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Editorial Matter for Volume 7, Number 1

Ada Long

University of Alabama - Birmingham, adalong@uab.edu

Dail Mullins

University of Alabama - Birmingham

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JNCHC

**JOURNAL OF THE
NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL**

A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL

OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND HONORS

JOURNAL EDITORS

ADA LONG

DAIL MULLINS

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

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EDITORIAL POLICY

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council is a refereed periodical publishing scholarly articles on honors education. The journal uses a double-blind peer review process. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology, articles on interdisciplinary efforts, discussions of problems common to honors programs, items on the national higher education agenda, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education. Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at (phone) 850.927.3776 or (e-mail) adalong@uab.edu.

DEADLINES

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

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* is now accepting papers for Volume 7, No. 2 (fall/winter 2006), which will focus on the theme of honors administration. We invite research essays for this issue that consider matters related to directing an honors program, serving as dean of an honors college, changing from a program to a college, term limits (or lack thereof), serving in any administrative or staff position of an honors program or college, institutional relations, positioning within an institutional hierarchy, budgetary management, fundraising, national involvement, tenure and promotion, career advantages or liabilities, balancing administrative/academic or honors/disciplinary responsibilities, or any other topic relevant to honors administration. We also invite book reviews of publications that might be of interest to readers of *JNCHC*, and we are happy to receive letters to the editor on matters related to materials published in *JNCHC*.

The deadline for submissions is September 1, 2006.

The following issue (**deadline: March 1, 2007**) will be a general-interest issue

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We will accept material by e-mail attachment (preferred) or disk. We will not accept material by fax or hard copy.

The documentation style can be whatever is appropriate to the author's primary discipline or approach (MLA, APA, etc.), but please avoid footnotes. Internal citation to a list of references (bibliography) is preferred; endnotes are acceptable.

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

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

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

DEDICATION



SUSANNA FINNELL

It is our privilege to honor Dr. Susanna Finnell and the special blend of intellect and energy—with a Swiss accent—that she has contributed to the National Collegiate Honors Council. Susanna has been an invaluable leader of the NCHC, especially throughout the key decade of the 1990s when both the organization and the honors programs/colleges it represents were experiencing unparalleled growth. During just this one decade, she organized the very successful annual NCHC Conference in San Francisco in 1996 as well as the Western Regional Conference in 1990 and the Great Plains Regional Conference in 1994; served as President of NCHC in 1997; gave over twenty presentations at national and regional conferences; conceived and coordinated the Corporate Programs sessions at six national conferences; co-chaired the Idea Exchange; chaired the Nominating Committee, External Relations Committee, and Committee on Women and Minorities; and served on other committees too numerous to list. Susanna has been Assistant Director of the Honors Program at Washington State University, Executive Director of Honors Programs and Academic Scholarships at Texas A&M, Director of Admissions at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln and (most recently) the University of Houston, and a professor of English at several universities. She has published in a wide range of fields that include Canadian literature and higher education. Susanna has always been a woman to take on major challenges with enthusiasm and courage. Her most recent and least welcome challenge has been a severe stroke that she suffered on January 30. She is due for discharge from inpatient acute rehabilitation as this journal gets ready to go press. We wish her the very best, and we thank her for her gifts of wisdom, grace, dedication, and inspiration to the NCHC.

JAY FREYMAN

Letter to the Editors

To the Editors:

Len Zane's response to my essay is very interesting and perceptive.

Indeed, he is frighteningly perceptive in noting that the criteria I suggest (I assume he means the values in the second part of my essay) "seem like a wonderful set of outcome objectives for an honors program as opposed to set of admission requirements." In fact, that is exactly how these values started out. I sat on an "Honors Task Force" some years before leaving the Honors College; the members of the Task Force were asked to draw up a list of characteristics we would like to see in graduates of, in our case, an honors university, as UMBC is styled.

Over the years after I drew up this list, my experience with honors students led me to the conclusion that, while I would certainly want honors graduates to hold and realize these values to a great degree, they are, in fact, values which any graduate of a liberal arts institution should display to one degree or another. I came to think that one of the things which distinguished those students who, on entering the university, would become regular graduates from those who would be honors graduates was that, even before beginning their university experience, the prospective honors graduates would have some inkling at least of the importance of these values and might even already have given some evidence of having lived thereby, e.g., the service activities in which they had engaged would address the value of altruism. In this example, I guess what I am saying is that, if there were such thing as an AP high school course in altruism, I would give more weight to a student's having taken it than I would to his/her having taken AP biology or United States history

To couch the matter in terms from my own field of Ancient Studies, there should be some germ of the ideal honors product there which can be cultured and, initially, brought to birth by the Socratic midwifery which is the honors program. Or, if you will, the potential for production of that ideal result must already be inherent in the raw material from which the honors program will sculpt at least a rough likeness of it, i.e., the candidate for admission to the honors program must provide the material cause, and possibly even some conception of the formal cause, for what the program will hopefully produce. It is not, I think, a matter of nurture or nature, but one of the cooperation of nurture and nature. We are looking, in a promising honors candidate, for a disposition, or predisposition, admittedly something very difficult to detect in someone with whom we have had only very limited contact. But, as I indicate in my essay with a bow to the late Supreme Court Justice Stewart, this disposition, while ineffable, in the right circumstances is quite possibly detectable.

Jay M. Freyman, Associate Professor and former
Director of the Honors College, University of
Maryland, Baltimore County

[Ed. Note: Freyman's essay can be found in JNCHC 6.2 (fall/winter 2005), 23-29, and Len Zane's essay is in the same issue on pages 35-37.]

ADA LONG

Editor's Introduction

ADA LONG

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

The opening section of this issue of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* is a Forum on “Outcomes Assessment, Accountability, and Honors.” This topic arose in part from the Forum on “What is Honors?” in the previous issue of *JNCHC* (6.2). The two topics are interconnected in numerous ways and have elicited important discussion of matters crucial to the evolution of honors education in the United States and beyond.

Before summarizing the essays that address the topic of outcomes assessment, accountability, and honors, I want to pull out of the conversation one issue that for the most part remains tacit in the essays but that to me seems fundamental. That issue is trust. What seems to have gained momentum in recent years is distrust of higher education and, more specifically, of college and university teachers. The various commentators on higher education—from journalists to parents, legislators to college presidents—seem to agree that teachers need to prove that they are doing their jobs, and pundits have a wide range of opinions about how teachers should provide such proof. My question is, what is the basis for this distrust? It cannot be some lowering of standards for the credentialing of faculty, who are spending more years getting more degrees and spending more years beyond the degree in post-doctoral teaching positions before finding full-time jobs. It cannot be that students are complaining that they have not been adequately challenged in college or that they are worse citizens after their college experience; if such complaints exist in some serious degree, I haven't seen them reported. It cannot be that a college education is failing to provide higher salaries or better jobs for graduates; all the data prove the opposite. The only cause for such distrust of which I am aware is the assumed crisis in literacy, but, even if the literacy crisis is real (do we really know that today's college graduates are less literate than in times past, or are we simply nostalgic about the good old days when fewer students had access to higher education?), the focus of current assessment developments has a much wider focus than basic literacy.

A subset of the problem of trust is the question of who will assess the assessors. A class and a culture of assessment professionals have grown up in the past decade or two, and they are having a major impact on the policies and procedures of undergraduate education across the country. Who are they, and why do they garner the trust that is with increasing meagerness afforded to college and university faculties?

These kinds of questions about the basis, validity, and motivation of increased distrust of college teachers and about the goals of the concurrent “accountability movement” are perhaps especially crucial to honors education. Honors programs and colleges are increasingly required to implement externally designed assessment procedures, a difficult task when their goals include curricular innovation and the

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personal as well as academic development of students, goals that are especially hard to assess. Moreover, honors programs and colleges depend on the enthusiasm, dedication, and expertise of faculty members to teach honors classes and to help run programs; if faculty members lose their autonomy, an inevitable by-product of losing trust, then what will become of the good will that is essential to honors education?

Honors programs depend, above all, on the love of learning that teachers bring to them, a love that very often—almost always, I would say—prompts teachers to do more work and to spend more time with students than what they or others would normally expect. But if teachers lose control over their classrooms, if they are required to teach in a manner that is assessable by instruments other than their own background and expertise, their love of learning and their desire to instill it in students will be imperiled.

And so we have wound back again to the previous issue of *JNCHC* (6.2), which focused on the question “What is Honors?” and from which emerged a consensus about what I called the “holy trinity of great education: the student, the teacher, and the focus of inquiry,” a trinity that depends absolutely on mutual trust and (in many ways a synonym for trust) respect. Not only do all the contributors to this issue of *JNCHC* share in that consensus, but they also create a new one: that assessment and evaluation must come from within. There is considerable disagreement, as there should be, about more general issues of assessment and evaluation—including the dangers it might present to honors, the forms it should take, and whether it should exist at all—but there is unanimous agreement that requiring standardized measurement of student learning outcomes is inimical to the very nature of honors education. From this basic consensus, we can proceed now to a wonderful variety of variations upon the theme of accountability.

The lead essay in the Forum—“Saving Honors in the Age of Standardization” by Linda Frost of the University of Alabama at Birmingham—was distributed on the NCHC listserv in February, 2006, with an invitation to respond to the essay and/or to the topic of outcomes assessment and accountability in honors. Frost’s essay is an outstanding overview of the issues as well as a compelling argument about the dangers of outcomes assessment. She attributes the rise of interest in accountability to “the skyrocketing costs of higher education,” leading parents and politicians to question the quality of education. She suggests that questions ought more properly to target the business practices of universities and the under-funding of education by federal and state governments, but the consequence of public skepticism about education, combined with the allure of data, has instead been outcomes assessment. This kind of assessment privileges ends over means, product over process, and requires that teachers know in advance exactly what they want students to learn so that they then can measure whether students have learned it. This kind of pedagogy, Frost argues, can only lead to a learning based on predictability, repetition, compliance, and standardization—the antithesis, in other words, of the imagination, empowerment, individuality, and pleasure in learning that honors education fosters. Frost concludes her essay with the sobering thought that, even though honors programs and colleges—by virtue of their unique status—may be able to cling to empowered learning as their special prerogative, they cannot maintain this kind of learning in an institutional context antithetical to it.

As Frost indicates, there is confusion about exactly what “outcomes assessment” is. For some it means quantifiable measurements of predetermined goals; for others it means more generally the collection and analysis of information that will allow improvement of educational processes. We have no real way to resolve this confusion other than pointing out that the Forum contributors who see value in assessment tend to use the more general definition while those who see no value in it typically use the “quantifiable measurements” definition. That said, the responses to Frost’s essay and/or to the general question of accountability fall into two categories: three essays argue for the value of assessment as long as it is internally developed and consistent with the goals of honors education; the other five responses focus on the dangers of assessment and counsel resistance. We present first the three responses that suggest the benefits of assessment.

Steffen Wilson and Rose Perrine, both of Eastern Kentucky University, published an essay called “We Know They’re Smart, but Have They learned Anything? Strategies for Assessing Learning in Honors” in Volume 1 (2005) of *Honors in Practice*. This essay was part of the inspiration for the Forum on “Outcomes Assessment, Accountability, and Honors,” and readers who want an in-depth discussion of outcomes assessment in honors should refer to that essay. In Steffen Wilson’s essay here, “Using Learning Outcomes Assessment in Honors as a Defense Against Proposed Standardized Testing,” she argues that outcomes assessment is here to stay because governments, donors, parents, and accrediting agencies demand it, and so we should develop forms of assessment that, even though they significantly change the educational culture and process, nevertheless give us some control. Wilson cites statistics showing that the success of higher education in producing higher pay and better job options is the reason most students go to college. It may seem paradoxical that the very statistics demonstrating “success” have created a climate where educators are required to produce *other* statistics to prove success, but Wilson argues that it is a fact and expectation that an undergraduate education is linked to future income and status. Accountability is necessary in this set of circumstances, and stakeholders have the right to demand demonstrable evidence of success.

Like Wilson, Jean Sorensen of Grayson County College suggests—in “Documenting the Achievements of Our Students without Compromising Excellence”—that academics need to design their own forms of assessment that can measure what they want to achieve, thus fending off external and standardized forms of assessment. Also like Wilson, she points to the need to be accountable to stakeholders, to prove that students are learning. In order to avoid the “reductive conformity” that Frost rightly fears, she says, honors administrators need to initiate discussions with other organizations—such as the State Higher Education Executive Officers—and certainly with each other about the appropriate ways to assess students and programs. She provides some ideas about how to get started on that conversation.

In “Honors Assessment and Evaluation,” Cheryl Achterberg—currently of Iowa State University and formerly of the Schreyer Honors College at Penn State—agrees with the point made by Wilson and Sorensen that accountability to stakeholders is both necessary and valuable but that the kind of reductive standardization Frost describes provides meaningless results. Achterberg defines assessment, which tells us

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“how to get better,” and evaluation, which judges our success, as processes that go beyond accumulation of data. She offers, as one model for assessment and evaluation, a collaborative process she undertook at Penn State to develop an honors course evaluation form. Because future developments of assessment and evaluation models will be a long-term commitment, she thinks honors administrators should start to take the lead now in that project.

Wilson, Sorensen, and Achterberg—while rejecting externally mandated and standardized forms of assessment—all seem optimistic about both the future role of assessment and the positive influence that honors educators can have on that future. The other five contributors do not share this optimism. Rather than encouraging honors educators to lead the accountability movement, they urge us to lead the resistance.

Two contributors—Jay Freyman of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and George Mariz of Western Washington University—make essentially the same point: that what matters in education are the long-term effects, not the short-term information that can be quantified but that has no relevance or value. In “When It’s Bad Cess to Assess!,” Freyman argues that the whole idea of outcomes assessment is linked to the faulty metaphor of “value added,” a phrase that is properly used to describe the transformation of chunks of raw material into industrial products and that should not be used to describe or inform education. Education should aim at the long-term goal of civic responsibility, a goal that cannot be assessed; thus, implementing assessment of short-term goals distracts us from our proper vocation.

George Mariz, in “Accountable to Whom? Assessment for What?,” makes the same point as Freyman, asking the question, “After all, how can an eighteen-year-old make meaningful evaluations of material whose real worth will be evident only years, sometimes many years after the fact?” Mariz provides an account of the political origins of the accountability movement in Washington State—an account that I suspect mirrors the recent history of many, if not most, other states. Mariz also describes the dynamics that have led institutions of higher learning to collude with legislatures and other external groups in promoting the accountability movement—dynamics that, he suggests, arise from a variety of motivations, all self-interested and all extraneous to the proper goal of education: learning.

Freyman and Mariz both argue against outcomes assessment on the grounds that it measures the wrong things, thus providing irrevocably flawed information that distorts and perverts the mission of higher education. Jeffrey A. Portnoy, of Georgia Perimeter College, adds a new facet to this argument in “Business and Educational Values.” He argues that the business model, which seems to inform modes of accountability being imposed on higher education, has hardly been successful even for business, where fiscal irresponsibility (Enron, HealthSouth, etc.), huge salaries for management, lack of concern for workers, and government bailouts have become a cultural norm. Higher education has, alas, already adopted many of these norms even though the goals of education are and should be altogether different from making money and satisfying stakeholders. By its very nature, Portnoy suggests, education is designed to create unquantifiable “goods” such as critical thinking, diversity of ideas, flexibility in problem-solving—qualities that, when you try to standardize

them, disappear. Thus the business model is not only inappropriate and inherently flawed, but it necessarily subverts the goal of excellence in education.

Whereas Mariz lamented the self-destructive complicity of universities in the accountability movement, Paul Strong of Alfred University finds this same complicity in the NCHC. In "Honors as Skunkworks," Strong sees the NCHC's document on "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program" as an instance and omen of the reductive standardization that Frost sees looming on our educational horizon. Honors programs, Strong says, should always be testing the rules, resisting restrictions, implementing new ideas, and challenging assumptions; they cannot accomplish these goals by acquiescing to measurements of conformity and standardization. The "Basic Characteristics," he argues, are a troubling manifestation of just such acquiescence.

Having the final word of the Forum in an essay called "They Graduated," Joan Digby of Long Island University – C. W. Post Campus underscores the point made by almost all the other contributors that the kind of data accumulated in large-scale assessment procedures are both unreliable and intrinsically meaningless. She echoes Mariz and Freyman in particular when she writes, "As honors directors, I believe, our own accountability lies not in any statistical results but in our moral directive." She then makes the disturbing point that, the more stringently we enforce quantitative measurement and standardization, the more we encourage cheating at every level. Perhaps most disturbing of all, she says, is the waste of time that teachers have to spend on assessment procedures, time they should be devoting to their students.

Those of you who read all the essays in the Forum in sequence will note, as I did, the differences in vocabulary as one moves into reading the essays urging resistance to assessment. The vocabulary itself—"morality," "civic responsibility," "innovation," "creativity"—signals values that are immeasurable. As Linda Frost outlined so effectively in her lead essay, the assessment issue exposes and pits against one another the dual roles of contemporary education, one of which, decades-old, is to prepare students for job opportunities at high salaries and the other of which, centuries-old, is to create better thinkers and citizens. The balance between these two goals is, to say the least, delicate, and there is cause for concern that the accountability movement will, as collateral damage, tip the scales in favor of career preparation. Honors educators do indeed need to be in the forefront of the national conversation about outcomes assessment, but first we will each need to decide whether we should join or resist the movement. The Forum essays should help readers make their decisions.

The second part of this issue of *JNCHC* presents three research essays that directly or indirectly relate to the theme of assessment.

Of exceptional relevance to all college and university honors programs as well as to the topic of assessment is the essay by Jennifer Lane of Glendale Community College on "The Impact of K-12 Programs on Postsecondary Programming." Lane provides important insights into the students we recruit into our honors programs and what we need to know about them. Four of these insights are (1) that K-12 programs for the gifted, bowing to the pressures of egalitarianism or of aggressive parents, often admit students who are neither gifted nor able; (2) that honors and AP programs

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in high school may be providing test-taking skills rather than the analytical and problem-solving skills required in college; (3) that students in high-school gifted programs thus often have the misconception that they are ready for college; and (4) that honors directors at post-secondary institutions may be subject to the same misconceptions and thus admit students who do not really belong in honors. Given this context, Lane goes on to provide five specific pieces of advice to honors educators: (1) continue offering academic and social support to students who have benefited from such support in high school, support that is essential to their success in college; (2) promote development of the individual identity crucial to college success by working directly with students, not their parents; (3) recognize that the student/teacher relationship is at the center of any productive education; (4) focus on “community building, peer relationships, and student-faculty interactions”; and (5) recognize that high-school honors students may be under-prepared for college work and that these students might dilute or diminish the educational experiences of genuinely gifted students. Lane concludes with her belief that the processes of identifying gifted and able students need to be consistent and appropriate throughout the K-12 educational system in order to create a stronger alignment between high-school and college honors programs—an alignment that can be achieved if and only if the focus on standardized testing in high school does not skew the focus of high-school programs toward other goals. Many of these points resonate with the Forum essays that focus on the dangers of standardized testing and the need for personal teacher-student interaction, and they also help explain concerns that honors teachers often have about the preparation of their students.

Nancy A. Stanlick picks up on the vocabulary of virtue and responsibility that characterized the arguments in the Forum against outcomes assessment. In “Creating an Honors Community: A Virtue Ethics Approach,” Stanlick provides the philosophical underpinnings and implications of an honor code such as the one in place at the Burnett Honors College of the University of Central Florida. She presents a detailed analysis of what it means to be a member of a virtue-theoretic model of social relations. Her argument, in short, is that membership in a community is authentic, rather than merely nominal, only when the member participates fully in the community, not only receiving its benefits but fully exercising its responsibilities. Stanlick lays the philosophical groundwork for the concept that plagiarism, for instance, is necessarily an action that excludes the plagiarist from full membership in an honors community. She suggests that other models of social relationships—such as the individual ascendancy model—do not offer full or adequate definitions of community membership and do not provide sufficient grounds to understand and prevent academic dishonesty, a point that connects in interesting ways to Joan Digby’s argument that quantitative assessment encourages plagiarism.

The final essay in this issue of *JNCHC* is “Building a City of Ladies with Christine de Pizan and Arkansas State University Honors Students” by Frances Malpezzi. Malpezzi describes an honors seminar she has taught that is built around the study of five medieval and early modern women: Hildegard of Bingen, Margery Kempe, Christine de Pizan, Aemilia Lanyer, and Elizabeth Cary. To imagine,

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however, that the study of these five women, remarkable as they are, is the only goal of the course would be to ignore the great variety of activities and objectives that arise from the seminar, many of which echo the values described elsewhere in this issue. Like the women they are studying, the seminar students re-vision their world and its history; they question assumptions, especially the misogynist assumptions that women have been contesting for almost a millennium; they do individual research on a wide range of topics that include medieval women poets, warriors, and mystics as well as modern women such as Benazir Bhutto, Emma Noether, and Oprah Winfrey; they build a community akin to the one described by Nancy A. Stanlick, in which each student participates and contributes; and, above all, they learn that the seminar is only the beginning of their study and of their re-visioning, a process that will continue throughout their lives as they question assumptions about their past and present culture.

It is fitting to conclude this issue with an essay about what actually happens in an honors classroom and with, therefore, the “holy trinity of the student, the teacher, and the topic of inquiry.” However much we get caught up in debates about assessment or about all the policies and procedures that preoccupy our daily lives in the academy, we need always to remember, value, and protect the immeasurable joys of teaching and learning that are the reason we care about everything else.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Cheryl Achterberg is the inaugural Dean of the College of Human Sciences and Professor of Nutrition at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. She was formerly at Penn State as the founding Dean of the Schreyer Honors College. She is widely published in nutrition and writes regularly about honors education. Her current scholarly interests include honors education, leadership development, and behavior change.

Joan Digby is a former president of NCHC and is Honors Program Director at the C. W. Post Campus of Long Island University. A Professor of English, she has published several books, including her own poetry as well as literary anthologies. With her husband, collagist John Digby, she has written on contemporary collage and started a small private press, The Feral Press. She is also editor of *Peterson's Honors Programs & Colleges*, now in its fourth edition.

Linda Frost is Associate Director of the University Honors Program and Associate Professor of English at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Founding editor of the women's literary journal *PMS poemmemoirstory*, Frost is also the author of *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture 1850-1877* (University of Minnesota Press).

Jennifer Lane is currently the Honors Program Coordinator at Glendale Community College, one of the Maricopa Community Colleges. She teaches English and is completing a Ph.D. in Post-Secondary and Adult Education with an emphasis in Honors/Gifted Programming.

Frances M. Malpezzi teaches in the Department of English & Philosophy at Arkansas State University. She currently serves as editor of *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, the interdisciplinary journal of The South-Central Renaissance Conference.

George Mariz holds B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Missouri, Columbia. He is Professor of History and Director of the Honors Program at Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA. His research interests and publications are in the intellectual history of Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and in the history of religion. He is currently working on a study of the social ideas of the sons of Protestant ministers in Germany, Great Britain, and the United States.

Jeffrey A. Portnoy is Coordinator of the Honors Program on the Lawrenceville Campus of Georgia Perimeter College in Atlanta and Professor in the Department of English. He is a member of the *JNCHC* Editorial Board, a co-chair of the Publications Board of the National Collegiate Honors Council, and General Editor of NCHC's monograph series.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jean Sorensen is Coordinator of the Honors College at Grayson County College. She is a Professor in the Department of Literature and Language. She earned her Ph.D. from the Institute of Philosophic Studies at the University of Dallas. Her teaching interests revolve around axiology, on issues concerning ethics, aesthetics, and rhetoric.

Nancy A. Stanlick is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Central Florida, Coordinator of the Graduate Certificate Program in Theoretical and Applied Ethics, and Co-Editor of *Florida Philosophical Review: The Journal of the Florida Philosophical Association*. Her research centers on the ethics of interpersonal relationships, academic ethics, academic integrity, and the moral and social thought of Thomas Hobbes.

Paul Strong has been Honors Director at Alfred University since 1985. Over the years he has taught Homer, Hardy, Hemingway, and Woolf, a variety of courses on recent American fiction, poetry, and film, and the history of painting from Giotto to Picasso.

Steffen Wilson is Associate Director of the Honors Program and Associate Professor of Psychology at Eastern Kentucky University. She earned a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from the University of Georgia. A significant portion of her honors work is outcomes assessment and strategic planning. Her research interests include the development of attention and factors that support student learning.