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Spring 2005

## Editorial Matter for Volume 6, Number 1

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# JNCHC

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**JOURNAL OF THE  
NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL**

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**A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL**

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## **STUDENTS IN HONORS**

### **JOURNAL EDITORS**

**ADA LONG**

**DAIL MULLINS**

**UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM**

**The National Collegiate Honors Council** is an association of faculty, students, and others interested in honors education. Virginia McCombs, President, Oklahoma City University; Jon Schlenker, President-Elect, University of Maine, Augusta; Kate Bruce, Vice-President, University of North Carolina, Wilmington; Norm Weiner, Immediate Past President, SUNY, Oswego; Patricia Ann Speelman, Executive Director, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; John Madden, Secretary, Cerritos College; Philip Way, Treasurer, University of Cincinnati. Executive Committee: Larry Andrews, Kent State University; Richard Badenhausen, Westminster College; Kambra Bolch, Texas Tech University; Akofa Bonsi, University of Alabama at Birmingham; Bruce Carter, Syracuse University; Danielle Coulter, Ball State University; David Duncan, University of Florida; Holli Hitt, Mississippi State University; Jocelyn Jackson, Morehouse College; Kathleen King, University of Maine, Augusta; James Knauer, Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania; Lydia Lyons, Hillsborough Community College; Nancy Poulson, Florida Atlantic University; Jacci Rodgers, Oklahoma City University; Stephen Rosenbaum, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Charlie Slavin, University of Maine; Stephen Wainscott, Clemson University; Emily Zhivotovskiy, Long Island University, C. W. Post Campus.

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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 the fall-winter 2005/2006 issue, which will focus on the question "What is Honors?" We are interested in articles that explore, for example, what distinguishes honors curricula, students, faculty, classes, activities, standards, or requirements from the rest of the institution in which an honors program or college resides. We are most interested in submissions that tackle the question of what we mean by "honors."

**THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS IS SEPTEMBER 1, 2005.**

The following issue (**deadline: March 1, 2006**) 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](mailto:adalong@uab.edu) or, if necessary, 850.927.3776.



DAVID MOWRY

## MEMORIAL DEDICATION



**FAITH GABELNICK**

Faith Gabelnick, for many years a leading spirit in honors education and in NCHC, passed away June 13, 2004. After completing her graduate work at American University she began her work in honors education in the General Honors Program at the University of Maryland, College Park where she also met and later married John Howarth, a former President of NCHC. She became Associate Director of the program at UMCP, then Dean of the Lee Honors College at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, and then Provost at Mills College in Oakland, CA. Her formal career ended as she retired from the presidency of Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon in 2003. But those who were fortunate to know her realize that Faith would only retire *to* some new arena where her passion for ideas, education, community and dialogue would take root and continue to flourish as they had in NCHC, in the National Learning Communities Project, in the “I Have a Dream” project which she brought to Forest Grove, and in the institutions she served and the communities in which she lived.

But the positions we occupy are never as important as the person we are or strive to become. Faith Gabelnick was a person we might well emulate. Her students, as well as her colleagues, became her partners in exploring new approaches to education. Her contributions to the learning community movement that sought to replace passive absorption modes of learning with what now seems the trite idea of active inquiry were foundational. For Faith teaching and learning were not separate enterprises engaged in by faculty on the one hand and students on the other. Instead they formed a continuum, a community in which teaching/learning is understood and experienced as a single and unified activity. Honors education was the laboratory in which these ideas were born, and Faith transplanted them wherever and whenever she could.

Faith Gabelnick never lost her own faith in the fruitfulness of the educational enterprise. Though always exploratory and evolving, the value and validity of a life devoted to ideas, to challenging the inertia of convention and to inviting new generations to join the conversation was so obvious to her that it defined who she was. She honored us with her vitality, her intelligence and her commitment, and so we now honor her.





ADA LONG

## Editor's Introduction

ADA LONG

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Most of the essays in this issue of JNCHC address the question “What are honors students like today?” As a topic of casual conversation in the halls of academe or of conference hotels, this question is both inevitable and annoying. All of us have bandied about generalizations and stereotypes about the current generation of students, either with glowing praise when we are touting our honors programs or with sarcasm, arrogance, and superiority when our students don’t quite live up to those high ideals. One minute we might complain that our students care only about grades and *résumé* entries (forgetting about all the energy we have committed to updating our own *vitae*), and the next minute we praise their academic success and commitment to public service. These conversations often smack of defensiveness, nostalgia, and worries about our ability to teach this generation of students effectively. While such conversations are useful, they are also self-indulgent and predictable. If our students were privy to the negative conversations, they would not think well of us just as they tend to be uncomfortable with our lavish and unqualified praise when we are in our public relations mode.

Occasionally, though, someone addresses the question of what students are like today in a way that focuses serious intellectual attention on the answer and that transforms our understanding of the people who are the center of our daily lives and the *raison d’être* of our careers. In an essay entitled “The Organization Kid” (*Atlantic Monthly*, April 2001), for instance, David Brooks provided a perspective on students at Princeton that pulled together much of what I had sensed about my honors students at the University of Alabama at Birmingham but had not quite articulated or understood. He suggested that the parental and cultural influences on faculty members were distinct from the influences on current students in ways that produced not just a generation gap but a culture gap. He argued that most teachers (at least those old enough to be senior and tenured) grew up playing in the street, making up their own games, and enjoying large amounts of unsupervised time; on arrival at college, they extended this upbringing in independent (if not rebellious) attitudes toward authority, a belief that they could change the world or make their own, and long, languorous conversations about the meaning of life at a local café or student union. Today’s students—at least the kind that attend Princeton and many of our honors programs—have had structured lives since pre-kindergarten, their days filled from dusk till dawn with, in addition to school, soccer practice, violin lessons, community service projects, and field trips. Playing in the streets is too dangerous or, given the shapes of our communities now, simply impossible; all activities are supervised to ensure their safety and educational value; and adults take charge of play whether at school or at

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home. On entering college, then, these students schedule appointments for pre-dawn breakfasts with their best friends, devote a specified number of hours per week to community service, and organize their lives to make them productive in a way that does not promote rebellion nor indulge long, languorous conversations about the meaning of life. Brooks concludes by saying that these students are not what their teachers were or are but instead are everything that the culture and their parents want them to be, and one can't help admiring them.

When I read "The Organization Kid," I experienced instant recognition and a new way of seeing my students. At the same time, I was not particularly surprised that some—maybe many—of the Princeton students Brooks described thought his essay was (you should pardon the expression) a crock. For me, the lesson here is that generalities about generations can help jolt us out of old unexamined stereotypes and get a useful and necessary new grip on our own perspectives. They can be wise without being true in some absolute or unqualified way. They become the new paradigms that will have to be supplanted almost as soon as they are spawned. But it is essential that they have an intellectual rigor that takes them well beyond casual conversation. They must examine causes and nuances and solutions in addition to expressing the new perception with precision, freshness, and honesty.

Joan Digby's essay on "The Age of Imitation" meets all my criteria for wisdom. Her thesis is that our current students have shifted away from the Romanticism that most of their teachers have always valued and toward a mode of imitation we associate with the eighteenth century. Like Brooks, she has transformed my understanding of my students, my work, and myself. In her essay, she creates a new context and expression for that understanding, exploring historical roots and analogues for the current generation/culture gap in the distinction between eighteenth-century respect for imitation and nineteenth-century passion for originality; she honors the values as well as deficits of both sides of the gap (Digby is, after all, an eighteenth-century scholar, as am I); she suggests plausible causes for the current shift toward imitation, causes that include internet and copying technologies, the mode of "sampling" in the arts, and the rage for sequels, remakes, and rip-offs in popular culture; she then recommends shifts in the way we think about and teach our students so that we might bridge the gap. Her recommendations include experiential educational strategies such as City as Text©, new kinds of writing assignments that might encourage "inspired imitation," and mentoring relationships with students such as the one described fully in the research essay (later in this issue) by Digby's colleague Emily Walshe. Finally, she invites all her colleagues in honors to contribute their own ideas.

Smitten as I was by Joan Digby's essay, I decided to take her up on her appeal for ideas from other honors faculty and administrators in the NCHC, and I sent out a solicitation on the NCHC listserv, the distribution list, and the website for responses to her essay and/or discussions of what honors students are like now. Nine of the responses are included in this volume, along with Digby's essay, as a special Forum on Honors Students. The variety of these responses is impressive and useful. Whether directly or indirectly, each of the essays in the Forum picks up on at least part of Digby's thesis. Some of the essays lean toward a desire to promote originality; others applaud the art of imitation when practiced beautifully. Whatever their stance on

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this issue, I find it gratifying that each of the writers reaffirms Digby's view that the shift in culture is not an occasion for head wagging but for rethinking our strategies in the classroom and in our relationships with students.

Bernice Braid and Annmarie Guzy both speak of our need to change the way we teach. Braid provides a detailed and intellectually energetic set of ideas about how to encourage students to think analytically and creatively by thinking that way ourselves in our pedagogical practices. Braid shares some of the philosophy and practices that characterized her development of *City as Text*©, Honors Semesters, and other educational innovations. Drawing on the insights of Parker Palmer, an early (1988) contributor to the discussion that now engages us, she suggests that students need to participate in discussions that take place over a substantial period of time, to hear and respect voices different from their own, to hear and create their own voices, and thus to develop "perspective." Honors is an ideal environment for developing perspective, but, to help students accomplish it, we must first do it ourselves and then create assignments that liberate students and teachers alike from the constraints of lifeless imitation.

Annmarie Guzy speaks of the particular tendency of honors, versus non-honors, students to be obedient, imitative, and "nice." She has a unique living laboratory for this observation in her class on horror literature and film, where the non-honors students tend to be defiant and outspoken while the honors students are worried about doing what is expected of them. Like Braid, Guzy concludes that the only way to encourage risk-taking in our students is by taking risks ourselves. If we are not willing to risk our careers by creating assignments that go against the academic grain, we surely cannot expect our students to risk their GPAs, scholarships, and self-images by doing assignments in an unconventional way.

Jeffrey A. Portnoy—like Digby and me—is an eighteenth-century scholar and so revels in the opportunity to revisit his love of Alexander Pope and to quote one of the finest passages from *Essay on Criticism*; always fair-minded, Portnoy also includes a passage from Wordsworth's *Prelude*. He draws our attention to the value of "silent toil and meditation," not always the favorite behaviors of students (or teachers) but central virtues of and for Pope—virtues that are indispensable to good writing, to serious thinking, and to all we wish our students to learn. The value of repetition in the form, for instance, of revisions and rereadings is an antidote for the "onslaught of the new" and has perhaps a crucial value in our current political climate (for elaboration on that provocative comment, you will need to read his whole essay).

Amy Bass and Michael Cundall qualify and expand Digby's reference to "sampling" as a way to adapt to and appreciate the perspectives of our students. Bass is struck by the immersion of her students in an "Age of Immediacy" and, as she rewords Walter Benjamin, an "Age of *Digital* Reproduction." All the technologies that create instant communication and gratification fuel students' post-modern sensibilities, often in highly creative ways. Students become appropriators and innovators in the service of their own original expression. Bass suggests that the "bootlegged culture" of the mash-up ("a musical form in which a vocal track from one song is superimposed on the instrumental track of another via computer") is a new

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

kind of originality, redefining ownership and authorship, that teachers can learn to value and enjoy.

Michael Cundall perceives pessimism in Digby's essay and offers an appreciation of "sampling" as a form of creativity and originality as long as it acknowledges its sources and transforms them into something new. He defines sampling, with apologies to those in the know (of which I was not one), as "a practice where a musician samples a portion of another song...and then places it into a new context as either the driving force of a new song or as an additional layer to a composition." To me, sampling sounds rather similar to the "mash-up" described by Amy Bass, and Cundall's argument follows a drift similar to hers, namely that it is "a form of musical expression that is as creative as traditional compositional authorship."

Cheryl Achterberg and Jay Mandt both focus on the causes of what Digby calls "The Age of Imitation" within psychological and social contexts. Achterberg addresses the influence of the internet and also the dizzying fullness of most students' schedules these days, a point that Brooks had also noted with both discomfort and awe. She also notes (as did Bernice Braid) that our students come to us just as they are emerging from adolescence, a period during which imitation is a normal and appropriate behavior. She then makes the very provocative point that students today have spent their lives, from day care through high school, competing with their peers, usually with very few sustained relationships with people outside their age group (not counting parents and other family members), but always with the high standards set by adults, especially in the media. Students are "'super-saturated' with horizontal references and an expert-oriented performance culture" that, along with market pressures, reward imitative behavior. Whatever the causes of imitation, Achterberg concludes along with the other respondents to Joan Digby that teachers need to adapt by assigning new texts, creating new teaching strategies, and thinking in new ways. "What better place to conduct the experiment," writes Achterberg, "than honors?"

Jay Mandt, on the other hand, examines the role of overprotective parents in creating risk-averse children, parents who fight their children's battles for them and who shield them from the consequences of their mistakes. But where, he asks, does this increased parental protectiveness come from? He discusses the economic insecurity that arises from divorce, single-parent households, poverty, recent immigration, rising costs of health and education, job out-sourcing, and other factors, all of which produce pressure on the children to succeed, not to make mistakes. Just as faculty members grow more risk-averse and self-serving when universities face budget cuts, so do our students rely on conformity and imitation when the price of a misstep is economic disaster, not just for them but potentially for their families. "Models fit for imitation are already proven," he argues, while "creative expression is a crap shoot." Mandt's argument accords with my own experience as a student and then a teacher: back in the 60s, I always believed I had a safety net, even if I didn't, and today's students, in my experience, rarely enjoy the luxury of this belief, much less the actuality.

The final two essays in the "Forum" section—by Mel Piehl and Rosalie Otero—are expressions of respect and even awe for the creativity and accomplishments of their honors students. They provide examples among their students who have dedicated countless hours to service projects, traveled to high-risk parts of the world to

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help improve conditions for others, undertaken ambitious research projects, challenged the status quo, and dedicated their lives to changing the world. Mel Piehl adds that, in the struggle between hope and fear following 9/11, hope seems to have the edge, making his students less insular, more committed to outreach, and more global in their perspectives. The strengths that Piehl and Otero document are the same as those that impressed David Brooks among the Princeton undergraduates he interviewed, and they are virtues that surely all of us in honors have found in abundance among our own students. It seems apt to conclude the Forum with these accolades since—whatever challenges, dilemmas, frustrations, and quandaries we all face as we try to better understand our students and how to teach them well—we all have the privilege and pride of working with students who, we believe, will indeed change the world and who stun us with their intelligence, generosity, and creativity. If my experience at NCHC conferences is any measure of our culture in honors, the one characteristic we all share is a deep and abiding love of bragging about our own students.

One student we can *all* brag about is Megan McWenie, the winner of a 2004 NCHC Portz Prize for excellence in honors research. A recent graduate of the University of Arizona, McWenie was a member of the Honors Program with majors in History and English. For the next two years she will be in inner-city Las Vegas working with Teach For America. Her essay, “Seeing Nature: Ansel Adams in the Human and Natural Environments of Yosemite,” does not address but instead demonstrates the topic of what honors students are like today. Her essay illustrates the qualities that Bernice Braid suggested we encourage in our students: exploration of different ways of seeing, respect for different voices and visions, development of an individual perspective that connects to the larger world, and recognition of the moral and political interconnections between that larger world, our personal lives, and our work. McWenie explores all of these qualities in the life and work of Ansel Adams, and she demonstrates them herself in the approach she takes to her subject. Student research is always at the center of honors education, and so it is fitting to place it at the center of this issue of *JNCHC*.

The latter portion of this issue includes three scholarly essays. Cheryl Achterberg, after completing her submission to the Forum on Honors Students, set out to do serious research on the topic of what honors students are like now. In “What is an Honors Student?” Achterberg provides a useful overview of research on the question of what distinguishes honors from non-honors students. She summarizes several categories of such distinctions: objective characteristics such as measurable high ability, background in advanced and/or accelerated education, and extracurricular and service involvement; characteristic behaviors that indicate curiosity, independence, and motivation; and personality traits such as ambition, autonomy, and introversion. One of the many studies she cites seems especially relevant to this issue of *JNCHC*: she writes, “Jenkins-Grieman (1986) noted the often paradoxical nature of honors students in that as a group they tend to be highly able, enthusiastic, task-oriented, and inner- or self-directed students, but simultaneously they may also be shy, fearful, or risk averse.” Achterberg’s own conclusion based on all her research, however, is that it is “inappropriate and misleading to stereotype honors students” because we lack adequate data to support any given generalization. This does not mean, however, that there are

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

not special groups of students on each campus who need to do the “serious intellectual work” of honors. In addition to the various qualities noted in previous research and affirmed by her own experience, Achterberg suggests that an honors student “should also be sufficiently different or unique from the institutional norm as to need, indeed require, a different, more challenging curriculum and other learning opportunities to satisfy his or her drive to learn, know, and do.”

Given the special needs of honors students, Emily Walshe's essay provides a new and useful way of answering their needs. In “Athena, Telemachus, and the Honors Student Odyssey: The Academic Librarian as an Agent in Mentored Learning,” Walshe describes in detail the librarian/mentor program at Long Island University / C. W. Post Campus. Her essay is thus an elaboration on Joan Digby's suggestion that such a program is one way to address the imitative urge of current students. (Digby is the Director of the Honors Program at the university where Walshe is a librarian.) If students are going to “sample” numerous resources, then a librarian is invaluable in showing them how to do it with the innovation and respectful acknowledgement that Cundall named as essential to excellent imitation. The sustained, one-on-one librarian/mentor relationship with honors students that Walshe describes is an outstanding model for other universities, providing invaluable benefits not only to honors students and programs but also to librarians—and it need not cost a dime!

The librarian/mentor program at LIU / C. W. Post is a very rare example of a “free” option that significantly improves honors education. We conclude this issue of *JNCHC* with an essay by Celeste Campbell on why Honors Programs need priority funding and how to justify it. In “Allocation of Resources: Should Honors Take Priority?” Campbell discusses the dilemma of trying to meet the special funding needs of honors programs and colleges—to maintain small classes, honors housing, special advising, meeting rooms, computer labs, study areas, offices, and more—during the recent cutbacks in funding for higher education. She offers a clear and well-organized set of rationales for priority funding, including rebuttals of the common arguments against such funding, and she concludes with four pieces of practical advice for honors administrators on how to prepare themselves effectively for the inevitable funding battles. This essay is a must-read for any honors director or dean who has had to beg for more money, and who among us has not become a professional beggar?

This issue of *JNCHC* begins with speculative questions and ends with practical advice, all in the interest of better understanding and serving our students. Enjoy, learn, and prosper!

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Cheryl Achterberg** is Dean of the Schreyer Honors College at Penn State University. She is also a professor in the Department of Nutrition and teaches in the College of Education. She holds a Ph.D. in nutrition from Cornell University. Dr. Achterberg has won numerous teaching awards and is widely published. Her current scholarly interests include honors education, service learning, international experience, and leadership development. She will be moving to Iowa State University in September (2005) as Dean of Human Sciences.

**Amy Bass** is Assistant Professor of History and Director of the Honors Program at The College of New Rochelle. Her areas of specialization include youth culture, racial and ethnic identity, and cultural theory. She is the author of *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: the 1968 Olympic Games and the Making of the Black Athlete* (2002) and the editor of *In the Game: Race, Sport and Identity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (2005).

**Bernice Braid**, a former president of NCHC, directs the University Honors Program and teaches Comparative Literature at Long Island University's Brooklyn Campus. She created City as Text@ and field tested it many times over for NCHC Honors Semesters, has authored numerous articles on discursive teaching and active learning, and co-edited the monograph PLACE AS TEXT with Ada Long.

**K. Celeste Campbell** is Assistant Director of The Honors College at Oklahoma State University. She currently serves on the NCHC Conference Planning Committee as Poster Session Chair and is a former member of the NCHC Executive Committee. Her interests include statistics, mathematics education, higher education administration, program evaluation, and educational research methods.

**Michael K. Cundall, Jr.** is Assistant Dean of The Honors College at Arkansas State University. He teaches philosophy with research interests in cognitive science, philosophy of psychology and philosophy of mind. A newcomer to honors, Dr. Cundall enjoys its collegiality.

**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 going into its fourth edition.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Anmarie Guzy** teaches composition and professional communication at the University of South Alabama. She is currently working with rhetoric faculty at the University of Arizona to develop scholarly forums for studying first-year honors composition, including a book-length project and a prospective peer-reviewed journal.

**Jay Mandt** has been Director of the Emory Lindquist Honors Program at Wichita State University for ten years. A philosopher by training, he is the author of numerous articles, particularly on nineteenth- and twentieth-century European philosophy. He is currently President-Elect of the Great Plains Honors Council.

**Megan McWenig** recently graduated from the University of Arizona with a BA in history and English. In her honors thesis, she considered the experiences of artists William Keith and Ansel Adams in Yosemite National Park and their representations of the natural scene. She is currently beginning a two-year commitment with Teach For America in inner-city Las Vegas.

**Rosalie Otero** directs the Honors Program at the University of New Mexico. A veteran of honors education, she has served as President of the NCHC and is currently Co-Chair with Robert Spurrier of the NCHC Assessment and Evaluation Committee.

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