I nevertheless feel that our honors community is equipped to step in and help. We are made up of optimists who care deeply about the learning environment of the classroom, the craft of teaching, and the well-being of students. We are a charitable bunch who like to get things done, even in the face of meddling by the Menos of the world, those who are so certain in their definitions of excellence but who are really mired in *doxa* or mere opinion. The antidote to such foolishness, according to William Deresiewicz, is liberal education, for it “liberates us from *doxa* by teaching us to recognize it, to question it, and to think our way around it” (80).

I’m done complaining; now have at it.

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Congregational Honors: 
A Model for Inclusive Excellence

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Abstract: This essay proposes a conception of honors programs and colleges as sacred communities that acknowledge and embrace the unique human dignity of each of their members. Drawing on Ron Wolfson’s congregational model articulated in *Relational Judaism*, McMillan and Chavis’s definition of “sense of community,” and the pedagogy of educators such as Paolo Freire and bell hooks, I argue that to create a true culture of inclusive excellence, an honors program or college should not be constructed as a checklist of “exceptional experiences for exceptional students” but rather as a “community of relationships.” Leading with a student-centered, holistic focus that recognizes and cherishes the specific students served by an institution enables proactive engagement with what Richard Badenhausen has termed the “monumental demographic shifts” in higher education and expands the frequently too narrow conception of who belongs in honors. It also requires grounding our efforts in the data (from the American College Health Association and the U.S. Governmental Affairs Office, among others) reflecting that 55% of U.S. college students reported being diagnosed with or treated for an illness or disability in the past twelve months, more than 88% have felt overwhelmed, 64% report anxiety, and 30% are food insecure, while 51.7% have found academics “traumatic or very difficult.” The essay concludes by offering concrete strategies for creating authentically relational communities by ensuring that honors programs, advising, and coursework are specifically designed to recognize and welcome the diverse and complex intersectional identities of students and to address the myriad challenges they may face.

Keywords: honors pedagogy, holistic education, spirituality, diversity, and inclusive excellence
A sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together. —McMillan and Chavis (1986), 9

When we believe that we will be welcome, that we fit or belong in a community, we have a stronger attraction to that community.

—McMillan (1996), 317

In 2013, every Jewish professional (or professional Jew) in New Orleans seemed to be reading Ron Wolfson’s *Relational Judaism*. The book was required reading for the staff at the Greater New Orleans Jewish Federation and at the two campuses of the Jewish Community Center (JCC). At my almost two hundred-year-old synagogue, Touro, where the book was the summer “common read” for the clergy, lay staff, and 36-member Board of Trustees, at least five people offered to lend me their copies. Many more encouraged me to buy a copy of my own. “You have to read this book,” one friend said to me, “but I just can’t bear to give you mine!” What, I wondered, was in this book that seemingly everyone in my faith community was reading but of which no one at my Jesuit and Catholic faith-based institution had heard?

Although I dutifully downloaded the book into my iPad, I didn’t actually begin reading *Relational Judaism* until I was flying home from my first National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) board meeting, where, as at Loyola, no one had even heard the title of this allegedly transformative volume. I still remember the sense of revelation as I highlighted these words, in pink, from Wolfson’s introduction:

But improved signage, greeters at the door, and name tags represent only the beginning of a transformative process that moves an institution from an ostensibly busy place with a calendar full of programs to an organization deeply committed to becoming a community of relationships. What really matters is that we care about the people we seek to engage. When we genuinely care about people, we will not only welcome them; we will listen to their stories, we will share ours, and we will join together to build a . . . community that enriches our lives. (4–5, emphasis mine)
Although Wolfson was referring to synagogues—communities that, by definition, are organized around a faith orientation and set of values—his deceptively simple words are valuable for the honors community as well: “What really matters is that we care about the people we seek to engage.” The ideology of honors gives primacy to a holistic concern for students and a pedagogy that eschews the “banking model” of education, described by Paulo Freire and others, in which the active, powerful teacher is envisioned as depositing information into the passive student’s account (see also hooks, among others); rather, honors embraces engaged, experiential, discussion- and discovery-based learning. Beyond pedagogy, many honors programs are, like faith-based communities, oriented around core values: civic engagement or social justice, for example. However, as in the synagogues Wolfson describes, despite engaged classrooms, values-oriented coursework, and themed-living communities, honors colleges and programs, as well as students themselves, frequently approach and frame the honors experience as a checklist of curricular, co-curricular, and other requirements.

To be truly transformative, an honors program or college must conceive of itself as more than a checklist of “exceptional experiences for exceptional students.” Rather, we must start with a student-centered focus that not only “cares about students” but recognizes and cherishes the specific students we serve, that embraces what Richard Badenhausen terms the “monumental demographic shifts” in higher education, and starts from the premise that many in our communities are “overwhelmed.” A “community of relationships” welcomes members and listens to them, leading and extending from the lived reality of those it includes to build a shared space that, in turn, invites in and welcomes others. In short, we must create congregations.

Some readers may find the idea of a congregational model of honors unsettling, or even inappropriate. In academic settings, conversations that reference faith even vaguely are frequently greeted with suspicion or misunderstanding. (Are you dealing with a crackpot? Or worse, a conservative?) Many have experienced congregations or faith-based communities as far from welcoming. But, although the percentage of those in the U.S. with no religious affiliation is growing rapidly—according to a 2015 study by the Pew Research Institute, 35% of millennials identify as “nones” (Lipka) and many people feel discomfort around questions of religion per se—the human craving for community is almost universal. Whether or not they belong to a mosque or a church, people want a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves, whether it is advocating for a cause, campaigning for a candidate, or
screaming their heads off for the Steelers or the Boston Red Sox. In students, “sense of belonging” (or lack thereof) is a strong predictor of retention, graduation, and student wellbeing (see, for example, Supiano).

An advertising campaign from the 1960s signaled the mainstreaming of rye bread in declaring, “You don’t have to be Jewish to love Levy’s.” Similarly, I would argue that you do not have to be religious to lead a congregation. What distinguishes a congregation, in the sense in which I am using the word, is that it is a community that originates in a foundational understanding of the innate dignity of each individual human being. Whether that understanding, in turn, is grounded in a belief that, as my own tradition holds, we are created *betzelim elohim* (“in the image and likeness of God”), we can all strive to create relational communities, where students, along with faculty, administrators, and staff, feel welcome to bring their full, authentic selves, and where the unique, human value of each individual is respected and embraced. This community is one where everyone is not expected to dress or think the same way or to engage in all the same activities; it embraces Goths and those into anime, preppies and gamers, trans- and cisgender students, first-generation students and those whose great-grandparents went to college. Starting from the premise that each member is not simply a checklist of identities but a uniquely valued individual, worthy of love, allows us to bring the full spectrum of the community together in a space where we can find common ground across differences, respectful disagreement, shared values, and support.

Psychologists David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis have defined a “sense of community” as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (9). As such, a true community, like truly engaged pedagogy, goes beyond the transactional to a space of collaboration, where individuals are supported and cared for by each other. Authentically welcoming students and listening to their stories can create the “sense of belonging” that we know has a profound impact on whether students persist in or graduate from either honors or its institution. The community of “genuinely caring about people” that Wolfson calls for and “listening to their stories” require that we intentionally address stereotype threat (the fear that one is at risk of conforming to negative stereotypes about one’s identity) and imposter syndrome (in which students doubt their accomplishments and fear being revealed as frauds), both of which can be especially challenging to students who may be first in their families to attend college, living in poverty, suffering from mental illness, or identifying with a marginalized community.
A people-first community also requires that we attend to data. A 2019 Government Affairs Office meta-review of thirty-one studies suggested that an estimated 30% of United States college students are food insecure (Harris). According to the National College Health Assessment conducted by the American College Health Association (ACHA), 55.4% of college students reported being diagnosed with or treated for an illness or disability in the past twelve months; 55% reported having felt hopeless; more than 88% reported feeling overwhelmed by all they have to do; 64% reported anxiety; and 64% reported that they have felt very lonely. The same study found that 51.7% of those surveyed reported that, in the past twelve months, academics had been “traumatic or very difficult to handle.”

Although we may talk about increasing diversity in honors, students who are of color, who are transgender, who live in poverty, who are parents or veterans, or who are the first in their families to attend college may not perceive themselves as welcomed or even invited. Citing research by Lee Daniels, Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner drew out the metaphor of students of color feeling not like family but like “guests in someone else’s house.”

Guests are not family, whose foibles and mistakes are tolerated. . . . Guests must follow the family’s wishes without question, keep out of certain rooms in the house, and always be on their best behavior. . . . Guests have no history in the house they occupy. There are no photographs on the wall that reflect their image. (356)

Although Turner was writing in the 1990s, recent studies strongly suggest that campus climate has not improved dramatically for many students. Elsewhere, I have called for honors admissions policies to move from a primary focus on GPA and especially test scores toward a holistic consideration of each student; Badenhausen has encouraged a more inclusive framing of “success scripts” (Yavneh Klos, “Thinking Critically”; Badenhausen). Changing the way we invite people to honors and how we offer the initial welcome is crucial, but if our goal is to create a genuine sense of belonging, our obligations go beyond questions of recruitment to address how our programs and colleges can serve the students actually sitting in our classrooms. However important it is that we welcome students to our programs, designing community-building orientations and classroom activities in order to create an authentically relational community is not simply a matter of recognizing and welcoming the many intersectional identities of our students. We must ensure that we know who our students are and that our programs, our advising, and our coursework are specifically designed for them.
We all, I am sure, have colleagues who care deeply about experiential, discussion-based seminars, and yet fantasize, Eliza Doolittle-style, about the idealized students they wish they were teaching. “If only we could get her to pay attention!” one professor exclaimed, about a student with accommodations for ADHD. “If only we could get him to quit his job!” said another, referring to a Pell-eligible student working to cover tuition costs. If only, I respond to such comments, we could appreciate the strengths and barriers students bring to honors! If only, instead of viewing underperforming students as lazy, we admired their persistence in choosing to attend school and worked with them to overcome the obstacles! If only we started with the premise that most of our students are struggling to address at least one of these challenges:

- Anxiety or mental illness
- Financial insecurity
- Gender identity issues
- Relational or familial issues
- Physical illness, of self or a family member, or need for childcare

If only we could welcome students as they are, into a community of relationships! Wouldn’t THAT be loverly!

Embracing our students as they are need not be hypothetical. For example, on a programmatic level, we can anticipate students’ needs by providing:

- Community-building orientation activities;
- Anti-bias training for faculty, administrators and students;
- Behavioral and mental health first-aid training;
- Workshops and anti-stress activities such as drumming, knitting, other crafts, or yoga, and newsletter articles about how individual faculty members handle stress so that students can see that they are not unique in facing challenges;
- Widely accessible lists of and links to both on- and off-campus resources such as disability services, the counseling center, community-based low-cost healthcare, job lists, food pantries, domestic violence centers, and houses of worship;
Within honors spaces, healthy snacks or meals, band-aids and feminine-care products, rocking chairs and recliners, and comfort dogs or other animals.

Because the classroom is generally a defining component of the honors experience, faculty development is essential, particularly in pedagogical strategies that contribute to students’ sense of belonging. Cia Verschelden’s *Bandwidth Recovery: Helping students Reclaim Cognitive Resources Lost to Poverty, Racism, and Social Marginalization* provides many resources and classroom strategies for increasing sense of belonging, including acknowledging the knowledge, values, and experiences that students from all backgrounds bring to class as well as the challenges they may be facing. For example, Verschelden recommends a two-day “grace period” for any student who does not meet the stated due date for a paper.

The “grace period” is helpful to this discussion as an example of universal design. Universal Design for Education (UDE) goes beyond accessible design for people with disabilities to make all aspects of the educational experience more inclusive for students, parents, staff, instructors, administrators, and visitors with a great variety of characteristics; these characteristics include those related to gender, race and ethnicity, age, stature, disability, and learning style (Burgstahler). The grace period meets the needs of a broad spectrum of the community, including the professor. A student with anxiety is spared the additional anxiety of meeting with the professor to work out an extension. A student who does not generally suffer from anxiety but has multiple assignments due the same week is not placing a student with documented mental illness at a disadvantage when she avails herself of a policy allowing each student a two-day “grace period,” no questions asked. For either student, the uncertainty of getting an extension or the concern that the student will now seem “less” to the instructor is obviated; the professor is spared the time of working out individual arrangements, the confusion of an often vague directive from the office of disabilities (“allow flexibility in deadlines”), and the anxiety of determining what is fair. For each—the anxious student, busy student, and professor—as well as for any other students in the class who have multiple deadlines or suffer from undocumented anxiety, the sense of belonging is enhanced by recognition that the policy is designed to meet the respective needs of the members of the community.

Websites such as the one developed by the University of Washington’s Center for Universal Design in Education provide useful information about adapting educational environments to meet the needs of all learners, but the
most helpful resource is available to anyone who participates in honors: our students, who, if they trust us to listen, will share their concerns, hopes, and dreams with us and, if invited, collaborate with us to create a welcoming and inclusive community of relationships.

Ron Wolfson's *Relational Judaism*, a book about strengthening congregations rather than about pedagogy, has encouraged me to consider honors programs, and honors itself, as a sacred community that acknowledges and embraces the common humanity in each of our students and in all of us. To view education in the context of the sacred is not, I know, original to me. For example, in his final NCHC monograph, the late and beloved Samuel Schuman (z"l) revealed in the title his ideal for honors: *If Honors Students Were People: Holistic Honors Education*. His thoughtful exploration of holistic honors education was a reminder to consider not just the intellectual but the physical and spiritual needs of our students. Similarly, the *cura personalis* (care of the whole person) at the heart of Jesuit pedagogy, based in the *Spiritual Exercises* of the order’s founder, Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), calls us to enter into relationship with our students and to recognize them as unique individuals. In educating students to be men and women for and with others, regardless of career or vocation, Jesuit pedagogy reminds us, regardless of our worldview, to direct our efforts to a higher purpose than self.

Reminders of the innate dignity of each human being cannot be repeated too frequently in an age of anxiety when far too many seek comfort by shutting their ears and eyes to all who do not share their concerns, their views, and their experiences. An inclusive vision of honors that invites and welcomes the full diversity of students to learn from and listen to each other and to build shared values across difference can help mitigate the challenges facing our communities, globally and locally, and strengthen the communities themselves.

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Taking on the Challenges of Diversity and Visibility: Thoughts from a Small Honors Program

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Abstract: The Monroe College Honors Program, located in New York, enjoys an extremely diverse student body, which can be attributed to its location within and proximity to New York City. Data about the Monroe College Honors Program are presented. More importantly, this essay presents the strategies that the honors program uses to meet the needs of a diverse student body. Our students face many challenges, including difficult family situations and economic hardship, and so the honors program has created a rigorous but flexible curriculum and co-curriculum to meet their needs. The approaches used to serve this population focus on getting to know students, implementing an adequate budget, and creating flexible curricular/co-curricular options. The essay also addresses student-centered tactics that increase the visibility of the honors program on campus.

Keywords: diversity, gifted education, higher education, marketing

INTRODUCTION

The field of honors education evokes a variety of images: students, faculty, and administrators waxing poetically about theories and ideas, for instance, or a drive toward academic and personal perfection. I argue that a third image of honors is one in which solutions to problems can be not only identified but implemented. I agree with Richard Badenhausen when he writes that we “are really good at complaining” because complaining is easy whereas identifying and implementing lasting solutions are really hard.
In considering Badenhausen’s call to solve problems in the field of honors education, I have realized that many of the challenges we face are interconnected. The same is true in a racially diverse honors program, where the reality that students face includes significant economic challenges. If these students are included in honors, we must work to make honors not only an “academic jewel” of the institution but a diverse and inclusive academic jewel. As Coordinator of the Monroe College Honors Program, I believe I can provide some insight into how the honors community at large can start to take on these challenges.

**About Monroe College and the Honors Program**

Monroe College has an undergraduate enrollment of just over 5,500 students. The college’s two on-site campuses are in the Bronx and New Rochelle, New York. A brief snapshot of Monroe College shows a much different picture from many other institutions of similar size around the United States: the college offers many of its undergraduate degrees online; 75% of undergraduates are enrolled full time; 62% are female; 43% are African American; and 40% are Hispanic/Latino. Our student population reflects the college’s geographic region. The New York metro area has always been diverse, and as of March 2018, Bloomberg ranked New York eighth on its list of “20 Most Diverse Regions in the United States” (Del Giudice & Lu, 2018).

Monroe College is not only attracting students from non-white backgrounds but is also successfully graduating these students. According to data released by *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education Magazine*, Monroe College is among the top 100 minority degree producers (Top 100, 2017). Virtually all of Monroe’s associate degree programs and two of its bachelor’s degree programs rank among the Top 10 in the nation for graduating minority students, including degree programs in its School of Allied Health, School of Business and Accounting, School of Criminal Justice, and School of Information Technology.

The Monroe College Honors Program enrolls approximately 4% of the undergraduate population, and the diversity of the program mirrors that of Monroe College. The honors population from the fall 2018 semester included 242 active, enrolled honors students: 169 were female and 73 were male; 106 were Hispanic; 93 were Black; 21 were non-resident aliens; 9 were Asian; 9 were White; and 4 were unreported. These data clearly demonstrate the diversity of Monroe College and its honors program.
CHALLENGE #1: DIVERSITY

To take on the challenges that diversity presents, the Monroe College Honors Program learns about each of our student’s lives and needs; implements an adequate budget to cover all program-related costs; and creates a flexible curriculum/co-curriculum to enable students to meet their requirements in a variety of ways.

Achieving diversity has not been challenging for the honors program, but growing the program has been harder. In fall of 2016, 155 students were actively enrolled in the program, and in the fall of 2017, the number grew to 212, so the program grew about 64% over two years. Achieving such substantial growth required a lot of outreach to incoming students, recruiting high-performing continuing students, and cheering on students who didn’t think they were “honors material.” Many of our students are first-generation college students or have had only one sibling in the family who has gone to college. Therefore, they lack the support they need to know that they can take on all the challenges a college environment presents. So getting to know our students is especially important.

Upon admission to the honors program, the honors program coordinator reads the personal statement of each student to gain insight into the student’s past and his/her motivations for the future. As students progress through each semester, the faculty and staff of the college stay in regular communication. All first-year students (not only honors) are assigned a full-time faculty/staff mentor, who remains in contact throughout the student’s first year. Mentors, student services staff, and other college personnel enter notes into the student’s profile on the “Monroe Tracking System.” The honors coordinator regularly checks in on the notes to understand the latest on each honors student.

Aside from battling feelings of doubt and fear about their ability to succeed in college, our students also face the problems Badenhausen mentions, including “difficult family responsibilities, and economic challenges.” Many of the students in the Monroe College Honors Program work either part-time or full-time. They serve as caregivers to their loved ones. Over half of the students enrolled in the fall 2018 semester reported a household income of less than $50,000. Knowing that our students face these challenges, Monroe College ensures that the honors program budget can cover almost all program-related expenses, which is the second way we take on the challenge
diversity presents. The honors program budget covers expenses such as tick-

et tickets to a theatrical production as part of a literature course; travel, board, and regis-

tration for a conference; and art supplies or a pair of dance shoes for honors courses in modern art/dance. Students pay a minimal course fee between $10 to $25 per honors course to help offset course-related expenses. Planning for our students has made it possible for students to afford honors experiences that are experiential or co-curricular in nature.

Despite the trials our students face in their personal lives, they are graduating from college and earning honors diplomas. We graduated 36 honors students in 2016, 31 in 2017, and 31 in 2018. As a point of reference, we began with 175 honors students in the fall of 2015, and 20% of them completed all the program requirements and graduated with an honors diploma in the 2018 commencement ceremonies. Nearly all the students who did not complete the honors diploma requirements still graduated from college, but our program wants to continue to increase the honors graduation rate, so we are working on innovative and creative solutions to make honors more accessible to our students.

The final way we tackle diversity is by crafting flexible requirements for the program. Students must “opt-in” to the honors program, and at this time, they are told about the academic and co-curricular requirements of the program: maintaining a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.3; completing a minimum of 15% of their coursework in honors; and participation and reflection on at least three experiential activities, e.g., a volunteer project, an intercollegiate project, and participation in a national or regional honors conference. Students are told they will be challenged and will grow, but the “do-ability” of the honors program is emphasized more because often these students are experiencing self-doubt or don’t have an advocate rooting for their success.

Honors administrators and faculty should take a good look at their requirements and evaluate them not only for rigor and challenge but for feasibility in terms of course scheduling and extracurricular scheduling since part-time workers, for instance, can’t always do evening events. Further, we need to get to know our students—not just their writing style or where they can improve a skillset but their needs as a person. Research shows that students of diverse, low socioeconomic backgrounds generally lack familial support; therefore, an advocate at their institution is extraordinarily important in determining whether or not students will graduate.
CHALLENGE #2: VISIBILITY

It isn’t enough to achieve all these goals; we also need to make sure our programs and colleges are seen and heard across campus. Visibility is a challenge that nearly every honors program faces, and to take on this challenge the Monroe College Honors Program allows students to do the job; communicates news regularly; and maintains an online presence.

Improving visibility could be the full-time job of an honors professional, but another way to achieve this goal is by empowering the students we have recruited. Honors students have a wide range of connections across campus: they major in various fields of study; they are athletes; they are resident assistants; they are commuters; they are leaders for other clubs on campus; they are basically everywhere. If we ask our honors students to take honors with them wherever they go, the visibility of the program/college will increase exponentially.

Part of my job is to increase the visibility of the honors program at Monroe College. Every time students are accepted to a conference, whether local, regional, or national, a press release is issued. When the honors program hosts a major college-wide event, e.g., Community Service Weekend, a press release is issued. When a student success story is posted on the college’s website for a graduate of the School of Criminal Justice, it notes that the student was also an honors graduate. Copies of the honors newsletter, The Experience, are distributed across both campuses, sent as part of admissions folders, and housed in an online repository on the college’s website. Regular updates are sent to the President’s Office, and the honors program is often featured in his college-wide emails. In all of these examples, the visibility of the honors program is connected to the students because, after all, honors is about the students.

The honors program is active online: it has pages on Instagram and Facebook, and it has a page on the college’s main website. Posting photos and announcements regularly keeps students up to date; they share these posts and enjoy seeing themselves tagged in pictures. Students have also come up with some of our social media strategies, e.g., Motivation Monday, Topic Tuesday, or Wayback Wednesday. Maintaining an active online presence and involving the students to help do that are essential to maintaining visibility.
CONCLUSION

Honors programs and colleges are leaders in higher education. Many well-established, high-impact practices began in honors, and honors can be the leader in creating pathways for greater diversity and inclusion in higher education. While higher education seems to be ignoring “the monumental demographic shifts taking place in our country and universities” (Badenhausen), we can invite change into our honors programs and colleges. When many of our students don’t see themselves as “honors material,” thinking that smart kids only hail from a privileged background, they are victims of a story about honors, what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie refers to as “a single story” (2009). It is time to write a new story about honors and, as Adichie says, “regain a kind of paradise.”

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The Case for Heterodoxy

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Abstract: Despite being originally designed to educate men, honors programs are not very attractive to male students in general and to male students of color in particular. Because access to honors programs is limited by a credentialing process that favors white men, many members of minority groups find them inhospitable and are significantly underrepresented. This essay suggests three concepts to be used to reimagine honors programs to be more welcoming of minority students: radical hospitality, asset-based thinking, and heterodoxy.

Keywords: diversity, honors, challenges, innovation, heterodoxy

“Touché . . . rapier wit . . . on point . . . engage . . . parry . . . counter . . . riposte.” The language of argument as a path to truth is not the language of agriculture, in which ideas are planted, nourished, and grow to maturity over time, but the ancient language of hand-to-hand combat. An “opponent’s” ideas are attacked and counterattacked; theses and dissertations are not “presented” but “defended.” Twenty years ago, Deborah Tannen reminded us in The Argument Culture that this culture exists because it speaks particularly to men, who are more inclined to agonism by nature (Tannen 166ff). Beginning in the Middle Ages, European scholars and teachers eagerly took ownership of this adversarial model of advancing erudition because men claimed reason as their special province and because the concept that the highest learning was attainable only through reason supported the widespread political practice of excluding from civic life those who were deemed incapable of reasoning at the highest levels of logos. The higher education establishment, which resisted the education of both women and African Americans until nearly the end of the nineteenth century, was stunned by Wiley College’s 1935 victory in debate over the University of Southern California and could attribute it only to the coaching of distinguished poet Melvin B. Tolson (a Columbia University
graduate) and to the presence on the team of James Farmer, Jr., whose father was on the Wiley faculty. Maintaining the intellectual status quo meant dismissing Wiley’s achievement as a historical fluke just as it meant dismissing the scientific theories of Rosalind Franklin and Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin until they were advanced by men years later.

After all, the dialectical approach to learning was not originally designed to educate the entire population of the democracy that invented it, including foot soldiers, farmers, women, and slaves, but rather to educate young men of wealth and privilege for military and political leadership. To deny that this classical infrastructure is central to American higher education in general and to honors pedagogy in particular is to fall victim to our own form of “white fragility” (DiAngelo 2)—call it “honors fragility,” in which our visceral response to questions about the way we do things (e.g., “Are we elitist?”) is to defend our practices rather than to listen carefully, take a deep breath, and re-examine them.

Richard Badenhausen is correct: our very immersion in the war of words that constitutes academic discourse keeps us trapped in the familiar and makes it difficult for us to venture outside the well-worn path to see ourselves from the outside with others’ eyes, particularly through the eyes of those who are not invited to participate in honors or choose not to. For a moment, let us look at honors through the eyes of Stephen C. Scott:

As the only Black honors student in my graduating class, I was aware of my tokenism, especially in my honors courses, in the honors college office, in the honors learning center . . . and in university and honors college committee meetings, but I never let it bother me much. My peers misperceived me as an “Oreo”; my physical appearance was Black, yet my mannerisms and opinions were “White” to them. Again, that did not bother me because I felt at home among my honors college peers—until my senior year, when I took my first study abroad trip. After that trip, I experienced my first engagement with the Black community at the university and spent a semester unpacking my distorted understanding of African Americans in American history primarily through the mentorship of a remarkable Black woman. By the end of the semester, I understood the importance of correcting my White friends’ sense of privilege, representing and advocating for my community in this elite academic space of honors, and paving the way for other Black students to succeed in higher education. (109)
To see the pervasiveness in honors programs of a casually accepted infrastructure of embedded assumptions about what white, middle-class, adolescent males need to know and need to be able to do, try flipping your honors program to see how well it serves populations other than that one. What if your honors program had more students of color than white students enrolled? What if nontraditional students outnumbered students of traditional age? What if men outnumbered women and the largest demographic group among your honors students was African-American males, many of them veterans? Would the program you have now still work for this population? Would you need to change or redesign it? If so, why? And how? What embedded assumptions about honors students might you need to address? Would the classes your program offers need to be different? Would your honors faculty be well suited to teach these students? Would the mentoring change? What kind of community building might be appropriate? Would the social justice activities your program engages in still work or would they need to be rethought? What might the community service vision look like? Given this college population of the twenty-first century, shouldn’t the honors program of the twenty-first century be designed for them?

I would like to propose a possible solution to the first problem in Badenhausen’s essay, “Shunning Complaint”: access. Badenhausen asks this question: “How do we create pathways into our honors programs and colleges for students from underrepresented groups when faced with the reality that honors programs and colleges are still predominantly white?” I would contend that what we call “access” is really an issue of “inhospitality” and what admissions professionals are increasingly referring to as “fit” (Smith and Vitus Zagurski).

The data that the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) has been collecting on honors programs over the past few years (see Table 1) suggest that students in honors programs are, on average, about 64% female and 36% male. As it turns out, the single combat model of academic discourse appears to be attractive to women who are more comfortable with that paradigm than with the set of behaviors assigned to them with their gender. Not only do they find what Badenhausen calls “intellectual disputation” more inviting than do our current cadres of high-achieving college-age men, but they appear eager to practice their skills in the more competitive and higher-stakes environment of honors, where women outnumber men by 56% to 44% among college students at large but almost 2:1 in honors programs (National Center for Education Statistics; National Collegiate Honors Council). In the 1960s, women’s colleges were loath to desegregate because their faculty felt that they
would lose their advantage as incubators of the next generations of Jeannes d’Arc. They were concerned that women would not feel safe engaging in ritual battle with male classmates and would defer. We seem to be past that. Clearly, women have been welcomed into the honors fraternity much more warmly than they have been welcomed into Congress. According to NCHC statistics, however, the participation rates for people of color in honors are dismal: we are 11% African-American, including students in the programs at HBCUs, which are predominantly Black, and two-thirds of African-American honors students are women, making African-American men a tiny minority. We are 9% Latinx, with a smattering of students who self-report as members of indigenous groups or as biracial or multiracial, but only 6% Asian (NCHC), although Asian students constitute the largest majority subpopulation at many of the nation’s elite high schools (Strauss; Rab; Freishtat).

Honors programs have been aggressively trying to reach out to students of color for some years, so perhaps our lack of success in recruiting them requires a bit more introspection. Perhaps they don’t think the culture of the honors community is a good fit for them; perhaps they are plagued by the “imposter syndrome”; perhaps they think of themselves as deficient in the qualities by which the ideal honors student is defined, presumably by the white community (Davis). Perhaps we exclude them with our admissions policies (Rhea): We have no way of knowing how well the students we did not admit would have done in our honors programs; they were never invited in because their grade point averages or class rank or test scores didn’t make the first cut.

Table 1: 2014–15 NCHC Summary Percentages of Students by Gender, Race, and Ethnic Diversity in Honors Expressed as an Estimated Number of Students per 100

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Men (36%)</th>
<th>Women (64%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (includes American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, two or more races, race/ethnicity unknown)*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*terminology taken from NCHC survey instrument; I have converted the percentage in the 2014–15 NCHC summary table to an approximate number of hypothetical honors participants per 100 students.
In our efforts to justify our admissions choices, we are better—as Badenhausen notes—at finding deficits in a student’s application package than assets. Many programs now offer aspiring honors students who do not meet the minimum standard for admission based on test scores, grades, and class rank an opportunity to enter the program through the kitchen since they could not get in through the front door, but this is second-class citizenship. Furthermore, such policies are potentially racist if back-door admission is an opportunity extended only to students of color who fall short of biased standardized tests or whose grade point averages are from school systems that are not as high-performing as others and thus not assumed to be “equal.” As a result, students offered special admission to meet diversity goals feel marginalized, only grudgingly welcome, constantly on probation, or as if their admission was a mistake and that eventually they will be discovered. This sense of marginalization seems inevitable if honors, like the academy of which it is a microcosm, reflects “domain assumptions and methods of inquiry long implicated in institutionalized racism, gender oppression, and service to dominant economic, social, and political institutions” (Harding 710)—hence Scott’s matter-of-fact assumption that he felt comfortable in his honors program because both he and the white students perceived him as culturally white.

Here, then, is my proposed solution to the problem of this homogeneous student population of our own making. It comes in three parts, each of which requires us to reimagine our admission and retention policies, our curricula, and our extracurricular activities to eliminate what Badenhausen calls “lack of community among students, a stale curriculum, an absent or incoherent mission, uninspiring programming.”

**PART I:**

**PRACTICE RADICAL HOSPITALITY**

Honors programs with selective admissions arrive at the final candidate pool like Michelangelo carving out David from that immense chunk of marble. The purpose of selective admission is defensible exclusion, so admissions committees excise away what they don’t need by the very “critical” processes for which Badenhausen calls us to account. They rely on criteria that are easily measured, making inclusion or exclusion easy to justify mathematically, knowing that the criteria they are using may or may not accurately predict a student’s success in honors past the first semester (Chenoweth 18) and knowing that their programs face higher attrition rates after the second year.
just as students begin to be judged by their ability to create new knowledge and not by what grades can measure, i.e., their ability to retain and reflect what is already known (Cognard-Black, Smith, and Dove). Many programs drop students whose GPA falls below a certain point. Does the failure to make good grades in an honors program mean that the students did not learn from it or benefit from it, or that their admission was a mistake because they did not achieve in the major leagues as glitteringly as they had in the minors against softer competition? Can only the students who are excelling in an honors program get a better education by participating in it? Grades can be affected by mental health issues such as anxiety and depression when learning is not. Unconventional thinking and creativity can put grades at risk; after all, the ability to get good grades reflects students’ ability to think like their teachers, or as their teachers want them to, not their capacity for original thinking. Students who get good grades have mastered the skills and strategies required to get good grades, so of course good grades and high class rank are a solid predictor of future good grades. But if the purpose of an honors program is to create an environment that allows high-achieving students to continue to be high achievers, it is practicing the opposite of diversity.

The opposite of exclusion is not just inclusion; it is welcome. The concept of “radical hospitality”—drawn from contemporary Christianity and Jewish thinkers, seeks to return those faiths to their ancient and medieval roots (Pratt; Schnase) and connect them explicitly with the values they share with Islam (Siddiqui). The charge is this: Welcome the stranger; as is put forth in Hebrews 13:2 of the King James Bible, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

The very fact that honors programs are not very diverse makes them seem inhospitable to all minority students—not just students of color but international students and nontraditional students as well, who see themselves as strangers because they are strangers—in a strange land. Optics matter. Minority students will be more likely to see themselves as welcome if there are more of them, so honors resources should not be used only to benefit students who are already the beneficiaries of privilege but should offer an enriched educational experience to students who did not have access to an honors education at lower levels but could still catch up.

We should invite students who have excelled at measures of excellence other than tests, grades, and class rank to join our programs because we believe they will benefit from the honors approach to learning. We should look at what students have done in secondary school besides achieve high grades and at what they have done at lower educational levels that looks like
honors work at the college level. Our thinking should be asset-based rather than deficit-based.

**PART II: PRACTICE ASSET-BASED THINKING**

When considering an application, we should ask ourselves what this student would bring to our program and what the student has done that would be an asset to the honors community of learners. We should ask whether the student made a YouTube video that went viral; crushed the SAT in seventh grade; started a business or founded a nonprofit; completed an Eagle Scout or Girl Scout Gold Award project or an Extended Essay for the IB diploma; wrote a piece of gaming software; completed a military mission before the age of twenty-one; put together a garage band; organized a national March for Our Lives.

A baseline GPA requirement for admission or retention is useful only to establish the point at which a student is assumed to be operating at a deficit. You cannot discriminate among students on the basis of GPAs even though, unlike test scores, they were not arrived at using a common standard. Identical grades blur how different all high-achieving students really are. We should look instead for the intellectual attributes that make a student unique and for work that shows extraordinary imagination, originality, or persistence. None of the achievements I listed above requires a privileged, middle-class upbringing or the extra help of college-educated parents who live in an affluent school district with a high-SAT zip code. You don’t need to be an insider to have the skills to accomplish them.

Some years ago, the College of Letters and Science at the University of Wisconsin began inviting every admitted student to apply for admission to the honors program, regardless of entering GPA. On their webpage, they assure students:

> Standardized test scores play a very minor role during the L&S Honors Program admission process. Instead, we consider your responses to essay questions and your high school co-curricular and community involvement as measures of your willingness to engage with the liberal arts experience at the heart of the Honors Program.

The Honors Living-Learning Community at Rutgers University-Newark goes a little farther:
The HLLC looks at the admissions process a little differently than most university honors living-learning communities. We begin by defining “honors” differently, looking much deeper into student potential than is possible through only blunt instruments such as standardized test scores. HLLC engages potential students in in-person interviews and group simulations to see how they employ multiple intelligences in collaborative problem solving. This process helps to reveal who students really are, what their talents are, and what they can bring to an incredibly diverse and challenging learning environment like Rutgers University-Newark.

An even more radically hospitable application system is that of the Pavlis Honors College at Michigan Tech University:

There is no GPA requirement for application, only your commitment and motivation to achieving your goals and strengthening your Pavlis Honors Abilities. To apply, you should be able to share your vision for incorporating this into your education.

1. Create and fully complete a Seelio E-Portfolio Profile.

2. Create a video that helps us understand why you have chosen to apply to the Pavlis Honors Pathway Program. Your video may consist of your own edited footage, a video recording of a PowerPoint or Google Slides presentation, an autoplay Prezi presentation, or even an essay that you read aloud on video. You will upload your video to the application form (please include your last name when naming the file). Your video should be approximately 2 minutes in length. Your video should:

   • Articulate your personal goals and vision
   
   • Explain why you want to join the Pavlis Honors Pathway Program
   
   • Connect to your pathway choice, or indicate which pathway(s) you are considering

3. Fill out this application form, which includes one essay question. The essay question is: *Which Pavlis Honors Ability do you believe will be most challenging for you, and why? What are some initial ideas you have about how to push yourself to grow in this area?*
In this system, there are no “strangers” or “outsiders within” (Collins 14). Everyone is welcome.

PART III:
BE HETERODOX

In honors, as in all education, best practices need to be dynamic and evolve as student populations change. If they become ossified, they become what Badenhausen, citing Deresiewicz, refers to as doxa, or conventional thinking. Popular opinion among academics is still popular opinion—arrived at by adopting the ideas of others rather than by thoughtfully arriving at the same ideas yourself. If you find yourself reflexively defending what has always been done just because it has always been done, doxa becomes orthodoxy—not just commonly accepted thinking but “right” thinking.

Instead of orthodox, we should be heterodox. If Hegel is right, thesis needs antithesis or the status quo remains in place. Even the NCHC’s Basic Characteristics were never intended to be followed as if they had been brought down from Mount Sinai on stone tablets. They were arrived at through debates that took longer than it took the Founding Fathers to write the Constitution, and NCHC leadership has always intended them to continue to be debated and amended if necessary so that they can remain our agreed-on best practice. We have always contended that honors should serve as a crucible for new ideas, including new ideas for honors education itself. Heterodoxy demands both innovation and leadership. The University of Wisconsin and Michigan Tech are good examples, as is California State University-Los Angeles, which admits students as young as eleven to its honors college through its early entrance program.

In practicing heterodoxy, some of the following suggestions are useful. Use your imagination to create new kinds of honors programs that can be flipped because they work for more than one population. Remember that not every honors student is a white, middle-class, post-adolescent male who has never done anything but go to school and has no real life experience but does have an obligation to give back to the community that is helping to subsidize his education. Do not seek to teach the importance of social justice to refugees or to students who live in food deserts. A service learning experience may not be necessary for students who are raising young children or who work in their families’ small businesses between classes or who care for their siblings so their parents can work. Do not presume to teach teamwork
to veterans or require study abroad for students who are here on F1 visas—studying abroad. Let your students teach these concepts to one another and replace individual reflection with problem-solving discussion and program projects. This approach not only leads to learning for all but also values collaboration over competition and rewards something besides winning.

Imagine other standards of academic excellence that are not derived from the patriarchal Athenian and Talmudic models. Accept capstone projects that are not research-based academic essays. Not every student is going directly to graduate school, and most do not plan a career in research. One of my honors students, a history major, made a film in the style of 60 Minutes called Eleven Minutes, consisting of a montage of scenes in which his neighbors in East Baltimore demonstrated how to cook cocaine into crack on your kitchen stove, interviews with local dealers, interviews with police and lawyers, and interviews with scholars in urban sociology at our university. He documented a piece of public history, but he also created a work of journalism and art. His faculty advisor and I told him at the time that he should be aware what the real 60 Minutes would pay for the footage. He is now a colleague, having since gone on to obtain an MA and MFA and write two bestsellers: a memoir and a collection of his essays for Salon. He is in great demand as a speaker. Perhaps the ideal honors student is not the perfect David you imagine, but a statue you have never seen before. If becoming a rock star in your honors program means making up structural deficits to conform to an artificial and outdated white, middle-class ideal, the model for that new and different statue will never apply.

The problems that Badenhausen proffers for our solution are wicked ones. While I have no map to suggest, I do think that reimagining our design strategies for honors programs is essential to our survival. I also believe that the concepts of inclusivity, hospitality, appreciative inquiry, and heterodox thinking can provide a form of celestial navigation to lead us into uncharted terrain. This approach involves risk, perhaps great risk, at a time when honors is already under attack from many quarters and higher education itself is on the defensive. Nevertheless, I suggest we turn for wisdom to Robert Frost, who ends “Choose Something Like A Star” with this thought:

So when at times the mob is swayed
To carry praise or blame too far,
We may choose something like a star
To stay our minds on and be staid.
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The Power of Creation: Critical Imagination in the Honors Classroom

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Abstract: The article examines how to incorporate issues of social justice and diversity in the honors classroom through critical imagination. Inclusion and diversity are among the five strategic pillars of honors education, but the challenge is to create space for social justice as an academic inquiry. This article describes an honors project where students were tasked to come up with their own concept for a television show, using their imagination to bridge gaps in representations on television. Critical imagination allowed the students to move beyond analyzing television in its current state and conceptualize what more inclusive television could look like in the future. Students often feel overwhelmed by issues like racism that seem insurmountable, and they can feel pressured to come up with a right answer rather than trusting their own observations. Critical imagination requires students to examine issues from multiple viewpoints and explore their own thoughts on the problem in front of them. The article concludes with suggestions for incorporating critical imagination in a few classroom scenarios and assignments.

Keywords: imagination, diversity, inclusion, social justice, creativity

A challenge that has been a focal point in the recent discourse about honors education is increasing diversity, which was recently added as one of the “five strategic pillars” of the National Collegiate Honors Council (Badenhausen). A challenge that has received less attention, in contrast to critical thinking, is creative thinking and how to encourage students to use their imagination in interpreting and changing their world. Creative thinking is one of the tools that honors educators need to use so that students can have awareness and find solutions to issues of social justice in their future lives. The challenge is to take ideas that seem insurmountable and find a way to engage
individual students in creative problem solving: to make space for all students to work on a problem of their own choosing and use their imagination to solve the problem while at the same time maintaining structure within the classroom. My answer to this question has been to have each student imagine and design a television pilot that addresses issues of diversity and social justice.

Sean Michael Morris, Director of Digital Learning at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia, has described the imagination as a “precision instrument that delivers a certainty that things can be otherwise.” Morris suggests that the usual players in education, such as formal essay and exams, are not enough to conceptualize what the world is beyond a problem to be considered. In a junior year tutorial entitled “Television as a Site for Social Justice,” I designed the TV Pitch Project as a way for students to use their imaginations to see the possibilities for the medium as a conduit for issues of diversity, inclusivity, and representation. Using the knowledge that they had gained from weekly readings, viewings, and in-class discussion, students identified gaps in diverse representations. Rather than sit in class and lament that television portrayals of diverse populations were not “accurate enough,” students used their weekly observations and critiques to fuel their television design. They would journal weekly about the assigned materials and use that information to inform their own imagined television show.

One of the primary issues that students identified throughout the semester was superficial representation. For a television show to simply add a person of color or a gay character is not enough. Characters need to be fully developed to be recognized as people shaped by the multiple facets of their identity. As a group we used the concept of intersectionality to illustrate how a character can be developed beyond a singular identity marker. Kimberle Crenshaw describes intersectionality as a response to what she has called “a framing problem.” As Crenshaw argues in her Ted Talk, “The Urgency of Intersectionality”: “Without frames that are capacious enough to address all the ways that disadvantages and burdens play out for all members of a particular group, the efforts to mobilize resources to address a social problem will be partial and exclusionary.” Students noted that, as they journaled each week, the concept of intersectionality played a key role in the function of their imagination, and the concept of “widening the frame” was particularly useful. One student, Maddy Jackson, said that the concept helped her to see and “fill the gaps we decided were still there even after a semester of analysis.”

For Maddy, this gap “in representation of women who work on television” was showing either complete success in one’s field or failed attempts to
make a dream happen but rarely the complexities of career highs, lows, and in-betweens. She wanted to see a television show that explored the dynamic relationships of women at various stages of their careers. She also wanted to move beyond the racial and gender binaries often depicted on “friend” shows and depict characters from various races and ages, with at least one transgender woman. Inspired by her own group of friends, whose conversations about “what comes after college” are frequent, Maddy saw this show as an opportunity to “encourage women, just like the friends who inspired this show concept, that there is a place for them” in the working world.

Another example of “widening the frame” came from Evan. Having learned American Sign Language at an early age in order to communicate with a family member, Evan was keenly critical of television’s lack of representation of deaf people’s experience. His television show, *Blazing Starships*, a space western in the vein of *Firefly*, became a venue through which he could make sure the character’s deafness was not seen as a problem that needed to be fixed. In fact, the character herself was an integral part of the ship’s operations: the mechanic. Evan also created a character who could act as interpreter for the mechanic in the hopes of normalizing the use of ASL. When researching deaf characters on television, he also found that of the very few who have existed, most have been white. He decided that the character should be black as he wanted to explore the intersectionality of race and deafness. “The experiences of a Deaf woman and a hearing woman are different, and the experiences of a white woman and a black woman are different, so why wouldn’t the experiences of a black Deaf woman and white Deaf woman be different?” Evan’s choices allowed the rest of us to see how he had conceived of a problem and found a way to look beyond the frame of what currently exists on television.

When asked to reflect on the final project, students discussed increased engagement, agency over their own work, and multiple ways they could use their imagination to see solutions to the common struggle of representation. Overall, the students noted that:

- Having the imagination at the center of this project allowed them to conceptualize what progress could look like.
- They could claim intellectual ownership over their own ideas instead of regurgitate information learned from an expert.
- They had to be fully present in order to imagine what their classmates’ shows might look like in order to listen and provide feedback.
• There was the freedom to create within the parameters of the assignment and because the classroom was a safe space where trust had developed among the students.

• The project emphasized critical reflection on choices with room for students to be innovative and use their own voice.

• They were engaging more parts of the brain to develop solutions to real-life issues.

• It was the first time in years (perhaps even since childhood) that they had been in a space where the imagination was encouraged.

Two students made particular note of this final point but also noted that imagination did not play a role for its own sake, but, as Liz said, “it created a unique platform for engaging with uncommon ideas for sending messages” about identity, equality, and issues of social justice on television. Evan echoed this sentiment when he wrote, “This has been an incredible opportunity to exercise my imagination and to do so for the sake of social justice in areas that I think are being neglected.” The power to conceptualize what television could look like allowed them to see what gaps still exist and what avenues those in the television industry might take to create space for more representation and acknowledgement of social justice in everyday society. The students thus achieved what Maxine Green referred to as “wide-awakeness” as they were both conscious of their imaginative power and critical of their own creation, deliberately and thoughtfully examining their choices with intellectual care and engagement.

The critical imagination allows students to find and practice agency. They bring their own voice to the issue and recognize the possibilities of engaging with a topic without always knowing the specific answer or outcome. Helping students find their agency or voice through the critical imagination does not have to require an elaborate project such as designing a television show, nor does it have to be part of a specialized class that has a central focus on social justice. The imagination can function in a number of contexts. For example, a teacher might ask students to imagine what the outcome in *The Metamorphosis* might have been if Gregor’s family had understood mental illness and treated him better. An assignment might ask students to rewrite portions of *Frankenstein* from another character’s point of view and to uncover what they might learn about gender if they saw the story through Elizabeth’s eyes. Even these small examples require students to use creative learning and engagement to examine significant topics and apply an individual perspective to the
issue at hand as the television project did, encouraging students to use their own experiences, values, and identities to fill what they saw as a gap in representation. Issues of social justice have a way of coming into the classroom whether we expect them to or not. The critical imagination gives students a way of examining justice issues outside the context of correct answers. Instead they explore what they think and what they have to say about it.

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With Great Privilege
Comes Great Responsibility

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Abstract: This essay contends that honors education should seize the opportunity to expose our students to the horrors of our society such as “the violence against those among us with the least amount of power.” We can affirm our curricular foundation (writing, reflection, and critical thinking) by supplementing it with histories of oppression in order to better equip our students with the tools necessary to become change agents. Such a shift in curricular content and pedagogies could engender changes in our institutional practices that model successful collaboration across races, cultures, and disciplines for our students, ultimately leading the way to a more just university. Our investment in our students’ ability to take the lead in interrupting oppressive patterns, challenging the status quo, and becoming change agents will lead to a more just society.

Keywords: social justice, critical thinking, honors curricula

In his lead forum essay, Richard Badenhausen invites solutions to intractable problems that are seldom addressed because of the daunting nature of the task. In his seventh question, he asks:

How should we situate honors education in a culture that devalues the written word, has little time or patience for reflection and critical thinking, valorizes violence against those among us with the least amount of power, and imagines the truth itself as something of little consequence? What responsibility do we have to orient our work with students toward these horrors?

As honors programs and colleges differentiate themselves from university curricula increasingly centered on skills and vocations, and as we affirm our
position within the liberal arts tradition, the need to expose students to “the violence [perpetrated] against those among us with the least amount of power” has never been more urgent. While we should not ignore our students’ anxiety about their employment prospects, I argue that the best way for students to do well in their future professions is to be equipped to work with individuals across differences of all kinds. To this end, students must confront the racist, sexist, and otherwise bigoted histories that limit opportunities for some, privilege the advancement of others, and inhibit relationships among people with different backgrounds. Professionalization and social justice are far from being antithetical; they need to be addressed together.

We can learn from social justice activists for whom learning is fueled by a continuous desire to challenge and interrogate oneself and others. In order to prepare students to interrupt the tendency for “things to fall as they have tended to fall,” to paraphrase Sara Ahmed in *Living a Feminist Life*, honors educators must equip our students with the necessary tools to identify patterns that lead to sustained inequities and unchallenged violences. By developing pedagogies, institutional practices, and spaces that welcome all identities and foster a culture that values differences, honors programs and colleges can model the fundamental importance of inclusion and equity. By moving in this direction, we not only better prepare our students for the multicultural and interconnected world we inhabit, but we also improve our institutions.

Much of the scholarship on diversity in honors acknowledges the privileged positions occupied by honors programs and colleges as well as by the individuals who belong to them. Aaron Stoller, for example, suggests that because honors is the one percent of higher education, we have a responsibility to employ our privileges for the common good of our institutions and societies. In “Occupying Naïve America: The Resistance to Resistance,” Lisa Coleman challenges all of us in honors to effect change and embrace our ethical responsibility in order to remain relevant. With national demographics changing, our students’ origins change as well, and with them their frames of references, priorities, and modes of grappling with the world. At a time when reflection and critical thinking appear to be luxuries engaged in only by the privileged, honors educators need to demonstrate the value added of an honors education for all students.

In a utilitarian fashion, honors educators need to stress to our students that they will only access meaningful employment if they embrace reflection and critical thinking, which will foster self-awareness and refine their understanding of the complexity of their own as well as other cultures and histories.
Innovative business leaders, according to Tarun Khanna in the *Harvard Business Review*, have three common characteristics: contextual intelligence, recognizing trends and contextualizing information; contextual acuity, recognizing their personal, cultural, and organizational milieus; and cultural intelligence, recognizing that their perspective differs from that of others with different cultural backgrounds. As Clinton Robinson, executive at the international civil engineering firm Black & Veatch, is prompt to remind engineering students: “We don’t fire engineers for being bad engineers. We fire engineers because they cannot work in different cultural contexts.” What honors has to offer is a contextualization of students’ vocational learning, thereby equipping them with the tools to collaborate with peers across cultural differences and become creative and openminded leaders.

Beyond business and engineering, researchers in fields such as cross-cultural psychology have claimed the positive impact of diversity in the workplace, from a correlation between the creativity and heterogeneity of teams to the demonstrated profitability engendered by diversity in corporations. Those of us in higher education, particularly in honors, should be preparing our students for this diverse work environment and mindfully equip all students on the path to an inclusive workplace. Most of our institutions are gesturing in that direction in their mission and diversity statements, yet Sara Ahmed, in *On Being Included*, has pointed out that universities rarely contribute resources to actualize these statements much less prepare our students to do so beyond college. Those of us in honors need the tools to turn these well-intentioned statements into tangible goals.

The solid foundation of honors education can and should be enhanced by intentionally exposing our students to the history of violence and horrors perpetrated against the most vulnerable, thereby helping to interrupt patterns of oppression. While writing, reflection, and critical thinking have long been staples of honors education, we need to focus them on new kinds of content. We can enhance the fundamental skills of reflection and critical thinking by focusing them on the variety of human experiences, the historical roots of contemporary violence and inequities, and the consequences of cultural fragmentation in the face of globalization. Exposure to systems of oppression and privilege should lead our students to better understand and collaborate with people whose values and experiences differ from their own.

Recent shifts in service-learning curricula promote these transformations and critical outcomes. The ethical service model introduced by Erik Hartman and his collaborators addresses the common occurrence of well-intentioned
students seeking to help others with little knowledge of the problems that shape how people navigate hardships. By asking questions about their lives, needs, and values, students learn to recognize individuals as agents, not victims. They break the neocolonial and neoliberal cycles and contribute to changing paradigms. This model provides students with tools to examine their positionality, to ask hard questions, and to be prepared for the discomfort that stems from challenging taken-for-granted power structures. The relevance of critical engagement extends well beyond service. Just as the service-learning model impresses upon students the importance of reflexivity, of recognizing and respecting cultural differences, honors curricula at large would be greatly enhanced by prioritizing such approaches to social justice.

Honors educators should apply the same principles of critical thinking in their own self-assessments. We need to examine the ways we reaffirm privileges and oppressions within our institutional practices. We also need to engage critically with the content of our courses and the ways our classrooms are organized in order to address problematic erasures (class and sexuality among other salient differences) and the status quo that such erasures maintain. In doing so, we challenge the function of university settings as sites where elitism is tacitly reproduced. bell hooks reminds us of the many ways we are socializing the students we educate and of the responsibility we might take to ensure that the coming generation is equipped to challenge the status quo. Our willingness to introduce our students to histories of the horrors on which our collective privileges rest and to inspire our students to become change agents may bring us closer to a more just university and more just society.

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No Complaints, Please; Just Time to Rethink Honors

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Abstract: This article responds to a lead essay by Richard Badenhausen posing current challenges to honors education and requesting solutions. Frost argues that the place of honors in our undergraduate curriculum needs to be rethought in part because general education core requirements are shrinking; accordingly, the NCHC Basic Characteristics noting honors viability by the number of honors credit hours a student takes need to be revised as well. As one of the few nimble academic units in the university, the honors program or college has been, is, and can continue to be a key site for innovation on our campuses.

Keywords: honors, credit hours, general education, innovation, design thinking.

Richard Badenhausen is good at writing Forum essays. He knows how to articulate the issues and make the reader, not just him, crave answers rather than snarky commentary. After I read Badenhausen’s essay, I made it a point to extoll its virtues not only to my friends in honors but to my friends seeking administrative posts that might have something to do with honors. I think “Shunning Complaint” provides an excellent distillation of the issues confronting us today in honors and beyond. Of course, the bulleted list at the end of Badenhausen’s essay isn’t just about honors. That list demonstrates how higher education today is turning faster and faster on its axis and how we who have been in it for a while are trying to decide which tactic is best: sinking our feet into whatever ground we can find or finding something new to grab on to and going with the whirl.

As so many of us are these days, I have been trying to see around the corner and into the future for higher education and consequently honors. I think Badenhausen has noted most of what I foresee, and I laud him for that. Not
the least of this list is the question of how we imagine honors curricula and our academic imperative in institutions that more and more are tasked with keeping tuition costs down by limiting the kinds of coursework our students are able to take. At an NCHC panel I was on a few years ago, we struggled with the question of how to deal with “all that AP,” AP being the stand-in for all college credit gained by high school students. We know that taking a hyped-up version of a composition class with your high school English teacher is not what college is about; it may be good preparation for college writing, but it is not college work. Even so, the time for complaining about it is over. Federal aid will no longer support courses students take that don’t clearly contribute to the completion of their degree programs. In Florida, students are charged 200% of their regular tuition for every hour they take over the 120 they are allotted for their college degree. It has been my feeling for a while that we cannot simply pretend that these truths don’t apply to our students. Honors students, too, are capable of graduating with horrific amounts of debt and grave doubts about the value of what that debt has paid for.

How we have thought about honors education, justified it to the students we recruit and the administrators to whom we answer, and delivered it—defined it—on our campuses is all in question now. At the same time, what is also true is that the work honors has done and promoted has had terrific success. Despite Badenhausen’s doubts about whether honors really can act as an experimental space on our campuses, I think it has done precisely that. Study abroad, undergraduate research, living learning communities, experiential learning—all of these innovations that honors has championed and tested and institutionalized in our programs for decades—are now flourishing beyond honors. Most universities and colleges sport study abroad offices now; they all have (or are scurrying to set up) offices of undergraduate research and creative activity; and “experiential learning” is a catchphrase throughout higher education. Honors doesn’t own these ideas, and while we may well have been the site where students were expected and guaranteed to participate in three or more of these kinds of high-impact practices, they are now being heralded across campuses.

That’s a good thing, right?

Despite what it may mean for honors educators trying to justify their existence, surely we should be glad that the work we have done for years has been adopted beyond us. Surely we should celebrate the fact that more students than ever at regional and large public institutions, if not all institutions, have access to the opportunities that we know give students the most bang
for their scholarship buck. Surely we should see this situation as the success of honors in the U.S. even if organizations like NCUR and AAC&U get the credit for branding and building out our successful experiments. Perhaps we should bask quietly in our experiment’s success.

Nevertheless, giving others the credit doesn’t help us justify our existence or budgets today, nor does it help us figure out what we need to be doing in our own programs. We have to come up with new innovations, as Badenhausen notes, new experiments to stay viable. Many of us are doing just that, finding ways to take on community problems, to move into early graduate work, to foster leadership in our students, to turn our programmatic energies toward overcoming social injustice. Still, the question remains of what it means to do honors work these days. Honors cannot be defined by how smart our students are via test scores and GPAs after so many of us have argued vehemently that those measurements don’t really matter. If indeed we are more than our students’ numbers, what are we?

Although it is not the favored child of “Shunning Complaint,” I hold on to our unique ability in honors to imagine, instill, test, and replicate innovation on our campuses. Honors programs and colleges are and can be, in the nomenclature of my state’s former governor, speedboats to our campuses’ battleships. We are nimble and can change and redirect what we do with minimal repercussion and obstacle, notably so when compared to our necessarily denser degree-granting fellow colleges. Our elasticity is the hallmark of innovation; it is what we can and continue to offer higher education in general. Rather than just smart kids with high test scores, the admitted students in all of the three programs with which I have worked have had two traits in common—initiative and the ability to take direction. That’s a mean combination when you’re looking for agents of change.

My solution then is two-fold. First, we need to resee honors and reclaim it in part as the site of innovation it actually is. Second, we need NCHC to record our revised notions of honors education to reflect the reality of the arenas in which we live and work today and in which we may well be working tomorrow.

**RESEEING HONORS**

At the 2017 NCHC conference in Atlanta, I attended a design thinking workshop hosted by the Pavlis Honors College at Michigan Technological University. The facilitators—Laura Fiss, Lorelle Meadows, and Mary
Raber—led ice breakers that encouraged our failures rather than our successes. We played a clapping game with partners and whenever someone screwed up, we both yelled “HOORAY!” From there, we did a very simple exercise to demonstrate what it might mean to think differently about honors.

The facilitators asked us for words or characteristics that we commonly associated with the circus such as elephants, the Big Top, popcorn, audiences of parents and children, and clowns. Next, they asked us to substitute an opposite for each of these words—ants for elephants, for instance, adult couples rather than families and children, an underwater auditorium for the Big Top. They then noted that we had basically outlined how Cirque du Soleil had reconceptualized the circus. Although not a one-to-one match, we got the point.

Next we were asked to list the characteristics and/or common assumptions made of honors. And we did: selectivity and elitism, high test scores, perks and benefits, scholarships, priority registration, separate housing facilities, closed classes—the works. Once we’d finished that, we were told to turn these honors staples on their heads and imagine programs that would decidedly rank as Cirque du Soleil subsidiaries of the NCHC.

Then the Pavlis Honors College facilitators explained how this exercise had worked for them. They noted that they had decided they had a real diversity problem in their program—i.e., NO diversity—and they were looking for a way to address it. They essentially did the design thinking exercise on their campus and made major changes to their program. From what I recall, they dropped the required test scores to get in and may have dropped the minimum GPA required to stay in. They let anyone register for their honors classes who wanted to. They didn’t offer additional scholarship or financial benefits of any kind. They innovated around honors and then looked at the result: much greater diversity, better retention, and, again if I recall correctly, a better community feeling overall.

I’m sure they had problems, not the least of which may have been convincing their administration that what they were doing was a good thing, but the approach had the effect in part for which they had hoped. In other words, they knew that they couldn’t use the same old tricks to do something that none of those tricks had ever managed to do. They needed to totally change the impression of what honors was if they wanted to attract a different kind of student to it, and so that is what they did.
DO WE STILL NEED THE FIFTH HONORS PROGRAM (AND NINTH HONORS COLLEGE) NCHC BASIC CHARACTERISTIC?

I am about to start the third curriculum revision of my career and the second overall at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Honors College. We have made incremental changes to our forty-year-old program and started new programs, but we have not yet addressed one of the major problems that today troubles almost anyone’s well-established honors curriculum: keeping the honors curriculum relevant as our students’ general education requirements shrink.

We require our students to take twenty-seven hours of honors seminars that replace general education courses. We don’t want to stop offering our general education honors seminars; they give our students and faculty exciting intellectual and academic experiences in robust, intimate, learning communities. (I always think that honors courses do as much to reenergize the faculty teaching them as to feed the hearts and brains of the students taking them.) We don’t want to stop the kind of humanities immersion we do in the first year, when our students have the most leeway to take our courses and explore the academic landscape beyond their major requirements. We are beginning a conversation on our campus about building out departmental honors beyond the thesis in order to give our students more options in their majors for fulfilling their honors requirements. Many of these options are in place at other institutions, and I was grateful to pull from the expertise of Greg Tomso at West Florida University, Malin Pereria at UNC Charlotte, and Christian Brady at the University of Kentucky when we were starting our conversation here about this issue.

I also spoke at length with B. L. “Rama” Ramakrishna, Director of the National Academy of Engineering’s Grand Challenges Scholars Program Network. The Grand Challenge Scholars Program (GCSP) is a competency-based, nationally instituted, Obama-era call to academic engineers to help their students craft a path through their undergraduate years in order to address one of fourteen “Grand Challenges” (these include directives like “provide access to clean water” and “prevent nuclear terror”). The students apply to their institution’s GCSP by showing how the courses they are and will be taking and the extracurricular activities in which they are involved align with their chosen challenge, a challenge that will serve as the key research question for their capstone project. While “engineering-centric,” as Rama says, the program’s guidelines never mention engineering in their description
of the competencies the students are expected to attain while working with their GCSP; rather, they include elements like multidisciplinary work, entrepreneurship, and social consciousness.

What the good people of Grand Challenges did was look around the corner and see the severe limitations that additional course credit would mean for any enterprising but financially and temporally limited engineering student. The GCSP has no specific required courses. Program heads evaluate their students’ success by how well they have envisioned a path through their educations and developed the skills they need to attack the Grand Challenge of their capstone project.

It is time for honors administrators to think differently about course credit—what we have mandated in our Basic Characteristics as at least 15% (for a program) and 20% (for a college) of a student’s credit-bearing degree program. If we want to keep abreast of the tides of our profession’s changes, we need to think beyond the credit hour as the primary marker of our students’ honors success. I think this means—for most of us—that we need to seriously rethink honors overall: what we are giving our students and why; who we want our students to be; what honors does for and gives to our campuses; what our raison d’être should be as we look to the next generation of honors.

The only viable solution I see for any of the challenges to honors that Badenhausen poses in “Shunning Complaint” is this kind of careful reconsideration of honors overall. If we do this rethinking together—thoughtfully and humanely and with the kind of curiosity and consideration that I know most honors administrators, faculty, and staff give to everything they do—we may well be able to usher in a new era for honors, one that solves many of the problems we know about as well as those we don’t even realize we have yet.

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Resisting Commodification in Honors Education

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Abstract: The commodification of education is an increasing threat to university honors programs. In honors, we seek to unpack this transactional model of education and uncover the inherent joy of learning. Honors professionals can challenge the commodification of education by helping students contextualize their educational experiences and by facilitating joyful, self-directed learning. Framed by research of both gifted K–12 students and college honors students, this article explores specific conversations and course designs that may combat a commodification culture and foster self-reflection and self-direction in honors students.

Keywords: honors, commodification, course design, self-directed learning

The commodification of education is an increasing threat to honors. As Digby (2016) succinctly stated, “The idea of teaching students how to think and how to expand their intellectual and cultural world has been overwhelmed by utilitarian ends” (p. 35). The particulars of this commodification, including students completing more college credit through AP and dual enrollment, have received attention in higher education at large as well as in the honors community (Camp & Waters, 2016; Cayton, 2007; Guzy, 2016; Walsh, 2016). In honors, we seek to unpack this transactional model of education and uncover the inherent joy of learning, to present students with “in-class and extracurricular activities that are measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning experiences typically found at institutions of higher education” (National Collegiate Honors Council, 2019). In our ongoing conversation with students, honors professionals can challenge the commodification of education by helping them contextualize their educational experiences and by facilitating joyful, self-directed learning.
In the honors program at Southwest Baptist University, this conversation begins in a one-credit, extended orientation course called “Honors University Seminar.” The text is Becoming a Learner: Realizing the Opportunity of Education by Matthew Sanders. Sanders (2018) tackled the commodification of education by addressing what he called the “distracting conversations” (p. 23) that can be prevalent among students entering higher education. These conversations include “I’m going to college so I can get a good job”; “I have to go to college if I want a good life”; and “I’m paying for this so it better be good.” In response to these notions, Sanders offered students an alternative narrative: college is a path to growth in creativity, critical thinking, communication skills, and character. He extended a gracious invitation to become a learner.

In our class discussion of the text last fall, one honors freshman was particularly indignant. After twelve years of unrelenting success in formal education, this class was the first time she remembered any educator presenting school as learning, as an opportunity for personal development and discovery. She had always viewed school as a transaction, a grade game that she always won. Unfortunately, she felt she had also lost the opportunity to be genuinely challenged and engaged. This realization opened a path for her out of the school-as-transaction paradigm and into the process of becoming a volitional learner.

As this example illustrates, honors students may benefit from an explicit understanding of the nature of their educational situation. One element of that situation is the increased effect of standardization in public schools on the lives of gifted learners (Scot, Callahan, & Urquhart, 2009). Research suggests that gifted students are often underserved (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). As a result, a gifted student may become bored, disengaged, and underachieving (Landis & Reschly, 2013). The students who manage to stay engaged or at least to continue achieving the standards of the system often find their way to honors in college. They may bring a commodified, ultra-pragmatic view of school with them.

Honors professionals are in a unique position to assist students in contextualizing their personal experience within a broader perspective. As students examine their own high school experiences and the effect on their approach to school, education, and learning, they form their honors identity within the community. They begin to develop “insightful awareness” (Roesner, Peck, & Nasir, 2006, p. 416) of their educational environment that can be liberating. Students often recognize a wide range of educational
issues, including underdeveloped study behaviors (Mendaglio, 2013) and perfectionism (Speirs Neumeister, 2004), as having developed through interaction with their K–12 educational environment. They identify with other honors students who may have not only similar academic aptitude but similar educational histories. Through this process, they can develop language to distinguish between education as a credential and learning as an opportunity for growth.

Another way we can resist the commodification of education is by facilitating joyful, self-directed learning, which—given the culture of toxic transactionalism—is both completely natural and nearly impossible: natural because curious learning is a normative behavior for healthy humans, but nearly impossible because some of our students have never practiced a joyful approach to learning. Unfortunately, practices in education that focus on extrinsic motivational tools (grades, behavior management, and competition between students) tend to increase as students progress through school, often resulting in a decrease in students’ curiosity and intrinsic motivation to learn (Roesner et al., 2006). It can be a challenge to “move students who are focused on their credentials away from running the gauntlet to relaxing into a new academic society” (Digby, 2016, p. 33). However, our job is to do just that by making our honors curriculum as student-centered as possible.

The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) includes a “distinctive learner-directed environment” in its definition of honors education (NCHC, 2019). This model can confound the commodification of education. When educational experiences are challenging and meaningful and students have close relationships with teachers, their intrinsic motivation can increase (Roesner, et al. 2006, p. 414). This environment in honors may position students to experience the joy of interest-driven learning.

In contrast, compulsory experiences are rarely joyful and generally contribute to the transactional model of education. To develop self-efficacy, individuals must feel they have an appropriate level of autonomy, of self-direction. According to Bandura (1997), “self-directedness not only contributes to success in formal instruction but also promotes lifelong learning (p. 174). Individuals must be free to take actions as directed by their values and goals. This synergy between values and actions forms identity, or “self-authorship” (Baxter-Magolda, 2009). To the extent we facilitate growth in self-directed, interest-driven, joyful learning, we are counteracting the effects of commodification. Although self-direction is a bedrock principle of honors, authentic student choice is not always simple to produce in practice. Curricular trends,
complicated advising, and advisor overload can reduce even the most idealistic honors professionals to checklist markers. We must persist in the challenge to preserve student self-direction beginning at recruitment and continuing through classroom learning and individual advising.

Honoring student choice can begin at selection and admission. At our institution, we do not wish for any student to feel compelled to participate in honors because of scholarships. Thus, although the honors program provides other benefits (priority housing, priority enrollment, yearly all-expense-paid regional cultural trips), no scholarships are associated with honors program participation. While not necessarily appropriate for every institution, in our case the no-scholarships policy allows students to choose their honors path without any financial consideration. On the curricular level, we have an honors core to promote honors community during the first year; however, the remainder of honors hours, which consist of honors general education courses and a variety of one-hour, honors-only topical colloquia and reading groups, are chosen by the student. We are continually developing additional programming, giving students as much choice as possible in planning their own honors curriculum and fostering a sense of autonomy and self-direction that may result in joyful, interest-driven learning.

The honors program’s individual courses encourage “a learner-directed environment” as well as “student-driven learning projects” (NCHC, 2019). In response to the commodification and standardization of education, honors should foster an ever more novel opportunity for students to pursue interest-driven learning within the honor curriculum. Among honors students, “one cannot overestimate the importance of interest in high levels of performance” (Siegle, Rubenstein, Pollard, & Romey, 2010, p. 95). As we travel with students toward self-authorship, they can become partners with whom we codesign the learning experience (Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009). When we seek to create a truly student-directed learning environment, we must necessarily cede some of our own power to students; Brookfield (2013) describes this type of teaching as taking account of power dynamics, illustrating how power works, and rendering teacher power transparent and open to critique.

As an example, in honors colloquia, we begin with a large question. This semester, one colloquium is asking, “How did the Lewis and Clark expedition illustrate the virtues and vices of the early American story?” Students may choose from three formats in response to the framing question: traditional research essay, class presentation, or creative response. In past colloquia,
creative responses have included the production of a children's book and a rap performance that included an annotated copy of the meaning of the lyrics, paintings, and songs.

Although students may initially resist such open-ended assignments, with scaffolding and clear instruction they generally begin to see themselves as subjects in learning instead of objects of education. Although this kind of student-centered teaching is widely practiced in honors, we must remind ourselves that we are not simply producing clever teaching tricks to keep students’ attention. The authentic, self-directed, interest-guided learning experiences within the honors community can be truly transformative both to the student and to the culture of commodification.

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Honors and the Curiouser University

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Abstract: With roots in the Latin cūriōus, meaning “full of care or pains, careful, assiduous, inquisitive,” the word “curiosity,” like this forum on “Current Challenges to Honors Education,” grows out of both the pain and promise of critical inquiry. This essay takes up the challenge of moving honors from the periphery to the heart of higher education by daring to redefine the college or university itself. Honors fosters—and even demands—the curiosity to look beyond the comforting confines of one’s own mind. Facilitating the conversation, collaboration, and innovation that shape a curious university, honors offers students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members both space and reason to meet across disciplinary lines. Through cross-disciplinary programming, innovative reward systems, expansive messaging, and broad partnership building, honors assumes the role of campus and community leader by issuing a dare to know that defines and shapes the curious university.

Keywords: honors, administration, innovation, collaboration, challenges

“Curiouser and curiouser!” cried Alice (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English).”
—Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

“Curious” is a curious word. Its roots in the Latin cūriōus, meaning “full of care or pains, careful, assiduous, inquisitive” (Oxford English Dictionary), suggest both the pain and promise of critical inquiry described broadly in Richard Badenhausen’s introduction to this Forum. More specifically, this essay explores how curiosity might guide honors programs and colleges through the challenge of becoming “essential and central units to which institutions look for leadership and on which the institutions depend” (Badenhausen). The Latinate definition of painstaking curiosity has shifted over time toward a more adventurous modern definition of the curious as
both “eager” agents “desirous of seeing or knowing” and, self-reflexively, the objects themselves of such curiosity, “exciting attention on account of . . . novelty or peculiarity” (OED). Honors students embody every facet of this definition: they are curious curiosities with minds both careful and eager, who therefore need encouragement and guidance as they take intellectual risks on the path to lifelong learning.

The National Collegiate Honors Council’s “Definition of Honors Education” maps this journey with the milestones of “measurably broader, deeper, or more complex” educational experiences resulting from a “learner-directed environment and philosophy.” Recognizing the risks and rewards of such pedagogically collaborative curiosity, honors educators are well positioned to issue—and accept—the poet Horace’s ancient challenge: “Sapere aude” or “dare to know.” They become true campus leaders, however, only by transforming this educational imperative into an institutional call to action, daring not just students but also colleagues and partners across campus and in the community to look beyond the limits of their own interests. Through cross-disciplinary programming, innovative reward systems, campus-wide messaging, and broad partnership development, honors programs and colleges can and should lead their institutions in curious collaboration.

The educational imperative of honors education is much like that of the liberal arts: curiosity and collaboration are core values of our missions. It is no surprise that a liberal arts college like Vassar, for example, explicitly “nurtures intellectual curiosity, creativity, respectful debate and engaged citizenship,” much as Carleton College “strives to be a collaborative community that encourages curiosity and intellectual adventure,” and Pomona College promises to engage students “in probing inquiry and creative learning that enable them to identify and address their intellectual passions,” which, in turn, “guide their contributions as the next generation of leaders, scholars, artists, and engaged members of society.” Built in this liberal arts tradition, many honors programs and colleges share the mission of cultivating these particular habits of mind, explicitly valuing “intellectual curiosity, academic attainment, and the development of social consciousness” (University of Pittsburgh), fostering “the free and creative exchange of ideas” and “intellectual curiosity” (Motlow State Community College), and promising “the intellectual, personal, and professional growth of students who demonstrate curiosity . . . and who seek a rigorous and well-rounded undergraduate experience” (University of Michigan), to cite just a few examples. While higher education as a whole teaches students to ask questions, the systematic cultivation of
collaborative curiosity in liberal arts and honors education models for other academic units, student services areas, and community partners how curiosity might lead individuals in unexpectedly rewarding directions.

A key initial step in institutionalizing the personal rewards of such curiosity is to develop honors programming that connects and opens communication between students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members who might not otherwise meet. My aim here and throughout this essay is to offer some concrete ideas that have worked at my public land-grant institution in the hope that they might prove useful in a variety of institutional contexts. Honors events and programs on our campus, for example, include quarterly university-wide networking socials for all faculty, staff, and honors students; annual community talks by top professors and honors alumni; cross-disciplinary faculty-student honors book clubs; an honors alumni professional mentoring program; student luncheons with visiting activists and speakers; and group community-engagement projects. In every case, our programming strategy results from the belief that curiosity can and should be cultivated: people want to engage with the intellectual community on a college campus because they enjoy learning about ideas and experiences beyond their own limited range of experience. By creating space in our programming to build the relationships between unlikely allies that lead to true innovation, honors incentivizes and operationalizes a “curiouser” institutional culture and thus establishes itself as a key site for cross-campus collaboration.

Honors can build on this foundation by creating a system of intentionally designed academic and professional rewards. For students, these rewards result from the careful documentation of their own broad and engaged curiosity. Our students, like honors students at other institutions, reflect regularly and with clear guidance on topics including interdisciplinary co-curricular events, extracurricular reading groups, community engagement and service, professional and academic internships, alumni mentoring experiences, study abroad, research, and creative work. Honors has developed partnerships with advisors, faculty, and staff across the university’s departments, colleges, and programs to ensure that these units, along with their students, benefit from this thoughtful extension of academic work. Pragmatically, honors rewards both students and sponsors by matching funding for study abroad, internships, research, and creative work; helping students to contextualize, understand, and represent professionally the value of this work; and guiding students in planning, enacting, and documenting projects that bring their academic passions to life. Each of these steps on the honors journey results
in trackable outcomes and rewards for both students and the institution: many honors students study abroad or complete internships, most engage in and present research and creative work at national venues, and all manage complex capstone projects that often lead to graduate school admission or professional success. While these outcomes are typical of honors education, they move honors to the center of campus policy discussions when we demonstrate clearly, thoughtfully, and systematically how our outcomes document and uphold shared institutional values of curiosity and collaboration.

Honors can help build a curious institutional culture that focuses on such values by engaging and documenting the work of faculty as well as students and their sponsoring units. Our honors program has made a priority of rewarding curious faculty with both collaborative opportunities and documentation of their honors contributions for the purposes of promotion and tenure. Faculty, of course, often enjoy teaching and mentoring talented honors students, but their loyalty and commitment to honors grow exponentially when we facilitate their professional development in cross-disciplinary research, teaching, and service through the networking events, team-teaching opportunities, interdisciplinary book clubs, and community-engaged learning suggested briefly above. In addition to creating opportunities for such work, our honors program ensures institutional credit for faculty engaged in it. Working with our faculty senate, provost, and offices of analysis, assessment, and accreditation, honors has drafted and earned approval for honors-specific language in faculty code and job descriptions (formalized at our institution on “role statements” that identify the percentage of a faculty member’s role dedicated to research, teaching, and service). This language clearly articulates the place and value of a faculty member’s work with honors not only as part of professional development but also as a key component of promotion and tenure dossiers. Our university’s promotion and tenure review committee recognizes a standardized résumé of honors activity, requested by faculty and generated by honors staff, that provides specific evidence of honors teaching, research mentoring, and service. Honors has thus established itself as an institutional leader in faculty development, advocacy, and cross-disciplinary professional development with a documentation system that clearly and specifically rewards curious and innovative collaboration in every area of a faculty member’s job description.

Honors can make its role as an institutional leader both visible and public by acting as a campus hub for all interdisciplinary academic programming. Our program demonstrates to both students and the institution how much
we value academic programming from all areas and disciplines by requiring honors students to attend and reflect upon campus co-curricular academic activities every term. To facilitate this requirement, we have created a central calendar and weekly messaging system for students, faculty, and staff that showcases the range of exciting educational opportunities on campus and in the community each week. This weekly messaging takes time to coordinate, draft, and edit, but that effort builds cross-institutional collaborative connections and publicizes the honors program’s daily challenge for students, faculty, alumni, staff, and community members to take on Horace’s “dare to know.” By regularly reaching out to departments, colleges, programs, student services offices, and community organizations to publicize their events alongside our own, we ensure that these areas understand our mission and consider honors a partner. Combined with an effort to place honors students, staff, and faculty in key roles on a variety of university-wide committees and community-engaged boards, this approach to programming and messaging has both emphasized the value of curiosity and situated the honors program as a campus and community leader that delivers this value to all.

Such clear messaging transforms honors into a hub for not just information but also collaboration. Because honors students, staff, faculty, and administrators are trained to seek overlap between their own and others’ interests, they are well-positioned to look beyond their own individual growth, forging collaborative partnerships designed to expand any single point of view. Working with admissions, student services, and major academic units on campus, for example, honors can become a leader in institutional recruiting. Not only does honors attract and support top students, but we thoughtfully engage faculty and staff across campus in recruiting and mentoring students from underrepresented groups; identify and train enthusiastic college and university student ambassadors; connect curious students and faculty with the institution’s signature research and creative opportunities; and raise institutional retention rates by engaging in and coordinating cross-campus high-impact practices.

Partnering with both campus and community organizations, honors can also take the lead in building crucial reciprocity between the university and the local community. In addition to modeling community-engaged learning across the curriculum and serving as one of Utah State University’s first “Community-Engaged Departments,” our honors program has collaborated in national grant and community-engaged-institution applications and created clear pathways toward a “Community-Engaged Scholar” transcript.
designation. Similarly, working with study abroad and global engagement programs, honors can pilot international experiences for first-generation or underrepresented groups; raise scholarship money to support international study or internships; develop transcript designations or emphases in global engagement; and engage honors students and staff in leading institution-wide pre- and post-travel reflection upon international experiences. As a collaborator, honors must serve not as an idea laboratory on the fringes of campus but as the catalyst at its core, sparking innovative combinations of unexpected elements to achieve shared goals. When honors students, staff, faculty, and administrators consider what we can do with and for other entities on campus—rather than what those entities can do for us—we become indispensable institutional leaders.

To this end, our honors program has adopted Horace’s “Sapere aude” as our motto and key branding initiative. Not only does our program dare curious individuals to open their minds to different points of view, but we also call upon our institution to know and embrace its own diverse strengths. Both personally and institutionally, honors can facilitate the thrill of discovering more than oneself and the delight of collaborative solutions and innovations. By leading both individuals and institutions beyond the ease and comfort of business as usual, honors introduces everyone on campus to the people who can change their minds. The risks of failure and frustration in this facilitating role are quite clearly the price of institutional leadership. Honors must dare to take these risks if the goal is, as it should be, to lead curiouster and curiouster institutions into the future.

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Faculty as Honors Problem Solvers

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Abstract: Postsecondary honors educators are adept at identifying problems and proposing solutions in honors education, but they may not disseminate their solutions effectively. This essay argues that honors administrators should familiarize themselves with the professional and scholarly resources that NCHC institutional membership affords, and then they should share what they have learned with honors teaching faculty. Rather than simply serving as advisors on administrative and programmatic issues, honors faculty also need the tools and opportunities to be effective honors problem solvers for day-to-day pedagogical issues.

Keywords: honors, administrators, faculty, problems

In his lead essay, “Shunning Complaint: A Call for Solutions from the Honors Community,” Richard Badenhausen tasks the membership of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) to move beyond merely bemoaning existential challenges in honors education toward formulating philosophical and practical solutions. Many of the current issues he identifies, however, from AP and dual enrollment to diversity and accessibility, have been addressed at NCHC’s national conferences and in its publications, such as special forums in the Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council. For instance, at the 2018 annual national conference, the issue of mental health and honors students was the topic of six separate conference sessions, including one in the Developing in Honors (DIH) pre-conference workshop. The conference also has dedicated tracks for Best Honors Administrative Practices (BHAP), Professional Staff in Honors (PSIH), and Students in Honors in which issues such as these are examined.

Perhaps the problem is not that honors professionals complain instead of solving problems but rather that they propose solutions without disseminating them effectively. Issues in honors ebb and flow—consider the
Accreditation Wars of the 2000s—and while some NCHC members are honors lifers, many more rotate in and out of the honors community within three to five years. By necessity, students graduate and move on, but administrators also move up or move out with regularity, as demonstrated by healthy registration for the annual Beginning in Honors (BIH) pre-conference workshop. With this amount of turnover, the honors community should not be surprised to feel as if conference sessions or posts to the electronic discussion list are constantly reinventing the wheel rather than moving forward.

So, in the spirit of Badenhausen’s call to shun complaint, I propose that we reexamine and deploy the comparatively stable resource of honors faculty, i.e., non-administrative, boots-on-the-ground, departmental teaching faculty. Teachers have become the keepers of institutional honors memory, especially because the dire post-2009 academic job market has drastically reduced both the appeal of and opportunity for the academic gypsy lifestyle. Also, teachers work with honors students on a daily basis, and when they see a student in real crisis, they coordinate with each other as best they can—under the shadow of FERPA—to provide assistance.

Therefore, if honors administrators are concerned with the mental health issues of honors students, they should remember that teaching faculty are generally compassionate and well-meaning but that most lack the training to intervene properly. One strategy is inviting campus mental health professionals and specialists in gifted education to speak with faculty about how the cognitive, affective, and behavioral needs of honors students differ from other students, such as addressed in James T. Webb et al.’s Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults: ADHD, Bipolar, OCD, Asperger’s, Depression, and Other Disorders. For example, in her 2018 NCHC conference session on “Teaching Gifted Students: Models and Methods,” Jodi Meadows outlined Kazimirz Dabrowski’s concept of overexcitabilities in gifted students (psychomotor, sensual, emotional, intellectual, and imaginational) and demonstrated ways that honors classroom practices can either enhance or exacerbate these traits. Administrators should share this material from NCHC conference sessions with their honors faculty or, if funding permits, take faculty to conferences to gather information from multiple conference tracks.

For dedicated faculty who see participating in the honors community as valid professional development, a faculty seminar or retreat provides the opportunity to discuss issues in honors pedagogy. Many honors colleges and programs have faculty councils, but their meetings may focus on
helping honors administrators with their administrative and programmatic issues. Faculty require the intellectual space and time to share pedagogical approaches as well, such as comparing thesis expectations from different disciplines. Faculty should help determine the focus for the teaching retreat rather than having the administrator dictate the agenda from the top down. NCHC also holds annual faculty development workshops, and NCHC publications include a variety of sample faculty development designs, such as Milton D. Cox’s “Building and Enhancing Honors Programs through Faculty Learning Communities” and Hanne ten Berge and Rob van der Vaart’s “Honors Components in Honors Faculty Development,” both from the recent NCHC monograph *Breaking Barriers in Teaching and Learning*.

Honors administrators are also rightly concerned with issues of diversity and socioeconomic accessibility in honors student demographics, but they should similarly examine diversity among honors faculty. Badenhausen argues that “honors programs and colleges are still predominantly white” and that our practices may “ignore the monumental demographic shifts taking place in our country and universities.” Faculty hiring, however, does not seem to exhibit a concurrent “monumental demographic shift” at the department level, which constitutes the pool from which honors teachers are drawn. Just as the honors community is working to overcome potential bias in honors admission and retention standards, honors administrators should also work with departments to expand the honors faculty pool in equally thoughtful ways to increase representation.

Another way to promote faculty diversity while addressing issues of sexism, racism, and LGBTQ-phobia in honors is to dismiss the sexist, racist, and LGBTQ-phobic teachers from the honors faculty pool. Faculty colleagues across campus know who makes wildly inappropriate pole dancing jokes in the Faculty Senate, who repeatedly grouses during department committee meetings about overly chatty, emotionally needy honors students, or who tells female honors STEM majors that they do not have to do well academically because they can just marry a higher-earning male classmate. Administrators can be naturally reluctant to wade into sticky issues of departmental politics, not wanting to hurt someone’s feelings or upset the pecking order, and faculty opinions might be dismissed as departmental gossip and infighting, and, besides, students are going to refer to Rate My Professor to see who is a raging jerk; however, honors administrators can also be proactive in weeding out the raging jerks from the honors course schedule.
Similarly, faculty members who only teach honors classes for the perks should be rotated out. In the JNCHC article “Honors Teachers and Academic Identity: What to Look For When Recruiting Honors Faculty,” Rocky Dailey conducted a quantitative survey of the NCHC membership and correlated academic rank and position with factors such as job satisfaction, self-efficacy, faculty governance, and compensation, concluding that traits of potential honors faculty included “highly motivated” and “outstanding teachers.” Just as honors programs and colleges want to recruit and retain students who will work hard and grow as leaders rather than simply game the system, faculty should be politely sent on their way if they only want a smaller class size, if they deign to teach an honors section because it is slightly less onerous than teaching a regular undergraduate class, or if they subscribe to the myth that teaching an honors course significantly reduces one’s workload.

Once honors administrators have identified and prioritized the problems to tackle in their individual honors programs or colleges, then they should assemble a pool of teaching faculty who bring drive and integrity to honors. The NCHC website provides practical resources, such as conference programs and bibliographies for the monograph series and the journals, that administrators can share with teaching faculty so that they do not have to start from scratch every time when approaching specific problems. For example, if a director is concerned about the effects that AP and dual enrollment are having on her program, then she can ask faculty to read and discuss the JNCHC forum on “AP and Dual Enrollment Credit in Honors” for potential solutions. Other forums on “Helping Honors Students in Trouble,” “Social Class and Honors,” and “Nontraditional Students in Honors” would be good starting points for productive faculty discussion in those areas. Honors administrators should familiarize themselves with the resources that NCHC institutional membership affords, and then they should remember to pass on what they have learned to give honors teaching faculty the tools and opportunities to be effective honors problem solvers.

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Being Honors Worthy:
Lessons in Supporting Transfer Students

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Abstract: In the ever-growing discussion of how to build and support honors programs that reflect the diverse communities our institutions serve, the recruitment of transfer students has only recently been identified as a key avenue to enacting more equitable programs. Reflecting on four years of recruiting, enrolling, and graduating transfer students in the University Honors Program at the University of California, Davis, we push the conversation beyond how to welcome transfer students in honors to how to meaningfully support them. We present the initial findings of our ongoing self-assessment to stimulate discussion about the unique challenges and opportunities transfer students experience in honors as well as how administrators and practitioners can rethink how our program structures and processes help our transfer students achieve success or hinder them from doing so. Drawing on descriptive statistics and focus groups, we found that, while transfer students in honors outperformed non-honors transfer students with similar backgrounds in terms of GPA and engagement with undergraduate research, many still struggled with not feeling, as one student described, “honors worthy.” Our preliminary findings suggest that concerns over belonging in honors can be mitigated by a cohort model that provides a sense of community, by a restructuring of the GPA requirements to cushion “transfer shock,” and, critically, by mentorship from administrators and faculty. Given the pool of diverse potential honors students currently in the community college pipeline and the recognition within NCHC that diverse cohorts best prepare students to engage meaningfully with the world around them, now is the time to increase the admissions of transfer students into honors programs. Lessons from early adopters such as UC Davis can help initial programming meet students’ needs and cultivate their talents.

Keywords: transfer students, diversity, honors, mentoring, research institution
Last year, Patrick Bahls authored “Opening Doors: Facilitating Transfer Students’ Participation in Honors” in this journal. He carefully documented, using websites as sources, what efforts are currently underway to target and welcome transfer students into honors program cohorts. Most of his focus is on the recruitment side: evaluating admissions criteria, articulation agreements, and website language. He concludes that while transfer students should be an important element of program diversity, few honors programs are recruiting them. At the University of California (UC), Davis, we agree with Bahls and would like to contribute another element to the National Collegiate Honors Council’s welcome attention to inclusion of transfer students in honors by discussing how we can support them after they have been recruited. Bahls encourages honors programs to assess whether their curriculum design and requirements for good standing are welcoming to transfer students. Pushing further, we add a focus on community building, undergraduate research, and mentorship. We describe structures that can help transfer students thrive after they have been accepted in honors and how to avoid impediments that we may inadvertently place in their way.

Such questions should be of interest to many honors educators since, as Bahls documented, a great deal of discussion during the last decade in NCHC has focused on the value of diversifying our programs and on the specific approaches to admissions, curriculum, and co-curricular matters that best equip honors graduates to engage successfully with diverse cultures and environments. Setting the Table for Diversity (Coleman and Kotinek) in 2010 highlighted the work being done to move from an assumed white-majority student and faculty honors community to one that is diverse, inclusive, and equitable in terms of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and first-generation college attendance. That volume represents an early effort to convince honors programs across the country to diversify, with particular attention to curricula. The volume signaled a time for “doing something” to recognize diversity within all honors programs. Author Lisa L. Coleman recalled a colleague saying, “everyone, all programs, could do something to improve their performance vis-à-vis diversity” (12). Eight years later, NCHC’s published collections on the topic continued to stress curricular diversity while also including a strong push toward diversifying the student body in terms of low-income and historically underrepresented groups.

Following closely on Coleman, Kotinek, and Oda’s 2017 Occupy Honors Education, Naomi Yavneh Klos asked how honors programs generally could be places of access, equity, and excellence. For Yavneh Klos, diversity
in honors works on two fronts. First, curricular: enabling students in honors to “learn how to use their gifts to develop an understanding of the world in its complexities” and emerge as graduates who have “the ability to listen to and engage with divergent opinions” (4). Second, demographic: defining eligibility as a broad subset of academic talents across all student socio-economic bands constituting a cohort. Bahls connected the dots between these aims and the often-overlooked prospective honors students that come from community college systems. If we are serious about diversifying our programs, Bahls contended, we would provide a front-and-center space for community college students, who represent a higher percentage of underrepresented backgrounds, limited incomes, and first-generation backgrounds as well as a wider range of ages and previous life experiences.

The value of community college students in diversifying honors was on our minds in 2013 when we restructured the honors offerings at UC Davis to create the single University Honors Program (UHP). The UHP was a reconfiguration of two previous programs. The first, Integrated Studies, was founded in 1969 as a residential, first-year living-learning community with a series of interdisciplinary, issues-focused seminars. The program’s first cohorts consisted primarily of academically strong students seeking unique ways to augment their studies in the face of increasingly large class sizes and siloed majors. Eventually, Integrated Studies came to be viewed as a recruiting venue for Regents Scholars, the most prestigious scholarship in the UC system, which led to its next iteration, the Integrated Studies Honors Program. In 1996, a grass roots group of faculty initiated the Davis Honors Challenge, an open-application program also for academically talented students but one less reliant on the traditional metrics of high school performance and standardized tests used to select Regents Scholars. With its more egalitarian mission, the Honors Challenge Program also had an application-based admission process for students entering as sophomores as well as for transfer students. While the Integrated Studies and Davis Honors programs shared some similar components, the open-application program of Honors Challenge was more focused on facilitating research and service projects with faculty after the first year so that its entering transfer students could “plug in” to the service learning and research project-based parts of its curriculum along with continuing third-year students in the program.

We imagined that the two programs, if brought together, could combine diversity, excellence, curricular rigor, and research engagement. We also sought to draw together the wide-ranging talents of our K–12 education pool
with its greater racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity than is found in our historically preferred feeder schools, even though doing so would likely result in a freshman class in which students were less evenly prepared than would otherwise be the case (Teranishi and Briscoe 592). The first class of UHP students launched in 2014 with three entry points: first-year students upon admission, second-year via an on-campus application process, and transfer students. Of the entering transfer students, 33% were awarded academic-based scholarships, a figure that was slightly lower than the 43% of direct-from-high-school first-year students who received funding. The 2014 transfer students were not the first honors transfers on our campus. What was new, however, was their arrival in a single cohort, recruited from community colleges, that stayed together. Like the UHP first-year students, they opted into honors and formed a community with common coursework and individual research experiences. To denote their full participation as UHP students, they were oriented and graduated together with their fresh-from-high-school program peers. This University Honors Program, with some modifications, continues today.

UC Davis, by design and circumstance, is on the leading edge of the movement to increase the number of transfer students in honors. For that reason, the focus here will not be on all available means for achieving diversity that we have pursued in the UHP but specifically on transfer students. What follows is a preliminary assessment of our experience and our efforts to recruit and retain transfer students, which remain a work in progress. We want more of our students to stay eligible by meeting the GPA minimum. We want to do a better job at recruiting students. We still need to figure out just how much to emphasize research experiences for this cohort. Nonetheless, we believe that the initial findings in our research demonstrate that the UHP’s focus on transfer students is succeeding in diversifying our community and improving support for students. We believe that our experience can help other honors programs, particularly at research universities, continue to achieve true diversity of people and thought. Like Bahls, we have found that honors programs must provide visible entry portals for transfer students and a clear curriculum that recognizes the distinct requirements for transfer students and their aims within our institutions. We also contend that honors programs must provide connections between transfer students and faculty who can open doors to research and success within and beyond the institution. At the same time, we must try to prevent transfer students from feeling that they do not belong at our institutions, a feeling that unfortunately the word “honors” can amplify if we fail to define it as transfer-inclusive.
One note of clarification may be helpful at the outset. Readers may wonder why we do not recruit transfer students for the UHP exclusively from honors programs at community colleges. We are, in fact, strengthening our relationship with several regional community colleges that have honors programs. In the last year, especially, we have made presentations to their students, hosted them for informational events on our campus, and increased the number of students we invite from these programs. However, because not every community college we recruit from across California has an honors program, and because the courses in the programs that do exist are not standardized, we cannot fully integrate honors from our community college feeders into honors in the UHP at this time. As honors programs in community colleges become more common across the state and curricular articulations become better defined, we anticipate finding stronger connections between community college honors and UC Davis honors, thus enabling a four-year honors experience for all UHP students, transfer and non-transfer.

UC DAVIS UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM (UHP)

Why Focus on Transfer Students?

Inclusion of transfer students was part of our earliest plans for developing a new honors program, in part because doing so makes sense in our UC context. Consider, for example, that we began working on the new honors program in 2013, the same year the UC Office of the President produced a report urging all UC campuses to do more to recruit and graduate transfer students. Although the UC system had long been a leader in transfer enrollments because of clear articulations across the state between itself and California’s 114-campus community college system, UC’s new President, Janet Napolitano, wanted us to do more. The report asked us to “recommit to enrolling at least 33% transfers both systemwide and by campus” (“Preparing California” 7). Provided as justification for this agenda were data on the high numbers of limited-income and first-generation students currently in the community college system, 55% and 52%, respectively (“Enhancing” 1). Given the alignment between this system-wide goal and our desire in the UHP to create access and further socio-economic mobility for the next generation of Californians, it made sense that transfer students would be a key component of our revamped honors program.

Given the transfer-positive culture in California, ours is not a story relevant only to honors programs in our state. Across the country there has been
growth in the percentage of community college students who intend to transfer to universities to complete their four-year degrees. One study from the late 1980s found that only one third of “all entering community college students referred to earning a baccalaureate degree as their primary aspiration” (Bahruth and Venditti 12). A recent study found that number to be much higher now, with 81% desiring a four-year degree when they began community college (Giancola and Kahlenberg, qtd. in Glynn 1). Still, there is a difference between what students intend and what actually happens. The same study found that within six years only 33% of these students had actually transferred to a four-year institution (Glynn 1).

Not only are the goals of community college students changing, but so is their makeup. According to a 2017 study, at the same time that university-aspiring students are increasing in number, the percentage of “students of color” and individuals who are “first-generation and low-income” is also increasing (Bragg 268). If we want our four-year institutions to attract the most talented and diverse students to tackle society’s problems, we need to help bridge the divide between the kinds of students who are academically capable and motivated in community college and those who ultimately complete four-year degrees. The argument is strong, given these conditions, that diverse honors programs should have points of access at year one and also at year three. Further, the value of including transfer students is not merely to diversify our cohorts and to accelerate the degree-seeking of talented under-represented students but may also be to support their self-efficacy. As David M. Jones reminds us in Occupy Honors Education, “honors programs at public universities have often served as a cost-effective way for underserved first-generation students to gain the benefits of high-impact pedagogies such as undergraduate research, smaller class sizes, and the like” (35). Thus, accepting transfer students from community colleges into the honors programs of four-year colleges and universities not only benefits those institutions by helping them attract stronger students but also benefits the transfer students by furnishing them with a stronger four-year degree than they might otherwise have attained.

**How the UHP Supports Transfer Students**

UC Davis has supported transfer students as they entered the honors program by providing structures that connect them to mentors and scaffold their learning throughout their degree progress. Tailoring the honors experience to transfer students starts with understanding some of the key differences...
between first-year admits and transfers. UHP first-year admits experience an immersive program on a number of fronts. They live together in a common residence hall; they take UHP courses that meet general education and graduation requirements; and they take part in a number of co-curricular events. In contrast, transfer students do not inhabit a living learning community because few have indicated that would be an option they desire. Many transfer students in the UHP report that family responsibilities and work schedules affect their ability to participate in opportunities to attend UHP-sponsored social events. Shared course experiences among cohorts of transfer students thus become critical; accordingly, each incoming cohort takes a mandatory seminar in the fall, which, while not required for their major, provides a transfer community experience, and the units count toward their degree.

The required seminar for transfer students has two primary goals: building their initial confidence as they make the transition from community college to a four-year institution and helping them fully achieve their particular learning goals at UC Davis. The class meets once a week for two hours over a ten-week quarter and is team-taught by the UHP academic advisor and Assistant Director, author Heidi van Beek, and a faculty member who is also the Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Education (VPDUE) with administrative responsibility for UHP, author Carolyn Thomas. Sessions are divided into two parts. In the first, students read and discuss a book that explores the history and culture of American universities. In the second, students learn about and discuss resources available on campus to help them achieve their academic and personal goals.

The course has evolved over the years we have taught it, particularly in its now clear division between the element led by the VPDUE and the element led by the academic advisor. We have also better calibrated the assignments in the course to build the skills our students have indicated to be of particular value to them in their first quarter, which include writing response papers, doing research with a partner on one campus resource and presenting it to the class, and meeting with a professor in their department to learn how research works. In-class presentations now are focused on information new transfer students can use: data comparing freshman- and transfer-entry student academic performance (led by the Center for Educational Effectiveness), resources on mental health and work-life balance (led by the Student Health and Counseling Center), and tips for students across disciplines on how they can get involved in research (led by a faculty panel). Our syllabus reflects our desire to help UHP transfer students form a community with each other,
better understand a research university, build their oral and written communication skills, and network with faculty in connections that lead to learning opportunities and open doors. We have also featured the course on our website program description and provided a more substantial overview of it on our preview day in order to achieve the “transparency” (Bahls 77) that helps students with diverse academic preparations understand the value of honors ahead of time instead of waiting until fall quarter to ask or find out.

The importance of mentorship is strongly emphasized to UHP transfer students from the beginning. When they arrive, each student is assigned to the VPDUE as a mentee. This assignment is meant to be temporary, serving as a bridge between the mentorship that students likely had in community college and the mentorship we want them to have from UC faculty in their areas of study. During the required seminar, two sessions are reserved for one-on-one meetings between each student and the VPDUE. Here the aim is for students to have done some background research on the faculty who teach in their department and reflected on their own interests so that a discussion can take place about a possible match between student and professor. An aim of the UHP is to solidify that mentorship match by the end of the first year.

The purpose of this approach is to meet students where they are, recognizing that some students will need additional support from these initial advising sessions to secure a mentorship connection. Thus, during some one-on-one sessions, students inform the VPDUE that they have already located a faculty member they want to work for and made the connection themselves. During others, the two look online together to do that research and think through the possibilities. During still others, students who hesitate to reach out to faculty directly instead help craft an email that the VPDUE sends to particular professors who are of interest, sharing some information about the students and asking if the faculty members would be willing to meet with them. This process helps put the class on equal footing in terms of mentorship. Students who are intimidated receive support; students who have a hard time pairing their interests with faculty research receive a bridge between the two; and students who have already initiated their faculty mentor search receive affirmation for the work they are doing.

The end of the course marks a transition in advising and curriculum. While students are encouraged to continue to meet with their UHP advisors once a quarter, they are also encouraged to connect to their departmental academic advisors. While the VPDUE continues to be available for mentorship, students are encouraged to begin meeting regularly with a faculty mentor
in their area of study. The remainder of their first year, they are focused on the requirements for their major along with two additional UHP activities selected from a list of nine, including study abroad, leadership training, a project management course, a faculty-mentored independent study, an internship, or a community service project. During their second and final year in the program they focus on their “Signature Work.” Typically, they work with a faculty member to conceptualize and complete a thesis or design project. If their GPA has dropped below 3.5, the minimum requirement for an honors thesis in many departments, yet remains above the 3.25 required for program eligibility, they can work with faculty through the UHP to complete an alternative thesis or design project. Through all of these decisions, they are supported by their UHP advisor, who co-taught their initial seminar, to define their own goals and pursue them with success.

In teaching the course, we observed that students feel supported; learn logistical and strategic information to approach their studies with success; and frequently begin the work of discerning their areas of interest and considering research. After the course, students continue to meet with the UHP advisor, van Beek, as they undertake a third-year research or community-service experience and move into a fourth-year Signature Work. They also meet, as they choose, with Thomas, the VPDUE, for informal mentoring. We track students who experience academic difficulty and reach out to support them, and ultimately we attend their successful graduation at the joint UHP spring ceremony. Still, our observations cannot reveal whether the program has achieved its chief aim: to enable transfer students more fully to integrate into the research university so that they experience an enhanced degree of academic success and personal growth through program participation. After four years of seeing the appearance of student success, we wanted to look methodically across quantitative and qualitative data to see what we might be missing.

LAYING OUT THE APPROACH

Our research team developed a multi-method approach toward internal assessment. Led by the VPDUE, the team included UHP leadership as well as a graduate student researcher. The project aim was to understand how institutional structures—for which they were responsible at different levels within the university hierarchy—support or hamper efforts to recruit, retain, and graduate UHP cohorts that reflect the diversity of California’s communities. In an early research team meeting, one member questioned what might be
behind the imposter syndrome reported by many transfer students in honors:
whether it originates with the students themselves or is imposed on them by
the institution, i.e., whether the experience of being dislocated originates in
our students or in the structures we provide them. By critically examining the
rules and support structures for which they are responsible, the research team
members found themselves in a unique position that comes with both oppor-
tunities and challenges. On the positive side, we could act on findings and
make changes as a result of the research. At the same time, we had to retain an
openness to findings, especially unflattering ones, in order to maintain valid-
ity and rigor.

Presented here are the findings from our initial phase of research, which
was designed to gather preliminary data to shape future research questions.
This initial phase captured a snapshot of the macrotrends in the UHP for the
past five years through descriptive statistics and then fleshed them out with
insights from students through a small set of focus groups. (Next phases of
research will continue with longitudinal tracking of the descriptive statistics,
surveys of incoming students, annual focus groups, and ongoing semi-structured interviews.) The goal of the initial phases was twofold: first, to establish
a baseline of how the UHP was doing in its efforts to recruit and retain transfer
students, especially from historically underrepresented groups; and second,
to hear from students themselves what they valued about UHP and what they
found challenging or disheartening.

The descriptive statistics derive from data collected by UC Davis’s
Undergraduate Education. Our research team disaggregated data on program
demographics by three categories: underrepresented minorities (African
Americans, American Indian/Alaska Native, Chicanx/Latinx, and Pacific
Islander); first-generation students (neither parent has received a four-year
degree); and students of limited income (defined as Pell Grant eligible).
Additionally, we looked at the GPAs of transfer students through a recent
internal evaluation (Tan 3) and at overall engagement with research through
the internal tracking records of UHP administrators.

The focus groups included nine of 55 active UHP students. Conducted
in May 2018, the focus groups were led by the graduate student assistant for
the project, the only researcher not involved in teaching or administering the
UHP, in order to maintain student confidentiality. Seven participants were
completing their first year (third quarter) at UC Davis while two were com-
pleting their final year. Four of the participants identified as first-generation;
three of the four also identified as an underrepresented minority. One of the
nine students identified as limited-income. Students were asked about the value and challenges of participating in the honors program and about their experiences from their time applying to UC Davis through the present. In a “journey map” exercise, students reflected on their most salient memories in honors by writing their high and low points on post-its, which were then affixed to a group map. Students then shared their contributions, often self-identifying collective experiences in subsequent discussions.

The research team developed an iterative process for data analysis, alternating between individual analysis and team debriefings. Research team members individually identified key findings in the descriptive statistics and key threads (codes) from the focus groups, then brought them to group discussions. After the group collectively agreed on preliminary findings, individual team members returned to the dashboard and focus group transcripts to identify data that complicated, corroborated, and/or conflicted with the preliminary findings and then re-grouped again. Throughout the process, team members shared and reflected on how and if the emerging findings corresponded to their own experiences as administrators, advisors, and instructors in the UHP. The process provided opportunities to unpack surprising findings as a team and critically reflect on them together, identifying new opportunities within the research as well as developing responses to programmatic challenges as they were identified.

FINDINGS I:
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Student Population

Our aim with the University Honors Program from the beginning has been to recruit a diverse group of students who closely reflect the composition of the university’s overall student body. Tables 1 and 2 show the side-by-side comparison of UHP transfer students relative to the total transfer population at UC Davis. In the first two years, the UHP enrolled a lower percentage of transfer students who identified as underrepresented, limited-income, and/or first-generation students than the university did overall. At this point, classes consisted nearly exclusively of prestigious Regents Scholarship holders selected by a process determined outside of any direct UHP influence; UHP was more the recipient than the selector of the honors transfer classes. By the 2016 recruiting year, the program was intentionally working with admissions to identify the highest-achieving transfer students outside the
prestigious scholarship applicants and made offers to students who already had selected UC Davis in their tagged transfers. These recruits included a more diverse range of majors as well as a larger percentage of students who identified as underrepresented, first-generation, and/or limited income than those selected for the Regents Scholarship. In addition to the Regents Scholars yield, these students were offered seats in the UHP. Direct outreach to candidates by the UHP Associate and Assistant Directors was also incorporated into the recruitment approach. An immediate result was that the UHP’s transfer cohort was nearly 10% higher in underrepresented students than what was found at UC Davis generally and was close to mirroring the general student population of limited-income students. A 12% gap in number remained between first-generation UHP students and first-generation UC Davis students generally.

**Academic Performance**

Transfer students, when they move from community college to a four-year institution, frequently struggle to maintain the same GPA that they carried in community college. Exploring GPAs for community college transfer students who entered the UHP with those who did not suggests that transfer students in the UHP were better able to maintain high GPAs, especially in the first quarter, than were their non-UHP peers. Between 2014 and 2017, a total of 110 UHP transfer students entered the program with an average incoming GPA of 3.97 for Regents Scholars and 3.93 for others. When compared to students transferring to UC Davis but not into UHP, all with an incoming GPA of at least 3.5, we see both groups with lower overall GPAs after the first quarter at UC Davis as compared to their incoming GPAs from community college. Yet the UHP-participating transfer students have a smaller drop in GPA (roughly .2 for UHP and .36+ for non-UHP). The gap between the two GPA “drops” is likely even higher because 3.5 functions as the floor for the non-UHP group. Since many students in the over 4,000 strong 3.5+ cohort entered with GPAs closer to 4.0 than 3.5, the dip in individual GPA within the cohort is frequently greater than .36.

The percentages change in the second quarter, however. Here the UHP transfer students experience a greater dip in GPA from the previous to the current quarter than their non-UHP transfer peers. Given that the transfer seminar occurs in the fall but not in subsequent quarters and given that this is the only difference in the fall academic schedule for UHP transfer students, the transfer seminar may be important in helping participants succeed
honors Worthy

academically. On the other hand, the transfer seminar itself is graded and, while only two units, the ‘A’ that students often earn may be the key factor in the first-quarter GPA boost. More investigation here is needed.

Undergraduate Research Engagement

Participation in the UHP has also resulted in robust research engagement among transfer students. Nationally, 26% of all undergraduate students completed research with faculty by their senior year at R1 universities such as UC Davis whereas only 15% of transfer students who started elsewhere completed research with faculty (National Survey of Student Engagement 13). Students are more likely to engage in research if they start their research in their first two years, and transfer students often struggle to catch up (Haeger et al. 17). At UC Davis, we have observed that students typically require time to learn about faculty research, and many students have to ask several faculty members if they can assist with research before being given the chance to do so. Students who began at UC Davis and are now juniors, for example, have had two previous years to learn about the campus, to understand faculty research, and to ask and ask again for research possibilities. Transfer students just entering from community college have not had that opportunity. As a result, if they want to do research before graduation, they have to work harder and faster to catch up to their non-transfer peers. Nevertheless, UHP transfer students, exceed by a significant percentage—38% (“Facts”)—the overall statistics for research engagement for all UC Davis students, a percentage that accounts for both straight-from-high school entering students and transfer-entry students. To date, all transfer students in UHP who have completed their Signature Work did so through faculty-mentored research projects. Therefore, completion of Signature Work, as tracked through internal records, stands as a useful proxy for participation in undergraduate research. Among transfer students entering in the 2014 and 2015 cohorts, 55% completed mentored research projects. Currently, the 2016 entering cohort (with some members still completing degrees) is on a path to reach 85% with completed research projects.

Another marker of what we might term a research-positive culture within the UHP emerged in the qualitative focus group data. Students frequently mentioned the research they were undertaking or planned to undertake before graduation. Participant B asked, “If someone doesn’t want to do research, would the honors program benefit them?” prompting nods from other students. The comment suggests that a primary benefit that students feel they derive from the program is support to pursue research for those who
desire it. While more research of our own would be required to determine the impact of student research on UHP transfer student success, studies show that opportunities for student research are indeed associated with positive student

**Table 1. Admissions Count by Percentage of Transfer Students in UHP Who Identified as Underrepresented Minority, Limited-Income, and/or First-Generation College Educated**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Underrepresented Minorities</th>
<th>Limited Income</th>
<th>First Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014–2015</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015–2016</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016–2017</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017–2018</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Admissions Count by Percentage of All Transfer Students at UC Davis Who Identified as Underrepresented Minority, Limited-Income, and/or First Generation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Underrepresented Minorities</th>
<th>Limited Income</th>
<th>First Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014–2015</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015–2016</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016–2017</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017–2018</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. First and Second Term GPA for UHP Transfer vs Non-Honors Transfer Students Entering UC Davis with a 3.5+ GPA from Their Community College (All Students Entering between 2014 and 2017)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admit Level</th>
<th>UHP Classification</th>
<th>Average First Term GPA</th>
<th>Average Second Term GPA</th>
<th>Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>Honors</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Honors</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>4769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4. UHP Transfer Students Completing Research through Signature Work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Year</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Completed Signature Work</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15*</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*two more in progress
outcomes. In addition to encouraging independent initiative and refinement of one’s interests, research experience increases the connection students have to faculty mentors and therefore can be considered an important high-impact practice. Further, studies have suggested that while undergraduate research benefits all students (Seymour et al. 493), it specifically supports retention of students at greatest risk of not completing their degrees (Gregerman et al. 55), a group that is well-represented among UHP transfers.

This data snapshot suggests that the UHP’s transfer program may be succeeding where it has put the greatest effort: helping students adapt to the pacing of the quarter system so they overcome the GPA dip associated with “transfer shock” (Scott et al. 304) and helping them develop mentored relationships with faculty engaged in the creation of knowledge.

**FINDINGS II:**

**FOCUS GROUPS**

**Mismatch between Being in Honors and Belonging**

The key thread that emerged from the small focus groups conducted in the spring of 2018 related to whether transfer students in the UHP felt they belonged in honors at UC Davis. Many reported experiencing imposter syndrome, compounded by being both a transfer student to a prestigious university and a member of its honors program. While the interviewer seeded the term “imposter syndrome” into one focus group, the students fixed on it as a topic of intense discussion. Two participants expressed concern that the phenomenon may be further compounded for students of historically underrepresented backgrounds. For many such students, this concern was heightened by fear that they would not maintain a certain GPA and could, therefore, lose their place in honors and lose the Regents Scholarship. Anxieties and questions of belonging, however, were mitigated by two key factors: mentorship from powerful allies and a cohort model that helped them further develop a sense of belonging.

Students expressed their anxiety over whether they belonged in the honors program at UC Davis from several perspectives. Capturing the crux of the imposter syndrome unique to transfer students from two-year institutions, Participant E shared this concern: “I knew I was community college smart, I didn’t know if I was UC smart.” The statement prompted universal nods of agreement in the focus group. Transferring not just into UC but into the honors program added a second layer. Participant G expressed doubts about
being “honors worthy.” In two separate focus groups, participants suggested a third form of imposter syndrome specific to students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. One of the participants, who self-identified as an underrepresented minority, wondered how many other students who identified as underrepresented minorities declined the invitation to join honors because of concerns that they would not be competitive enough. In a different focus group, this suggestion was corroborated when Participant E, who also self-identified as an underrepresented minority, shared their story of deciding whether to accept the invitation to UHP. The student did not tell anyone or accept right away out of a fear there would “be a bunch of smart people who are way smarter than me blowing me out of the water.” Such feelings affected students’ adjustment to the new academic environment generally and to UC Davis and the honors program specifically.

The 3.5 GPA Cliff

Worries over one’s ability to perform at a UC honors level also had potential material consequences. As Participant E noted, “if my grades tank, [. . .] I might lose my scholarship and not get to stay here anymore.” At the time these students were admitted, all UHP students needed to maintain a 3.5 cumulative GPA in order to stay eligible for the program. In addition, for the eight of nine who had received the Regents Scholarship, valued at $7,500 per year, a 3.25 GPA was required to stay eligible for funding. For those of us who run the UHP, the focus groups were the first time we realized the negative impact our minimum GPA requirement had on many of our transfer students. Eight of the nine participants reported that their first quarter at UC Davis was the first time they had struggled to maintain their grades. Unlike other Regents Scholars in their third year at UC Davis in the UHP, the transfer students did not have a cushion for their GPA from their previous years of study. These conditions contributed to near-universal low points for transfer students throughout the fall quarter, with several sharing that they experienced the onset or uptick of depression and/or anxiety during this period. They seemed unaware that once they were accepted, they were not actually under the threat of being removed from the program at the end of the fall quarter if their GPA dipped below the cutoff. Their anxiety was the result of a mismatch in the program communication that has since been corrected. The program was inadvertently holding honors students to a higher standard than that of the campus’s most prestigious scholarship. Some of us failed to see the discrepancy as a large problem: we knew that if students failed to hit it, they...
would still keep their scholarship and we could support them to get back on track in honors. What we failed to realize was that, for students, the focus was not on the exception that could be made for them but on the sense of failure they internalized by not maintaining a 3.5 when likely they had done so at community college every quarter. The GPA requirement was for them a cliff which they could fall off, a fall that could both hurt them and affirm that they were not good enough for honors. Clearly there was a disconnect in the program’s message regarding higher standards and scholarship requirements.

The Common Course and Discovery that No One Is Superhuman

Communication between the honors administration and transfer students seems to have been particularly strong in the First-Year Seminar taken by all UHP transfer students in the fall. Capped at nineteen students, these two courses divided the overall cohort into two identical class sections. During each weekly meeting, students sat at one of four table groups with two to three of their peers and engaged in a combination of small group discussion, larger class discussion, and presentations. Focus group participants reported that connecting with their peers through the First-Year Seminar course was particularly beneficial. First, it helped make “a huge school smaller and feel more intimate” according to Participant G. For majors in the biological sciences at UC Davis, for example, the third-year curriculum can feature no class with fewer than 100 students. English majors, on the other hand, might have fewer than 50 students in their classes. The shared honors seminar served as an equalizer across colleges and majors, enabling all students to have an intimate learning space where the facilitators know their names and they come to know each other. Second, for many participants the course facilitated friendships that bridged across disciplines and sprung from shared experiences: Participant B commented, “we study together and we also are able to talk about where are you on finding your mentor […] It’s just nice to have people that are going through the same thing.” UHP transfer students can go from knowing no one in the group that first fall to rooming together as close friends by their senior year. Further, focus group participants felt that the common course helped them break preconceived notions that their contemporaries in the program were somehow better students than they were. Instead of feeling threatened by or competitive with their classmates, they found that through talking to each other over the course of the ten weeks that not all other UHP students are “super human,” as Participant J put it.
The Value of a Powerful Mentor

The overwhelming majority of focus group participants identified the mentorship provided by instructors and administrators of the UHP as critical to their academic success, sense of belonging, and emotional wellbeing as they transitioned into and out of UC Davis. A majority of participants also reported that they had sought advising from UHP instructors and administrators and that, in the words of Participant B, the advising they received “exceeded expectations” by being both useful and emotionally attuned. The stature of honors mentors within the hierarchy of the campus also played a positive role. As Participant B reported, “it just kind of helps to know that someone this high up is actually invested in your success. Right? Like, being a Dean.” Mentors in high places were prized in part for their ability to open doors to research and work opportunities by directly connecting students with faculty and other administrators. Facilitating access was not their only value, however. Having someone in a highly visible role on a new and large campus recognized the students’ potential:

I remember Dean Thomas just said flat-out, ‘you belong here. […] You made it here.’ That means something. And it doesn’t mean any less that you went to a community college first. And I feel like that makes a difference. To hear those words said to you point blank, they have power to them and they make a difference. And there is still I think some sense of that, just because people can act a certain way toward you if they find out that you’re a transfer. (Participant C)

Mentors affirmed that students had the right to be at UC Davis and, specifically, in the UHP. In turn, participants also reported that they saw not only their cohorts but also faculty and administrators as, in the words of Participant F, “just people” whom the students could approach and talk to, deepening their sense of belonging.

DISCUSSION:
MITIGATING RISK, MAXIMIZING SUPPORT FOR HONORS TRANSFER STUDENTS

One of the reasons we sought to undertake this research was to discover how we might use evidence from our students to improve the experience of future students. As Jones has argued, in order for honors to move toward
“inclusive excellence . . . honors leaders need an extraordinary willingness to give and receive constructive feedback,” especially as it relates to improving “diversity-related outcomes” (56). Recognizing that the feedback gathered in this study is limited by the early nature of the findings, we are eager to undertake this work in order to listen and learn so we can improve the success of our recruitment and support of transfer students in the UHP. We have already made substantial changes to the program based on our research. First, we have shifted our admissions process to augment the Regents Scholars pool selected by campus entities outside the UHP, partnering with admissions to identify students who have outstanding community college academic records and also who are broadly representative of the UC Davis incoming transfer class. However, even with all our efforts to ensure the admission of an honors-ready cohort of community college transfers, the moment they learn of their acceptance to the UHP may come as a disorienting surprise, with the subsequent likely response from some of them of “why me?” We try to address this issue on the UHP website: when students visit the site, they find a drop-down menu asking if they are first-year or transfer students. If they select “transfer students,” they are connected to stories of other transfer students, many from diverse backgrounds. Further, Eddy A. Ruiz, Associate Director of the UHP, along with Assistant Director van Beek, reach out to every admitted transfer student. We are also working toward providing scholarship funding to all incoming transfer students as opposed to the two-tiered system we currently have wherein only some students receive financial support; we hope that this will provide yet another signal to our UHP transfer students that UC Davis recognizes their exceptional academic record and that it will ultimately boost their confidence.

To better serve our transfer students, we have also changed the GPA requirement. After learning that the 3.5 cumulative floor was causing stress, we also noticed that while students did occasionally drop below that mark, they rarely fell far below it when they received adequate support. Thus, we have revised our GPA policy, shifting the required minimum from 3.5 to 3.25. The new policy has caused us to become more conscientious about our students. We have instituted an appeals process for those who fall between a 3.24 and 3.0 that grants transfers a full quarter to regain a 3.25 GPA by the end of fall quarter their second year and thereby their honors eligibility. Our hope is that offering this opportunity rather than observing an inflexible cutoff will enable students to discuss whether a major they may be struggling with is the best choice and to recognize any personal or academic concerns that may
be barriers while still maintaining a path to complete their Signature Work. While this policy is too new for us to assess its impact on grade anxiety, we are hopeful that it will better align our program’s policy with its aim: to admit talented and diverse students who have had varying levels of academic preparation and who can, by the time they graduate, create pathways that have positive impacts on the world.

Another reason we undertook this research was to share our experiences with others in the honors community in the hope that more honors programs, particularly at research universities with common transfer paths, will choose to admit transfer cohorts. With this hope in mind, let us step back briefly into the literature on transfer students to consider what barriers they face when admitted to our institutions and to determine whether our program has mitigated some or all of them.

Literature on the transfer experience discusses the difficulty many transfer students coming from community college face adjusting to four-year institutions. For some, the difficulty is linked to a difference in scale. One 2014 study that looked at transfer students who had come from different community colleges attested that “students accustomed to a smaller more intimate campus found the physical geography and scale of the university system complex and challenging” (Allen et al. 361). When community college student transfers were asked to describe what was difficult in their new institution compared to their previous one, they responded with adjectives associated with size and organization like “bureaucratic, chaotic, and confusing,” and many also mentioned the challenge of needing to know things and finding that “information and direction were not easily obtained” (Allen et al. 361). A more recent study titled “The Community College Penalty?” (Lichtenberger and Dietrich) refers to three separate elements that can contribute to what the authors see as “the stress and difficulty of the social adjustment” (25) when students shift between institutions. The first element is “latecomer” (Handel 2011) status. Entering a four-year institution in their junior year, transfer students are walking into a world where many of their fellow juniors have already had two years on the campus to form social relationships and to begin distinguishing themselves academically. A second element is that bridge programs typically do not include transfer students or do not include them proportionally to first-year students so that the regular support that might be there to help lower-income or underrepresented students adjust to expectations and academic pacing is not typically available for transfers. Last are “pull factors” for transfer students, such as family responsibilities, living arrangements,
and outside campus employment, which, if they are not mitigated, may prevent transfer students from being on campus enough during their first year to create social networks and engage in academically enriching activities in the way that freshmen frequently can (Lichtenberger and Dietrich 25). These elements, taken together, constitute what has commonly been referred to as “transfer shock,” the “psychological, academic, and environmental challenges” (Allen et al. 354) that lead to feelings of alienation, isolation, and anonymity and that frequently correlate with a decline in GPA for students moving from a community college to a four-year institution.

The UHP transfer pathway seeks to mitigate “transfer shock.” Our transfer students are placed into two small cohorts determined by the first-year seminars they take in fall quarter, where they have a chance to make connections with other students that could be difficult were they only in large classes with students they could not easily identify as incoming transfers. In some cases, the seminar leads to new friendships that enable social bonding. In others, it merely demystifies a student’s sense that other students are “superhuman.” Participation in the course and the relationships that develop out of it may also help mitigate any “late comer status” issues (Bahr et al. 479, qtd. in Lichtenberger and Dietrich 25).

The UHP also helps students navigate the bureaucracy and confusion of our large, research-intensive campus. While each student has an advisor in their home department and likely has attended the general campus orientation for transfer students, focus group participants frequently cited the advising they received from the UHP as particularly valuable. In the UHP, students are always able to drop in or make an appointment to talk with their advisor—the same person who co-teaches their First-Year Seminar course and who specializes in the questions transfer students ask and the issues they face. Further, a number of elements of the transfer program address the “pull factors” that can keep students from fully participating in university life. A special orientation held over the summer is built around transfer students’ work and family schedules. The social event for incoming transfers is held during class time at the home of the Vice Provost and Dean so that all students can participate and feel appreciated by someone with a large role on campus. Group projects in the course are planned far in advance so that family and work obligations can be circumvented. Finally, during one-one-one sessions scheduled during class time, students talk about academic and personal concerns with the co-instructing advisor and about research/mentorship plans with the co-instructing VPDUE. All of these planned arrangements draw students into...
activities we associate with first-year success like peer connection, social engagement, staff and faculty mentorship, and research engagement.

At the same time, the very fact that these students are participating in an “honors program” can itself be a barrier to success. “I knew I was community college smart” powerfully expresses the insecurity that transfer students often feel as they enter our four-year, high-prestige institutions. Keeping in mind the context of community college, from which only one-third of the students transfer to four-year institutions and only 15% ever earn a bachelor’s degree within six years, transfer students have reason to feel unsure if their skill sets will transfer (Fink and Jenkins 295). They have stood out academically in an environment where the competition for academic accolades was lower. In contrast to graduating with honors from a community college, an honors invitation from a four-year institution to someone attending a community college may be understood as a statement more of potential than of proven success.

As Badenhausen has argued, “The term ‘honors’ by itself carries an enormous amount of baggage around questions of privilege, elitism, and separateness” (11). As a result, we need to “interrogate the way we narratively frame honors experiences” to make them “as inclusive as possible” (Badenhausen 9). Citing admissions practices that invite students to share their volunteering or their club leadership experiences while in high school as part of honors selection, for instance, privileges students who did not need to work to earn money after school or take care of younger siblings. The same is true for placing great weight on SAT/ACT scores, which correlate strongly with the income and education level of a students’ parents. When in the UHP we tell potential transfer admits that they are invited into honors because of their previous academic success, we are telling a story that assumes that students’ confidence in their community college performance will translate into confidence at our institutions. As it turns out, many students transferring from community colleges need to experience success at a four-year institution before they can believe such success is transferable. The story also assumes that the students we invite can, without assistance, see themselves as honors people, an assumption we ought not indulge given the elitism many associate with the term “honors.” Inadvertently, we may be falling into the trap Badenhausen identifies by discussing “honors and the stories we tell about it” in a way that “signal[s] to underrepresented students that they do not belong” (9–10).

This signaling may be why students in the focus groups reported being, at first, uncertain about saying yes to the invitation to join honors. Indeed,
our average yield rate over the program’s first five years is only about 48% among the 40 students we invite annually to participate, and the take rate for underrepresented minorities and limited-income and first-generation transfer students is lower still at 41%, 43%, and 40% respectively. Reflecting on this research area, the team has sought to improve the honors website communication to newly admitted students in order to stress content and community over the title “honors” and has begun the practice of calling students directly with similar messaging. In the future, we may seek to further enhance peer-to-peer recruitment efforts by pairing students with similar backgrounds and encouraging them to connect with each other through recruitment conversations.

CONCLUSION:
SYNCING OUR PROGRAMS TO TRANSFER STUDENTS

As honors programs across the country continue to explore ways to diversify the talented students they admit and to support their efforts to achieve success, they should look to transfer students—in part because of the sheer numbers of community college students who aspire to receive four-year degrees and the mismatch between those who desire such an outcome and those who actually achieve it. We know that honors programs enable high-touch environments, even within large institutions, and that the cohort model of community building and classroom instruction, combined with faculty mentorship, provides a powerful multiplier for student success on our campuses. The argument that honors programs should consider transfer students is further strengthened when we consider the increasingly diverse pool of talented potential honors students currently in our community college system. If we want to bring together students who have varied life experiences and who can learn from each other as a community, creating a first-year and transfer path into our honors programs is a very good idea.

Yet our experience at UC Davis reveals that it is not enough to bring transfer students into honors; we also have to bring our programs into sync with what our transfer students need. In order to create a true transfer-friendly honors program, we need to go beyond academic support and community building and even research experiences, as meaningful as these are. We also need to pay close attention to mentorship, particularly from individuals who can open doors for students within our institutions. Thus, faculty can play an important role. By connecting to faculty mentors, transfer students catch up
to their first-year-entry peers. Perhaps they have missed the first two years of university course exploration and faculty relationship building, but with dedicated point-of-entry faculty mentorship, they can still fully engage, even at a large research institution. Further, faculty can communicate to transfer students that they belong. The simple act of telling transfer students that you have selected them to work with you, that you see their strengths, and that you are sometimes insecure and uncertain as well can create a foundation of confidence in a student on which risks can be taken and successes launched. We need to build this sense of belonging into all elements of our programs if we want our transfer students to feel at home. From our websites to our admissions messages to our questioning of the word “honors” and all it signifies, we need to talk more about what we aspire to become and whom we serve as an honors community than about how we qualify honors people, thus making sure that we are, in the end, “honors worthy.”

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Understanding the Development of Honors Students’ Connections with Faculty

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Abstract: Nearly 40% of full-time students enrolled at four-year institutions depart within the first year. Previous research has shown college students are more likely to graduate if they have meaningful interactions with faculty. Honors students provide unique perspectives because of their high levels of interaction with faculty, yet not much is known about how these connections develop. The purpose of this study was to understand how honors students develop connections with faculty. Six upper-division students were interviewed, and participants reflected on meaningful connections made with faculty during their first year. Two themes were identified as influential in developing connections: approachability of faculty and motivation of students.

Keywords: students, faculty, connections, retention

The U.S. Department of Education estimated that nearly 40% of full-time students enrolled at four-year institutions depart within the first year (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Attrition rates at two-year institutions were even higher, with nearly half of students dropping out by their second year (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Previous research has shown, though, that college students are more likely to persist and graduate if they have meaningful interactions with faculty (Astin, 1999; Cho & Auger, 2013; Kuh et al., 2007). Moreover, many programs, such as honors programs, aid retention efforts by creating opportunities for students to engage with faculty. These opportunities are widely understood to positively impact retention; however, much is left unknown about how these interactions and connections are fostered between faculty and students.
Meaningful interactions between faculty and students promote a sense of connection. This increased type of interaction, particularly outside of the formal classroom, decreases student attrition and increases persistence until graduation (Glass et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014). Additionally, interactions with faculty increase students’ satisfaction, academically and socially, while in college (Braxton, 2006; Hoffman, 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Informal interactions with faculty also increase students’ academic achievement and their intellectual and personal development (Shepherd & Tsong, 2014; Schreiner et al., 2011).

Several researchers have examined the outcomes of faculty-student interactions and found students with interpersonal self-esteem were more likely to seek out faculty, thereby increasing meaningful interactions (Astin, 1997; Clark et al., 2018; Glass et al., 2015; Hoffman, 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These meaningful interactions then aid in developing deep connections with faculty. In another study, students and faculty were interviewed to determine the nature of conversations between the faculty and students (Hoffman, 2014). Students perceived academic matters, career aspirations, and campus problems as the most influential types of conversations with faculty (Hoffman, 2014; Schreiner et al., 2011; Shepherd & Tsong, 2014).

Understanding the interactions between faculty and students is vital to considering how meaningful connections develop. Many institutions have specialized programs to increase student engagement with faculty such as mentoring programs, research teams, and honors programs. For honors students, these meaningful interactions with faculty are cultivated on multiple levels, including small class sizes, research opportunities, and co-curricular or out of classroom experiences. Honors programs within higher education readily provide students with opportunities to develop connections with faculty. Moreover, honors students provide unique perspectives arising from their intentional socialization with faculty via honors programs. The purpose of this study was to understand how connections develop between honors students and faculty from the student perspective.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Traditionally, academically high-achieving students within higher education are drawn toward honors programs for the prestige, challenge, and opportunities such programs provide. With over 600 honors programs already in existence in 2002 across various institutional types, many high-achieving students have participated in these programs and connected to
Connections With Faculty

The institution in intentional ways (Digby, 2002). These programs have aided high-achieving students in connecting with peers and provided a more enriching academic experience. Many such students have felt added pressure to continue their high achievement while in college, and some struggle with coursework because they have been capable of success with little effort (Neumeister, 2004). Nonetheless, honors programs increase the likelihood of academically high-achieving students’ persistence and retention rates.

Typically, honors programs provide students with a number of resources to acclimate them to the academic community, support services, and curricular opportunities beyond the classroom. These programs do not simply provide academic challenges but are a valuable way for high-achieving students to integrate into the university. Within many honors programs, connecting with faculty in formal and informal ways is critical. Programs often offer ways for undergraduates to gain research experience and other advancement opportunities through connections with faculty. For these students, connecting with faculty in a collegial way is important individually and increases broader persistence and retention in the university setting (Hoffman, 2014; Kem & Navan, 2006; Kuh et al., 2006).

Retention

Retention remains an issue within higher education. Students and institutions have a stake in the benefits of retention and graduation. For students, upward mobility, cultural and social capital, and rewarding employment are some of the perceived benefits of graduation. Furthermore, for those students who matriculate but do not graduate, the debt accrued during their collegiate years can be doubly detrimental. In contrast, institutions often look at retention rates to determine institutional effectiveness. Graduation and retention rates play a role in institutional rankings by U.S. News & World Report. These criteria have been weighted anywhere from 20 to 25% within the overall rankings (U.S. News & World Report, 2010). Retention and graduation rates are indicators of success for colleges and universities, and undergraduate students’ success can be negatively affected by attrition (Hoffman, 2014; Glass et al., 2015; Schreiner et al., 2011).

The highest college dropout rates occur between the first and second years of college (Levitz, Noel, & Richter, 1999; Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999; Reason, 2009). Since roughly 40% of students leave an institution before their second year, institutions need to evaluate the first-year college experience and strategies for retention (U.S. Department of Education,
The first year of college is pivotal for students to connect to the institution. Similarly, connection to a campus is significant in a student’s attrition from their first year to the second (Hoffman, 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

**Retention Predictors and Strategies**

Although there is no single predictor of retention, continual research efforts have focused on identifying the factors that contribute to student success and graduation prior to and after arriving in college (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Clark et al., 2018; Kuh et al., 2006). Numerous studies have looked at retention, and many campuses have assessed and evaluated their policies, procedures, and programs to better understand the needs of students regarding persistence and graduation (Clark et al., 2018; Glass et al., 2015; Kuh et al., 2006; Levitz, Noel, & Richter, 1999). Some predictors for success prior to matriculation are level of academic preparedness, institutional environment, and personal characteristics (Clark et al., 2018; Keller & Lacy, 2013; Kim & Sax, 2007). Additionally, four of the greatest predictors of attrition are gender, grade point average (GPA), ACT/SAT scores, and race (Astin, 1997; Keller & Lacy, 2018). Moreover, strategies such as social and academic integration, first-year seminar courses, and increased faculty-student interaction can decrease attrition rates (Astin, 1997; Clark et al., 2018; Keller & Lacy, 2018; Reason, 2009). Several researchers have studied the importance of faculty-student interaction and its effects on persistence, retention, and overall satisfaction with students’ collegiate experience (Glass et al., 2015; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

**Faculty-Student Interaction**

Connecting with a faculty member has a positive influence on satisfaction and retention (Cox et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and increased interaction with faculty is a predictor of persistence and retention (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The significance of faculty-student interaction is particularly important for first-year students (Braxton, et al., 2004; Hoffman, 2014; Kuh, et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These interactions also have a positive correlation with areas such as intellectual and personal growth, scholarship, intellectual self-esteem, social activism, leadership, artistic inclination, and racial understanding (Astin, 1993; Cho & Auger, 2013; Cox et al. 2010; Glass et al., 2015). The literature related to college student outcomes suggests
that student background characteristics plus institutional factors, informal contact with faculty, and other collegiate experiences can influence academic performance, intellectual development, personal development, educational and career aspirations, college satisfaction, and institutional integration (Kim & Sax, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Despite a lack of literature surrounding the factors that connect students with faculty, some researchers have investigated the types of interactions most beneficial to students. Six types of conversations about topics of academic programs, career concerns, personal problems, intellectual or course-related matters, campus issues or problems, and informal socialization were found to be influential for students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The most salient of these six types of interactions were those that focused on intellectual and academic interests (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Personality differences and frequency of contact were also factors that contributed to meaningful faculty-student interactions and connection, thus influencing students’ satisfaction and retention (Cho & Auger, 2013; Lamport, 1993; Reason, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Although the effectiveness and importance of meaningful faculty-student interaction is evident, there is a need for research on the development of these influential connections between students and faculty (Cox et al., 2010; Hoffman, 2014; Kodama & Takesue, 2011).

**METHODOLOGY**

The current study used a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach in order to understand the connection between students and faculty. To make meaning of this connection, an interpretive approach was applied (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Phenomenology is rooted in the understanding of constructionism; in essence, all meaning is constructed in relationship to objects or other persons. The aim of phenomenology is to identify and describe the subjective experience of the participant in regard to a phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). In this study, the participants reflected back on their first year of college and described their connection with a faculty member. This design allowed participants to reflect on and make meaning of their experiences with faculty. This research method operates within the framework of phenomenology, which aims to describe and understand the meaning of these experiences for multiple individuals around a topic (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2003).
Sampling and Participants

Purposeful snowball sampling was used in this study to identify upper-division students (sophomores, juniors, and seniors) who participated in an honors program during their first year at a large research institution in the southeast (Patton, 2002). The snowball method consists of one participant providing a few names of potential participants until an appropriate sample size is reached (Noy, 2008; Patton, 2002). In order for students to be eligible for the study, they needed to be an undergraduate enrolled at the university, to be currently in the honors program, and to have made a connection with a faculty member during their first year at the institution. The purpose of soliciting upper-division students was to ask participants about connections made during their first year at the institution. Six upper-division (i.e., sophomores, juniors, and seniors) students were interviewed (see Table 1).

Data Collection and Analysis

Each individual interview was conducted using a semi-structured interview technique in order to provide flexibility yet direct the interview within structured guiding questions (Patton, 2002). Participants were asked to describe a meaningful connection they made with a faculty member, and follow-up questions were asked when needed. A comparative method was used to analyze the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This method is used when one part of the data is taken and segmented, in this case coded. Then subsequent data are compared to the coding to either establish new relationships or continue to develop relevance (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Upon completion of the interviews, transcriptions were analyzed in relation to the previous interviews’ codes. As part of a phenomenological study, data were analyzed

Table 1. Participant Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Student Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marissa</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>English &amp; Economics</td>
<td>U.S. Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>U.S. Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>U.S. Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>U.S. Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bio-Chemistry</td>
<td>International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Pre-Med</td>
<td>U.S. Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each of these items—gender, year, race/ethnicity, major, and student status—were self-reported by students.
for emergent themes by reducing participant responses through in vivo, axial, and thematic coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Trustworthiness**

Although qualitative research does not seek to be generalizable, it can be considered trustworthy and particularisable (Merriam, 1998). In interpretive research, particularisability is achieved when aspects of the concrete cases under study can apply to other cases (Yin, 2014). Through triangulation techniques the researcher can enhance the transferability and particularisability of the data. I consulted the literature to determine if the responses of the participants aligned with existing literature regarding faculty-student interactions. Additionally, participants were invited to review and respond to transcript themes via member checks in order to increase trustworthiness. The method of peer debriefer was also used in this study. A peer debreifer is a professional peer who is knowledgeable about the subject matter and who can challenge the process and question interpretations of the findings (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). The use of methodological triangulation enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings from this study.

**FINDINGS**

Findings from this study provide insight into how honors students establish connections with faculty. The information gleaned from the students’ experiences fall into two main themes: approachability of faculty and motivation of students. Each theme was found consistently throughout each interview and provides a context for understanding how honors students connect with faculty at the university.

**Approachability of Faculty**

Although students had many types of interactions with faculty, participants specifically mentioned approachability of faculty as an important factor in the development of their connection. Approachability was experienced in formal, informal, and co-curricular interactions. When asked about a faculty member with whom he was connected, Tim, the only junior, responded this way:

I wanted to talk to him about [his lecture] just because it was an interesting topic, and he seemed really nice [and] he made a lot of jokes.
he’s just a really nice guy. And he’s very approachable, very open and he’s a pretty funny guy. It’s a very open or giving relationship . . . he’s really encouraging and it’s like he knows what you’d be good at.

This student echoed sentiments of the other participants regarding approachability. Stephen commented, “she just seemed approachable,” and David remarked, “she was approachable and genuine, personable, and sincere.” When asked what made the faculty member approachable, many of the participants described faculty who smiled, who did not take themselves too seriously, and who appeared friendly. Marissa mentioned that the faculty member she connected with was “just so approachable, and he’s really friendly,” and Chris remarked, “when faculty smile, it’s like [he’s] open to conversation or like he’s open to interaction . . . so I basically go talk to him about stuff.” While demeanor often made faculty seem more approachable to students, other types of interactions also cultivated the perceived approachability of the faculty.

One other factor in approachability was seeing the faculty in varying contexts. These students interacted with faculty in three ways: formal, informal, and co-curricular. Formal contacts occurred in the context of class or in programs offered through the honors program. Informal interactions occurred during lunch, office visits, or faculty mentoring. Finally, co-curricular interactions were defined as activities that were ongoing outside of the formal classroom and included research opportunities or student groups. Jon discussed one such interaction that resulted from the faculty’s initiative and Jon’s perception of the approachability of the faculty member.

He was always very engaged in class and wanting to reach out to students [and] to interact with them. And over the course of the semester, we had some great classroom interaction and so outside of the classroom, [when I’ve been] walking and run into him, I stop and have a few moments of conversation. . . . And at the beginning of the semester he said, “you know, I’ve gone to lunch with students before,” and I [thought], we should go.

Although the perceived approachability of the faculty member played a significant role in the initial connection students made with faculty, the faculty’s actual approachability seemed to also contribute to their continued connection. Many of the students felt that both the honors and university faculty took genuine interest in them and were invested in their development both as students and individuals. While approachability was a quality that faculty
seemed to possess, other themes emerged that increased an understanding of how students made connections with faculty.

**Student Motivation for Interaction**

In identifying students’ motivations for connecting with faculty, many responses indicated that students had personal and professional desires to connect with faculty. In most cases, these students approached faculty in order to have meaningful interactions. Marissa commented on her motivation for connecting with faculty:

I guess [honors students have] probably got it engrained in ourselves that we need to make connections and networking, it’s important, that’s not the only reason I [approached him], I thought it’d be fun, and it was, but at the same time I do recognize that making connections with faculty is the way you’re going to get ahead in research, get into classes that you really need later on, and such . . . it’s good to make those connections.

Each participant mentioned a desire intrinsically or extrinsically to connect with faculty on some level. Chris stated, “Well, I reached out to him . . . and I am hoping to learn a lot from him.” Stephen commented, “I’m fairly ambitious and knew at some point I’d need [a connection with a faculty] whether for recognition or scholarships, or applications.” Each of the participants mentioned the connections with faculty being crucial to their success as students. “I feel like [my connections with faculty] have given me a more well-rounded experience here and they can be very helpful,” said Jon.

Among the themes that emerged in the types of motivations for initiating a relationship with faculty, three main areas were identified: research possibilities, career and academic major planning advice, and networking opportunities. Research possibilities included students connecting through courses and brown bag lunches offered through the honors college in order to participate in research with faculty. Many of the students noted that connecting with faculty helped solidify or expand their way of thinking in regard to career or major possibilities. Jon mentioned, “after interacting with [this professor] and what-not, I’m a little more undecided because I realize there is a lot more I can do with this degree,” and David added, “I now know if they can do it, I can do it because if they can find a niche, then maybe there is one for me too.” Finally, students often discussed the need to connect with faculty in order to increase networking opportunities. Marissa mentioned the
process and selection criteria her student organization went through in order to select a faculty advisor.

We ended up choosing someone, the person with the best kind of personality that seemed to have the most different subject knowledge and who we thought would be someone we could go out to lunch with and be around. For us, we think these things are important. And especially with as much as students have to network and have to go out and make the effort to get to know faculty and other people, it’s really important to have a faculty advisor who cares about helping the students within their organization.

Although each student had multiple reasons for making faculty connections, every student was either personally or professionally motivated to make such connections.

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The findings from this study contribute to previous research on faculty-student interactions and also establish new ways of understanding the connections students have with faculty. The findings support the preexisting literature on retention and retention strategies for first-year students. Although there are many predictors of retention, research has noted that academic preparedness, institutional environment, and personal characteristics play a large role in retaining students from their first to second years of college (Astin, 1997; Hoffman, 2014). Academically high-achieving students who enroll in honors programs have some level of academic preparedness because GPA and SAT/ACT scores are usually required for admissions (Neumeister, 2004). Honors programs also seek to socialize students to the institutional environment and provide support for the rigor of the collegiate environment in terms of academic preparedness. Moreover, the honors program at this institution also provides students various opportunities to engage with faculty through brown bag lunches, lectures, and research opportunities. These opportunities create a welcoming institutional environment for honors students, and therefore these students are more likely to be retained (Cox et al., 2010; Digby, 2002; Kuh, et al., 2006).

Since all of the participants were upper-division students, their retention continues to support the literature. Findings from this study also support previous research on personal characteristics as predictors of retention (Astin,
Participants were determined, motivated individuals seeking out opportunities for their continued growth and development. Although previous literature has discussed student motivation with regard to student success and retention, it falls short in addressing motivation in terms of faculty-student interactions. The findings from this study contribute to the literature regarding students’ motivation to connect with faculty while at the same time continuing to support the idea that personal characteristics, such as student motivation, are a determinant of retention.

Another portion of the literature surrounding retention strategies concerns students’ interaction with faculty. Connecting with a faculty member within the first year has been pivotal for student retention and satisfaction (Braxton et al., 2004; Cho & Auger, 2013; Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1976). Each of the student participants described having what they felt was a meaningful connection with a faculty member during their first year at the institution. Additionally, previous literature shows that personality and frequency of meaningful interactions with faculty influence student retention and satisfaction (Lamport, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For the study participants, approachability was extremely important in the connections they made with faculty, which supports previous findings on faculty-student interaction and student retention.

There is a dearth of research on the approachability of faculty as an important factor in connections with students. Although approachability may appear to be common sense, it was a large contributor for students making meaningful connections with faculty. Additionally, defining approachability was often difficult for participants. While the definition was challenging for students, it may even be more difficult for faculty to understand how to enhance their approachability or accessibility (Cox et al., 2010; Cho & Auger, 2013). Moreover, many institutions, particularly research-extensive institutions, reward publications and research and do not often reward interactions with students. This lack of value is most readily evident in criteria for promotion and tenure, which stress research but rarely pedagogy or interaction with students. Therefore, faculty members have to see value for students in these interactions in order to initiate them. Faculty-student interaction can be incentivized, however, by providing financial resources to create informal interactions, thus aiding in the perceived approachability of faculty.

Student motivation, the second theme in the findings, has implications particularly within student service areas. Many faculty departments have staff members specifically designated to develop programs that encourage...
interactions between faculty and students. Moreover, many student affairs practitioners attempt to involve faculty through programming to connect them with students in intentional ways. Therefore, partnering with these individuals provides programmatic opportunities. The potential benefits of these interactions, however, was more beneficial to students who developed their own connections than who made connections through programs. Therefore, promoting the benefits of these interactions through marketing, conversations, and networking will encourage and increase the likelihood of students’ developing connections with faculty. This study may not have implications for all honors students at other kinds of institutions, but there are meaningful implications and transferability for honors students in general.

The current study showed that meaningful interactions between faculty and students foster a sense of connection. These interactions with faculty also increase students’ satisfaction while in college. The information gleaned from the students’ experiences should be used to help increase faculty/student interaction and decrease the attrition rates of college students.

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Creating a Profile of an Honors Student: A Comparison of Honors and Non-Honors Students at Public Research Universities in the United States

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Abstract: This study uses data from the 2018 Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Survey of undergraduate degree-seeking students to develop a profile of an honors student. Nineteen research universities participated in the 2018 SERU Survey, with a resulting sample size of almost 119,000 undergraduate students, of whom 15,280 reported participation in or completion of an honors program. No other study has surveyed honors students on such a scale and across so many institutions. This study could be useful for recruiting since it would give recruiters a better idea of what to look for that would make prospects successful in an honors program/college. Knowing what high-ability students expect from their education could also be useful in structuring an honors curriculum and experience accordingly. Finally, knowing better the wants and needs of high-ability students could be useful for advising, mentoring, and counseling honors students.

Keywords: characteristics of honors students, honors student profile, identifying honors students, diversity in honors students

BACKGROUND

Student Experience in the Research University Survey

Initiated by sociologist Richard Flacks, Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) is an annual survey of the undergraduate experience at
research universities around the country. In 2018, SERU surveyed students at 19 universities and collected data on roughly 119,000 undergraduates, including about 15,200 students reporting participation in or completion of an honors program. The survey data include measures of standardized college admissions test scores, both high school GPA and cumulative undergraduate GPA, undergraduate major, and an extensive variety of experiences such as frequency of engaging in class discussions and participation in undergraduate research. The survey also includes an indicator of honors program participation, but, to date, little has been done to exploit the potential of SERU data for comparison of honors and non-honors students.

The SERU Survey began in the early 2000s at the University of California-Berkeley’s Center for Studies in Higher Education (CSHE) under the aegis of the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). The survey was originally limited to nine University of California undergraduate campuses. In 2008, however, the project expanded to include a consortium of other research-intensive universities (R1s: Research Universities/Very High Research Activity Carnegie classification) and designated international campuses. While still known within the University of California system as UCUES, the survey project is now better known as SERU. The project uses an online census survey methodology of undergraduate students at top-tier research intensive universities to gather student-level data. A survey of graduate students was later added. The Consortium’s goal is for institutions to be able to use these data for better management and improvement. More specifically, it seeks to provide member institutions guidance on:

1. understanding who their students are—their familial, academic, cultural, ethnic background as well as their self-identity, and career and other goals;

2. disaggregating the student experience—providing sufficient data that allows for analysis at the academic discipline and program level and among various sub-populations; and

3. translating what is learned into policy—using the data to identify strengths and weaknesses of academic programs and other components of the student experience that are then integrated into policymaking. (Berkeley Center for Studies in Higher Education, 2019)

As of 2018, in addition to the nine University of California members, sixteen other North American universities were listed as Consortium members, and there were twelve international SERU-I university members (Berkeley
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The SERU Survey generally is administered annually although not all members of the consortium participate each year. In 2018, nineteen consortium universities took part in the survey: the nine campuses of the University of California system and ten large public universities, all with the R1 Carnegie Commission classification. The total sample size was 118,852 undergraduate students, with 15,280 students reporting current participation in or completion of an honors program. Detail regarding sample sizes, distribution of respondents across participating schools, and response rates can be found in the Appendix. While response rates vary considerably from school to school, and response is generally higher at University of California campuses, the overall 2018 SERU response rate was 24.8 percent. This rate of response is reasonably good for an online survey, and it is also consistent with rates reported for similar surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2016). More information on the SERU Survey is given below.

Honors Education and Honors Students

Honors education has existed in elemental form in the United States since the late nineteenth century and in about the last hundred years through distinct honors programs and colleges (Rinn, 2006). In 1957, the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), which was formed by Joseph Cohen that year, held a conference in Boulder, Colorado. Participants at the conference began the draft of what eventually became the “Sixteen Major Features for a Full Honors Program” (Cohen, 1966). These sixteen features gave broad definition to honors programs and in the process some definition to honors education itself and, tangentially, to honors students. More than 35 years passed before honors programs and colleges, the conduits for honors education, were given a more formal and definitive structure through the listing of the National Collegiate Honors Council’s (NCHC) “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program” (Cummings, 1994). These Basic Characteristics also gave more definition to honors education and, tangentially, to honors students. Surprisingly, however, not until 2013 did honors education itself get a formal and detailed definition (National Collegiate Honors Council, 2013). Definitions for honors education up to that time had been generated from personal experience and were largely institution-specific or so focused on one aspect that they were not generally applicable (e.g., Cohen, 1966). Very likely, honors programs and honors education have eluded formal definition for so long because of the
wide variation in honors programs and what they deliver (Slavin). Also, standardization of honors education has over the years met at times with strong resistance (e.g., Snyder and Carnicom, 2011). The variation in honors programs, however, has today lessened to the point where honors programs across institutions have many features in common (Cognard-Black & Savage, 2016). More uniform conditions in honors programs/colleges across institutions have resulted in research, such as our study, that attempts to measure and define characteristics of honors students.

Because of the variations in earlier honors programs/colleges and the experimental or innovative nature of honors education itself, identifying and then tracking honors students—who are defined as academically talented undergraduate students participating in an honors program or college—has happened rarely. As Achterberg states in her 2005 article on the characteristics of honors students, no definition exists for honors students such as there is for honors programs. Even today, when honors programs and honors education have been better defined, not many data-driven studies that focus on defining the characteristics of an honors student exist (see the review of the literature below). Most empirical studies on the topic are limited in their sample size and specific to one institution. No study exists today that approaches both the number of participating institutions and the sample size of our study.

SURVEY OF RELATED RESEARCH

Many explications of the characteristics of honors students are based solely on personal experience (e.g., Harte, 1994; also see the Forum on Honors Students in JNCHC 6.1, 2005). Although these descriptions can be informative, they are mostly limited to a single individual and often a single institution. The personal and anecdotal accounts taken in sum over the years have created a characterization of honors students that is largely accepted as accurate even though it is not based on empirical evidence. The result has been what Achterberg (2005) terms an “ideology” or “belief system” or “paradigm” of what an honors student is, which may or may not be accurate (p. 75). As for studies on honors students that are empirical and quantitative, nearly all tend to focus on specific features, such as personality characteristics and specific behaviors (e.g., Cross et al., 2018, who focus on perfectionism and suicidal ideation), rather than development of a comprehensive profile. Moreover, most data-driven studies are confined to one institution and/or are limited in sample size (e.g., Carnicom and Clump, 2004, who surveyed 45 students, 17 of whom were honors students, at Marymount University).
The most informative survey of the research previous to 2005 on characteristics of honors students is Achterberg’s (2005), which provides a useful summation of past studies (see also Clark, 2000; Rinn and Plucker, 2004; Cuevas et al., 2017). Achterberg (2005), as well as several others who have surveyed the literature, note the lack of reliable, data-driven studies on the characteristics of honors students and call for more to be done. Moreover, several authors include studies of the gifted as part of their survey and research in order to supplement the little that has been done on college honors students (Rinn and Plucker, 2004; Cross et al., 2018; Scager et al., 2012). Achterberg (2005), from her survey of the research, is able to formulate these general characteristics of honors students: compared to non-honors students, honors students demonstrate academic superiority (they are more able, accelerated, and advanced); have more contact with faculty; are more likely to enroll in graduate school; are more motivated, ambitious, conscientious, and self-directed; are more involved in co-curricular activities; are more open to new experiences; and tend to be introverted. In her conclusion, however, confounded by the variation in honors programs and the differing criteria used for selection of honors students, she concludes that honors students “are not a homogeneous group with a set of absolute or fixed characteristics” and that any “firm conclusions about them should be held as suspect because empirical data about honors students are in extremely short supply” (p. 79).

The last two decades have produced more data-driven studies that attempt to define the characteristics of honors students in a more systematic and rigorous fashion. A few have larger sample sizes, and some span multiple institutions. We survey such studies below that relate either directly or in part to the goal of this study (formulating a comprehensive profile of honors students) in order to provide either a contrast to, or corroboration of, the findings of our study. Most of these studies, however, are limited either by relatively small sample sizes and/or location at single institutions. Several have more specific additional limitations, which we have indicated in our summaries below. While the data presented in these studies cumulatively begin to paint a picture of a typical honors student, their lack of a shared methodology and focus limits evaluation of the generalizability of the varied characteristics under consideration.

The first study, which Deborah A. Gerrity et al. published in 1993, shows the results of a survey of a group of 940 incoming college students—231 honors students and 709 non-honors—at the University of Maryland at College Park. The goal of the study was to help academic advisors be better informed
on what would be most beneficial for both honors and non-honors students. Because the authors administered their survey during the summer orientation before the students’ first semester of attendance, their results reflect more what type of secondary school student becomes an honors student rather than the characteristics of an honors student already on campus. With their survey they collected information on demographics and the attitudes, interests, and behaviors of honors as compared to non-honors entering freshmen. They found that although honors and non-honors students were similar in their co-curricular interests and their educational objectives, they differed in most other areas. The most significant differences were that honors students tended to be introverted; they valued intellectual and aesthetic pursuits more than practical activities; they showed more self-determination and thought-independence; they had more interests and engaged in more co-curricular activities; they had an intrinsic interest in learning rather than just a focus on grades; and they tended to be perfectionists. More non-honors students were first-generation students; honors students had better HS-GPAs; more honors students lived in residence halls; and more honors students came to college primarily to prepare for graduate school and learn more while non-honors students came primarily to get a better job and gain a general education. Both groups were the same in worrying about social relationships, health, and appearance. Also, race and gender were similar for both groups (note that the honors program at Maryland emphasized minority recruitment). The limitation of this study in regard to the purpose of our own study is that the students surveyed had not yet had on-campus experience as honors students. Hence, they were more representative of academically talented secondary students than honors students.

The second study, published in 2002 by Edgar C. J. Long and Stacey Lange, was based on a survey of 360 undergraduate students (142 honors, 218 non-honors) from a large regional university in the Midwest. The authors had no specific hypothesis to develop and test; rather, the study was a simple comparison of honors and non-honors students and in that respect was closest to our study’s purpose. Questions were designed to assess social involvement, behavior (how much students read, studied, and worked each week), and student satisfaction with their education. They also collected demographic information and included two personality measurements: conscientiousness (dependability or conformity and will to achieve) and openness to experience (curiosity, imagination, artistic sensitivity, and originality). Additionally, the authors assessed student interaction. Their findings on honors students were
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that they were more conscientious and more open to experiences; they exhibited more anxiety over grades; they were high-maintenance in the sense that they gave and required more attention in their academic pursuits; they were more academically focused (less likely to attend social parties, watch television, and drink and spend money on alcohol); they were more engaged in co-curricular activities; they were more involved with faculty; and finally, they were no more or less satisfied with their university than non-honors students.

The third study, by Frank Shushok and published in 2006 as a follow-up to his 2002 study, was designed to assess how students were affected by participation in the honors college at an R1 Carnegie-classification university in one of the Mid-Atlantic states. Shushok (2006) surveyed two groups of similarly credentialed students, half of whom (86) applied and were selected to participate in the honors college. The other half (86) were equally qualified students who were not participants in the honors college. All students were beginning their first experience with postsecondary education and had achieved a high school grade point average of at least 3.5 and a minimum combined SAT score of 1250. In addition to SAT scores and high school grade point averages, each group was controlled to achieve a balance in race, gender, and place of residency (on- or off-campus housing). Although Shushok’s primary emphasis was on academic performance, he found in both his 2002 and 2006 studies that honors students differed from non-honors students only in the type of activities in which they participated: (1) honors students were 2.5 times more likely than non-honors students to meet with a faculty member during office hours and 3.1 times more likely than non-honors students to discuss career plans and vocational aspirations with a faculty member; (2) honors students were 2.5 times more likely than non-honors students to discuss a social concern, political issue, or world event with another student outside of class; (3) male honors students were 3.6 times more likely than male non-honors students to be involved outside of class in activities with an academic interest. As for academic performance between the two groups, the grade point average and retention differences between honors and non-honors students were statistically significant in the 2002 study but not in the 2004 study. This study is unique in how closely the control group matches the test group.

The fourth study, published in 2007 by Donald P. Kaczvinsky, used empirical data to characterize honors students at his own institution, Louisiana Tech University (a selective-admissions comprehensive public university). Kaczvinsky used the College Student Inventory (CSI), which
is part of the Noel-Levitz Retention Management System and was designed to help students find the learning path that best matches their personality. The CSI scores are organized into five main sections: Academic Motivation; Social Motivation; General Coping Skills; Receptivity to Support Services; and Two Supplementary Scales. This study compared the averages of 58 honors students with students in the entire freshman class, the 1,496 students who took the survey in September 2004. Kaczvinsky (2007) found that when compared to the rest of the student body, honors students were more academically confident; had greater intellectual interests; and were more willing to challenge their accepted values, beliefs, and ideas. He also found that they were more financially secure than the average student, and, finally, that the honors students were far less socially inclined—that is, less likely to join groups or social organizations. The limitation of this study was that it was restricted to first-year, first-semester students at a single institution, which meant that it was not fully representative of honors students across all levels.

The fifth study, done in the Netherlands by Karin Scager et al. and published in 2012, investigated whether honors students differ from non-honors students in regard to Joseph Renzulli’s three-ring conception of giftedness, which posits that student characteristics relating to above-average general ability, high level of task commitment, and high level of creativity are the most important predictors of achievement in professional life. The authors asked more than 1,100 honors and non-honors students at Utrecht University, a large research university, to assess themselves on six characteristics: intelligence, creative thinking, openness to experience, the desire to learn, persistence, and the drive to excel. Their results showed that honors students were significantly different from non-honors students in all the six variables except persistence. The most significant differences were in the desire to learn, the drive to excel, and creativity. Intelligence was the weakest factor other than persistence. The limitation of this study was that the model for honors education in the Netherlands differs significantly from that used in the United States. Specifically, honors programs in the Netherlands are an overlay on the existing curricular requirements and hence require honors students to take more classes and do work in addition to what would normally be required for a degree. Honors programs/colleges in the United States typically integrate the honors experience into the curricular requirements for degrees so that honors students do not have to take additional classes and spend more time at the university in order to fulfill their requirements for graduation. This major structural difference could skew the comparison between honors students from the two different countries.
The sixth study, by Ted M. Brimeyer et al. and published in 2014, used quantitative data from two online surveys of a total of 743 students to compare the background characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of honors and non-honors students at a medium-sized public university in the Southeast. The authors were testing the question of whether their honors program was reproducing socioeconomic and racial privileges, which is a common charge against honors programs. Their findings indicated significant racial and gender differences in the honors students, which suggested that the program was reproducing racial stratification. In contrast, the similarities in economic backgrounds of the test and control groups indicated that the honors program was not reproducing economic stratification. The authors also found that honors students differed significantly in attitude and behaviors: honors students were less concerned about grades and showed more concern with what they learned in class than non-honors students; also, honors students reported that they investigated their professors (i.e., learned more about them before taking their classes) more than non-honors students did.

Amanda Cuevas et al., whose study was published in 2017, surveyed 945 undergraduate honors students from eleven honors programs across the United States, some public, some private, and with differing Carnegie classifications. The purpose of the study was to measure how well honors students were “thriving,” defined as academic, psychological, and social well-being and engagement, which is a recently developed concept that expands the traditional approach to measuring college student success beyond such cognitive measures as GPA. To measure thriving this study looked at honors students’ behavior in five areas: 1) academic determination, as measured by the different strategies students used to enable their learning; 2) how engaged they were in learning; 3) how positive their perspective was; 4) diverse citizenship, i.e., how open students were to diversity and how committed they were to social change; 5) and their social connectedness, as measured by their desire to develop and maintain meaningful relationships. The authors then compared the results of the test group to samples of traditional students (termed as the national baseline model). Results indicated that the overall thriving levels of honors students were not significantly different from the control group of traditional students, i.e., non-honors students. Honors students’ scores for social connectedness, however, were significantly lower than their other scale scores and lower as well than the traditional students’ scores. Also, honors students differed most significantly from traditional students in their higher scores for academic determination. Honors students’ characteristics were also significantly less spiritual than the national sample. The limitation of this
study was that the student sample comprised predominantly first-year students (33%) and white females (76%), which likely biased the results since a more common gender mix for honors students would be 63 percent female (NCHC 2016 Census).

The next study, by Tracy L. Cross et al., published in 2018, used an online survey to collect data on personality, perfectionism, and suicidal ideation of 410 honors students at a large Midwestern university. The authors’ intent was to identify patterns of personality traits from their sample of honors students; to determine if there was an association between patterns of personality traits and perfectionism; and to determine if there was an association between patterns of personality traits and suicidal ideation. The authors used the five-factor model of personality (aka the Big Five), which posits five basic dimensions of personality: agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism (vs. emotional stability), extraversion, and openness to experience. Their findings were that the honors students in the sample on average, across all five factors tested, were more similar to a norm group of young adults their age than expected, but there were significant differences within the five factors: the sample of honors students was higher in conscientiousness and openness to experience, and they also exhibited greater emotional instability (nearly two thirds of the sample) and were higher in introversion than the norm group. As with the previous study, a limitation of this study was that 73 percent of the sample were females, which poses a bias.

The last study, by Angie L. Miller and Amber D. Dumford and published in 2018, used data from the 2015 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to compare aspects of student engagement for honors students and non-honors students. Their sample was 1,339 honors students and 7,191 non-honors students from fifteen different universities of various types although all with an honors program or college. The NSSE is administered only to first-year students and seniors, i.e., not to sophomores and juniors. The authors’ hypothesis was that honors programs/colleges have a positive impact for honors students in regard to student engagement. They also examined how the honors experience differed for first-year students and seniors. To determine the level of student engagement they used ten indicators for how students could be involved: higher order learning à la Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001); reflective and integrative learning; quantitative reasoning (using and interpreting data); learning strategies; collaborative learning; discussions with diverse others; student-faculty interaction; effective teaching practices; quality of interactions; and supportive environment.
After controlling for various student characteristics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, etc.) and other factors, they found that honors first-year students were significantly more engaged than non-honors students in the following areas: reflective and integrative learning; use of learning strategies; collaborative learning; diverse discussions; student-faculty interaction; and quality of interactions. For senior students, honors students’ student-faculty interaction was significantly greater than for non-honors students. A limitation particular to this study was that its primary purpose was to determine whether and how honors programs/colleges were affecting student engagement as opposed to the purpose of our study, which is to determine what characteristics and behaviors honors students exhibit. This study nonetheless gives some indication of how honors students choose to engage in contrast to non-honors students.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Methods

Analytic Approach

Data for our current study come from the 2018 administration of the Student Experience in the Research University Survey. The general analytic approach we employ to develop a profile of honors students as distinct from non-honors students is to present side-by-side comparisons of honors and non-honors students on selected indicators in the SERU data set, many of which are reflective of Astin’s (1993) Inputs-Environment-Outcomes model of student success. In general, the tables presented below provide descriptive text as well as details about measurement that we believe will be clear to most readers. Those wishing additional detail about survey question wording and response options for close-ended questions can find a PDF facsimile of the online survey at the SERU website located at the University of Minnesota cited in our references (see Student Experience in the Research University, 2018).

For each comparison, we have also provided information about corresponding tests of significance using either t-tests or chi-square tests. In all but two of the comparisons presented herein, differences between honors and non-honors were significant at the \( p \leq 0.01 \) level. However, statistically significant differences are easier to find when sample sizes are very large, as is the case for all of our analyses, and this can be true even when the magnitude
of the difference may be small. For instance, the percentages for honors and non-honors students reporting that “intellectual curiosity” was “very important” as a reason for choosing their major were 94.99 and 93.59 ($p \leq .001$, df $= 83,853$). While this difference is statistically significant and while there may be some small underlying effect resulting in the difference of 1.4 percentage points, this particular difference is hardly exciting as descriptive of a profile that helps to describe the typical honors student. Thus, while some small differences may be statistically significant, they may not necessarily be especially meaningful. As always, analysts and readers alike must use their own careful judgment about whether such differences deserve attention. In the discussions of results, our goal will be to highlight and discuss differences that, in our judgement, appear to provide some separation between honors and non-honors students, and so we would be more likely to highlight, for instance, that honors students were 4.1 percentage points higher in terms of reporting that “prestige” was a “very important” reason for choosing a major (cf. 47.88% vs. 43.78).

**Measures**

**Honors Student**

While the meaning behind most indicators presented herein will be fairly transparent, several measures deserve special mention. In particular, the key distinction between honors and non-honors students is facilitated by a single question asked of students as part of a set of possible undergraduate experiences. The common question stem for the set reads, “Have you completed or are you now participating in the following activities at [University Name]?” with response options allowing for “No” or “Yes, doing now or have done.” Our measure of honors participation is based on the response for “honors program” within that question set. Unfortunately, the question wording does not allow us to distinguish between those who currently are in an honors program and those who may have started in honors but subsequently left due to attrition or dismissal: this represents a source of error that likely will have the effect of understating differences between honors and non-honors students, especially among more senior respondents. For example, a student who started as an honors student and fell out of the program due to low GPA can nonetheless answer in the affirmative about having done honors, but this hypothetical student’s experience is likely to be different from that of other students who persist and are active honors students at the time of the survey.
Future research will be needed to better assess the extent of this source of error. In the meantime, the SERU Survey nonetheless represents one of the best sources of data allowing for direct comparison of honors with non-honors students.

**Race-Ethnicity**

Our measure of race-ethnicity was derived from a set of Yes/No measures asking respondents to indicate whether they were “International Students,” “Hispanic or Latino,” “American Indian or Alaskan Native,” “Asian,” “Black or African American,” “Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander,” “White,” or “Race/Ethnicity Unknown.” Multiple responses were allowed so that respondents could indicate identification with any combination of racial or ethnic categories. We used responses to these discrete questions in constructing a single nominal-level measure of race-ethnicity consistent with that used widely throughout higher education. The result is a nine-category operationalization of race-ethnicity that, for instance, distinguishes those with Hispanic background from others in conventional racial categories. This approach should allow for more direct comparison of SERU data with other reports of race-ethnicity distributions presented by the U.S. Department of Education—e.g., National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2017)—and other data sources using similar conventions.

**Gender**

The SERU Survey is unique among large surveys of any stripe in including separate measures of gender identity and biological sex. The question tapping into gender identity asked, “What is your current gender identity?” with response options including “Man,” “Woman,” “Trans Man,” “Trans Woman,” “Genderqueer/Gender Non-Conforming,” and “Not listed above.” Those who responded with the last of these options also had the option to provide an open-ended response. Inspection of the open-ended responses revealed wide variability in chosen gender identity, the exploration of which is beyond the scope of this study, and it also revealed considerable hostility to the question itself. For these reasons, we have chosen to omit the small percentage of those who responded to this undefined category. The question tapping into biological sex asked, “What sex were you assigned at birth, such as on an original birth certificate?” and had response options “Male,” “Female,” and “Intersex/Non-binary.” We used these two items to construct
a measure distinguishing cisgender men and women from a smaller group including trans, intersex, genderqueer, and gender-nonconforming students. In this operationalization, men are those who reported both male biological sex and a gender identity as a man; women are those who reported both female biological sex and a gender identity as a woman; and the third category of gender includes all other respondents except those who indicated that their gender identity was ‘Not listed above.’”

Combining trans individuals with intersex likely ignores important differences within this aggregated category, but fewer than 2 percent of individuals fell into these categories, and the small numbers argued for aggregation.

Pre-Matriculation Academic Profile

Some measures reported are derived not from student responses but instead from data available in university data systems and matched to student survey data as part of the survey administration protocol. Such measures of first-year student admission profile as high school GPA and SAT or ACT scores come not from student responses but from student databases maintained at participating SERU universities.

Patterns of Response

Finally, while 118,852 students responded in some form to the 2018 SERU Survey, those 118,852 students did not necessarily respond to all questions, nor were campus data necessarily universally available for all student participants. Readers will note that sample sizes (denoted by “n” in the column headers for summary tables) vary considerably though all would be considered quite large by most standards (the smallest is 14,625, for the SAT critical reading test scores, of which 2,697 were identified as honors).

The extent to which data omissions are a result of underlying bias is difficult to assess, but we should be cautious—as we should be in all evaluations of survey research—and recognize that some response bias is possible, i.e., some groups of respondents may be less likely to respond to certain questions, and some may be less likely to respond at all. For example, many contemporary readers will be aware of the current national debate about inclusion of a citizenship question in the upcoming 2020 U.S. Census, the risk of which may be an undercount of noncitizens residing in the United States. In the case of the SERU data, serious and high-performing students may be more likely to respond than weaker students so that honors students might
respond in greater numbers than non-honors students. In the case of small segments of populations like honors program participants, such an effect has the benefit of generating larger sample sizes, which are generally preferable for conducting tests of statistical significance, but an inherent risk may be that such response bias could be associated with other variables in the analysis in ways that would lead to errors in estimation. One consequence may be that weaker non-honors students are less likely to respond than stronger non-honors students, and, as with the wording of the question for the honors item, this response bias could have the effect of understating differences between honors and non-honors students. With the data available at this time, we are unable to evaluate such sources of bias, but the cumulative impact of these two sources of error are likely to mean that our comparisons represent conservative estimates of what may be larger honors differences than we are able to detect in the SERU data. In any case, levels of response among the 118,852 students in the sample are quite high for most measures and indicate data worthy of serious consideration.

RESULTS

Diversity Enrollment

The question of whether higher education reduces or reinforces social class and racial inequality has for many years driven large areas of social science and educational research (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Brooks 2000; Hout 2009; Khan 2012; Torche 2011), and the National Collegiate Honors Council has recently undertaken a new strategic priority to address issues of diversity and inclusion specifically as they pertain to honors programs, the students who end up in and persist in those programs, and, importantly, the students who may not be selected to participate or who may become discouraged and leave such programs (Yavneh Klos, 2017). A question of interest for some time is how diverse honors students are and how closely they represent the student populations from which they come. To date, however, few data have been available to address these questions, so we begin our profile of an honors student by exploring the important issue of diversity.

Table 1 focuses on measures of diversity enrollment and includes indicators of race-ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic diversity as well as a category of well-being and ability measures. All numbers in Table 1 can be read as percentages, and in the case of items under the race-ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation headings, numbers sum to 100.
For the analysis of race-ethnicity, we have restricted the sample to include only those schools outside of the state of California because the unique race-ethnic composition of California, combined with the disproportionate number of California schools and California students participating in SERU—57.1% of respondents were at the nine University of California schools—had an undue influence on the estimates of racial composition. In particular, the percentage of Asian residents in California is about three times higher than in the U.S. population, and the percentage of Hispanic residents is about twice as high (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019: Tables 19 and 20). The university student population in California in many ways reflects these differences, and when California schools are left in the analysis, the overall percentages of Asians and Hispanics are considerably higher; concomitantly, the overall percentages of whites and African Americans are smaller than they would be in a national sample (see Table 1 notes for details). Thus, leaving out the California schools results in a sample race-ethnicity distribution that is closer to the national distribution at research universities (NCES, 2017).

As a point of comparison, Figure 1 presents the average race-ethnic distribution for the 52 institutions that provided relevant data to the 2014–2015 NCHC Admissions, Retention, and Completion Survey (ARC). The sample size of those with valid data in the ARC survey was fairly small. Nevertheless, to date ARC has been one of the few sources of national data on race-ethnic composition specifically in honors (NCHC, 2015). Despite sizable differences in some of the minority groupings across the SERU and ARC, most notably for black and Asian students (both differences of about 8 percentage points, though in opposite directions), both data sources point to almost identical proportions of non-Hispanic white students in honors (66.96% vs. 66.72%). Whether the differences across the two surveys are the result of actual differences between research universities and the broader range of NCHC institutions or response biases in one or both surveys, we note that the relatively strong correspondence between the two different data sources lends some credibility to both sets of data. Further, the ARC percentages also provide some support for having limited the SERU sample to those schools outside of California. (Race-ethnicity is the only variable for which we have excluded California schools; all other analyses include data for students from the University of California campuses and thus have much larger sample sizes.)

On first glance, honors and non-honors students seem to be strikingly similar in race-ethnic distribution. While somewhat more honors students
appear to be white than the non-honors students, by about 5 percentage points, most of the differences for race-ethnic categories are within 2 or 3 percentage points of each other. This finding might seem to point toward diverse representation, but the differences are for numbers that are already quite small, and in some cases the magnitude of the differences is quite large, especially for black and Hispanic students. In other words, the 2.2 percentage point difference for African American students is actually quite large in a university environment where only 4.5 percent of students are African American, so African Americans are only half as likely to be in the honors group as they are in the larger SERU university sample (2.36 ÷ 4.51 = .52, or half). Some students with African American heritage may be captured in the percentage of those with two or more races, but such students are in roughly the same proportions in the honors and non-honors groups, so that is unlikely to explain much of the discrepancy in African Americans between the two groups. Similarly, Hispanic students are only 58 percent as likely to be in honors as in the non-honors SERU group (5.19 ÷ 8.98 = .578, or 58%).

These race-ethnic disparities are in the context of a larger educational environment that is already fairly racially homogenous. The overall African

**Figure 1. Average Race-Ethnicity Distribution of Honors Programs**

![Pie chart showing the distribution of race-ethnicity in honors programs.]

*Source: 2014–2015 NCHC Admissions, Retention, and Completion Survey (n = 52).*
American percentage of 4.51 seems quite low. The black population of the United States in 2017 was 13.4 percent according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), and 4.51 is so low by comparison that one might wonder whether it is a result of some non-response bias or other undercount. However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), only 6.7 percent of students at Research 1 universities were African American in 2016. While that estimate includes graduate as well as undergraduate students, it is an indication of the extent to which the larger undergraduate populations lack diversity. The low 4.51 percent number for African Americans could also be a reflection of the fact that participating SERU schools are located in states that are somewhat more white than the nation as a whole, but most of the discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that Research 1 universities do not, in general, have enrollments that are especially representative of ethnic and racial minorities. This problem goes beyond honors, affecting the larger institutional environments in which honors programs and colleges are located, and it is a problem of which we should be aware.

By contrast, honors programs and colleges in the SERU sample appear to be fairly representative of the larger undergraduate populations in terms of gender and sexual orientation: in fact, transgender, gender queer, gender-nonconforming, LGBQ, and gender-questioning students appear to be slightly overrepresented among honors students. Differently-abled students are also fairly well represented within honors, with those reporting learning and physical disabilities being 30 to 45 percent more likely to be in the honors group (4.77 ÷ 3.29 = 1.45, or 45% greater). Mental and emotional health concerns do not distinguish the honors group from the non-honors group, but the numbers for both groups are high: almost one-third of all students responding reported some mental or emotional health concern.

Some of the most striking differences in Table 1 concern the two measures under the heading of socioeconomic diversity. Results reveal that first-generation students and low-income students (as indicated by having ever received a Federal Pell grant) are significantly and substantially underrepresented in the honors group. While this finding will not surprise most readers, it is one of the first revelations of the scope of this problem across multiple institutions. Pell grant recipients are about 30 percent less likely to be in the honors group than in the non-honors group, and first-generation students are about 40 percent less likely to be in the honors group.
First-Year Student Profile and Measures of Student Experience

We turn now to comparisons of student admission profiles, indicators of student values regarding choice of major, and a variety of measures of student experience. Table 2 presents the results of these analyses. Unlike Table 1, most analyses are comparisons of means for ordinal-level measures of underlying interval concepts. In the case of test scores and GPAs, numbers are presented on standard SAT, ACT, and GPA scales although the weighted GPA is truncated in analyses to exclude a small number of implausibly high scores (some approaching 90); we capped the unweighted GPA at 5.3 and excluded those with higher scores. For the four measures tapping into factors used in deciding a major, numbers are the percentage of students who indicated that the factor was “very important” in deciding their major.

Not surprisingly, those in the honors group had substantially higher test scores and high school grade point averages. Regardless of which test score is used, the honors group had scores that were about 10 percent higher, on average. These differences represent about one-half of a standard deviation on the standard college entrance exams (in the vicinity of 2.5–3.0 ACT points and about 50–60 SAT points). Higher test scores among honors students will not be especially surprising to most readers: 65 percent of institutions responding to the NCHC 2014–2015 Admissions, Retention, and Completion Survey reported having a minimum ACT or SAT score as a criterion for honors admission (NCHC 2019), and many more probably use test scores as part of the admission process. Similarly, those in the honors group had somewhat better high school GPAs than those in the non-honors group—a difference of about .11 grade points.

In the reasons for choosing a major, honors and non-honors students displayed little difference. Almost equally high proportions in both groups reported that “intellectual curiosity” and interest in a “fulfilling career” were “very important” reasons for choosing their major, and roughly equal numbers reported that desire for a “high paying job” was a “very important” reason. Some meaningful difference in motivation may exist in the proportion of the honors group who reported that “prestige” was a “very important” reason behind the choice of major, but the difference is also not so overwhelming that it would lead us to conclude that honors students are in it just for the boost they get in status. Attendance at Research 1 and other flagship universities already confers substantial status in today’s educational marketplace, and this reality may have an effect of shrinking a difference that we might see in
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Honors</th>
<th>Non-Honors</th>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race-Ethnicity</strong>&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>44,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident alien</td>
<td>5.22**</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race-ethnicity unknown</td>
<td>2.14**</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>66.72**</td>
<td>61.65</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>2.36**</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>14.23**</td>
<td>12.84</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>0.04**</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>3.99**</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>5.19**</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong>&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>96,649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>34.88**</td>
<td>36.02</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>63.06**</td>
<td>62.55</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans/Gender Queer/Nonconforming</td>
<td>2.05**</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>94,974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>82.71**</td>
<td>85.78</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, or Questioning</td>
<td>17.29**</td>
<td>14.22</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic Diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-generation student</td>
<td>12.50*</td>
<td>20.80</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>97,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever received a Pell grant</td>
<td>27.50*</td>
<td>40.46</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>96,582</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well-Being</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical disability/condition</td>
<td>4.77*</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning disability/condition</td>
<td>4.20*</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurodevelopmental/cognitive disability/condition</td>
<td>5.74*</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional/mental health concern/condition</td>
<td>31.05*</td>
<td>31.64</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\( p < .05 \) **\( p < .01 \)

Source: 2018 Student Experience in the Research University Survey.

Significance for the gender and race-ethnicity measures was tested using chi-square (gender \( \chi^2 = 34.2, df = 2 \); race-ethnicity \( \chi^2 = 245.6, df = 8 \)).

Notes: The race-ethnicity analysis is restricted to SERU schools outside of California because the unique racial composition of California, combined with the disproportionate number of California schools participating in SERU, had an undue influence on the racial composition estimates. In particular, the percentage of Asian residents in California is about three times higher than in the U.S. population, and the percentage of Hispanic residents is about twice as high. When California schools are left in, the overall percentage of Asians in the sample is 24.0 instead of 12.8 percent, and the percentage of Hispanics in the sample is 18.8 instead of 8.1 percent. The overall percentage of whites in the sample is only 41.5 instead of 62.4 percent; the percentage of African Americans is 3.3 instead of 4.5 percent. Thus, leaving out the California schools results in a sample race-ethnicity distribution that is closer to the national distribution at research universities.
### Table 2. Comparison of Means and Percentages for Honors and Non-Honors Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Honors</th>
<th>Non-Honors</th>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First-Year Student Profile</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT I—Critical Reading</td>
<td>676.81**</td>
<td>614.88</td>
<td>SAT Score</td>
<td>14,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT I—Math</td>
<td>693.82**</td>
<td>634.76</td>
<td>SAT Score</td>
<td>15,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT—English</td>
<td>31.30**</td>
<td>28.07</td>
<td>ACT Score</td>
<td>25,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT—Math</td>
<td>29.82**</td>
<td>27.28</td>
<td>ACT Score</td>
<td>25,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT—Reading</td>
<td>31.30**</td>
<td>28.61</td>
<td>ACT Score</td>
<td>24,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT—Science</td>
<td>30.07**</td>
<td>27.40</td>
<td>ACT Score</td>
<td>24,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School GPA (weighted)</td>
<td>4.06**</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>GPA capped at 5.3</td>
<td>65,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School GPA (unweighted)</td>
<td>3.77**</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>GPA 0 to 4</td>
<td>58,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factors in Deciding Major</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual curiosity</td>
<td>94.99**</td>
<td>93.59</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>83,855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads to high paying job</td>
<td>59.22**</td>
<td>61.55</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>83,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for fulfilling career</td>
<td>91.94**</td>
<td>90.52</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>83,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestige</td>
<td>47.88**</td>
<td>43.78</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>83,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undergraduate Student Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often this year have you found your courses so interesting that you did more work than was required?</td>
<td>3.46**</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>Never (1) to Very Often (6)</td>
<td>106,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often this year have you communicated with instructor outside of class about issues/concepts derived from a course?</td>
<td>3.55**</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>Never (1) to Very Often (6)</td>
<td>106,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How frequently this year have you worked with a faculty member on an activity other than coursework?</td>
<td>2.13**</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>Never (1) to Three or More (4)</td>
<td>106,934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How frequently this year have you gone to class unprepared?</td>
<td>2.54*</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>Never (1) to Very Often (6)</td>
<td>106,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How frequently this year have you increased your academic effort due to the high standards of a faculty member?</td>
<td>3.83*</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>Never (1) to Very Often (6)</td>
<td>106,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How frequently this year have you substantially revised a paper before submitting it to be graded?</td>
<td>3.91*</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>Never (1) to Very Often (6)</td>
<td>106,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On average, how much of your assigned course reading have you completed this academic year?</td>
<td>7.07*</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>0–10% (1) to 91–100% (10)</td>
<td>107,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours in a typical week this year studying and other academic activities outside of class</td>
<td>4.54*</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0 (1) to More than 30 (8)</td>
<td>106,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours in a typical week this year performing community service or volunteer activities</td>
<td>2.12*</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>0 (1) to More than 30 (8)</td>
<td>106,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours in a typical week this year participating in physical exercise, recreational sports, or physically active hobbies</td>
<td>2.61*</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>0 (1) to More than 30 (8)</td>
<td>106,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours in a typical week this year participating in spiritual or religious activities</td>
<td>1.73*</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>0 (1) to More than 30 (8)</td>
<td>106,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours in a typical week this year participating in student clubs or organizations</td>
<td>2.49*</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>0 (1) to More than 30 (8)</td>
<td>106,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours of paid employment (including internships) in a typical week this year—on campus</td>
<td>5.19*</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>Number of Hours</td>
<td>102,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours of paid employment (including internships) in a typical week this year—off campus</td>
<td>3.91*</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>Number of Hours</td>
<td>100,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of hours slept per weeknight this year</td>
<td>3.64*</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>4 or less (1) to 9 or more (6)</td>
<td>107,022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05  **p < .01
Source: 2018 Student Experience in the Research University Survey.
other types of campus settings such as lesser-known regional universities or community colleges.

In their undergraduate experience, students in the honors group reported a more positive experience, on average, than those in the non-honors group. While there was no significant difference between the two groups in the frequency of going to class unprepared (one of the few non-significant differences reported in this study), honors students tended to report greater frequency in the following areas: finding coursework so interesting that they do more work than required; communicating with instructors about coursework outside of class; working with faculty on activities other than coursework; increasing effort as a result of high faculty standards; and completing assigned reading. Students in the honors group also reported spending more time in a typical week at academic, enriching, and self-care activities that we might expect are associated with well-rounded success and well-being. The honors group reported spending more time, on average, on study or other academic work; performing community service and volunteer work; participating in religious activities; and participating in student organizations. They also reported getting more exercise and sleep. Finally, while students in the honors and non-honors groups reported similar overall amounts of time spent in paid employment, honors students appeared to be more likely to do that work on campus rather than off campus.

The use of ordinal-level data with discrete rather than continuous scales of measurement made it difficult to gauge how much more the students in the honors group were being exposed to various experiences. For instance, the averages for doing more work than required and communication with an instructor outside of class indicate that students both in the honors group and in the non-honors group were somewhere between “occasionally” (coded 3) and “somewhat often” (coded 4), and the averages for the number of hours studying in a typical week indicate that students in both groups were somewhere between “11–15 hours” (coded 4) and “16–20 hours” (coded 5). While the meaning of average differences in the neighborhood of 0.3 for many of these indicators are hard to pin down with any precision, the pattern of higher relative scores for students in the honors group seem to point consistently to a conclusion that honors students have a different and qualitatively better experience with faculty; that they spend their time somewhat differently in college; and that they spend more of their time on activities that most educators would regard as enriching and developmentally advantageous.
Student Success and High-Impact Practices among Seniors

We conclude with an analysis of student success and student experiences, many of which are widely referred to as high-impact practices. Because many such experiences are normatively restricted to students with upper-class standing (i.e., senior theses, capstone experiences, study abroad), we have restricted the sample for this analysis to only those identified as “seniors” or “graduating seniors” in the data set. The restriction to seniors allows us to focus on differences in accumulated experience over the course of an undergraduate career.

Table 3 presents the results of this analysis. Those in the honors student segment of the senior sample had markedly higher cumulative college grade point averages. The average college GPA for seniors in the honors group at the beginning of the semester of survey administration was 3.65 compared to just 3.31 for the non-honors group. This 0.34 grade point difference is not only statistically significant but substantively large. A grade point average of 3.31 is located at the 38th percentile in the overall distribution within the study sample, and a grade point average of 3.65 is at the 69th percentile. Thus, the difference in average GPAs for the two groups is a difference of about 31 points in percentile rank in the overall GPA distribution for those students who persisted to senior standing. This difference seems particularly impressive given the comparatively smaller average difference in high school GPA between the honors and non-honors groups.

Other impressive differences between the honors and non-honors groups are apparent when examining exposure to high-impact practices and other meaningful undergraduate experiences. The honors group had higher averages for every measure of such positive student experiences. Specifically, students in the honors group reported having experience with an average of 5.39 high-impact practices compared to just 3.75 for students in the non-honors group. When we look at exposure to a sampling of specific experiences, the differences between students in the honors and non-honors groups becomes even more obvious. Seniors in the honors group were 77 percent more likely than those in the non-honors group to report having assisted faculty in conducting research (55.08 ÷ 31.15 = 1.77, or 77% greater); they were 85 percent more likely to report having studied abroad; they were twice as likely to report having assisted faculty with their creative project; and they were 2.5 times more likely to report having conducted their own research or creative project under faculty guidance. In the case of that last indicator, almost half of senior students in the honors group had conducted their own research under...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Honors</th>
<th>Non-Honors</th>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative College GPA</td>
<td>3.65**</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>GPA 0 to 4</td>
<td>14,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have done or currently participating in . . .</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>own research/creative project with faculty guidance</td>
<td>47.33**</td>
<td>19.18</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>43,621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>own research/creative project without faculty guidance</td>
<td>25.59**</td>
<td>16.63</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>43,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>credit bearing internship, practicum, or field experience</td>
<td>48.38**</td>
<td>34.74</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>43,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-credit bearing internship, practicum, or field experience</td>
<td>57.02**</td>
<td>39.52</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>43,879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>study abroad for at least one academic credit</td>
<td>33.06**</td>
<td>17.90</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>43,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assisting faculty in conducting research</td>
<td>55.08**</td>
<td>31.15</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>43,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assisting faculty with their creative project</td>
<td>20.58**</td>
<td>10.47</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>43,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>serving as officer of a student organization</td>
<td>65.28**</td>
<td>57.37</td>
<td>Percent Yes</td>
<td>27,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of high-impact practices completed or currently doing a</td>
<td>5.39**</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>HIPs 1 to 11</td>
<td>42,181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05 **p < .01

Source: 2018 Student Experience in the Research University Survey.

The measure of high-impact practices is the number of distinct experiences that seniors report either having completed or currently participating in: “first-year seminar,” “learning community,” “living-learning program,” “writing-intensive course,” “academic experience with diversity,” “capstone or thesis project,” “academic service learning or community-based experience,” “credit bearing internship, practicum, or field experience,” “non-credit bearing internship, practicum, or field experience,” “leadership program,” and “study abroad.”
Creating a Profile

faculty supervision whereas only about one-fifth of non-honors students had had that experience. Differences between honors and non-honors students for the other experiences in the table were smaller but still notable, and even the smallest of these differences was fairly impressive: students in the honors group were 14 percent more likely to have served as a club officer.

DISCUSSION

The data presented here reveal a profile of a college honors student with a strong academic background in high school, drawn disproportionately from Asian, white, and higher socioeconomic family backgrounds, and motivated in some greater measure by the desire for status and prestige. While in college, such students appear somewhat more likely to find coursework interesting, communicate and work with faculty outside of class, and increase effort in response to high standards. They also appear to complete more of their course readings and spend more time studying or participating in enriching activities such as community service and student clubs. In addition to study and academic pursuits, honors students reported spending somewhat more time participating in spiritual or religious activities as well as self-care such as exercise and sleep. Over the course of their college career, honors students are much more likely to participate in high-impact practices such as study abroad, internships, and working with faculty on research and creative projects. These students do considerably better academically while in college, and by the time they reach senior class standing, their cumulative grade point average is, on average, much stronger.

While this profile provides a coherent picture largely consistent with what previous studies have indicated and with the paradigm that honors educators have developed for honors students from their personal experience, the results also show that honors students are not entirely different creatures than non-honors students. The knowledge of demonstrable differences, however, can be of value in several ways. For example, knowing that honors students are more likely to find coursework interesting, that they will communicate and work with faculty outside of class, and that they will increase efforts in response to high standards, i.e., they like a challenge, would be more useful in identifying prospective honors students through a holistic review than the simple use of standardized tests and high school GPAs (Smith & Zagurski, 2013). Also, knowing that honors students are much more likely to participate in high-impact practices such as study abroad, internships, and working with faculty on research and creative projects will guide the structuring of
honors curricula and the ways that scholarships and awards are used to support the honors experience.

LIMITATIONS

As is often the case when using survey data collected for broad use, we are limited by such factors as the kinds of questions asked, the ways in which those questions were phrased, and the level of detail allowed in the responses. We might like in addition to know about the quality of the experience students have while working with faculty or the levels of frustration, fear, and gratification while studying abroad or working on research. Also, previous studies indicate that honors students as compared to non-honors students show tendencies to introversion (Gerrity et al., 1993; Cuevas et al., 2017; Cross et al., 2018) and perfectionism (Gerrity et al., 1993), but the SERU Survey questions did not allow us to explore these areas. Thus, opportunities remain for research to provide more nuance to our growing understanding of who honors students are, what motivates them, how they react to the experiences we provide for them in college, and how much they learn and grow as a result.

One important weakness in our study concerns the wording of the survey question at the heart of our analysis. As we pointed out earlier, the question tapping into honors student experience is much broader than we might have hoped for, and some unknown number of students who fell into our honors group are ones who once were but are no longer in the honors program. In light of the large size of the honors student population in college today—an estimated 300,000–400,000 at NCHC member institutions alone (Scott, Smith, & Cognard-Black, 2017; see also Smith & Scott, 2016)—large-scale undergraduate student surveys such as SERU would do well to refine such questions to allow for greater precision in identifying students who are actively participating in honors. In still other surveys of the undergraduate experience, no questions whatever allow researchers to distinguish honors from non-honors students; this omission is striking and should be addressed. The widely-used National Survey of Student Engagement is one such research project.

The SERU Survey data have allowed us to make great strides in comparing honors and non-honors students, but the SERU sampling frame focusing exclusively on R1 universities omits large numbers of undergraduates studying at other kinds of institutions. Significant deviations may and probably do occur from the honors student profile revealed by SERU Survey data.
CONCLUSION

Results from the analysis of SERU Survey data provide us with an empirical basis to sketch out an honors student profile as distinct from the generic undergraduate at major research universities around the country. While “R1,” “very high research activity” doctoral universities represent only one sector of higher education, it is an important sector. In 2018, the 131 R1 universities in the United States were only 3 percent of the 4,322 institutions of higher education in the country, but that small subset of institutions educated almost one-fifth of the 20 million students enrolled, and it educated 28.5 percent of students studying in traditional four-year degree institutions (CPR, 2018). Thus, knowing something about the student experience at the major research universities across the land goes a long way in telling us about the overall student experience in the United States.

In light of the fact that the sampling frame of this study is restricted to R1 universities, one direction for future research will be to elaborate or modify the honors student profile described here by expanding similar multi-institution analyses of the undergraduate experience to a wider group of institutions that is more diverse in size, mission, and institutional control. Early work on such projects is now underway in collaboration with several other large-scale surveys of the undergraduate experience. Along with the results presented here, the results of those efforts promise rich potential for an even more comprehensive portrait of the collegiate honors student in the United States today.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank Matthew Anson, Associate Director of Institutional Research and Assessment at the University of Iowa, for his help and guidance in accessing the SERU Survey data. Thanks also to Wayne Jacobson, Director of Assessment at the University of Iowa, for his support of this study. Any errors are the responsibility of the authors.

REFERENCES


National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). (2019). Percent of honors programs and colleges with a minimum ACT or SAT score for honors


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## APPENDIX

### Responses and Response Rates for Consortium Schools Participating in the 2018 *Student Experience in the Research University Survey*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent of All Responses</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>University of California Schools</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>11,707</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>28,904</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>8,756</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>28,552</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irvine</td>
<td>10,644</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>28,451</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>7,859</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>30,005</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merced</td>
<td>2,266</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6,890</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>4,381</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>19,538</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>9,164</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>27,359</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Barbara</td>
<td>6,542</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>21,558</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>6,575</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>16,954</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>University of California Totals</strong></td>
<td>67,894</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>208,211</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SERU Consortium Schools</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan State University</td>
<td>4,654</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>35,893</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purdue University</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>29,256</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Delaware</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Florida</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Iowa</td>
<td>4,118</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>21,816</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>7,208</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>28,328</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Minnesota</td>
<td>8,741</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>29,513</td>
<td>29.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of North Carolina</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Oregon</td>
<td>3,306</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>18,137</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Pittsburgh</td>
<td>3,418</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>18,064</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas at Austin</td>
<td>3,890</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>40,227</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Toronto</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Virginia</td>
<td>3,978</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>15,328</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Washington</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutgers University</td>
<td>6,645</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>34,091</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SERU Consortium Totals</strong></td>
<td>50,958</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>270,653</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall SERU Totals</strong></td>
<td>118,852</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>478,864</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources:* Frequencies and the percent distribution of survey responses come directly from the SERU 2018 data set (CSHE 2018), and student population numbers come from the University of California Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning (UCIRAP 2019) and the University of Minnesota Office of Measurement Services (UMOMS 2018). Response rates are derived by dividing the number of respondents by the target student population and multiplying by 100.

*Note:* Dashes (—) indicate Consortium schools that did not participate in the SERU Survey in 2018.
Disciplinary Affiliation and Administrators’ Reported Perception and Use of Assessment

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Abstract: Using survey data collected from 269 participants in the fall of 2016 and the spring of 2017, this study examines whether any changes might have occurred within the last 20 years regarding the disciplinary affiliation of honors administrators. Additionally, we explored current assessment practices of honors administrators and possible associations between these practices and the administrators’ disciplinary affiliation. Our study investigates disciplinary variation among honors directors in their attitudes toward and perceived effectiveness with outcomes assessment. While we mostly found similarities among directors/deans in their use of assessment, some significant differences occurred in attitudes toward and confidence with using assessment and program review. We discuss these differences and their implications for the National Collegiate Honors Council.

Keywords: administration, disciplinary affiliation, efficacy, perception

INTRODUCTION

As the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) celebrated its fiftieth year in 2015, we reflected on the history of the honors movement over the past century. From its origin, honors education has provided interdisciplinary training to its student participants, yet the connection between honors education and the humanities is undeniable. Frank Aydelotte, widely regarded as the father of honors education, was an English professor (Rinn).
In his *JNCHC* Forum essay titled “The Humanities are Dead! Long Live the Humanities!” Andrews pointed out that, of the 48 former presidents of NCHC since its founding in 1966, more than two-thirds have come from disciplines within the humanities. This interconnection between humanities faculty and honors education goes beyond leaders within the national organization and can be seen throughout the leadership of honors education around the country. Ada Long’s (1995) survey of the NCHC membership in 1992 found that nearly half of the honors directors who responded were from the traditional humanities (59 of 130, or 45.4%). Shepherd and Shepherd, in their 1991 study of the ideological orientation of honors directors, surveyed a total of 173 honors directors, and at that time noted that 79 percent of the honors directors in their study indicated an affiliation with the fields of humanities and social sciences. No recent study, however, has examined the disciplinary affiliation of honors directors or whether the humanities disciplines continue to play such an influential role within the changing shape of honors education. Given the growth in the number and diversity of types of honors programs over the last twenty years, the question of disciplinary diversity within honors is worth another look.

In particular, disciplinary diversity may have implications for how directors teach or administer honors programs. Thus, we plan to explore the extent of disciplinary variation in one seemingly polarizing issue within higher education: the use of, attitude toward, and perceived effectiveness of outcomes assessment.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Honors programs are increasingly expected to provide evidence of added value to participating students, and greater implementation of outcomes assessment could be the best answer for honors programs. Assessment and evaluation in honors programs can serve multiple functions: for instance, programs can respond to concerns about and demands for accountability from internal and external audiences (Achterberg) and can acquire the information necessary for their improvement. Not all faculty and administrators in honors education are accepting of these practices, however. Digby argued against outcomes assessment in higher education, stating that her “goal is not to score or measure students against preconceived expectations but to encourage the unexpected, breakthrough response that is utterly new, different, and thus exciting” (4). The concern that student learning is not easily measured is one that remains prevalent within honors education despite the
long history of practice in outcomes assessment that evolved in the last half of the twentieth century, particularly taking root in the 1970s as pressure mounted that higher education function “as a means of increasing U.S. international competitiveness” (Stufflebeam 8).

Philosophical differences in educational approaches have always existed among the various disciplines within higher education; most notably, the focus on qualitative rather than quantitative methodology is characteristic of the humanities. Very little empirical research has focused on whether these differences have had an impact on faculty or administrator attitudes toward assessment. In 2011, Halonen and Lanier theorized that faculty from the humanities often “view measurement itself as a reductive, distasteful, and deadening enterprise” because they value “diversity in interpretation” and therefore do not feel the need to “establish quality through the hard numeric evidence of data” (235). On the other hand, they hypothesized that because “measurement is a fundamental principle in science and social science,” the use of “measurable evidence to support claims of quality” are more widely accepted in those fields (234). Fields such as business and education have long histories of “accountability expectations” due to practices of accreditation in those areas, so they speculated that these disciplines would also be more open to assessment practices (234). While these hypothesized differences seem plausible, they remain largely speculative with no research to support the claims.

Research on faculty perceptions of assessment has tended to focus on institutional practices and perceived benefits. Previous research has shown that faculty are more supportive of assessment when they see a connection between assessment practices and their own teaching and learning efforts (Hutchings; Welsh and Metcalf; Wang and Hurley). Whether the perceived benefits of assessment are influenced by faculty members’ disciplinary affiliation has not been examined, nor has research examined what relationship disciplinary affiliation may have with views or attitudes toward assessment. Likewise, no research has examined the attitudes toward outcomes assessment among administrators in the field of honors education.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate disciplinary variation among honors directors in their attitudes toward, use of, and perceived effectiveness in outcomes assessment. We explored current assessment practices of honors administrators along with potential associations between these practices
and the administrators’ disciplinary affiliation. We also examined the current landscape of honors education and whether the disciplinary affiliation of honors administrators has changed since it was last recorded.

**IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study contributes to a growing body of knowledge within honors education and higher education as a whole. It adds to existing knowledge about the role that the humanities have played in the development of honors education, and it also examines whether any changes might have occurred within the last twenty years in the disciplinary affiliations of honors administrators.

The study examines the relationships between disciplinary affiliation and administrator attitudes toward outcomes assessment, which could be valuable information for administrators who are trying to understand how best to approach faculty and administrators and encourage their participation in campus-wide assessment. If it is found that differences exist in disciplinary training that affect current practices, this information could be useful for academic leaders and administrators attempting to increase participation in outcomes assessment.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Has the academic disciplinary affiliation of administrators in honors education changed over time? In other words, is there a greater variation of academic disciplines represented within honors administration now than twenty years ago?

2. To what extent do differences exist in the responses of honors administrators to the value of outcomes assessment in the program planning process?

3. Is there a relationship between honors administrators’ attitudes toward assessment and their academic disciplinary training (arts and humanities vs. social sciences, sciences, etc.)?

4. To what extent are there differences in assessment practices related to disciplinary affiliation?

**METHODOLOGY**

The current study examined the disciplinary affiliation, attitudes toward outcomes assessment, and other demographic characteristics for individuals
actively involved in the leadership of honors education. Specifically, an electronic survey consisting of 41 items was distributed using Qualtrics in the fall 2016 and spring 2017 semesters. The survey collected demographic data from respondents: age range, gender, race/ethnicity, and educational level. Respondents were asked to report their position within honors education as well as their institutional type, honors program type, honors program size, and years of experience in honors education as a whole. Finally, respondents were asked to answer a series of questions designed to assess their attitudes toward assessment, record their reported use of assessment, and document their perceived effectiveness of assessment.

Overview of study participants and recruitment procedures. Participants were recruited based on their experience and active leadership in honors education. Specifically, the survey was distributed to 838 participants, each of whom was listed as the current director or dean for an honors program or college affiliated as an institutional member of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC). Of the 838 individuals invited to participate, a total of 269 completed the survey, for a response rate of 32 percent.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPANTS

Of the 269 total respondents, 136 (51%) were male and 133 (49%) were female. Regarding race and ethnicity, the majority (84%, f = 227) of respondents reported being white. The majority of participants (84%, f = 226) reported holding a doctorate or other terminal degree (e.g., JD, PhD, MD, EdD, MFA). Participants were asked with which academic discipline they affiliate but were not limited to one response, so some participants selected more than one discipline (see Table 1). Arts and Humanities was the area of training with which the greatest number affiliated, at 44 percent (f = 119). Thirty percent (f = 81) affiliated with the social sciences, making it the second most common area of training. Thirteen percent (f = 35) were affiliated with a STEM discipline. Eight percent (f = 22) identified education as their area of training while an additional 5 percent (f= 12) identified other professional disciplines as their area of training.

Table 1 shows that the study sample matches quite well that of the 2016 NCHC Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges (Scott, Smith, and Cognard-Black) in disciplinary representation among honors directors and deans. The percentages of honors heads within broad areas of disciplinary
training (i.e., field of highest degree) for the study sample are within only a few percentage points of those for the NCHC Census. These data also show little evidence of change in the makeup of honors administrators in the last twenty years. Shepherd and Shepherd (1996) reported that 79 percent of honors administrators in 1991 were from the humanities and social sciences. As Table 1 shows, those two combined groups made up about 74 percent of the study sample described here, but that difference is not statistically significant at either the $p < .05$ or the .10 levels. Shepherd and Shepherd did not provide more precise disciplinary detail within that 79 percent, and so there is no evidence from that comparison alone of change within those two areas of training (i.e., fewer humanities and more social sciences). Moreover, comparing the distribution in our study sample with results presented by Long (1995) leads to the same general conclusion of no substantive change in disciplinary diversity. Of the 130 cases in her survey results with valid discipline data, 45.4 percent (59 out of 130) were in the humanities, nearly identical to the 44.2 percent responding to our survey. These data demonstrate that the disciplinary training of honors administrators has not changed significantly over time and that the humanities and social sciences still represent a majority of the disciplinary backgrounds of honors administrators.

RESULTS

Table 2 reveals few significant differences across broad disciplinary areas in attitudes about outcomes assessment in honors with a few notable exceptions. Some of the most noticeable differences in attitudes appear to be related to the respondents’ highest degree in education. Those with their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Training</th>
<th>Study Sample</th>
<th></th>
<th>NCHC Census</th>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage Point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Humanities</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages for the NCHC Census appeared in Scott, Smith, and Cognard-Black.
primary training in arts and humanities or social sciences were significantly more likely than those with education degrees to report that administrators focus too much on outcomes assessment. In contrast, those with education degrees reported stronger agreement than those in arts/humanities with the statement that they would do outcomes assessment “even if it was not required” ($p < .05$). The numbers reflecting attitudes about assessment do not appear much different for honors directors from the humanities, social sciences, or STEM fields.

Despite any disciplinary differences in attitudes about assessment, Table 3 shows little disciplinary difference in the assessment behaviors measured, and analysis of variance revealed no significant differences. However, there may be some disciplinary differences in the perceived background necessary to execute outcomes assessment. Table 4 shows a comparison of means for five broad disciplinary areas in various levels of confidence related to carrying out assessment activities. Those from arts and humanities backgrounds reported that they felt significantly less prepared by their graduate school training to administer outcomes assessment than those in education, STEM fields, and social sciences. However, honors directors/deans trained in arts and humanities reported similar levels to those in other fields of relevant knowledge, proficiency at interpreting assessment evidence, and ability to implement change based on the program review process.

It is worth noting that the overall numbers for everyone are low for the item on assessment-relevant skills acquired during graduate training, and they appear to be especially low for those trained primarily in the arts and humanities; this may translate into lower levels of confidence (i.e., proficiency at interpreting evidence) for those in arts and humanities, but that difference does not reach conventional levels of significance.

CONCLUSION

As Halonen and Lanier speculated, this study confirmed some disciplinary differences in attitudes toward outcomes assessment. Specifically, those in the arts and humanities or social sciences were more likely to think that too much importance is placed on assessment and that they would be less likely than those in education to participate in outcomes assessment if it were not required. We attribute this difference at least somewhat to the differences in graduate school training, as those from arts and humanities backgrounds reported their training prepared them significantly less to administer outcomes assessment than those in education, STEM fields, and social sciences.
### Table 2. Attitudes Toward Assessment among Honors Directors and Deans, by Primary Area of Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Arts &amp; Humanities</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>STEM</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Attitudes toward Assessment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would participate in outcomes assessment activities even if it was not required to by my college or university.</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes assessment is a valuable component of student learning and should guide program changes . . .</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes assessment is a valuable component of the program improvement process.</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Attitudes toward Assessment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes assessment is not a true reflection of program effectiveness; therefore, assessment should not carry much weight . . .</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic administrators are focusing too much on outcomes assessment.</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The time invested in developing and maintaining an assessment program is not worth the information gained.</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>116</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Numbers presented here are means for Likert-type measures of agreement, with responses coded 1 = “Strongly Disagree,” 2 = “Disagree,” 3 = “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” 4 = “Agree,” or 5 = “Strongly Agree.” Analysis of variance revealed few differences across disciplines; however, there were significant ($p < .05$) F tests for items 1 (“I would . . . even if not required”) and 5 (“administrators are focusing too much on outcomes assessment”). Tukey post hoc tests indicated that the source of the significant F tests were differences between those with education degrees and those with arts and humanities degrees, as well as, in the case of item 5, those with social sciences.

* The Social Sciences $n$ for this item is 80.
Table 3. Assessment Behaviors among Honors Directors and Deans, by Primary Area of Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Arts &amp; Humanities</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>STEM</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes assessment findings are used in the analysis of program policies and procedures.</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My honors program has defined learning outcomes that exist as part of a programmatic outcomes assessment.</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My department uses outcomes assessment data to guide the majority of our program changes.</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With what frequency does your department participate in discussions of programmatic outcomes assessment?</td>
<td>2.94(^a)</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Numbers presented in the first three rows are means for Likert-type measures of agreement, with responses coded 1 = “Strongly Disagree,” 2 = “Disagree,” 3 = “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” 4 = “Agree,” or 5 = “Strongly Agree.” Numbers for the bottom item on frequency of discussion are means for data coded from an open-ended question. There were 118 unique open-ended responses that were coded from 0–4, with higher numbers indicating greater frequency: 0 = “Never/infrequent,” 1 = “Every three to five years,” 2 = “Every two years,” 3 = “Yearly,” 4 = “Two or more times/year.” Analysis of variance revealed no significant differences across disciplines for any of the four items in the table.

\(^a\) The sample n's for this item are, in order from left to right, 103, 67, 31, 13, 9, and 223.
Table 4. Confidence and Preparedness in Assessment among Honors Directors and Deans, by Primary Area of Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Arts &amp; Humanities</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>STEM</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am knowledgeable in the process of creating program-related outcomes.</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am capable of gathering appropriate evidence to be used to assess</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>program-related outcomes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| I am proficient in interpreting evidence gathered through the process     | 3.74              | 4.01            | 4.09<sup>a</sup> | 3.90          | 3.73         | 3.88<sup>b</sup>
| of outcomes assessment.                                                   |                   |                 |               |               |              |                 |
| I am adequately prepared to implement change based on evidence gathered    | 3.83              | 4.04            | 3.85<sup>a</sup> | 3.86          | 3.64         | 3.89<sup>b</sup>
| in the program review process.                                            |                   |                 |               |               |              |                 |
| The skills I received in my graduate/disciplinary training effectively    | 1.80              | 2.60            | 2.71<sup>a</sup> | 3.14          | 2.18         | 2.29<sup>b</sup>
| prepared me to administer outcomes assessment.                            |                   |                 |               |               |              |                 |
| N                                                                          | 115               | 78              | 35            | 21            | 11           | 260             |

Notes: Numbers presented here are means for Likert-type measures of agreement, with responses coded 1 = “Strongly Disagree,” 2 = “Disagree,” 3 = “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” 4 = “Agree,” or 5 = “Strongly Agree.” Analysis of variance revealed few differences across disciplines; however, there were significant differences in means for the item asking whether graduate/disciplinary training effectively prepared the respondent to administer outcomes assessment. Tukey post hoc tests indicated that the source of the significant F test were differences between those with arts and humanities degrees and those in the social sciences, those in STEM fields, and those with their highest degree in education. Those from arts and humanities backgrounds reported significantly less agreement with that item than those from the other backgrounds (<i>p</i> < .01).  

<sup>a</sup> The STEM n for these items is 34.  

<sup>b</sup> The sample n for these items is 259.
Table 5. Types of Outcomes Assessment Incorporated into the Honors Program, by Primary Area of Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Arts &amp; Humanities</th>
<th>Social Sciences</th>
<th>STEM</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theses or undergraduate research</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capstone projects</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written compositions or research papers</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual student assignments</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships/field experiences</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The question stem for all items here was, “Indicate which of the following categories of outcomes assessment are incorporated in the honors program where you serve. (Select all that apply.)” Numbers indicate the percentage selecting a given category of assessment. The last three items were constructed from an open-ended option specifying, “Other (please indicate).” Analysis of variance revealed no significant differences across disciplines for any of the items in the table.
This result is not unexpected given the focus on qualitative rather than quantitative approaches that is characteristic of the humanities. The lack of experience with specific kinds of assessment-relevant training seems to have at least some impact on attitude toward assessment, but it does not seem to have much impact on the actual use of assessment, likely because faculty have to remain in compliance with the demands of their institution.

Despite some disciplinary differences, we should not overstate the difference. One key finding from these data is the many similarities among directors/deans in their use of outcomes assessment and program review. Though the overall attitude toward and confidence with assessment were lower for those in the arts and humanities, they nevertheless reported similar levels, in comparison to other fields, of relevant knowledge, proficiency at interpreting assessment evidence, and ability to implement change based on the program review process. One possible explanation for this promising finding is that only those arts and humanities faculty with a predisposition toward assessment are being selected to run honors programs. However, we think a more likely explanation is that honors deans/directors, regardless of discipline, are getting similar support from their institutions and from professional organizations such as the NCHC to meet the demands of program assessment.

Across all disciplines, we found areas in need of improvement with regard to increasing confidence of the directors/deans in their use of assessment practices. Further training could probably be helpful for deans and directors who may not feel confident implementing assessment. While directors and deans are reporting that their programs are participating in discussions of outcomes assessment as well as reporting that they are prepared to interpret evidence and implement changes, one area in particular that stood out as an area in need of improvement across disciplines was that the majority of deans and directors reported that outcomes assessment data were not being used to guide the majority of program changes. These findings, seen in Table 3, show that honors directors report an average just below “neither agree nor disagree” that assessment data “guide the majority of our program changes,” which is somewhat less than the averages found for other items in the survey data. While other factors certainly could be influencing and guiding program change, one possible reason that honors directors and deans are not using outcomes assessment in this way is that they lack the proficiency to use the information they have and translate it into necessary action. NCHC could focus its efforts on providing support in this area, specifically in training.
directors and deans to implement changes based on the evidence gathered in the assessment and review process.

REFERENCES


Shepherd, Gordon, and Gary Shepherd. “War Attitudes and Ideological Orientations of Honors Educators in American Higher Education.” *Journal*


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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.

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Breaking Barriers in Teaching and Learning edited by James Ford and John Zubizarreta (2018, 252pp). This volume—with wider application beyond honors classrooms and programs—offers various ideas, practical approaches, experiences, and adaptable models for breaking traditional barriers in teaching and learning. The contributions inspire us to rethink the ways in which we teach and create curriculum and to rethink our assumptions about learning. Honors education centers on the power of excellence in teaching and learning. Breaking free of barriers allows us to use new skills, adjusted ways of thinking, and new freedoms to innovate as starting points for enhancing the learning of all students.


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 practical 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. Kotinek (2010, 288pp). This collection of essays provides definitions of diversity in honors, explores the challenges and opportunities diversity brings to honors education, and depicts the transformative nature of diversity when coupled with equity and inclusion. These essays discuss African American, Latina/o, international, and first-generation students as well as students with disabilities. Other issues include experiential and service learning, the politics of diversity, and the psychological resistance to it. Appendices relating to NCHC member institutions contain diversity statements and a structural diversity survey.

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

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

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

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

Honors in Practice (HIP) is an annual journal of applied research publishing articles about innovative honors practices and integrative, interdisciplinary, and pedagogical issues of interest to honors educators.

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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