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Spring 2007

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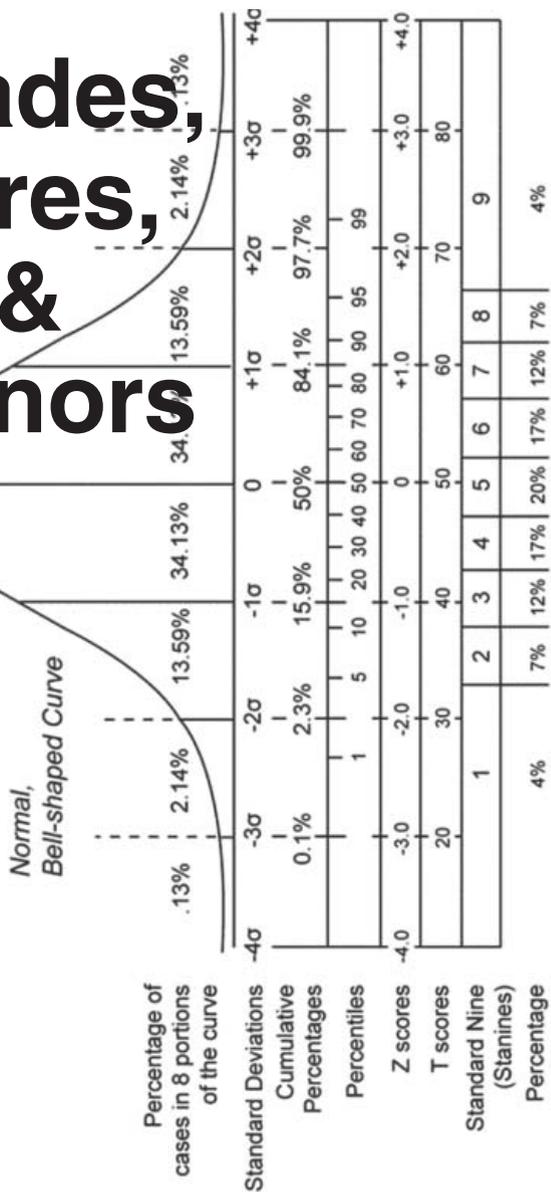
# JNCHC

## JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL

Spring/Summer 2007

Vol. 8, No. 1

# Grades, Scores, & Honors



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#### PORTZ PRIZE WINNER

DARRIS CATHERINE  
SAYLORS



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL VOLUME 8, NO. 1

JNCHC

Honors Program

University of Alabama at Birmingham

1530 3rd Avenue South

Birmingham, AL 35294-4450

NON-PROFIT

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

PERMIT NO. 1256

BIRMINGHAM, AL



ISBN 0-9773623-9-6

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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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## **GRADES, SCORES, AND HONORS**

**JOURNAL EDITORS**

**ADA LONG**

**DAIL MULLINS**

**UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM**

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ISBN 0-9773623-9-6

ISSN 1559-0151

## 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 [adalong@uab.edu](mailto:adalong@uab.edu).

## DEADLINES

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

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# CALL FOR PAPERS

The next issue (**deadline: September 1, 2007**) of JNCHC will focus on the theme “Managing Growth in Honors.” We invite essays that discuss growth in size and/or complexity of individual honors programs and colleges or the growth in numbers and kinds of programs/colleges nationally. We invite essays that analyze the consequences of growth for students, faculty, honors administrators, or institutions. Essays might focus on numbers of students, size of budgets, allotment of space, class size, ambition of extracurricular activities, or any other kind of growth within a program or college. Other essays might focus on the increased size of national honors conferences, intra- or inter-institutional competition, national visibility, or any other developments and consequences of the rapid growth of honors during the past three decades. An underlying question might be, “Is less more, or is more better?”

The following issue (deadline: March 1, 2008) 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.



# DEDICATION



**JEFFREY A. PORTNOY**

GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE

Jeff Portnoy!—thou in whom creative powers  
Blossomed first among the midwest flowers  
Of Iowa (the Univers'ty of),  
Reseeding then at Emory, where love  
Of eighteenth-century literature produced  
A Ph.D. and teaching jobs, all juiced  
With honors, in whose verdant fields they flourish  
Splendidly, as all the while they nourish  
The editors on thy most stately Pub Board,  
Keeping them HAPPY, with libations poured  
To proper grammar, wit, good sense, and pith,  
All virtues thy own writing is endowed with,

And generate, like pollen in the spring,  
Journals and learned monographs that bring  
Acclaim to, with the help of thy sharp pencil,\*  
The National Collegiate Honors Council—  
Of thee I sing, Great Portnoy, who my boss is,  
And now I'd better stop and cut my losses  
But not before I quote dear Alex Pope, who  
Wrote some lines which best were said of you  
In praise of a fellow writer, "One whose fires  
True Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires;  
Blest with each talent, and each art to please,  
And born to write, converse, and live with ease..."

\*Let it be known to all honorable parties that Dr. Portnoy useth, in fact, not a pencil but a Sanford Uni-Ball Micro with green ink, and the author of this so-called Dedication should be chastised for diverting from factual accuracy. [Martin Scriblerus]



ADA LONG

# Editor's Introduction

ADA LONG

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

We begin this issue of *JNCHC* by paying homage to Virginia Tech. Charles (Jack) Dudley, long-time Director of the Virginia Tech Honors Program, has honored his program and university with great eloquence in his letter "To Honors People Everywhere," which, along with a newspaper column he wrote, we reprint here with the permissions of both Jack Dudley and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. All we can add to Jack's letter is that Virginia Tech has inspired all of us with the generosity and nobility that its students, faculty, staff, and administration have shown in their response to the devastating losses they have suffered. We are proud that Jack, his students, and Virginia Tech are deeply intertwined in the history and traditions of NCHC, and we hold them close to our hearts.

The next section of this issue is a Forum on "Grades, Scores, and Honors." During the past decade or two—as quantitative measurement has taken on increasing prominence in regional accreditations, legislative mandates, and institutional self-studies—honors programs and colleges have become ever more sensitive to the numbers game in their policies, marketing strategies, and cultures. Some have resisted this trend; others have made reluctant concessions; others have welcomed the opportunity to do, for instance, quantitative self-assessment; and no doubt some have been thankful for the opportunity to let numbers do the difficult and fraught work of admission and retention decisions. From the beginning of the burgeoning honors movement in the United States during the 1960s, the role of numbers has extended over the full spectrum of possibilities, from the single factor determining admission and retention, for instance, to pretty much complete irrelevance in that process. The more recent decades, however, have expanded both the applications and pressures of numbers within honors programs and colleges. The dedication of a Forum to the topic "Grades, Scores, and Honors" thus addresses a common interest of all honors administrators.

Fortunately, Larry Andrews of Kent State University—in his solicited essay entitled "Grades, Scores, and Honors: A Numbers Games?"—has written what seems almost the definitive essay on the Forum topic. Examining admission, retention, and graduation standards as well as course grading issues, he has covered the broad range of matters that every honors administrator must consider, and he has done so with a wonderfully balanced perspective, connecting the

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

various options with the traditions and cultures of individual programs. The balanced perspective of his essay culminates in the wisdom of his final sentence: "We may depend on numbers, but they must not tyrannize us."

Andrews' essay served as the starting point and inspiration for the Forum, having been distributed on the NCHC listserv with an invitation for responses to his essay and/or to the topic itself. Although it seemed unclear at first what could be added to Andrews' discussion, NCHC members always find a way, and several of the contributors consider the topic in specific contexts within the general field of honors.

Annamarie Guzy of the University of South Alabama—in "Evaluation vs. Grading in Honors Composition, Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying about Grades and Love Teaching"—does not, as the title might initially suggest, argue against grades. On the contrary, her implicit point is that grades are both necessary and valuable. She focuses on the difficulty her students in honors composition have in distinguishing between learning and grades, in reading her comments rather than immediately thumbing to the back of the paper in search of an A. Guzy suggests that figuring out how to learn, as distinguished from simply how to get good grades, is part of an honors education. She describes in this essay how she assigns grades and how she tries to persuade her students to look beyond them.

Joyce W. Fields also argues for the value of grades in "To Speak or Not to Speak: That is the Question," and she proposes that class discussion should be the focus of rigorous, quantitative assessment along with other traditionally graded course work like tests, papers, and presentations. In a survey she did at Columbia College, she found that her students believe that class discussion should be the primary focus of assessment, and she proposes, therefore, that it should be assessed using precise criteria (she offers five) and objective methodology.

Rather than narrowing the contexts in which grades are valuable, Ryan Brown, of Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne, broadens it in "Grades, Scores, and Honors Education." He makes the point that grades and scores in honors are part of the larger institutional context. Numbers play an integral role in all components and levels of an institution; honors may use different numbers in different ways than other parts of a campus, but the broader context in which honors programs are situated determines their options and limitations. Brown contends that one should not try to consider the matter of grades and scores in honors as if honors programs were autonomous and independent from their institutions.

Rosalie C. Otero, on the other hand, describes a grading system in the UNM Honors Program that is different from the grading system outside of honors at the University of New Mexico. Otero—in "Grades, Marks, Scores, Oh My!"—

acknowledges the necessity of grades, scores, and other numerical forms of evaluating student performance, but she also describes the unique and controversial grading system that has been a tradition in the UNM Honors Program for almost five decades. She describes some resistance to it, but she provides compelling rationales for its usefulness and value in honors education.

In “Searching for Tatiyana,” Sriram Khé describes his struggles with a number of issues that face all honors directors, and, perhaps because he is still fairly new to honors, he sees them with fresh eyes. He quickly learned that going just by the numbers in admissions, for instance, would have deprived his program of important students, and so he developed another admissions option, which potentially had its own set of problems. Larry Andrews’ essay helped him contextualize and validate his policies within the mission of Western Oregon University.

In “I Love Numbers,” Bruce Fox of Northern Arizona University points us to both the value and the treachery of numbers in evaluating student performance. He describes problems that we have probably all faced in grading: grade distribution vs. attainment of course goals as the determinant of individual grades, for instance, or where to draw the line, precisely **and** accurately, between an A and a B. The problems he identifies suggest the extreme caution we should—and often do not—exercise in using numbers to make decisions about students.

The Forum concludes with an essay by the dedicatee of this issue of *JNCHC*—Jeffrey A. Portnoy—responding to two recent essays by Larry Andrews: the one that begins this Forum and another in the previous issue (“At Play on the Fields of Honor(s),” *JNCHC* 7.2, 33–35) in which Andrews calls for balance between work and fun in the life of an honors administrator. In “Balancing on the Edge of Honors: A Meditation,” Portnoy acknowledges the difficulty of achieving a balance between work and fun, especially in an academic culture that is dominated by numbers, but—in his inimitable fashion—Portnoy makes even this difficulty part of the play that Andrews advocates.

Our first research essay—*Using Characteristics of K–12 Gifted Programs to Evaluate Honors Programs* by Mary K. Tallent-Runnels, Shana M. Shaw, and Julie A. Thomas—is a study of university-wide honors colleges and programs at Big 12 universities in terms of nine characteristics that have previously been applied to K–12 education for gifted students. Based on data gathered from websites, phone calls, and emails, the authors (two from Texas Tech and one from the University of Texas at Austin) evaluated eleven of the honors colleges/programs in relation to each of the nine characteristics, discovering what they perceived to be some areas of weakness, especially the lack of teacher training designed specifically for honors faculty. The authors make some good recommendations, several of which have already been addressed by the NCHC.

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In “The Effects on Outcomes of Financing Undergraduate Thesis Research at Butler University,” Anne M. Wilson and Robert F. Holm describe three funding opportunities for students at Butler University, their different goals, and the means of assessing fulfillment of these goals. The two funding programs that produced a significant increase in completion of undergraduate theses were one that targeted thesis research and another that provided summer research grants. This essay is a collaborative effort by the directors of the Honors Program and the Institute for Undergraduate Research at Butler. The campus collaboration between these two programs allows effective assessment of the goals and outcomes of undergraduate research.

David Taylor, in “Residential Housing Population Revitalization: Honors Students,” presents a statistical study showing that a new, better, more centrally located residential housing center for honors students not only attracted almost full occupancy (in contrast to the older, unrenovated, and out-of-the-way facility) but also increased on-campus residency of honors students in other housing as well.

In “Experiential Learning and City as Text<sup>®</sup>: Reflections on Kolb and Kolb,” Robert A. Strikwerda discusses the City as Text<sup>®</sup> (CAT) form of experiential learning in the context of two writers named Kolb: one a philosopher and the other a psychologist. In addition to explaining the process and value of CAT exploration, Strikwerda comments generally on higher education and the lost art of the Peripatetic philosophers, who—like participants in Honors Semesters and Faculty Institutes—understood the relationship between walking and learning.

We are proud to conclude this issue of *JNCHC* with an impressive essay by Darris Catherine Saylor, a 2006 NCHC Portz Scholar. In her prize-winning essay, “The Virgin Mary: A Paradoxical Model for Roman Catholic Immigrant Women of the Nineteenth Century,” Saylor focuses a wide variety of research, analysis, and insight on the dilemma of nineteenth-century Roman Catholic immigrant women as they tried to fulfill two sets of impossible expectations: emulation of the Virgin Mary and adherence to the American code of True Womanhood. Saylor presents a well documented account—scholarly and also moving—of the frustrations that had to arise from the imposition of these two patriarchal codes; while adapting to a new country and culture, these women also struggled to achieve unattainable ideals that were adapted by men to be adopted by women. We congratulate Darris Catherine Saylor and her mentor, Dr. Charles Lippy of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, for this fine essay and for the 2006 Portz Prize.

# Honoring Virginia Tech





CHARLES (JACK) DUDLEY

# Letter from Charles (Jack) Dudley

VIRGINIA TECH UNIVERSITY

April 25, 2007

To Honors People Everywhere:

Your cards, letters, emails, and phone calls helped sustain us in the most terrible moments of our lives and for that we are forever in your debt. For the period Monday through today (April 16–25<sup>th</sup>), we have lived through periods of uncertainty, grief, intense emotions, and a profound sense of loss. We lost thirty-three students, our sense of security, and sense of direction. Your concern, as evidenced by more than two hundred communications, provided islands of comfort in a sea of horror. For your thoughtfulness we say a humble thank you.

With a heavy heart and more questions than answers, I write to provide some comment concerning the events of April 16 at Virginia Tech. At this early date, we don't pretend to understand the senseless loss of life, so insight and understanding will have to wait. I have copied to this letter an editorial I wrote for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* on Sunday.

Honors had an early warning of the extent of the disaster. Michelle Wooddell, the office manager, is the wife of one of the police officers to first enter the scene. We heard that at least twenty students were injured. As the day progressed, the number would continue to climb. We began to check on students in Honors and most of the day was spent fearfully seeking information. We learned (about three in the afternoon) that all of the Hillcrest House students were accounted for. There were four from Main Campbell House still missing. Two were found late at night and safe. Two others, Leslie Sherman and Heidi Miller, were still missing. We feared the worst. Late that night, Terry Papillon, faculty preceptor for Honors, found Heidi in the local hospital. She was wounded but in stable condition. The next day we learned that Leslie died of her wounds. We also learned that Shelley Turner and Austin Cloyd were dead.

Four young women in Honors had experienced horror of that day, and three did not survive. They were students of the first order. Leslie was a founding member of the Main Campbell Honors House—a major in History and Political Science. Austin was a major in International Relations and

## TO HONORS PEOPLE EVERYWHERE

French. She was five feet eleven inches tall with an irrepressible spirit. Shelley majored in engineering and was among their best. Heidi also majored in International Relations. I find myself uneasy with reporting numbers. The loss to the University is so much greater than thirty-three dead.

On Tuesday, the University responded with convocation. The President, the Governor, Senators, and Representative state legislators came, and we were grateful. Their visit to the campus proved helpful. But it was one of our own, Nikki Giovanni, who captured the moment, the sadness, the human will to prevail, and the bonding of community. The Virginia Tech homepage gives access to a site labeled “Detailed information available in our April 16 Tribute Section.” If you click on that, it will take you to a site that has Nikki’s reading. I encourage listening to it.

Classes were suspended for the week and many students went home. The ones that remained on campus endured the week as best they could. Our biggest problem proved to be the efforts by some to find blame in the University administration and University police for things not done. There will be an investigation concerning the response to the shootings. We need to learn all we can, but the campus community supports the efforts made. The horror was so great that the need to blame, to find fault, seemed palpable. We are proud of the students who, when goaded to be critical, maintained the grace to focus on the victims.

I am also newly aware of the power of tragedy to bring a resurgence of community. Last week, we lived in an orange and maroon world. Acts of kindness became ordinary. Looking out for one another simply the norm. It continues with even greater intensity this week with the students returning to class. Despite the option to end the semester now, most students returned and faculty are reporting classes with ninety percent attendance. Most are well over fifty percent. I have seen students consoling faculty members and faculty members not afraid to show emotion in class. Many faculty members seek students having difficulty and assist them. Nikki Giovanni’s “We will prevail” becomes a reality before our very eyes.

Those in Honors know that community extends beyond physical borders. As I wrote this, the florist delivered a beautiful basket with a variety of plant life. It graces the table in our living room. The Calhoun Honors College at Clemson sent a gigantic card from the students there to the students here. A huge banner from the honors students at North Carolina State followed this. Both are filled with care and compassion. Students seem to be reading every entry.

Three alums, Mark Embree, Sarah Airey, and Ashley White, are flying in this weekend. Mark graduated in 1996 and studied for a doctorate at Oxford and is currently on the faculty at Rice University. Sarah (2001) and Ashley

CHARLES (JACK) DUDLEY

(2005) are both doing doctorates at Cambridge University. They were coming to Tech to assist with the kickoff of the public phase of our capital campaign. When that event was cancelled, they wrote to say that were coming to be with students and faculty members. I look forward (for the first time in over a week) to something on campus.

Today was the funeral of the last of the Honors student to be buried. Leslie's service was held at the Old Presbyterian Meeting House in Alexandria, Virginia. It is a five-hour drive from Blacksburg. The level of care among faculty and students is confirmed by the fact that two Honors staff and forty-five students from Main Campbell House drove the ten hours to "be there for Leslie" one more time. We have lost much, but out of all this we have gained.

Maybe in the not to distant future, we can apply reason to the events here. I hope so. In the meantime, know that your expressions of kindness will long be remembered and appreciated by us all.

Cordially,  
Jack

[Jack's column below is reprinted here with permission of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, for which we are very grateful. Eds.]

## All Have Seen the Treasure of the University: Its People

Sunday, Apr 22, 2007—12:05 AM

Blacksburg. We come to know, if we are perceptive enough, how truly wealthy we are. In the wake of extreme tragedy, television reporters aired interviews with dozens of Virginia Tech students. These interviews revealed the intelligence, the courage, the grace, and the deep kindness that those of us at this university have grown to appreciate on a daily basis. The generosity of spirit on this campus (and on other campuses) is always present and often overwhelming.

Universities often try (with uneven success) to let the world in on our secret: The treasure is the people. As student after student stepped onto the international stage, the great wealth of this nation came into clear focus for all to see.

The price was too high.

The cost of this attention was 33 students and faculty members dead and 29 other students wounded. Families ripped asunder, dreams destroyed,

## ALL HAVE SEEN THE TREASURE OF THE UNIVERSITY: ITS PEOPLE

talent obliterated, knowledge lost—all of this and more make this a moment of horror that will be long part of all our lives.

As the gunman took his own life, he robbed us of parts of our future.

### **What Might Have Been**

Universities deal in the future. The passing of knowledge from one generation to the next forms the core of our lives. When that future is stolen, we measure the costs in what might have been.

Among the first messages I received late Monday were two from Syracuse University. The dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the director of Syracuse's Honors Program wrote with perception—recalling that the Pan Am Flight 103 explosion over Scotland had taken more than 35 of their students on December 21, 1988. They indicated the continuing presence of that event in the life of the campus.

Just so, the events of April 16 will become part of the lore of Virginia Tech.

Events such as this are not overcome but must, by sheer enormity, weave themselves into the very fabric of the institution. The test of our greatness is our growth in the generosity with which we give to the world. Whatever grace we find is the gift of the 32 who died to provide the opportunity.

Alumni and friends from around the world have sent messages of concern, consolation, and care. Virginia Tech is blessed with engaged alumni. Their concern transcends the notes they send. We know that should we call, they would come. A university cannot ask for more than continued association with its students.

Many on this campus knew the fallen. Despite its size, Virginia Tech acts very much as a small community of people.

I knew several of the students and three of the faculty who died. They were committed to their studies, hardworking, and caring. They were fun people to know and always had something interesting to say. Their loss will disrupt the conversation that defines Virginia Tech, and their voices will be missed.

Even though a new freshman class is preparing to enter Virginia Tech this fall, there will be 32 empty places in our classrooms and not even 5,000 new students can replace them.

### **Coping With the Enormity**

As I write these words Thursday morning it has been a scant 72 hours since the horror first became visible. We are reeling as we try to comprehend its enormity and its meaning to the university. How will we get through the very end of the spring semester? How will we assist students in completing the work of this session? Will we change summer orientation for new stu-

## CHARLES (JACK) DUDLEY

dents? What accommodations to a new and more dangerous world must we make in the future? How can we stay the open and welcoming place we are even as we increase our efforts at security? There are administrators, faculty, and students debating such issues even now. Decisions are being made, and the university seeks to bring some degree of order out of chaos so profound that it is hard to imagine the idea of order itself.

When this ordeal began many of us found that there were simply no words sufficient to the world we found in Blacksburg. As students and faculty struggled, it was left to a resident poet to find those words for us. Nikki Giovanni holds a high place in the honored professors on this campus. She ended our memorial convocation on Tuesday with the following:

“We will continue to invent the future through our blood and tears and through all our sadness. We are the Hokies. We will prevail. We will prevail. We will prevail. We are Virginia Tech.”

*Charles Dudley, a professor of sociology at Virginia Tech, is the director of the University Honors Program.*



**Forum on  
“Grades, Scores, and Honors”**



LARRY ANDREWS

# Grades, Scores, and Honors: A Numbers Game?

LARRY ANDREWS

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

The surest indicator of college success in honors is a proven high-school record as revealed in grade point average and class rank. No, no, we need to balance those numbers against the ACT/SAT performance. No, no, motivation is the “it” factor; we need to ascertain the prospective student’s *attitude* through an essay and interview. No, no, all of our prospective students are capable and ambitious; we need to know about how well-rounded they are by looking at activities and letters of recommendation. No, no, we have a freshman class of 400; who has time to read all that stuff, which all sounds the same anyway?

These are some of the positions honors programs and colleges take toward qualifications for admission. But the question of how important numbers are haunts other decisions as well, such as retention requirements, grading standards in honors courses, graduation requirements, and graduation rates. As we wrestle with this issue in our own programs, we are often pressured by our students, our faculty, administrators, families, and state legislators. As I consider each of several areas in which numbers can be a factor in our standards and expectations for students, I argue that we should be guided by two major values: (1) the *specific culture* of our honors programs and our institutions, and (2) the noble honors pedagogical and advising tradition of *investing in the individual student*.

## ADMISSIONS

How do we get the students we want? Students who we think are best suited to honors work and for whom honors work will do the most good? And are those two sometimes separate purposes? Honors deans, directors, and staff must continually re-examine their program’s mission and values in light of these questions and make decisions about recruitment and admission that determine the character of their student body. The importance of grades, scores, and rank in the admissions process varies significantly among honors programs. At one end of the spectrum a program might exercise a strict requirement of a 3.7 high-school GPA, 29 ACT/1300 SAT score, and top 5%

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in class rank, while at the other end a program welcomes anyone by self-selection, first come, first served within a given capacity. A large number of programs, however, coalesce around a 3.5 GPA and an ACT score in the 26–29 range (1180–1330 SAT). Where one draws the line may depend not only on the population of available prospects and their likelihood of matriculation, but also on institutional resources, which affect selectivity by limiting or encouraging a target enrollment number.

Larger programs tend, usually with some regret, to rely increasingly on numbers while smaller programs still prefer to interview candidates and/or examine documents such as essays, letters of recommendation, and lists of activities. Thus the size of the program and its resources of staff time (also numbers) influence the decision. But published research and experience with students over time play a role as well. If we take the time to correlate our students' college performance with their original qualifications, we can determine what information about incoming students best predicts their future success in our own programs. For example, my colleague Deborah Sell Craig's dissertation showed a significant correlation between the ACT English score and application essay of our incoming students on the one hand and their subsequent grades in our first-year Colloquium on the other (*Predicting Success in an Honors Program: A Comparison of Multiple and Ridge Regression*, 1987, Kent State University, 112).

High-school GPA may seem the most reliable predictor of academic success based on some research studies, and even on anecdotal evidence, but grading standards vary, and good grades in some cases may indicate that the student has simply learned how to be a good student, that is, how to perform in a way that matches the reward system. We may value such virtues as good study habits, time management, punctuality, disciplined response to assignments, good memories for tests, ambition, and even good writing, but are they the most important habits of mind that we seek?

What do numbers tell us about creativity, curiosity, or integrative thinking, for example? How do we accommodate not just the "good student" but the original character, such as the under-achiever with high potential? How do we assess the potential masked by less-than-impressive numbers? We all know and have perhaps admitted students who do not fit our numbers profile but who blossom superbly. They may have performed well on standardized tests but have a mediocre GPA and class rank because they were bored by classes even as they pursued a fascination with historical reenactment, mathematics puzzles, or Chinese language on their own. How do we determine how many of these students to accept at risk? Some will surely come to life in college and achieve soaring GPAs while others will not rise to our expectations.

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But then, some of our prospects with a 4.0 GPA and 29 ACT may flop as well!

How do we resolve these dilemmas? First, we pay attention to our own program and institutional context. If using a 3.3 GPA and 24 ACT seems below perceived national standards but matches the kinds of students we are likely to be able to attract in the numbers we desire, let us not be embarrassed. If we have grown so large that we go by the numbers without further evidence of motivation or unusual intelligence, let us work within the limitations of our resources but also pay attention to the interesting exceptions who bang on our door to get in. We can invite such students to submit other documentation, and we can be flexible enough to take a gamble. If part of our expectation of current students is leadership or service, we will look for these qualities among our prospects in lists of activities and service, giving them considerable weight alongside the numbers. If we are receiving too many qualified applicants, we must consult the admissions or enrollment management leaders and our academic superior about whether cutting off admissions and wait-listing will be best for the institution or whether additional resources for class sections or scholarships will be forthcoming to support this success. Second, we should recognize the limitations of the numbers and make every effort to get to know prospective students *as individuals* through invitations to visit, discussions at recruiting events, open houses, follow-up email exchanges, perhaps even a brief paragraph on an application essay explaining their motivation for joining honors. We can also offer membership to students after their first semester or year of proven college success—again usually according to some minimum GPA threshold but aided by an interview and application essay—on an individual basis.

## RETENTION

So now that we have our new class, what do we require them to do to stay in our good graces? Must they maintain some good numbers again, such as a 3.5 GPA and a certain number of credit hours in honors? Perhaps, as in some programs, an escalating GPA year by year? As if our students are not grade-conscious enough already, do we hold over their heads this constant pressure? Do we give them a second chance if they are close to the mark, by putting them on probation for a semester? Do we welcome them back when their GPA again meets our standards?

Setting the GPA number for retention would seemingly depend on the admission criteria. If we are highly selective in admissions, presumably our retention requirement would be high. But the case is often made that a lower college GPA, especially for the first year, acknowledges the daunting impact of this new experience on even the best students. Raising the bar later

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encourages the laggards to rise to our expectations. In some cases, the program errs on the side of generosity, wishing to hold to its heart the students it already has rather than trying to “weed out” the stragglers. Such a program may expect a high-school GPA of 3.5 coming in but a college GPA of only 3.0 for retention.

The choices we make depend on our values as a program and institution. Do we wish to support and encourage our students as well as challenge them? Does our tradition tend toward stringent rules and rigid requirements or forgiving options and flexible opportunities? We all want to be humane to our students, but the image we project through our numbers game can be nurturing or threatening, depending on the character of the honors staff and faculty and the atmosphere of the institution. Our institution may pressure us to retain students in honors by means of a modest membership standard, or it may care only about retaining the students at the institution. It may, on the other hand, urge us to base our prestige on the number of students we dismiss. Further, because each individual student is precious to us—nowhere is this clearer than here at Kent State, where one of our honors students was a victim of the shootings of May 4, 1970—we will work closely through advising to help diminish obstacles impeding a student’s success, “success” defined by a GPA number but also by clarity of goals and comfortable fit with the chosen major. Let us also consider that loss of honors membership may have a positive result: a student might focus better on other priorities, and even a transfer to another institution may be in a student’s best interests despite all the desperate pressures on us for retention.

### COURSE GRADING

Here they are, our wonderful smart students, responding to the challenges of their rigorous course work and individual projects with noble persistence. Is one of their special challenges being graded on a higher scale than the instructor would use in a non-honors course? Honors faculty members may exercise fairly well-defined grading rubrics in all of their classes, applying them equally to honors students. Still, grading can be relative, depending on the nature of the class. It is tempting to reward the student who stands out in a non-honors class with an *A by comparison* whereas that student might not appear so special in an honors class of peers. Is it then more difficult to earn an *A* in an honors class? Is it more difficult simply because the work is more challenging and the responsibility for active learning more taxing? Or does greater challenge match the greater capacities of the students? Some of us have found that honors students often earn better grades in their honors courses because they work harder in them and care more about them. An honors faculty member, however, might tend to award higher grades as a self-fulfilling

prophecy. I suggest that honors students should not be penalized by being in honors because of a shift upward in grading standards. It is acceptable to have, without embarrassment, a set of final grades that are all or mostly all As if the professor has fully challenged the students and they have challenged each other.

Adding to this complexity is the often excessive concern over grades among honors students. This worry is real; they know how competitive graduate and professional schools are, especially the more prestigious ones. Numbers count, not only the GRE, MCAT, and LSAT scores but also the GPA. A 3.5 may signal solid achievement, but how does it look among medical school candidates with 3.8 and higher GPAs or among candidates for a Truman or Rhodes Scholarship? To what extent does grade anxiety undermine the genuine learning experience in honors courses? Would it help to use more portfolio evaluations, to issue extensive written evaluations that might be more useful to the student, even in an institution that still requires the assignment of a traditional grade?

Again, the local culture bears on our thinking about these issues. Only a handful of institutions have tried to replace grades with written evaluations, and some of these have given up. If we are stuck with the necessity of assigning grades and keeping GPAs in the foreground of the student's vision, we can still respond creatively. In some honors programs, faculty in some disciplines invite students to contribute to the grading rubric during the first week, giving them a say in the nature of grade assignment. Some invite students to contribute self-evaluation as part of the assigned grade. In another discipline the instructor might take improvement into account or use a portfolio approach to allay the haunting threat of numbers. But our conscientious students will often rebel if they do not receive clear, ongoing, quantitative signals of how they are performing (or at least they complain on course evaluation forms). In still other disciplines the instructor may use a point system that allows him or her to rank precisely the students in a class and across years of the same class. This can work in the student's favor on a letter of recommendation when the professor can aver with quantitative certainty that the student ranks in the top 3% of all 450 honors students who have taken the chemistry class over twenty-two years! Yet this same professor can alleviate the stress over grades by providing endless support in office conferences, even on weekends, and access to old exams to study in preparation for a major test.

Attention to the individual helps us notice nuances of performance and variations in learning styles that affect performance in a class. Much as we value class discussion, tolerance for the shy introverts—common enough among honors students—mitigates their fear that the “class participation” grade will do them in. Offering a creative project as an alternative assignment

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can elicit gratitude, relief, and superb work. Giving students voice, throughout a course, concerning which learning methods are working and which are not can empower them to feel a bit liberated from the authoritarian imposition of grades. Finally, we can assure students through advising that grades are not everything, that an A- is not tragic, that a B or even an occasional C will mean nothing ten years later. We can help them redefine their perfectionism, their high expectations of themselves, in terms other than just grades. We can help them develop their own measures of success, such as their excitement over learning, their passion for their field, their impulse to make learning matter in the world around them, their feeling of having achieved healthy balance and having learned how to deal with stress, including stress over numbers.

### GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS AND RATES

Congratulations to us! We have kept our beloved students happy and productive, and now we are poised to offer them a graduation recognition for having successfully completed their honors requirements. Have they met our numbers requirements—GPA, credit hours, courses? Have they completed a thesis, which most programs require? Have we kept them engaged with honors so that they do not withdraw in large numbers when they come face to face with that thesis? Do we pride ourselves on our high graduation rates as compared to those of the institution in general? Is the most important statistic graduation in honors or in the institution, and who cares—the enrollment management folks, the president, the state legislature?

Setting the GPA requirement for graduation is usually easy—it is the same as that for retention of membership, even if that requirement becomes more stringent after the first year. The amount of honors work required is a more variable matter. Many of us count credit hours and establish a minimum number consistent with the “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program,” that is, a number equal to at least 15% of a student’s total degree hours but preferably 20–25%. My college, however, counts the number of courses/experiences, giving equal weight to 3-hour honors courses, one-hour contracts and senior portfolios, 1–4-hour individual research projects, a community service contract, a senior portfolio, a combined bachelor’s/master’s program, and a semester of study abroad, but counting the 10-hour thesis as two of the required honors courses/experiences. This flexibility can be abused, and the complexity of such a counting system makes us watchful lest students not complete a significant number of actual 3-hour courses. Another decision is whether to reduce the graduation requirement for late-entering students or students with, say, 15–25 AP hours as entering freshmen. Such students often simply do not have as much opportunity to take

general education honors courses. Finally, some of us grant different levels of graduation recognition depending on GPA; for our highest “University Honors” designation, for example, we require a 3.8 GPA, coinciding with *summa cum laude*, whereas for “General Honors” or “Departmental Honors” (the latter for late entrants focusing on the major), the GPA requirement is lower. If a large number of our students, even a majority (as in some large honors programs), do not graduate with an honors designation, something seems wrong; do we admit them and retain them only to sabotage them?

What principles should guide our decisions? Again, local culture suggests that there need not be an agreed-upon, precise national standard. We do what makes sense for our population and fits our traditions. We attune the graduation GPA standard to our retention standard, whatever that may be. If we believe that individualized research is critical to an honors education, we require a thesis or an alternative research experience. If we simply believe that the honors curriculum should be climaxed by an integrative learning experience, we might achieve that through a capstone seminar, a thesis, a creative project, an internship, study abroad, or even, as in the early days of honors, a comprehensive final examination. And again, what are the needs of the individual students? If we require a senior thesis, will we lose a large number of students in professional majors whose curricula are overcrowded and who may benefit more from an internship? If we require a thesis, we can prepare each student for that experience through a required research course or a faculty mentoring program in the sophomore and junior years that is attuned to the student’s particular interests. Flexibility of options works in favor of individual needs, but we can still apply lofty standards of excellence to whatever honors work qualifies the student for graduation recognition.

## CONCLUSION

In a national education system that seems bound by numbers more than ever before—witness proficiency testing in K–12 and the absolute reign of GPAs and standardized tests on the college level—we may still find creative ways to mitigate their deleterious effects on our honors students and programs. In this essay I have tried to explore the issues swirling around our decisions on how we use numbers. Now I would distill my personal views in the following list of principles:

- Unless you can emancipate your program, or part of it, from grades, scores, and credit hours, use the numbers, but balance them with other information as a reality check.
- Be realistic in attuning your numbers standards to the population you serve, your honors traditions, and your institutional culture, and don’t

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be apologetic about doing so, regardless of supposed national “benchmarks.”

- Honor and pay attention to the individual student.
- Err on the side of generosity—take a risk on admitting an interesting underachiever, and give students a second chance to meet your retention requirements.

Our use of numbers is a complex issue that deserves ongoing research and discussion as we devise and then continue to question our policies and procedures. We may depend on numbers, but they must not tyrannize us.

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The author may be contacted at

[landrews@kent.edu](mailto:landrews@kent.edu)

ANNMARIE GUZY

# Evaluation vs. Grading in Honors Composition Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying about Grades and Love Teaching

ANNMARIE GUZY

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

As a professor of composition and technical communication, I have had extensive training for and experience with evaluating student writing. The intellectual work of composition as an academic discipline manifests itself in three areas: rhetorically-based composition theory, empirical research of both qualitative and quantitative natures, and—unlike other disciplines aside from education—the applications of that theory and research to build sound teaching practices. In the pedagogical third of our scholarship, compositionists learn not only to design syllabi and assignments that will meet educational goals for students who will need to argue, research, and write at the postsecondary level, but also to establish criteria and develop techniques for useful evaluation of student performance.

As early as the master's level, graduate teaching assistants typically take a course on theory and practice in composition before or during their first semester of teaching. They do not lead laboratory sections or grade papers for a professor; rather, they are fully responsible for teaching at least one composition course, more likely two or more, for their school's freshman writing program. At times, undergraduate students in my technical writing courses, particularly those majoring in hard sciences or engineering, express their surprise that although I have a Ph.D., I continue to grade all their papers myself rather than assigning this seemingly onerous task to a graduate assistant. As a professor, I have indeed supervised graduate students who assisted with my research projects, and I have mentored teaching assistants through their first year of teaching, but I have always personally graded all of the assignments from all of my courses.

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Why? Because the evaluation of student writing in a composition course is inextricably intertwined with the course goal to improve not only writing features but overall critical thinking and argumentation skills. I am sometimes envious of colleagues both within and outside my department who can use assignments and exams simply to gauge what material a student has retained, whether through demonstrations of facility with formulae, memorization of terminology or dates, or completion of SCANTRON-based multiple-choice exams in which students match quotations and characters to titles of works read throughout the semester. Even with the growth of postsecondary initiatives such as writing across the curriculum and writing to learn, I have found that many colleagues, when faced with the administrative mandate to incorporate a writing assignment into their courses, are unprepared to evaluate the paper for any features beyond accuracy of content and (mis)perceptions of correctness in grammar and punctuation, often falling back on the red scribbles that freshman composition teachers made on their own essays twenty or thirty years ago.

Grading undergraduate writing, however, entails far more rigorous work than making arcane, blood-red symbols across every page and then writing some dismissive, arrogant summation that rationalizes the low grade assigned at the end. Evaluation of student writing should not be predicated solely on *what* the student says but also *how* she says it; not on how many sources she uses in her research paper but whether she uses them effectively in supporting her argument; not on her advanced vocabulary but whether she uses language innately or relies on the thesaurus function to supply pompous verbiage in a misguided attempt to impress the teacher. In short, thoughtful evaluation of student writing can be an exhausting task.

Ideally, this burden of evaluation should be alleviated in the honors composition course; if the students could not write well, they would have been denied admission into the honors course and/or honors program (a good number of writing programs have honors composition courses that exist apart from any honors program, but for the purposes of this essay, I will focus on honors composition courses that serve students from an honors program). I should be able to scan easily through each student's masterpiece, lifting my pen only to inscribe a bright, shiny A+ at the bottom of the last page. As we are all well aware, however, national test scores may not accurately reflect a student's writing ability, nor may application essays that have been endlessly revised, polished, or even ghostwritten before submission. Although many incoming honors students were proficient writers in high school, even the best writers need a period of transition and acclimation to the writing, research, and argumentation skills that they will need to succeed at the postsecondary level, especially in an honors program.

Having written several articles and the NCHC monograph on honors composition, I feel well qualified to discuss the evaluation of honors students' writing. The core of my professional research program is the study of honors composition, more specifically the academic writing of freshman honors students. In a recent research project, I constructed identical syllabi and assignments for regular and honors sections of freshman composition so that I could compare quantitatively measurable characteristics in the students' papers. Early results demonstrated that, given the same assignments, the honors students wrote longer papers with longer sentence structures and fewer grammatical and mechanical errors than the non-honors students. Fewer errors, however, does not mean error-free, nor do longer sentences overcome overly pretentious word choice or Yoda-esque syntax.

In my writing courses, therefore, "better than average" does not automatically translate into an A grade, and therein lies the rub for students in my honors composition class and for myself as well. I like *evaluating* my honors students' writing, but I hate *grading* it; put another way, I enjoy reading their texts and helping them to improve their writing, but I have come to loathe watching the facial contortions and slumping body language as the students tear past all of my carefully-worded comments and go straight to the letter grade. I have developed a set of strategies for paper-return day—distributing papers at the end of class, stationing myself at the door to encourage students to leave with the papers and groan elsewhere, and instituting a 48-hour moratorium on coming to my office to complain about their grades—and yet directly outside the door lingers a huge cluster of students who seem to care more about comparing their grades than reading what I said about their writing. On my more cynical days, I wonder if this is the result of the archetypal ropes-course, community-building freshman retreat: they still whine about their grades, but they whine together as a group.

Naturally, the fault is mine because I gave them a B or a C, and, especially during the first paper of the semester, mine may be the first assignment of their entire academic careers for which they did not earn an A. According to hallway lore, I am the author of many such auspicious moments, and I am always bemused by the fact that they will take credit for *earning* an A grade but that grades of B and below are *given* to them. Granted, receiving the first graded paper of the semester can be a trying time in any lower- or upper-division writing course; this is the time when students must begin to adapt their writing styles to the mythical "what the teacher wants." While the levels of cognitive dissonance at facing this academic challenge are relatively constant among students across my writing courses, the level of affective dissonance coming from my honors freshmen can be overwhelming, and I find myself positioned at the start of the arduous process of separating their

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self-worth from their grades. Who are they if not the students who earn straight As? If such a thing as a “textbook” honors student exists, that young person has probably been rewarded frequently and consistently for academic achievement throughout the previous twelve years, and a good portion of her self-esteem has become cemented to these achievements, which most readily boil down to the common quantitative denominators of GPA and test scores. When I then “give” her a C on the first paper, she somehow interprets this as my dislike of not only her paper but herself as well. This is particularly troublesome when students perceive the evaluation of writing as utterly subjective, unlike the fill-in-the-dot tests or math and science exams in which correct and incorrect answers are objectively marked, at least in the students’ minds.

Honors students also experience difficulties learning to separate the grade from what they have actually learned in a course. I share with them that I learned and retained more information from some courses in which I earned a hard B than from some “blow-off” classes in which I received an easy A, all while still earning a 3.79 GPA and graduating from my own undergraduate honors program. Shifting their focus to life after college, I ask whether they have ever queried professionals in their prospective fields regarding GPAs. For example, our campus has a medical school with an early admissions program, and at least fifty percent of our incoming honors freshmen are planning to attend medical school, so I ask them whether they have ever asked their own physicians about their undergraduate GPAs, transcripts, test scores, and such. None ever has. We then discuss why pre-med students believe that they must maintain a 4.0 GPA to be admitted to medical school and whether grades can predict such intrinsic characteristics as good bedside manner. For some students, separating learning from grades can be a painful revelation, and not all are successful at it. On the occasions when I have caught an honors student committing plagiarism, I internally acknowledge the pressure that these students face to maintain their academic standing, but I also feel brokenhearted over the fact that such cheating takes the “honor” out of honors, forsaking the intellectual effort required of the honors mind to the mindless pursuit of the A.

I also discuss with honors freshmen my struggles with what I call Former Honors Student Syndrome. I, too, had been a product of gifted and honors programs since the age of four, and my “B is for Bad” epistemology continued well into my first teaching assistant assignment. Through a heady mix of naïveté and arrogance, I was afraid that my background as an honors student who had always earned high grades for writing would somehow skew my ability to provide a fair evaluation for papers from non-honors students. To overcompensate, I gave out As and Bs like Halloween candy. I was also

allowed by the writing program administrator to revive a dormant section of honors composition, and since I had recently graduated from the very honors program served by this honors composition section, I knew how important A grades were to the honors students. At the end of that term, the writing program administrator pulled me aside with a copy of my final grade sheet, which had more As than Fonzie from *Happy Days*, and asked me a question that has since become the cornerstone of my grading in honors courses: "Would these students have earned an A in a regular course?" At the time, I responded wholeheartedly in the affirmative, but now, more than fifteen years later, I know better.

To address that question of comparison and to counter those issues of perceived subjectivity and intense "grade-grubbing," I strive to be fair and consistent in my grading, not just in my honors courses but throughout all my teaching. I do not grade honors students' papers differently than those of non-honors students, a practice supported by our freshman writing program's custom-published resources manual, which is used across all sections of English 101, 102, and 105(H). This manual, established and maintained by our excellent writing program administrator, includes not only policies and university resources but also a list of "Shared Criteria for Writing," such as organization and development, and a set grading scale that includes letter grades and corresponding numerical scores to be used across all composition sections. When designing my syllabi and assignment sheets, I include *in writing* as much information about additional criteria for that specific assignment as I can. I remind honors students that they would indeed earn the same grades if they enrolled with me for a regular composition course with similar types of writing tasks and that I do not grade their papers either "easier" or "harder" because they are honors students. When a student asks how to earn an A on the next paper, I respond, "Write an A paper." When a student asks how to improve her writing using the "Shared Criteria," then we can talk.

Overall, fifteen years after I taught my first honors composition course, I feel confident that I have achieved a workable equilibrium between my disciplinary training's call for thorough, thoughtful evaluation of student writing and my own hyperawareness of the importance of grades to honors students. I have finally accepted that trying to sustain a useful class discussion on the day after the first papers have been returned is futile because half of the class will be pouting with arms crossed or heads firmly planted on desktops. I have vowed to continue writing qualitative comments for students' papers, whether the students read them or not, because I want students to know that writing is too complex to be reduced to a simple letter or number grade. And ironically, as I cajole my students to remove grades as a component of their self-perceptions, I find that part of my identity as a professor, or at least the honors

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students' perception of me as a professor, is being shaped by the grades I assign (although I'm too self-conscious to frequent "Rate My Professor"). At last spring's interview day for prospective honors students, I overheard one of my freshmen telling a group of candidates, "That's Dr. Guzy. She teaches honors freshman comp. You'll get a C on the first paper and you'll hate her, but after that everything's fine and you'll love her." I can live with that.

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The author may be contacted at

[aguzy@jaguar1.usouthal.edu](mailto:aguzy@jaguar1.usouthal.edu)

JOYCE W. FIELDS

# To Speak or Not to Speak: That is the Question

JOYCE W. FIELDS

COLUMBIA COLLEGE

In the best of all academic worlds, the phrase “grading in honors” is an oxymoron. According to many and various sources, the gifted college student is more of a perfectionist with higher educational aspirations than non-honors students. She tends to be more autonomous, self-aware, and willing to engage in discourse than non-honors students. We know that she comes to us with higher academic credentials than non-honors students and that she is, therefore, more poised for success. How, then, do we assess the creative, energetic, enthusiastic, impassioned work we expect from such students? Should we be required to do so?

In the best of all academic worlds, students sit at the feet of wise and experienced professors and gather knowledge until they feel they have achieved the measure of education to which they aspire. Such students determine the parameters of their own learning and, thus, their saturation point. They maintain their own quality control so that their efforts reflect their personal best. In an age of big-business education and rising credentialism, however, this model is impractical and unmanageable. More’s the pity.

Legislators, academic officers, registrars, department chairs, parents, and students create a formidable parade of constituents clamoring for grades, evaluations, and hard assessment data. How do we know if teaching is successful if we cannot provide the evidence of high marks for our most excellent students? With some apprehension, more of us may find ourselves, like Harvard, reviewing grade inflation and adjusting our sights.

As Larry Andrews postulates, undergraduate honors programs, not unlike many other social institutions, are forced to play the numbers game. Obviously, a number of games are involved: assessing the program itself, assessing the classroom instructor and content, and assessing student learning and outcomes. The assessment of student learning is the focus of this discussion, with guidance from the second of Andrews’ two major values: “the noble honors pedagogical advising tradition of investing in the individual student.” Numbers games have an obvious impact on retention and program development but are more far reaching in terms of personal student outcomes,

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a product we market as characteristic of honors programs. Andrews delivers one solution in the form of creative assessment of honors students' work.

With interest in this creativity and a desire to be true to our honors tradition and institutional philosophy, I surveyed our honors students. I asked them to share their ideas about the necessity of assessing their work, the best method for assessment, and their preferred method of assessment. Roughly a third of our students (n=36) responded to my request for information. Of these, twenty-four were in their second semester of their first college year, ten were second-year students, and two were third-year. Perhaps because this group was composed mostly of first-year students, there was a clearly expressed desire for evaluation. When asked to comment on "how important you feel an assessment of your work is to your education and intellectual progress," representative comments were:

- The assessment of my work is often as important as actually doing the work. It's essential.
- I believe that assessment from instructors helps me, as a student, to hone my work. Advice from a professional helps me make wise choices.
- I believe evaluation and constructive criticism provide opportunities for growth and mastery in most of my courses.

A third-year student affirmed Andrews' understanding of assessment as a motivator for student learning and growth:

- I do think it is important because assessment is the motivation to do it well. If you always studied and did work but no one assessed it, there wouldn't be as much satisfaction or motivation.

I am an eternal seeker for an answer to the proverbial question "What is an honors course?" I was interested, therefore, in specific student preferences with regard to assessing their honors work. When asked what method *best assesses* the quality of their honors work, 57% of students responded that class discussion is the best method, followed by a distant 20% with written research papers, and 17% with tests and quizzes. Only 6% reported that oral projects and presentations provide the best assessment of honors work. When asked what method they *prefer* for assessing their honors work, 60% answered class discussion, 14% tests and quizzes, 12% each written research papers and oral projects and/or presentations, and 2% (one lonely student) online threaded discussion. An overwhelming 86% preferred that the instructor evaluate their work as opposed to self (8%) or peers (6%), and 94% felt that the evaluation of their honors work was reflective of their

effort and study. This last number was very affirming but problematic when coupled with their preference for class discussion as a method of evaluation. The students seemed to think that our class discussion was the best focus of assessment.

What determines an honors course in the eyes of students, then, is our reliance on class discussion as a pedagogical and assessment tool. When breaking down the data, the first-year students felt most strongly about class discussion, perhaps because stimulating conversation is what they imagined when they contemplated honors work at the college level; fewer tests and papers than they produced in high school and more extensive reliance on their ability to express and share their ideas seemed prominent in their view of the college honors experience. I suspect, however, that few instructors are adept at conducting academic discussion and fewer are adept at using these discussions to assess student work and study.

Since numbers matter, the appropriate evaluation of students is a critical element of honors education. The comments of these students validate their expectation of excellence from us in assessing their work. I propose that we look toward establishing a community for dialogue within our classes that reflects the Yeshiva tradition or Socratic method, where students not only share their own ideas but back them up with those of important scholars and thinkers. Because these traditions are based in one-on-one dialogue, they would require adjustment to a classroom context but could serve as models for intellectual discussion.

In evaluating such discussions, professors remain responsible for keeping them focused and intellectually substantive. It is necessary to generate critical thinking with probing questions and periodically to summarize the discussion, eliciting further comment. In 1998, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory released four criteria that may be helpful in establishing assessment tools for class discussion (<http://www.nwrel.org/assessment/pdfRubrics/groupassess.pdf>). Their first criterion is verbal effectiveness or the use of language and expression in developing and presenting ideas. The second criterion is nonverbal effectiveness or the ability of the student to convey and support his or her message with nonverbal cues. The third criterion is appropriateness of both the language and message of the speaker. Are his or her ideas organized for the setting and audience, and is he or she respectful of other participants? The fourth criterion is responsiveness or the ability of the student to demonstrate active listening and modify his or her responses based on verbal and nonverbal cues. These criteria are not unlike those used for written assessment but require attention and astute skill when applied to verbal exchanges. I would add a fifth criterion: providing valid

## TO SPEAK OR NOT TO SPEAK: THAT IS THE QUESTION

external sources in intellectual exchange. Too often, class discussions devolve into “I think” or “I feel” types of exchanges, with little academic or intellectual stretching and even less integration of the ideas of others into the conversation.

While assessing student work is an ongoing challenge for honors programs and instructors, honing numerical measures for evaluation is critical for honest exchange between students and professors with regard to expectations and outcomes. Relying on evidence such as tests, written papers, and oral projects is relatively easy for a number of assessment tasks, but incorporating quantitative evaluation of class discussion is much more intricate than simply allowing a portion of grading for participation. Because we advertise enlightened discussion as part of an honors experience, it is incumbent on us to further our ability to incorporate objective assessment of discussion as an integral part of the honors classroom.

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The author may be contacted at

[jfields@colacoll.edu](mailto:jfields@colacoll.edu)

RYAN BROWN

# Grades, Scores, and Honors Education

RYAN BROWN

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PURDUE UNIVERSITY FORT WAYNE

A while ago, I had a conversation with a fellow who was, shall we say, “quantitatively disinclined.” He complained vehemently about the use of numbers and grades as a sorting mechanism in higher education, and, given my affiliation with honors, he decided to focus his attacks in that direction. “It’s all about SATs, ACTs, and GPAs,” he claimed, “but education is so much more than that!” After quickly agreeing with him, I asked him to describe honors without referencing any grade or scoring system at all. Within minutes, he had a beautiful description of honors as a learning environment where a community of diverse students and teachers alike were challenged to expand their minds and exceed their potential. “Great,” I replied, “You’ve almost sold John Q. Student, but he has one question for you: Can he join?”

The point of my remark was to underscore the importance of selection criteria to honors programs. In determining whom honors serves, such criteria become integral (though not necessarily central) to what honors does, for without a good fit between the program population and its activities, failure will swiftly follow. Of course, as my conversational partner argued, selection criteria need not be quantitatively based; but, I would reply, grades are not limited to quantitative means either. Portfolios, writing samples, interviews, standardized tests, transcripts—all have their strengths and their weaknesses when used as assessments or selection criteria.

Obviously, this discussion is nothing new—one need only peruse the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or pedagogical journals to find similar opinions gaining in frequency, intensity, and legitimacy. The lead essay of this issue of *JNCHC*, Larry Andrews’ “Grades, Scores, and Honors,” does an excellent job of analyzing ways to encourage a connection between selection criteria and the purpose of your honors program. What these essays and articles often gloss over or omit entirely, however, is a consideration of the university educational context.

## THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Presumably, the central goal of every institution of higher education is to facilitate learning for its students; similarly, the presumed goal of every

## GRADES, SCORES, AND HONORS EDUCATION

student is to go to a university for that learning. In order to demonstrate that the learning is occurring, the university applies multiple assessment criteria, otherwise known as grades and scores. Using these criteria, we in higher education then help decide which learners get scholarships, which are making satisfactory academic progress, and which have earned a certificate or degree. If we are doing our jobs well, we will have a clear set of learning outcomes for students to achieve, a means of assessing students that accurately determines whether they have met the desired outcomes, and a system of recognitions and awards that acknowledge the individuals meeting our desired outcomes. In honors, as throughout the university, our central goal is to facilitate learning; grades and scores are an important means of assessing this outcome, but they are not why we do what we do.

Since assessment criteria are so important, we should examine them in more detail. I submit that they all begin with the following premise: *teachers can't teach everything, and learners can't learn everything*. It seems so self-evident and obvious: knowing that perfection is impossible, we are forced to decide how much learning is enough, whether the issue is what percentage results in an A or a C on an assignment or in a course, or how many and which courses are needed to graduate with a certain degree. As a result of the choices we make, certain knowledge claims and skill sets are privileged and rewarded while others are discouraged and dismissed. This doesn't mean that we need have all-or-nothing, either-or dichotomies in the classroom or at the university, but at some point decisions about which skills are more important will be made. For instance, we might be flexible about whether our students learn French, Latin, Spanish, or Chinese, but we insist that they learn a foreign language; we might use a research paper to determine part of a course grade to help students who don't test well, but the syllabus still states that *X percent* of a student's grade is derived from test scores.

As responsible educators, we need to be aware of these decisions and their ramifications; they don't matter just when a student is a point or two away from the next grade or admittance into the program. They tell students, TAs, and even ourselves what skills are needed, where efforts should be directed, and what information is important. From day one, these values affect how students and teachers act, react, and interact to each other, to the university, and to learning.

### **EDUCATION, NOT HONORS**

Honors is a part of this university environment; we are not above or beyond its influence. At the same time, however, many people in honors have borne the burden of justifying the educational system's values. Consider the following rationale for honors from my own institution: many, though not all,

## RYAN BROWN

view honors as an opportunity for students who have demonstrated excellence in a traditional learning environment to expand their experiences through such means as experiential classrooms and individualized honors contracts. A standard for excellence in a traditional learning environment has been set (the program's minimum GPA, SAT, etc.), and those who do not meet the standard are encouraged to gain a higher proficiency in those settings before attempting to do more through honors—to put it in terms parents might use, “Clean your plate before you take more food.” Just as the food on your plate is your focus, the expanded experiences are central to honors education; grades and scores are simply a means of determining what learning opportunities are available to you and when.

This mentality is common throughout all of higher education: we have class prerequisites, minimum academic progress indicators, minimum passing grades, and other similar measures to gauge students' readiness for the next step in their education. We also have positive aides—including awards, honors societies, and advanced placement options—to recognize and challenge students who have demonstrated excellence with our existing standards. Despite the similarities to other areas of academia, the people in honors are constantly asked to justify their system of values and rewards; I have lost count of the number of times I have had to answer charges of “honors elitism” or “unfair requirements,” but I have rarely heard anyone question *summa cum laude* designations or minimum passing grade regulations.

Like these other mechanisms, honors works within the educational context; it offers new opportunities for those who excel in the university system. As with the educational system as a whole, grades and scores are integral (though not necessarily central) to what we do; our central focus is on student learning, not the ways that we assess those learning outcomes. For our part, we in honors need to be cognizant of all the choices that we make and their consequences for our constituents; we should always be ready with an answer for why we have made the choices we did, especially about grades and scores. We need to make abundantly clear, however, that this issue is not left primarily for honors to wrestle with; grades and scores are an educational issue that affects all of academia.

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The author may be contacted at

[browrm01@ipfw.edu](mailto:browrm01@ipfw.edu).



ROSALIE C. OTERO

# Grades, Marks, and Scores, Oh My!

ROSALIE C. OTERO

UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

**M**y granddaughter, Ema, a kindergartener, came to my house the other day to show me her homework. She proudly pointed to a colorful butterfly sticker that she had received. Naturally, I oohed and aahed at the paper with the requisite big hug. We also found an empty spot on my refrigerator to display her work.

From the very beginning students are constantly assessed and graded according to their performance and the particular standard of the teacher. Some schools use letter grades, others use numbers, and still others use E for excellent, S for satisfactory, and so on.

I read Larry Andrew's essay "Grades, Scores, and Honors: A Numbers Game?" with great interest. It's an excellent essay touching on these topics in relation to honors. In the University of New Mexico Honors Program, students are assigned an A for excellent, above average honors work; a CR for acceptable, meeting the basic requirements for the course; or an NC for unacceptable or nonexistent work. In addition, instructors complete an evaluation form that includes both quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (written comments) appraisal for each student.

The University of New Mexico has a plus/minus grading system, and, needless to say, the grading system in the honors program has come under attack various times during its 49-year existence. Some folks on campus have argued that the different grading system for honors students is elitist (where have we heard that before?) and that the "special" system keeps the honors program apart from the rest of the university. My argument is that the benefits of such a system far outweigh any potentially negative results.

Honors students do not "belong" solely to honors. These students are majoring in various fields across the university and taking many courses outside of the honors program. They interact with many other students and faculty during their term at UNM. So they aren't isolated. There is a great deal of interaction and interface between honors students and the rest of the campus. At the same time, I argue that the honors grading system fosters collegiality and puts emphasis on learning rather than on letters or numbers.

## GRADES, MARKS, AND SCORES, OH MY!

I would further argue that the interdisciplinary nature of honors courses requires a specialized kind of assessment. First of all, the classes are small (16–18 students). They are run more like graduate seminars, where emphasis is on interactive, discussion-based pedagogy. The seminars underscore the importance of mastering a subject, reasoning, using knowledge to solve problems, and creating or constructing products. There are no exams, so students are required to demonstrate their learning in other ways including essays, term papers, performances, interviews, conversations, student-teacher conferences, and projects. A holistic process of learning requires high student participation. Although some instructors do rely on a point system for various activities, the emphasis is on timely, high-quality feedback. Instructors and students recognize the quality of learning that takes place.

In addition, students who are concerned (often overly concerned) about their GPAs can take risks and register for honors courses they might not otherwise consider for fear of getting grades that might limit their opportunities for professional or graduate schools. Our grading system levels the playing field for all honors students, including engineers as well as biochemistry, business, and humanities majors. Honors students like challenges, but they also like to do well.

Another argument against the specialized grading system we use is that it gives honors students an unfair advantage—making it easier for them to get As and therefore to graduate *cum laude*, for example. The reality is that graduation with a mark of distinction depends on a number of criteria, not the least of which is cumulative grade point average overall. Since honors students are required to complete only 24 credit hours in honors, their cumulative GPA can't possibly depend solely on their honors courses. Some honors students complain that an A in honors, in fact, brings down their GPA. There have even been students who dropped out of honors because a plain A would bring down their 4.3 GPA.

The issue of grade inflation has been going on for some time. For instance, a C average used to be typical for college students, a statistically average grade. Now it is considered a bad grade. I don't believe there is such a thing as a uniform grading system. "So much depends," to quote William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" (with apologies!):

so much depends  
upon  
a red wheel  
barrow  
glazed with rain  
water

ROSALIE C. OTERO

beside the white  
chickens.

—depends, that is, on the way a given instructor interprets performance or on the way a potential graduate or professional school administrator or employer interprets transcripts. Some instructors, for example, lower a student's grade based on absences and tardiness regardless of the quality of work performed. We also know that some instructors are considered "hard graders" while others are more sensitive to the possibility of demoralizing their students with low grades. I know faculty on campus who refuse to give an A+. How, then, can students who do receive such a grade be meaningfully compared to those who don't, when some who don't weren't given the chance to get one?

We can't get away from grades. Assessment is with us whether it's done through grades, numerical scores, written evaluations, or stars and stickers. The best we can hope for is to give evaluations of student performance that are as consistent, fair, and accurate as possible. To achieve fairness of this sort, we must begin each of the courses we teach with clear and clearly articulated expectations.

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The author may be contacted at

[otero@unm.edu](mailto:otero@unm.edu)



SRIRAM KHÉ

# Searching for Tatiyana

SRIRAM KHÉ

WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

A female student rushed into my office with a backpack swinging from her shoulder as I was enjoying freshly brewed coffee and a brownie from the batch I had made for my class. No introductions, but an abrupt “Dr. Khé, you don’t know me, but I heard that you have applied for the Director position, and I totally support your application.”

This was how my interaction with honors students started a couple of years ago after I had barely submitted my application for the Director position. I had no idea what to say other than “thanks, but who are you?” She sat down and introduced herself—Tatiyana was her name (no real names used in this essay). I offered her brownies, Tatiyana took one, and we started chatting. She was a senior majoring in history and planned to go to law school.

The “law school” got my attention because for a couple of weeks I had been closely following the Michael Newdow case: Newdow, an atheist and father of a third-grade student, sued the government, claiming that it was unconstitutional to force his daughter to listen to “under God” in the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools. So, naturally, I asked Tatiyana what she thought about the case that had made its way to the Supreme Court. Her quick-fire responses clearly showed her familiarity with the details of the case. Tatiyana was confident that the court would toss the case out on the grounds that Newdow had no standing, which was exactly what the court did months later. And, by the way, Tatiyana did go on to a prestigious law school on the east coast.

In a way, that student, who charged into my office and disrupted my ruminations over coffee, also defined for me what I thought an honors student ought to be like. After being appointed Director, I suppose I have been searching for Tatiyanas among the high-school seniors applying for admission to the Honors Program: students who are confident about their understanding of the world and simultaneously eager to know more; students who serve as sparring partners for faculty, sometimes even knocking the faculty down, metaphorically speaking, of course; students aware of their intellectual limitations so that their confidence does not cross over to arrogance.

I am sure that all faculty members have their own Tatiyana stories. I am glad that I have run into quite a few Tatiyanas, and we do have many of them

## SEARCHING FOR TATIYANA

even now in the Honors Program. But there was always one feeling that nagged me: what if many such Tatiyanas existed among the 900-plus freshman students who join our university every year but did not apply for admission to the Honors Program because they did not know about it?

So, I no longer merely wait for students to apply to join the Honors Program. In order to recruit potential Tatiyanas who, for various reasons, end up not applying to the Honors Program, we have now instituted a direct admission process, in addition to the traditional application format. I scan for students' academic credentials—SAT/ACT scores and high school GPAs—in the university's database of admitted students and then send a few of them letters offering them direct admissions to Honors—without applications and recommendations. If they like the sound of it, they then send us the signed contract indicating their intention to join our learning community. About a third of the current freshman and sophomore classes are such direct admits to Honors, and the rest are through the traditional application route.

In this context, I truly appreciate Larry Andrews' observation that it all comes down to the populations that our respective institutions serve, our honors traditions, and our institutional cultures. Yes, for the direct admissions to Honors we rely on the holy academic trinity—SAT, ACT, and GPA. However, we do not want that to be the only route for admitting students to Honors because, if we had based admissions strictly on those numbers, we might have lost out on students like Olga, whose combination of SAT scores and high school GPA might not have led me to offer her admission to Honors. As a regional public university, our institution's mission is to provide learning opportunities to students even if their past academic records might fall short of our expectations. Olga was admitted through the traditional route of application, essay, and letters of recommendation. We know we have a winner in Olga; according to students in her cohort, Olga is the ideal honors student because she places academics first even through the hours she spends at her part-time job. I can easily imagine her dedication from what she wrote to the Honors Committee as a sophomore, after a year in Honors:

The prospect of going to college frightened me at first, but when I was accepted into Honors Program I began to anticipate the arrival of the first day of college more than I ever had before. During the summer registration and the new student week I was nervous. As I walked towards my first class on that first Monday, I was terrified, but by the end of the first week the fears were gone. My attitude now has changed many times. It began as fear, and then turned to interest. Now, nearly five quarters through, I can sum up my experience in one word: exciting.

As I was reflecting on our dual admission process and whether direct admits might value Honors differently from those who applied for admission,

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one student confirmed that we do indeed have Tatiyanas. This student, a direct admit herself, asked me whether I was concerned that students might find out who was directly admitted and who was not and, therefore, whether tensions might develop as a result. My immediate response was that this was exactly how we expect honors students to think through issues, even those that are not directly related to the curriculum.

Yes, I sidestepped her question and still do not know how to answer it. As of now, there is no evidence that this split admission process has created tensions among students. Perhaps we simply lucked out with a great group of students who do not care about the process that brought them together. Or perhaps students who value the idea of honors pay no attention at all to these admission channels; they are just happy to be here. At least, I find it easier to think thus than otherwise.

A couple of years into my responsibilities in the Honors Program, I know I have barely understood the admissions process and high-school seniors. Then there is retention, thesis work, and the success of our students post-graduation—all a huge challenge that, based on my experience with admissions, is beyond simple quantification.

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The author may be contacted at

[khes@wou.edu](mailto:khes@wou.edu)



BRUCE FOX

# I Love Numbers

BRUCE FOX

NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

I love numbers. Five and two thirds: the number of years it took for me to finish my bachelor of science degree. 05/05: my wedding anniversary. 15826: the address of the house where I grew up (well, perhaps “got older”—many folks believe that I have never grown up). Twenty-nine and 1290: the minimum ACT and SAT scores, respectively, needed for admittance to an honors program. Forty-two: for you *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* fans, the “...Ultimate Answer to the Great Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything.” As a forester, I work with numbers on a regular and continuing basis: board feet, acres, growth rates. Numbers provide me with a way of measuring things—the size of a tract of land, the grade of a woods road, how many trees to plant. Numbers are very cool and very comforting. Numbers often bring with them a sense of knowing and a sense of security.

But numbers can also confuse. We forget—or never knew—some important aspects of using numbers: units of measure, precision, accuracy, averages, distributions. However, we feel secure because we have the numbers to help us measure things. Alas, this security often reflects only our ignorance. Or much worse, it is a security based on willful neglect or a failure to take the time and effort to find out what the numbers really mean. We lack quantitative literacy. We can recognize the numbers, but if we fail to understand what the numbers really mean, we bask in a false sense of security.

A test of our quantitative literacy: Is 89.4% the same as 89.6%? Of course not. Or maybe not. Or not really. Wait, how can such a simple comparison of numbers generate three such contradictory answers? Simple: accuracy and precision. One example: grading papers. I grade student work in terms of percent. I add up all the scores at the end of the semester and then assign grades. A total of 90–100% earns a student an A, 80–89% a B, etc (we don’t have the option of assigning plus/minus grades, but this really doesn’t matter). So, based on standard rounding rules, a student with a total score of 89.6% would receive a grade of A, and the student with a total score of 89.4% would earn a grade of B. Very precise, but surely not! Should 0.2% of the total points that a student earned over the course of an entire semester make a difference between an A and a B? Doubtful. Did the A student really know 0.2% more than the B student? Doubtful. Did my skills as a grader eliminate the possibility that I might have given the A student a few more points than deserved on one assignment or the B student a couple points less? Doubtful.

## I LOVE NUMBERS

So where does that leave me? Do I assign a grade of A to both students? If so, have I abandoned my standards? Or do I assign a B to the 89.4% student and an A to the 89.6% student? A very easy decision to support. Some help, please. Two As or one A and one B?

A second test of our quantitative literacy. Imagine a case where at the end of the semester, all the students in my honors class end up with a score of 89.6% or higher. Do they all deserve As? Yes, they earned them. “How could every student in your class receive an A?” some would ask. Easy, they earned them. “Isn’t this grade distribution a bit skewed?” Statistically, yes. So what? All these answers seem quite reasonable to me (of course I did create these answers). If I perform my job correctly and have the integrity and strength to resist the urge to make myself look better or more popular by giving out good grades, why not assign each of these students an A? A forced distribution of grades, for example the infamous curve, sets up a competitive situation that discourages students from, and indeed penalizes them for, working together—discourages and penalizes as in “If I help my classmates, and they receive higher scores on the exam than I do, my course grade will suffer, so I won’t help them.” Why would we ever want to encourage such behavior in our honors students (or any other students for that matter)?

Lest you think me a Luddite, I do not reject the notion of measuring things. But I like to think that at least to a certain extent I can ferret out what numbers really mean—or don’t mean. Larry Andrews, author of the feature article in this issue of the *JNCHC*, raises extremely important questions about numbers—numbers for admission, numbers for retention, numbers for graduation rates. He also challenges us to look for answers to these questions in the context of our honors programs. Therefore, the answers to these questions depend on the composition of our institution’s student body, the goals of our institution, and the vision we have for our program. In other words, we need to understand what these numbers really mean for us in our own honors programs.

Yes, I love numbers. They can bring me comfort and security. They can give me both precise and accurate answers. But when it comes to honors students and honors programs I sure hope that I can differentiate between precision and accuracy and that I understand distributions. Yes, I love numbers, but I love them conditionally. My love does not extend to the point where I don’t question the numbers. I like to understand things too much for that.

Oh, BTW: Two As or one A and one B?

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The author may be contacted at

[bruce.fox@nau.edu](mailto:bruce.fox@nau.edu)

JEFFREY A. PORTNOY

# Balancing on the Edge of Honors: A Meditation

JEFFREY A. PORTNOY  
GEORGIA PERIMETER COLLEGE

In thinking about Larry Andrews' two recent offerings in *JNCHC*, his Forum piece featured in this issue and his "At Play on the Fields of Honor(s)" in the last issue, I am struck by a central motif connecting these essays. That motif is not particularly surprising as I reflect on my years of knowing Larry and working with him on the Publications Board. He is smart, witty, hardworking, and humane. His sense of language is sharp and graceful. That he runs the first-rate Honors College at Kent State University is well known throughout the honors universe. In many respects he himself embodies the balance and perspective that he advocates for honors administrators, their programs, and their students. When he advises us or reminds us in "At Play" not to neglect the fun and the joy in our working lives and to insure that students recognize as well the importance of intellectual and creative play in the academy and beyond, he is offering wisdom to value and to practice. Therein lies the rub. Saying one wants to be balanced and keep the travails of job and pleasures of life in balance is easy; achieving this balance is hard to do and even harder to sustain.

The most cursory reading of *JNCHC*'s Forum on Honors Administration reveals the incredible range of tasks facing the directors of honors programs and colleges (7.2). From students needing counseling about what courses to take or how to handle the painful cancer of a family member to the oft-heard call from Public Relations that they need a group of ten honors students for a video by 12:45pm tomorrow (the implicit subtext: bright, articulate, engaging, photogenic, and racially and culturally diverse), the hours, much less the day, of an honors administrator rarely proceeds uninterrupted. Trumping all, of course, is email, exponentially expanding a Director's open-door policy to the world and screaming its silent demand for either an immediate response or the guilt of delay, the latter entailing the stubborn persistence of the email amidst an ever-growing menu of missives.

Beyond such chores, the pressures and imperatives of numbers on honors are part and parcel of the sea change that Len Zane observes in the visibility and centrality of honors within the institutional landscape. Numbers

## BALANCING ON THE EDGE OF HONORS: A MEDITATION

typically serve as the currency within such a landscape, which is increasingly populated by deans, councils, and vice presidents who must be concerned, and rightly so, with numbers: class size, recruits, retention figures, graduates, budgets, and more. In such a world, an honors administrator's voice may sound tinny and off-key while chanting that ubiquitous choral refrain of academic excellence, small classes, and challenges and opportunities for students and faculty.

At my own institution, which has five campuses, I am in the throes of constructing a case to the academic vice president for expanding the re-assigned time of the campus coordinators for honors. I promised an argument that would include measurable goals and expectations in terms of the numbers of honors courses, students enrolled, and advisees on each campus but that would not just be about the numbers. The additional ingredients are, of course, the unanticipated problems and requests but, more importantly, intangibles of great education that defy ready quantification and that constitute what Andrews in this issue of *JNCHC* calls "the noble honors pedagogical and advising tradition of *investing in the individual student*." This investment by the institution translates into an investment of attention, time, effort, and more attention by those in the trenches of honors education and advisement. The success of that investment in students and the longevity of honors may well hinge on maintaining a balanced perspective.

Apology in lieu of a conclusion: Perhaps this meditation on balance and perspective is little more than a self-reflexive (read self-indulgent?) interlude during a hectic spring, reminding me to enjoy Atlanta's resplendent dogwoods as they blossom. After all, four blocks of my thirty-mile commute (one way) wend beneath a canopy of giant dogwood trees completely covered in white blooms on the street Jessica Tandy walks as Miss Daisy before Hoke Coleburn, played by Morgan Freeman, convinces her to get in the car to drive to the Piggly-Wiggly in Alfred Uhry's *Driving Miss Daisy*. But even enjoying such spring reveries has its challenges: all views are siphoned through the haze of pollen with its particulate count of 5,208. (Any amount over 120 is considered extremely high.) The simplest pleasures, like the simplest adages, are often confounded, are often the most profound. If all this brief reflection offers is a convoluted journey to a simple finger extended toward Andrews' wit and wisdom in pointing to the middle way, to a middle path, so easy to articulate and so hard to follow, that may be enough for this moment. An old woman responds in a koan, writes Jerry Shinshin Wick, to every sojourning monk asking for directions to the monastery on the Great Mountain: "Straight ahead" (34). Perhaps we, too, are left with only going straight ahead while knowing that it is always a serpentine road that ascends the mountain.

JEFFREY A. PORTNOY

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The author may be contacted at

[jportnoy@gpc.edu](mailto:jportnoy@gpc.edu)



# Research Essays



# Using Characteristics of K–12 Gifted Programs to Evaluate Honors Programs

MARY K. TALLENT-RUNNELS

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

SHANA M. SHAW

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

JULIE A. THOMAS

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to conduct an exploratory evaluation of honors programs in institutions of higher education. Nine characteristics of exemplary K–12 gifted programs were used for this analysis of honors programs in the Big 12 schools. One school was eliminated from the process because it was the only one without an honors college. Instead, this school had departmental honors programs, and all programs there were somewhat different. Overall results showed that the eleven honors programs we examined complied with the same criteria recommended for K–12 programs. However, compliance with the characteristics varied. Most notably, only one program provided for teacher training. Further studies, such as interviews with graduates of these programs and comparative studies with other universities, might produce valuable insights. Published results of formal program evaluations would help other schools use empirical data to design or improve their honors programs. These studies would begin a new, comprehensive body of knowledge about quality honors programs.

## USING CHARACTERISTICS OF K–12 GIFTED PROGRAMS TO EVALUATE HONORS PROGRAMS

The analysis of honors programs in higher education is possibly the next frontier in research on gifted learners according to Robinson (1997). Universities are where most of our gifted youth go after high school, and studies have shown that the majority of gifted learners wish to enroll in

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honors programs in their universities or colleges (Boulard, 2003; Christopher, 2005; Kerr & Colangelo, 1988; Robinson, 1997). Nearly two thirds of all four-year institutions have honors programs, almost all large four-year schools have honors colleges or departments (Achterberg, 2004b), and this is an ever-growing trend in higher education (Hamilton, 2004). Some honors programs are organized as individual programs in departments, some are programs by college, and some are university-wide honors programs or colleges. Many believe that the honors programs in these schools capture the majority of gifted students who cannot afford the expensive Ivy League schools (Fischer, 1996) or who prefer not to attend these schools. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of information regarding characteristics of good honors programs, and this situation impedes our ability to ensure that gifted students are receiving the most appropriate university education (Rinn & Plucker, 2004; Robinson, 1997). There seems to be some agreement regarding common features of honors colleges (smaller class size, enhanced educational opportunity) (Hamilton, 2004), but there is little research on assessing the quality of honors programs (Huggett, 2003).

The objective of this research was to conduct an exploratory evaluation study of honors programs in higher education institutions. Although traditionally evaluation of gifted education has focused on K–12 learning environments, some studies have been conducted concerning collegiate honors programming. These studies provide some recommendations for honors programs. Some criteria suggest that honors programs should offer interdisciplinary courses (Guerrero & Riggs, 1996; Loston, Watkins, Kirkland, & Smith, 2002; Hamilton, 2004), have teachers who are dedicated (Loston, et al., 2002), offer students mentorships, apply cluster grouping of students, and allow students autonomy with their lessons (Robinson, 1997). Huggett’s qualitative study of four honors programs resulted in a grounded theory of honors programs she called the “Environmental Theory of High-Quality Honors Programs.” Besides the need for monitoring honors programs and gathering resources for them, she concluded that there should be a culture of shared commitment to individual and collaborative teaching and learning, which includes some of the characteristics already mentioned. However, there is no comprehensive body of knowledge about how honors students should be taught (Achterberg, 2004b).

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF OUTSTANDING HONORS PROGRAMS**

We wanted to work with measurable characteristics of honors programs in order to make some comparisons among programs. We knew there had been many studies of characteristics of outstanding gifted programs.

Accordingly, we reviewed the literature on evaluation of K–12 gifted programs and decided to use these characteristics to evaluate the honors programs rather than those characteristics listed by the NCHC. The following nine measurable characteristics of K–12 gifted programs emerged most often in the literature:

1. An interdisciplinary approach to learning—Typically defined as an exposure to a variety of fields of study and an exploration of broad issues, themes, or problems (Achterberg, 2004a; Feldhusen, 1986; Hamilton, 2004) presented in a challenging fashion (Kerr & Colangelo, 1988).
2. Nonclassroom options—Usually consists of field trips to community agencies, cultural institutions, and interschool seminars, conferences, and internships (Arizona Department of Education, 2000; Dubner, 1984; Maker, & Nielson, 1996; Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003; Hamilton, 2004; Orenstein, 1984).
3. Independent studies—Requires that gifted students be trained in how to choose and carry out an independent project under the supervision of school personnel (Arizona Department of Education, 2000; Dubner, 1984; Fischer, 1996; Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994; Maker & Nielson, 1996; Maryland State Department of Education, 1983; Van Tassel-Baska, 2003) and that the project be publicly shared and critiqued (Kerr & Colangelo, 1988).
4. Students involved in their own curriculum development—Allows students to be heavily involved in decisions about the content or types of projects they study. Honors programs can allow students their choice of material, activities, content, and outcomes while encouraging students to become more self-evaluative (Kerr & Colangelo, 1988; Maryland State Department of Education, 1983).
5. Screening and identification procedures—Provides for systematic screening to find exceptional students (Orenstein, 1984). The identification process should require that multiple criteria be used to identify gifted students (Feldhusen & Jarwan, 2000; Khatena, 1992). The Texas State Plan for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (2004) released by the Texas Education Agency's Division of Advanced Academic Services describes acceptable, recognized, and exemplary identification procedures, which also include multiple criteria (Texas Education Agency, 2004). In addition, screening procedures must include a system of identification for gifted minorities, ensuring that they are not neglected by the program (Feldhusen, 1986; Gregory, et al., 1988).

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6. Mentoring—Classified as an in-depth relationship between a young adult and a community professional over an extended period of time (Davis & Rimm, 1994; Robinson, 1997). In K–12 education, the mentor should not be a school official (Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994) but rather a member of the community who can serve as a model of success and high standards for the student to follow (Feldhusen, 1986). In university honors programs, the students are most often also mentored by their faculty advisors or a professor with whom they have interactions outside of the classroom (Fischer, 1996).
7. Evaluation of the program—Monitors the effectiveness of the program using both formal and informal procedures (Arizona Department of Education, 2000; Baldwin, 1994; Davis & Rimm, 1994; Feldhusen, 1986; Gregory, et al., 1986; Guerrero & Riggs, 1996; Orenstein, 1984). A good evaluation plan provides information for decision makers regarding program improvement, installs a plan for ongoing evaluation, and assesses the processes and products of each component of programs for gifted learners (Texas Education Agency, 2004).
8. Guidance support for students—Provides counseling services to help students cope with academic difficulties and personal problems (Davis & Rimm, 1994) as well as career decisions (Schroer & Dorn, 1986). In addition, guidance programs have ongoing provisions for regular meetings and give attention to the social and emotional needs of the students (Fischer, 1996; German, 1995).
9. Teacher training—Makes teachers aware of the nature and needs of gifted learners (Cross & Dobbs, 1987; Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994; National Association for Gifted Children, 1998) and of how to increase the level, complexity, and pace of the curriculum (Feldhusen, 1994; National Association for Gifted Children, 1998; VanTassel-Baska, 2003).

Some recommendations for characteristics, such as parent involvement, were left off of this list because we could find no appropriate correlation for them in higher education. The nature of parent involvement in K–12 education is different from that in university programs. However, for the most part, those doing research in this area believe that honors colleges and programs accommodate the gifted students who attend public universities and colleges (Boulard, 2003; Christopher, 2005; Kerr & Colangelo, 1988; Robinson, 1997;). Therefore, we felt confident in using the nine characteristics we pulled from gifted programs in K–12 schools to evaluate honors programs in higher education.

## METHOD

*Participants* included the Big 12 universities. These were Baylor University, Iowa State, Kansas State University, Oklahoma State University, Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, University of Colorado, University of Kansas, University of Missouri at Columbia, University of Nebraska, University of Oklahoma, and University of Texas. These were chosen following the assumption that they are similar universities that share many common characteristics including geographic location. Additionally, these universities share characteristics with many other research universities in other locations in the United States. Accordingly, results of this study will generalize to the Big 12 schools as well as to other research universities similar to them.

*Instrumentation* used to evaluate the honors programs in those schools was drawn from the nine characteristics of good K–12 gifted programs described earlier. Initially, programs were examined for the presence or absence of each of the characteristics. This method proved to be problematic since we noticed that there were many levels of implementation in the schools. We then decided to use a Likert scale from 1 to 5 with 5 representing fully implemented and 1 representing not implemented. This scoring system also proved to be unsatisfactory. This simple scale failed to allow us to report accurate information. Therefore, we created a ranking system using a scale from 1 to 5 for each of the nine characteristics, based on the data we observed. This ranking system can be seen in Figure 1. The use of this final method of scoring was the system we finally chose because it communicates more information to the reader and scores more accurately reflect the results for comparison across schools.

*Procedures* in this exploration first included examination of the websites of the twelve universities in order to note the presence or absence of each of the nine characteristics of good K–12 gifted programs. Because some websites did not contain enough information, we also telephoned and sent e-mails to the directors of some honors programs. Eleven of the twelve universities defined honors colleges as centrally administered programs. Kansas State had programs within departments and differences among the programs. Because of the difference between Kansas State and the other universities, we eliminated Kansas State from the analysis. All further analyses included only the other 11 universities.

*Analysis* of the results began with two of the researchers reaching a consensus on scoring for each school according to the nine-characteristics ranking system. Results were obtained for each school and averaged across schools for each item. In order to communicate more information on the results, the mode was also noted for each item.

## RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The means and the modes of the nine characteristics across all eleven schools were calculated. The mode adds information about the ranking most frequently chosen for each characteristic. Nonclassroom options had the highest mean ( $M = 4.55$ , Mode = 5) with guidance and support having the second highest mean ( $M = 4.18$ , Mode = 5). The characteristics of an interdisciplinary approach to teaching, independent studies, and program evaluation had equal means ( $M = 4.00$ , Modes = 3, 3, 4). The three characteristics that were lower were students involved in their own curriculum development ( $M = 3.82$ , Mode = 3), screening and identification procedures ( $M = 3.55$ , Mode = 3), and mentoring ( $M = 3.36$ , Mode = 3). Finally, the result for professor training ( $M = 2.55$ , Mode = 2) was the characteristic with the greatest room for improvement for most of the schools.

These results show that most of the universities are employing program components that are the same as most of the nine characteristics of good gifted programs. Most notably, all but one honors programs we studied did not have any formal teacher training or preparation for instructors prior to their working in the honors programs.

### EXAMPLES OF THE NINE CHARACTERISTICS

Our investigation revealed that some programs demonstrated excellence with respect to one or more of the characteristics. In an effort to provide honors programs with information on how they can improve aspects of their programs in order to better meet their students' needs, the following section describes the exemplary characteristics we discovered in the Big 12 schools.

#### **Interdisciplinary Approach to Learning**

Rather than simply incorporating an interdisciplinary component into some of the honors courses, the students at one school are majors in a selective, four-year interdisciplinary arts and sciences program. The program begins with a broad core curriculum in the students' first two years and is followed by a more flexible course of study in the last two years. This school's commitment to providing an interdisciplinary approach to learning distinguishes it from other programs in the conference.

#### **Nonclassroom Options**

One program outperforms other programs in providing students with nonclassroom options in that there are extensive opportunities for real-world study and community service. According to their website, honors students at this school participate in independent studies, study-abroad programs, special

presentations, field trips, and a community service option. The community service option allows students in their sophomore and junior years to work with an area organization in exchange for course credit. In order to receive credit, students must be observed and supervised by faculty. This program provides an outstanding example of an approach that provides students with a hands-on and challenging honors experience.

### **Independent Studies**

Consistently, when a program formulates its curriculum around one of these characteristics, the program seems to be much more effective at providing students with an opportunity in that area. The honors program at one school encourages its students to engage in independent research with an individual faculty member. Additionally, there are specific courses designed to provide students with an opportunity to pursue their independent interests. For example, an Independent Readings and Research course is available to students in their junior and senior years.

### **Students Involved in Their Own Curriculum Development**

One honors program makes a special attempt to involve students in their own curriculum development through special advising sessions that encourage students to stretch their intellectual muscle and be fully involved in their education. While other programs do not seem to focus on the importance of student autonomy within an honors program, this program allows its students a great deal of freedom in their curriculum choices.

### **Screening and Identification Procedures**

Most schools' screening and identification procedures consist of examining potential honors students' SAT or ACT scores, high school class ranks, and extracurricular activities. While these criteria for identification are acceptable, using only these measures can define honors' students as an extremely homogeneous group. One program broadens its selection to include honors students' self-reported individual strengths, thus adding diversity to the program's student population. The formal application procedure considers the following aspects of a student's suitability: class rank, standardized test scores, required high school units, extracurricular activity information, student-written essays, letters of recommendation, and special circumstances (e.g. family's socioeconomic status, cultural background). By considering aspects other than high school grades and test scores, this program provides a broader and more equitable admissions process.

### **Mentoring**

Most of the honors program websites mentioned that mentoring was a focus of their programs, but one university highlights the mentorship process involved in students' research with faculty members. Research opportunities occur throughout the various curricular components of the program in order to offer students an opportunity to connect with one or more faculty members in the students' department. Another university matches Honors College students (usually upperclassmen) with incoming freshmen and sophomores who are either admitted to the Honors College or are eligible to join.

### **Evaluation of the Program**

There is great variety in the honors program evaluations among the Big XII conference universities. Many of the programs engage in course evaluations, and some of them solicit information from current or graduating students, but one honors college goes over and above the typical. According to a representative of the program, yearly, merit-based evaluations affect the pay raises of staff and personnel. Further, all graduating students are asked to complete an evaluation form upon exiting the program. Additionally, online surveys are available, and these are completed at a response rate of approximately 75%. From these online surveys, the program's staff learned that the number one request of honors students was to increase the availability of upper-level honors courses. Obviously, schools that do not administer these types of surveys or questionnaires do not become privy to some of the needs of their students. In addition to the evaluation processes already mentioned, this university also conducts annual evaluations, the results of which are supplied to the dean of the college. Not only do they already do an excellent job of monitoring and evaluating themselves, but they are currently lobbying for the funding that would allow them to pay for an external evaluation of their program in order to obtain an outside perspective. This outside perspective can certainly be provided by NCHC evaluators using the procedures outlined by the NCHC.

### **Guidance Support for Students**

Many of the honors colleges we examined attend to more than just the academic needs of their students. They also address the students' social and emotional needs. One such program provides students with exemplary social, career, and emotional guidance during their tenure in the program. Their students have the opportunity to live within a community of scholars. This building houses approximately 400 honors students and serves as the focal point of honors activities at this school. According to their website, this Residence

Center also houses program administrators, faculty offices, classrooms, conference rooms, computer labs, study rooms, and lounge areas open to all honors program students. This type of close contact with faculty and staff ensures that honors students at this school have many opportunities to seek guidance outside of the classroom.

### **Teacher Training**

Of the nine characteristics of exemplary honors programs, teacher training was the feature most commonly neglected. In fact, only one school had rules regarding instructor training. Their *Guide for Honors Faculty* contains information for faculty about how to teach an honors class. The first section outlines the goal of the program. The second section is titled *Chief Characteristics of Honors Courses* and talks about restricted enrollment, limited class size, student participation, communication skills improvements (for students), enrichment (rather than acceleration), hands-on learning, close interaction between student and professor, realistic grading, extensive independent work, and instruction by regular, tenure-track faculty members. The third section talks about the opportunities and rewards available to honors faculty (e.g. satisfaction of working with small classes, grant opportunities, award opportunities). The final section talks about how to schedule a new honors course. This type of thought and planning for teacher training should be practiced. It is unfortunate that knowledge of a subject area and generally good teaching skills seem to be the only criteria for teaching an honors course in many universities. These honors students do have unique needs that have helped them qualify for the program. Differentiation of curriculum should be based on those needs.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Clearly, those universities that host university-wide honors programs and colleges, as opposed to non-centralized programs, have well developed honors programs. It is also apparent that some universities invest more time and planning in their honors courses and programs than others.

Accordingly, we recommend that honors programs examine some exemplary program evaluation models and incorporate yearly evaluations of their programs. These plans should include formal evaluations conducted by outside evaluators on a regular basis, perhaps every three years. Additionally, honors programs and colleges should do the same with guidance programs. Particular problems of gifted and other very bright students (due to perfectionism, stress, or other causes) need to be addressed. Regular group help sessions should be conducted (at least for freshmen and sophomores) to help students adjust to the demands of the honors classes. Finally, there should be

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some thought and planning for teacher training. Honors students have unique needs that have helped them qualify for the program. Differentiation of curriculum should be based on those needs. Many colleges have centers or programs aimed at improving instructor effectiveness. It is our recommendation that these centers be consulted in order to assist honors faculty better deal with the unique challenges of instructing exceptionally bright students.

### FUTURE STUDIES

Further studies need to be conducted, such as interviews with graduates of these programs and with employers of the graduates and as well as studies of other universities besides the Big 12 conference schools. Publication of the results of some of the formal program evaluations might help other schools use empirical data to design or improve their honors programs.

Because some of the literature we cited mentioned that students who could not afford more expensive private schools benefited from honors programs, it would be interesting also to know how these honors programs compare to opportunities students have in major Ivy League and comparable elite universities. Students from each situation could be interviewed or case studies conducted to compare these experiences. As yet, no one has examined this question.

Finally, we will investigate the use of our ranking system survey to evaluate other honors programs besides those evaluated in this study. If this endeavor proves fruitful, this instrument might be used by individual programs as a supplement to their program evaluations.

Given that the majority of gifted learners matriculate to universities and take part in honors programs, this study provides information that will help to determine whether these honors programs are appropriate for gifted learners. Further, this study establishes that there is much variance among honors programs. This study points to the need for directors of honors programs to identify what is and what is not effective and to discuss *best practices* of honors programs. It is especially crucial for schools that might currently be losing their most academically promising students to institutions with better, more fully developed honors colleges and programs. This study is a beginning of an endeavor to develop an alternative evaluation system for honors programs that might be used as a supplement to the already established system of evaluation provided by the NCHC.

**Figure 1. Ratings for the Nine Characteristics of Gifted Programs as Applied to Honors Programs**

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- I. Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching
  5. Program designed to be interdisciplinary
  4. More than courses are interdisciplinary
  3. Many of the courses are interdisciplinary
  2. Very little interdisciplinary curriculum
  1. No mention of interdisciplinary curriculum or courses
- II. Non-classroom Options
  5. Numerous non-classroom options
  4. Some non-classroom options
  3. Stated they are there but are not delineated
  2. Unclear implementation
  1. Not available as part of the program
- III. Independent Studies
  5. Essential and required part of the program
  4. Important part of the program
  3. Encouraged but not required
  2. Available as an assignment in class
  1. Not mentioned
- IV. Students Involved in Their Own Curriculum Development
  5. Encourages students to be involved in planning their studies in and out of class and in choosing courses
  4. Student influence on syllabus and reading list in many classes
  3. Very little choice in curriculum
  2. Minimal choices in courses
  1. Prescribed course schedule
- V. Screening and Identification Procedures
  5. Uses multiple criteria in a holistic approach to identification so that no one score or criteria can prevent inclusion in the program and also provides a systematic way to promote diversity
  4. Multiple criteria that allow for diverse learners
  3. Multiple criteria
  2. Limited criteria
  1. One score or criterion for inclusion in the program

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### VI. Mentoring

5. Mentors working individually with students on research and career goals
4. Students are given faculty mentors and many other advisors available
3. Close contact with faculty and staff of the program
2. Mentoring mentioned but not facilitated
1. Mentoring not mentioned as a special component of the program

### VII. Program Evaluation

5. Systematic and complete external evaluation with some specified criteria such as the NCHC evaluation
4. Evaluation of professors, courses, ongoing evaluation of program
3. Course evaluation and survey
2. Course evaluation
1. No evaluation

### VIII. Guidance and Support for Students

5. Organized program to counsel and guide students about personal as well as academic issue with special attention to social and emotional needs
4. Help with adjustment to college, orientation to Honors, advising, and identifying resources
3. Personal advising and informal time with professor
2. Academic advising
1. No formal advising

### IX. Professor Training

5. Qualifications of instructors and formal training for professors before they can design and teach honors courses
4. Written information on guidelines for honors courses and qualifications of instructors
3. Qualifications for instructors
2. Department chooses instructors for honors courses
1. Instructor proposes honors courses

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The authors may be contacted at

[mary.runnels@ttu.edu](mailto:mary.runnels@ttu.edu)



ANNE M. WILSON AND ROBERT F. HOLM

# The Effects on Outcomes of Financing Undergraduate Thesis Research at Butler University

ANNE M. WILSON AND ROBERT F. HOLM  
BUTLER UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

Financial support of undergraduate thesis work is assumed, both by the administrators who provide it and the faculty members who oversee it, to provide an incentive for undergraduates to complete their theses. At Butler University two different academic units supervise this process: the Honors Program for thesis oversight and the Butler Institute for Research and Scholarship for funding oversight. We have seen that the effect of financial support for undergraduate thesis work can become obscured when two separate programs are involved in the process. Thesis support at our University was examined by and from the perspective of both programs over a period of seven years.

## BACKGROUND

There is logic to the presumption that institutional funding support for student theses will provide reinforcement of the thesis preparation process and yield a higher proportion of completed theses. Support can come in the form of summer stipends for full-time work on a project, thesis grants for supplies and/or travel to perform research, and money for scholarly meetings and presentations. We have been fortunate to have support in all three areas at Butler University through the Butler Institute for Research and Scholarship (BIRS). However, until this review, such funding allocations had not been examined to determine if they are actually successful at helping the Honors Program or BIRS achieve their desired goals pertaining to student research and scholarship.

The goal of the Honors Program is to meet the expectations of academically outstanding students in all colleges and majors who wish to develop their talents and potential to the fullest. Through a combination of honors courses, cultural events, independent study, creative activity, and research, the program is designed to foster a diverse and challenging intellectual

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environment for honors students and to enhance our academic community by adding a distinctive variety of innovative thinking and interdisciplinary dialogue.

BIRS has the following goals for funding undergraduate student research: supporting student attraction to and accomplishment in conducting creative and research projects. To that end, Butler University has made funds available to aid such endeavors. Specifically, there are two types of grants available to Butler students: the Travel-to-Present Grant (TTP) and the Undergraduate Thesis Grant. In addition, students can apply to the Butler Summer Institute (BSI). The goals of BSI are to provide an opportunity for selected summer scholars to engage in a research project that is investigative, creative, and experiential, to interact with Butler faculty, and to build a community of learners. BSI students receive a summer stipend for nine weeks of concentrated research and creative activity on our campus.

We believe that the strongest intersection of BIRS and the Honors Program is found in the thesis project—a requirement for completing the Honors Program. Since 1924, completion of the Honors Program (and thus the thesis) has been required, along with the requisite cumulative GPA, for students who wish to graduate from Butler University *magna* or *summa cum laude*. Departmental honors at graduation have also been awarded since 1968. A student may elect to complete the requirements for University/Latin honors, for departmental honors, or for both. An honors thesis is also required for highest departmental honors. Butler has a one-student-one-thesis policy, so students wishing to produce a thesis for departmental honors must make sure that it will be accepted by the faculty of the appropriate discipline. The Honors Program oversees the thesis process for all students at Butler University. For the purposes of this study, a completed thesis for either departmental or University honors (or for both) will be counted as one in the same.

How are we to measure success in financing the undergraduate thesis process? How are we to measure said success? Is success to BIRS the same as success to the Honors Program? Is one form of financial support more “successful” than another in the area of thesis and/or project completion? Has an increase in financial and university support in the form of the Butler Summer Institute resulted in an increase in the number or percentage of completed theses and/or projects? This study is designed to examine these questions using data from 1999 to 2006.

### **CURRENT STATUS OF STUDENT SUPPORT**

Each year, funds are allocated to our Holcomb Undergraduate Grants (HUG) Committee. This group contains a single faculty representative from

three of our professional colleges (College of Business Administration, College of Pharmacy and Health Science, and Jordan College of Fine Arts) and four faculty representatives from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences with at least one each from the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. The College of Education does not send a representative to this group as education students rarely participate in these programs, although they are not precluded from doing so. This seven-member group reviews all applications for the summer scholars (Butler Summer Institute, BSI), travel to present (TTP), and undergraduate thesis grants. There are specific application forms and guidelines for each of the awards, and the student must have the signature of his or her faculty sponsor as well as signatures of the department chair and academic dean. In addition, documentation is required for each support category. For BSI, a letter of support from the faculty sponsors is required. For a TTP, official acceptance of the paper or poster from the professional society is required. For the thesis grant, documentation of acceptance by the Honors Program and a complete budget are required. For all grants, compliance with human subject and/or animal care regulations and policies must be documented if appropriate.

Applications to BSI are open to all students at Butler University. Typically, students participate in BSI during the summer after the sophomore or junior year; therefore, the Honors Program strongly encourages honors students to apply for BSI. Applications for TTP's are open to any student at Butler University who is the primary author of a paper or poster for presentation at a professional meeting. Thesis grants are limited to students writing a thesis for departmental or university honors. The Honors Program also supports students in applying for either of these awards. In fact, students applying for a thesis grant must include documentation to show that the student's thesis proposal has been approved by the appropriate College Honors Board. HUG also seeks the signature of the Director of the Honors Program.

The budget allocated for BSI, TTP, and thesis grants is divided between science (natural and social sciences) and non-science budget lines. There is no transfer of monies between these lines since they are endowed by different sources with specific intents. Currently, HUG is able to support 20 science BSI students with an annual allocation of \$4000 for science TTP and \$2000 for science thesis grants. Transfer of money between the TTP and thesis line for science students is allowed. As part of the application procedure, applicants outline the anticipated methodology of the project as either "science" or "non-science" accordingly. For example, most of our psychology and many of our business students perform social science projects, and these are deemed "science."

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For non-science students, HUG is able to support 10 non-science BSI research projects in the form of creative projects, literary critiques, and historical and philosophical investigations. For the TTP and thesis grants for non-science projects, a total of \$1500 (usually \$750 for all TTPs and \$750 for all thesis grants) has been allocated. Some support for non-science students is also available from key departments (theater in particular); examination of departmental support as well as support coming from grants written by faculty mentors is not included in this study. The monetary awards by HUG represent recent increases in the funds available. Additional funds for non-science student support are currently being sought.

Regardless of discipline, TTP grants are currently capped at \$250 per student with a maximum of five proposals for any one conference and a maximum award of \$750 per conference. Prior to the 2002–03 school year, the maximum award was \$500 per student with no maximum award per conference. Often, large groups of students from the same discipline (e.g. chemistry, psychology, pharmacy) would go to the same professional meeting; disproportionate allocations to these groups were of great concern to the HUG committee. In order to distribute awards over all disciplines and serve as many students as possible, the 250/750 maximums were put in place.

Thesis grants are currently capped at \$500. These grants are designed to support miscellaneous costs of conducting research for departmental or University Honors thesis programs, including small equipment (i.e. paper, pencils, batteries); office, museum, or library access fees; postage to mail survey forms or other information; the purchase of rare books; and other necessities. The HUG committee may vote to approve funds for travel if it is integral to the thesis project. Any funds awarded are to be used only for the thesis project and are disbursed via reimbursement to the student.

### DATA ANALYSIS

How do we determine whether funds awarded for research and creative activity contribute to “success” in the thesis process? For BSI recipients, a final report is due at the end of the summer and students are required to present at either the Butler Undergraduate Research Conference held on our campus each spring or an off-site conference. While all awardees for thesis grants and TTPs are encouraged to present at the Undergraduate Research Conference (HUG may be moving toward making this a requirement for awardees of TTPs and thesis grants in the future), this is not a universal requirement for all award categories and thus can not be utilized as a measure of success. For the purpose of this study, thesis completion was viewed as the marker of success.

Effectiveness of all student support was analyzed between the years of 1999 and 2006. These data were examined in relation to two perspectives. First, we examined total disbursement of BSI, TTP, and thesis grants for the fiscal years 1999–2000 to 2005–06 in order to determine how the award money was spent. Secondly, when reviewing support of undergraduates who produced a thesis between 2000–2006, we determined whether financial support influenced students to complete the thesis project; in other words, we investigated if students who received financial support were more likely to complete an undergraduate thesis. We examined both how our thesis students were being supported financially and how these students responded to such financial support.

In the time period of the study, 350 undergraduate students completed a thesis: 273 for completion of the honors program and 73 for departmental honors at graduation. Of the 350, 124 students who completed theses were supported by at least one award, with 35 individuals supported by more than one award (a BSI and a TTP, for example). In the same time period, 182 total grant awards were made to students who went on to complete a thesis for either departmental or University/Latin honors. These numbers—182 grants going to 124 students—clearly illustrate that a large number of the thesis students garnered multiple awards. The breakdown of the support was as follows:

- 57 TTPs (44 science, 13 non-science)
- 76 BSI (62 science, 14 non-science),<sup>1</sup>
- 49 thesis grants (26 science, 23 non-science)

(see Figure 1 for awardees by year)

As the determinant for successful outcome is the completion of a thesis, our study shows that our success rate is greatest for the thesis grants with 49 of 53 awards resulting in a thesis (a rate of 92%), followed by BSI with 76 of 125 awards resulting in a thesis (a rate of 61%), and lastly TTP with 57 of 149 awards resulting in a thesis (a rate of 38%) (Figure 2). The thesis grant success remains consistently high over the seven years while the BSI success trend seems to be increasing with time (see Figure 3). The TTP is inconsistent over the study period and may not be the best indicator for thesis success.

Matching the number of theses produced to the number of funding awards indicates that an increase in the number of awards yielded an increase in the number of completed theses (Figure 4). In 2001, for example, 16 of the 45 thesis students had some kind of support. When the number of supported

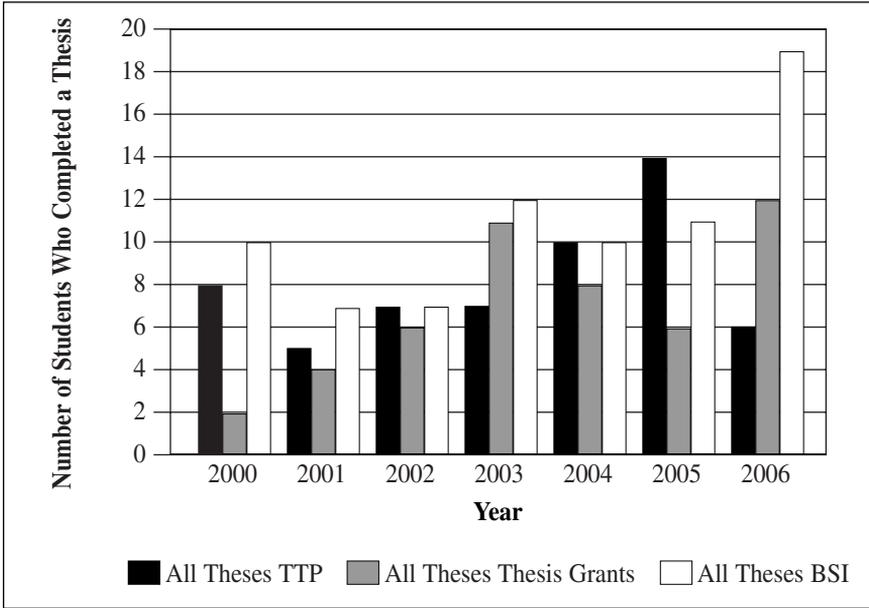
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<sup>1</sup> Ten participants of the 2005–06 BSI (summer of 2005) are current seniors who may yet complete an honors thesis.

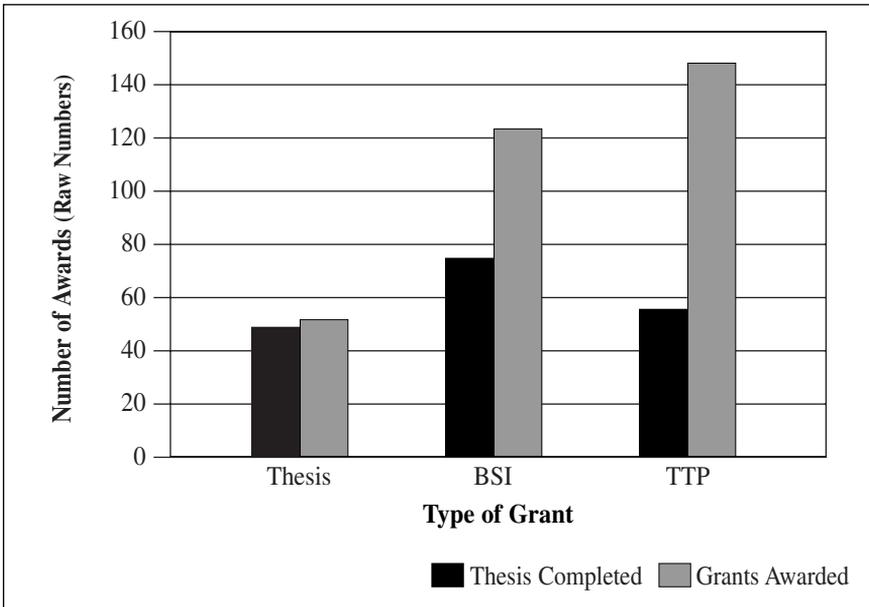
## THE EFFECTS ON OUTCOMES OF FINANCING

students rose to 30 in 2003, 61 students completed a thesis. When the TTP's were excluded from the data, the link between increase of awards and

**Figure 1: Thesis Grantees by Year**

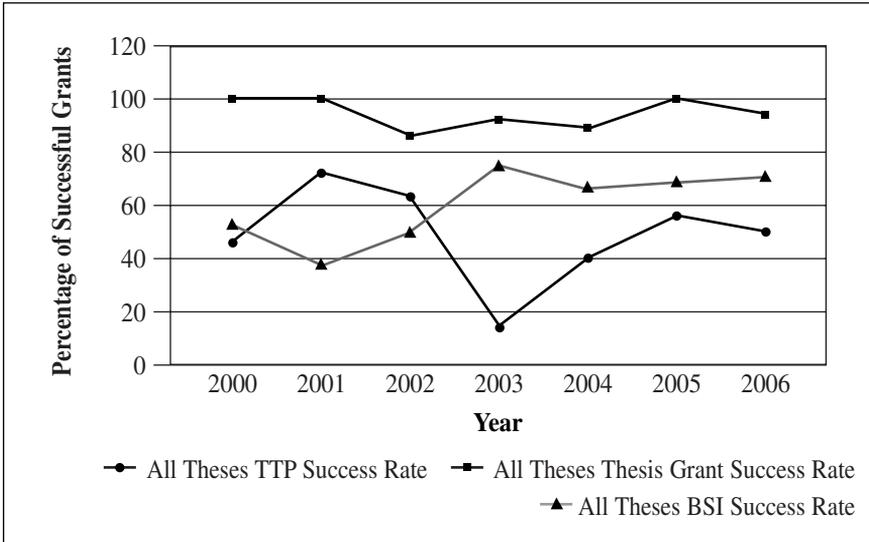


**Figure 2: Overall Award Distribution**

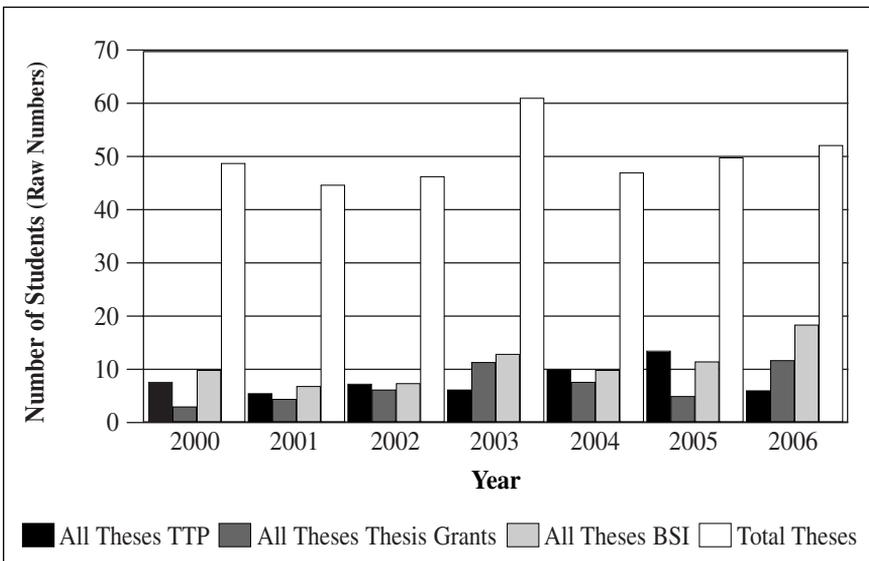


increase of completed theses became even more evident. Upon an evaluation of our thesis process, it became clear to us that the monies that were most supportive of *thesis preparation* were BSI funds and the thesis grants (Figure 5). In 2000, 12 of the 49 thesis students were supported through BSI or thesis grants, or 24.5%. In 2003, 23 of the 61 students were supported, 37.7%.

**Figure 3: Award Distribution by Year**



**Figure 4: Support with Total Theses**

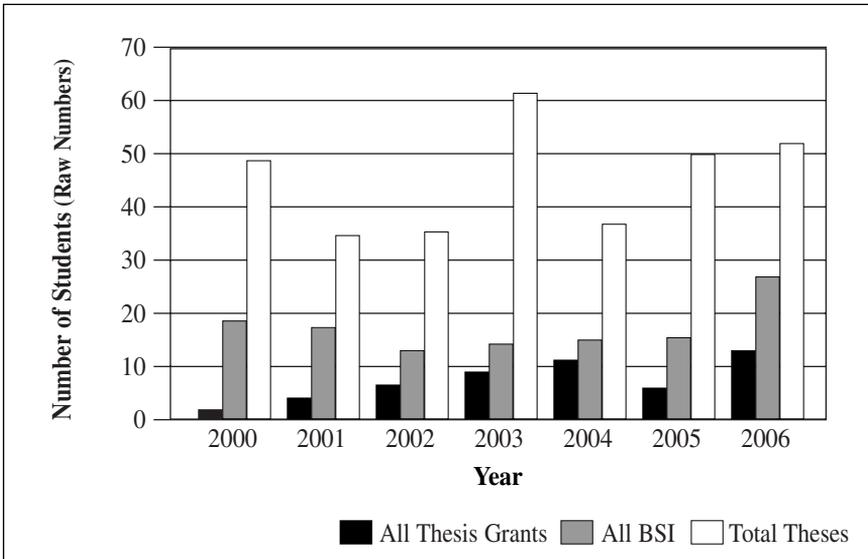


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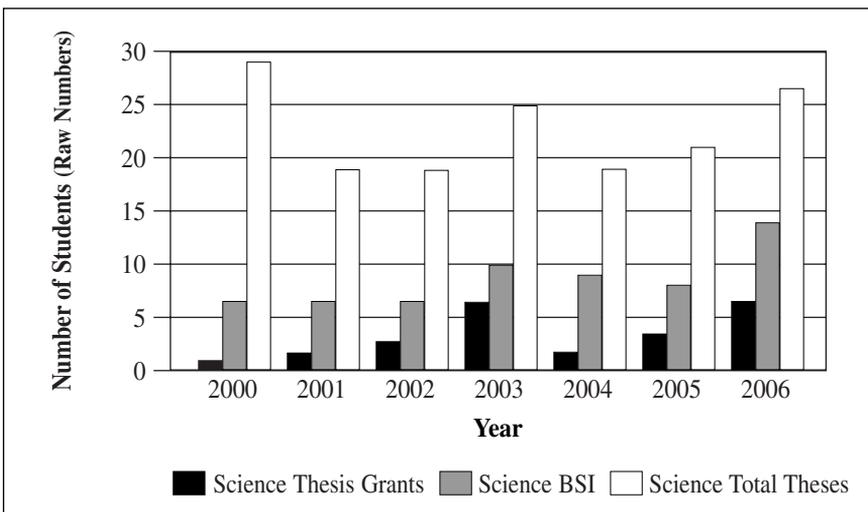
By 2006, thesis support had become the norm with 31 of the 52 thesis students (59.6%) supported in the thesis preparation process.

When awards for science and non-science projects are analyzed separately, the link between support dollars and student performance becomes stronger for the sciences while for the non-sciences there seems to be little correlation between support and completion of the thesis (Figures 6 & 7). The

**Figure 5: Thesis Preparation Support with Total Theses**



**Figure 6: Science Thesis Support and Theses**



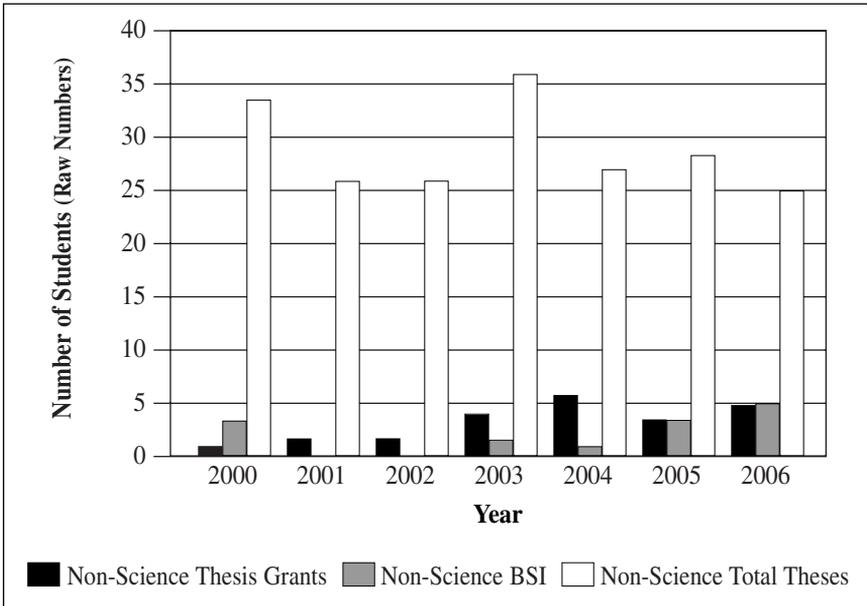
science students have enjoyed a support rate between 47.4% and 77.8%. In the academic year when eight students received support, science students produced the fewest theses (16). In the year of the greatest support, 21 science grant awards, 27 science theses were produced. The non-science students varied from 7.7% to 40% grant support of the thesis process. However, the data sample size for grants awarded to non-science students may be too small since, until recently, financial support for undergraduate thesis work has not been as strong.

## OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Honors Program does not itself provide money for student support, nor are we recommending that it do so. The Honors Program has no desire to become more involved in the dispersal of university funds for student support, not even for thesis grants. However, opportunities may arise where funds for thesis grants come available through fundraising by Honors, and Honors will gladly allow BIRS to supervise the dispersal of the funds. This has worked well for our university, and our students are aware that all student research grants are housed in one location.

The Honors Program measures success by the completion of the thesis while the HUG committee measures success by the full dispersal of available funds. These two yardsticks are divergent in nature. In an era when funds are limited and support of undergraduate research becomes increasingly

**Figure 7: Non-Science Thesis Support and Theses**



## THE EFFECTS ON OUTCOMES OF FINANCING

important for recruiting motivated students, concrete and measurable outcomes of financial support of undergraduate research may become an expectation. It is clear that financial support of student research can lead to an increase in—although it is not a guarantee of—thesis completion.

Some departments on our campus have become very adept at utilizing resources for the support of their undergraduate students. Many of these students do not write a thesis yet have obtained BSI funds and presented results at up to four national meetings. One might presume that any work extensive enough to merit presentation at a national professional meeting should be able to qualify for “thesis” status, and collaboration is needed among all parties to insure that those students capable of producing a completed thesis are encouraged to do so.

The lack of a coherent relationship between support of non-science students and thesis production is troubling. Until 2006, the number of completed theses had always been greater in non-science than in science areas. Financial support of non-science student work has recently increased, and we anticipate that the trend seen in the sciences will also be seen in the non-science areas.

There may be other benefits to supporting student research through BSI and TTP that are beyond the scope of this study to illuminate. Perhaps other measures of success (presentation at our undergraduate conference, production of a project report or reflection) could be implemented for those students not interested in the thesis process. It may be appropriate to explore these other options and seek student perspectives on financial support and expectations from the university. Measurable outcomes are likely to become the expectation for student grants, and agreement from all constituencies will increase the success rate for all involved parties at the university—including the students engaged in undergraduate research/creative activities and writing undergraduate theses.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has verified that there has been a positive link between financial support and thesis production on our campus since 1999. This trend was most strongly verified for science students who received thesis grants and BSI support. Thesis grants and BSI both provide support for the work of the thesis itself. The thesis grant provides funds for materials for the actual research where BSI provides paid time for research activities as well as a community of student scholars for moral support.

There was not a strong connection between TTP grants and thesis production. In fact, in years where there were more TTPs awarded, there were actually fewer theses completed by those awardees. Perhaps the TTP grants

are more a reward for completion of a project than support for the research activity. Neither was there a strong correlation between support and thesis production in the case of non-science thesis students, but again we must consider that the amount of support for these students has been relatively small until recently. Data on the support of non-science students should continue to be gathered; a positive trend may develop as numbers increase.

It seems very likely to us that, if more money were available for student researchers, the result would be more completed undergraduate honors theses. Data from the past seven years support this trend most strongly in the sciences. From the perspective of the Honors Program, production of high-quality thesis work is a priority. From the perspective of BIRS, support of undergraduate research and/or student projects is a priority. Our example shows that coordination between honors programs and offices of undergraduate research (in our case BIRS) is essential for tracking and analyzing such information and for ensuring that both parties' goals are being met.

This study only examined financial support of the undergraduate thesis process. The authors acknowledge that there are other than financial means by which thesis work, student research, and creative projects can be supported. Faculty mentor involvement, departmental support, and institutional support (libraries, research space, performance space, etc.) are all important factors for student success; these, in conjunction with financial support, are critical pieces in the creation of a welcoming environment for undergraduate research/creative projects and honors theses.

The authors would like to thank Melissa Ludwa for her helpful discussions and editing.

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The authors may be contacted at

[amwilson@butler.edu](mailto:amwilson@butler.edu)



DAVID TAYLOR

# Residential Housing Population Revitalization: Honors Students

DAVID TAYLOR

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

## INTRODUCTION

Construction is not an uncommon sight on college and university campuses today. Such importance is placed on facilities that erection, addition, and modernization costs totaled more than 14.5 billion dollars in the United States during the 2005 calendar year (Agron, 2006). Collegiate administrators have come to realize that prospective students and their guardians focus not only on the academic quality of an institution but also on the vehicle through which that product is conveyed (Hanish & Romano, 2003).

The physical environment of a campus plays an important role in the eventual selection of an institution. Students spend a great deal of time and energy discerning the distinctive merits of housing amenities before finalizing their selection (Baltic, 2001). If academic programs are comparable between institutions, any edge a college or university has with its physical plant might sway an undecided student. Of the funds devoted to erection, addition, and modernization of campus facilities, 18% were devoted to residential buildings in 2005 (Agron, 2006). Residential students are no longer willing to accept older or outdated facilities, especially when other schools or off campus competitors are more amenable to provide them what they seek (Whittington, 1974). With numerous options from which to choose, the student as a consumer must be taken seriously.

Students who choose to live on campus have more interaction with the surrounding campus facilities than those who do not. Additionally, residence halls have been shown to have a strong effect on students' satisfaction with their new environment (Forrest, Jr. & Schuh, 1976; Strange, 1991). A study by Foubert, Morrison, & Tepper (1997) concluded that residents' satisfaction with the physical facilities of the hall predicts 30% of the variance in overall hall satisfaction. Satisfaction with the residence hall experience influences selection of the living accommodations for the next year.

Given that facilities matter in forming satisfaction judgments, it makes sense that a new residence hall would attract students. Demand is high for a living environment that is equal to, if not better than, the environment with

## RESIDENTIAL HOUSING POPULATION REVITALIZATION

which the student is already familiar (Amenities Matter, 2005). Assuming the perceived economic viability is high, a new structure is likely to be at or near capacity when classes begin.

At the campus in which this study was conducted, many of the newest residence halls have special programmatic opportunities. A seamless learning environment may be created in a residence hall in the form of themed housing, such as a living learning community (Inkelas, et al., 2006). These communities can integrate curricular and co-curricular student experiences and help remove the division between work and play.

One type of living and learning environment is the honors residence hall and corresponding honors program. This study is focused on the effects a new residence hall complex had on the number of honors program students choosing to live on campus at a large, midwestern state university. The overall attractiveness of on-campus housing for honors students will be investigated through historical residential participation data. Honors program growth will be discussed along with the programmatic issues resulting from this type of configuration.

### BACKGROUND

The description of an honors program offered by Stewart (1980) largely mirrors that of the current state of the honors program in this study: offerings of specialized instruction, a more intimate classroom setting, enhanced student/faculty interaction, and co-curricular activities. Opportunities exist for studying abroad as well as engaging in individual research endeavors such as a senior thesis.

This honors program first began in 1933 and in 1965 was transformed into a separate college. The program has been housed in many locations, most recently in a three-building complex on the periphery of the campus. In recent years, this complex has been underutilized by honors students largely because of the room amenities and its physical location. For the first time, in Fall 2006, the opportunity for homogeneous housing assignments for honors students emerged with the completion of a new residence hall complex. This complex was constructed to house all offices for honors college staff as well as several classrooms for in-building instruction.

The new facility was constructed with the promise of housing only honors students. Prior to this point, the existing three-building complex was designated as an honors area, but there were no restrictions precluding a non-honors student from living there. Heterogeneous housing assignments (both honors and non-honors students) became expected over time even in the complex specifically allocated to the honors college; there just was no demand for their facilities. Honors events and other coordinated programmatic activities

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were still mainly centralized in the designated honors area despite the fact that more than 85% of all residential honors students historically lived elsewhere on campus. Table 1 shows area percentages of honors students living somewhere other than in the specified honors complex. The new honors facility, denoted by Area F, became part of an existing multi-building residence hall area, hence the prior year totals.

Several decades separate the completion dates of each honors facility. As might be expected, the amenities of the newer complex are superior to the older one. Table 2 shows a comparison of the two facilities. There are also advantages beyond the physical facility itself. The perceived benefits or characteristics of the newer building can be compared to the perceived benefits of the existing facility in a process Bonnici, Campbell, and Frendenberger (1992) call benefit segmentation. This process encompasses a more holistic approach to the selection of a residence hall. Rather than looking only at amenities provided, students may see a value in the new honors complex on a psychological and emotional level. The social climate of the building may be more conducive to fostering an academic environment of which they desire to be a part. Participation in an honors college and exclusively honors residence hall environment may create an automatic peer group to ease the burden of the college transition (Rinn, 2004).

A more desirable living environment is what DeCoster (1966) sought to define in one of the first studies of housing assignments for those of high ability. The reluctance to disperse the majority of the honors populace to other residence halls is an acknowledgement of the value of the intellectual

**Table 1. Percent Honors of Each Residence Hall Cluster**

Area	Fall 2002	Fall 2003	Fall 2004	Fall 2005	Fall 2006
A	0.00%	0.60%	0.22%	0.39%	0.68%
B	15.46%	15.14%	12.44%	14.98%	10.64%
C	20.08%	15.94%	17.56%	16.54%	9.29%
D	4.02%	20.52%	20.44%	19.26%	13.85%
E	6.83%	3.59%	7.56%	5.84%	3.55%
F**	5.82%	3.59%	5.11%	5.45%	44.76%
G*	21.49%	11.55%	12.22%	12.84%	0.68%
H	17.07%	17.73%	14.67%	15.56%	9.12%
I	9.24%	11.35%	9.78%	9.14%	7.43%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

\* denotes previous honors area \*\* denotes current honors area

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atmosphere created in the honors classes and community (Angell, 1960/2001). Still, the exclusivity of an all-honors residence hall does not come without antipathy. The segregation that occurs may create feelings of

**Table 2. Facility Comparison**

<b>Facility</b>		
Dedicated	1967	2006
Buildings	3	1
Total Floors	9	3
Capacity In Beds	223	230
<b>Student Room</b>		
Average Square Footage	160	265
Electrical Outlets	6	28
Air Conditioning	Yes	Yes
Lights	1	4
Flooring	Terrazzo	Carpet
Network Connection	Yes	Yes
Wireless Connection	No	Yes
Cable TV	Yes	Yes
Microfridge Provided	No	Yes
Electronic Door Locks	No	Yes
Bed Frame	Bunk	Loftable
<b>Restroom</b>		
Location	Communal In Wing	Private In Room
Shower	5:1	2:1
Stall	5:1	2:1
Sinks	3.75:1	2:1
<b>Common Areas</b>		
Open	6	3
Closed	2	8
Total Square Footage	7102	4505
Flooring	Terrazzo	Carpet
Washers	5	8
Dryers	5	8

isolation in high ability students (McClung & Stevenson, 1988). At the university in this study there are more residential honors students than what the exclusively honors complex can accommodate. Therefore, freedom of choice for the student exists, and they are able to decide if a homogeneous assignment is in their best interests.

The new 230-bed honors-exclusive facility opened for the 2006 academic year without incident. At the conclusion of the first week of classes, occupancy for the building was at a level above 96%, one of the highest on campus. The three-building complex that was formerly designated as recommended honors housing stood at approximately 69% occupied. The interest in the new complex was evident, but an unanswered question was how the new building affected the overall popularity of residential housing among high-ability students. Did the increased visibility of the honors program and subsequent promotion affect the overall numbers of honors students within the residence halls or simply congregate them in one area?

## METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were acquired via the university's Office of Research, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness and Department of Residence Services. Consecutive semester records for the fall term were provided beginning with academic year 2002. Included within this material were aggregated data regarding overall institutional honors participation, historical residence hall occupancy, and class-standing breakdowns of honors students in on-campus housing. All provided information was taken from the university's official fifteenth-day census.

On the basis of this information, the specific residence hall areas that honors students populated were isolated. The relative percentage of honors students in each of these areas was calculated, culminating with the final proportions for each academic year. Over time, the percentage of students in housing who were honors students remained fairly constant (Fall 2002, 7.86%,  $n = 498$ ; Fall 2003, 7.50%,  $n = 502$ ; Fall 2004, 6.81%,  $n = 450$ ; Fall 2005, 7.70%,  $n = 514$ ; Fall 2006, 9.24%,  $n = 592$ ) with the exception that Fall 2004 was below the expected value and Fall 2006 above. To determine whether or not these differences were statistically significant, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed, with the appropriate post-hoc tests.

## RESULTS

Over time, significant differences were observed in the number of honors students as a percentage of on-campus residents ( $F = 7.109$ ,  $p = .000$ ). To discern significant year-by-year variations, the results of Tukey's Honestly

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Significant Difference (HSD) are displayed in Table 3. This table demonstrates that honors students comprised a significantly greater percentage of on-campus residents in the Fall 2006 term. No significant differences were found during the four previous academic years. With the addition of the 2006 academic year, the mean differences compared to all other semesters showed findings worthy of additional inspection.

Calculating the net difference in honors students in residential housing for Fall 2005 compared to Fall 2006 revealed an increase of 78. In that population there were 22 juniors and 22 seniors who in Fall 2005 did not live on campus and did so in Fall 2006. This increase of 44 upper-class students who

**Table 3. Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD)**

Origin Year	Comparison Year	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
2002	2003	.004	.005	.937	-.01	.02
	2004	.011	.005	.168	.00	.02
	2005	.002	.005	.997	-.01	.01
	2006	-.014(*)	.005	.031	-.03	.00
2003	2002	-.004	.005	.937	-.02	.01
	2004	.007	.005	.576	-.01	.02
	2005	-.002	.005	.991	-.01	.01
	2006	-.017(*)	.005	.002	-.03	.00
2004	2002	-.011	.005	.168	-.02	.00
	2003	-.007	.005	.576	-.02	.01
	2005	-.009	.005	.303	-.02	.00
	2006	-.024(*)	.005	.000	-.04	-.01
2005	2002	-.002	.005	.997	-.01	.01
	2003	.002	.005	.991	-.01	.01
	2004	.009	.005	.303	.00	.02
	2006	-.015(*)	.005	.010	-.03	.00
2006	2002	.014(*)	.005	.031	.00	.03
	2003	.017(*)	.005	.002	.00	.03
	2004	.024(*)	.005	.000	.01	.04
	2005	.015(*)	.005	.010	.00	.03

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

formerly found alternate accommodations suggests the new residence halls increased the popularity of residential housing for the high-ability students.

## DISCUSSION

The addition of 78 honors students living on campus is meaningful beyond a simple numerical tally; the percentage of the increase tells a more interesting story. Overall students living on campus dropped between the semester of Fall 2005 ( $n = 6671$ ) and Fall 2006 ( $n = 6408$ ). Despite this 4% decrease, the yield of honors students choosing to make residence on campus increased significantly.

This one-year 15% increase of honors students in housing corresponds directly with the new residential complex opening. There are different possible explanations how the new facility might have contributed to the increase. One explanation is the promotion and marketing of the new residential facility and actual honors program. (Based on operational information given by the college, the majority of students in the honors college are recruited by the college itself; it is not nearly common that students already at the university decide to pursue the honors track.)

While recruiting the incoming class, the college distributed promotional literature and information to prospective students that contained information on the new housing complex. These promotional materials might have caused a slight increase in the total number of honors students, but, since an informal enrollment cap in the honors program limits large variations in the incoming freshman class, these materials seem an unlikely cause of the on-campus honors student increase, certainly to the extent of the observed variation.

What is likely, as Table 1 shows, is that high-ability students had previously sought out other locations on campus not because of their dislike of a homogenous assignment but because they desired a room with the perceived benefits and amenities to which they were already accustomed. The former honors-designated area had not received major renovations since its dedication nearly four decades earlier. With many on-campus alternatives as well as a large off-campus apartment market, honors students chose the more desirable non-honors accommodations over the less well-accommodated honors residence. This pattern of housing preference was altered with the opening of the new 230-bed facility, which honors students filled to near capacity for the start of the new academic year. Now honors students who had filled many of the high-demand non-honors halls before, caused a migration of residence hall assignment. More accommodations in desirable non-honors halls were now available to honors students desiring heterogeneity in their housing assignment since additional space became available. Both upper-class and

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lower-class honors students proceeded to select those rooms when they otherwise might not have.

### LIMITATIONS

The data were gathered at a large, state-supported, residential campus. There are many housing opportunities outside the university but not to the extent of a commuter campus integrated into a more metropolitan or urban area. The locality of the school certainly guided the demonstrated results.

In addition, freshman and sophomore students are required by university policy to live on campus unless special exemption status has been granted. Nevertheless, over half of the net increase of honors students in residence was due to upper-class individuals not bound by this policy. Universities without such mandates might find different overall housing numbers, and a new facility might not face the high demand found in this study.

At this institution, a scholarship for residential housing may also be awarded to qualifying honors students. The overall dollar value in the pool of scholarship resources has not changed in value from academic year 2005 to academic year 2006. However, the total number of scholarships given to incoming students increased by fourteen students, decreasing the average relative size. This incentive could have had an effect on the number of incoming students and their eventual housing selection.

### CONCLUSIONS

Statistically, the recent addition of the honors residence hall complex positively affected the number of high-ability students living on campus. Many of these high-ability students are now living in a homogeneous environment that provides the opportunity to increase social integration. Social integration in turn increases institutional commitment, which has been shown to be linked to persistence (Helland, Stallings, & Braxton, 2002). As previously mentioned, however, the debate in the literature continues regarding socialization outcomes of honors residence halls (Rinn, 2004). Segregation from the general student body may or may not adversely affect a high-ability student. What is unique in this case study is that the institution provided its honors students an alternative. While the new complex was near its 230 person capacity, 362 honors students found on-campus housing in another area. These students were able to choose the environment they felt best fit their needs and interests, and the net result has been the growth of the on-campus residential honors population.

For a senior honors administrator, new construction and/or renovation of existing facilities provides the opportunity to attract high-ability students to the residence halls. As this study indicates, there is empirical support for the

concept that a new facility encourages students to live on campus and can create a more vibrant academic community populated by honors students. For those administrators interested in ways to expand and promote their honors program, facility improvements can accomplish programmatic revitalization.

The new facility also has intangible value for the honors program. A newly constructed modern physical environment is important to communicating the character of the institution (Banning & Strange, 2001). To be awarded a new facility, a functional area must be regarded highly enough to merit sought-after resources. Space alone can communicate that an effective and vital program resides inside (Brown, Jr., 1991). This honors college was successful and respected before the new construction, but a highly visible honors facility helps perpetuate its growth and excellence (Cohen, 1966).

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The author may be contacted at

[dataylo1@kent.edu](mailto:dataylo1@kent.edu)

ROBERT A. STRIKWERDA

# Experiential Learning and City as Text<sup>®</sup>: Reflections on Kolb and Kolb

ROBERT STRIKWERDA  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY KOKOMO

The ancient Greek followers of Aristotle were called the Peripatetics, apparently because their teacher taught philosophy as they walked under the *peripatos* (“covered walk”) of the Lyceum, an area just outside of Athens. As a graduate student I thought this had to be a rather inefficient way of teaching, conjuring as it did an image of students jostling to get close to the teacher, some rushing to keep pace while asking questions or taking notes and others distracted by a bird flying overhead. City as Text<sup>®</sup> (CAT) has made me rethink the facile assumptions behind that image. Maybe walking around in a particular place is an especially appropriate way of learning.

I am a philosopher by training, and “experiential learning” is not a term I would have used when I began as a college teacher to describe my approach to teaching. I have taught what philosophers *say* about experience—but only in a rather abstract way. We have not philosophized about what we have experienced together. But I do like to walk around cities, and a number of years ago I participated in my first City-as-Text exploration as part of a National Collegiate Honors Council conference. What I chose then as simply a pleasant way to spend an afternoon has led to a very enriching professional and personal journey. CAT has been not simply another good teaching method but an opportunity to reconsider all of my teaching.

Experiential learning is a staple of all that the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee does (Braid 1990), whether it is the Semesters themselves, the City as Text explorations at NCHC conferences, or NCHC Faculty Institutes. I was honored to be one of the facilitators in January 2006 for an Institute focused on Miami Beach and the Everglades where my current reflections first took shape. I will continue to write of it as “City as Text” even though several successful Faculty Institutes have shown that you don’t have to be in a city to do “Place as Text”. The value of CAT is amply evidenced by its results; nonetheless, I think it is valuable to situate CAT in some broader philosophic contexts.

The committee's practice has been influenced by the thinking of David A. Kolb, a well known psychologist and organizational theorist at Case Western Reserve University. I am somewhat chagrined to admit that it was only after several iterations of these NCHC activities that I realized this David A. Kolb was not the same as David Kolb, sans initial, a philosopher, whom I had also read. But this misidentification was a fruitful one for me, as I explain below.

The revolving process of learning is a hallmark of David A. Kolb's account of learning, and I will start with that. His account of experiential learning begins with a model derived from the work of the Gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin, with doses of John Dewey and Jean Piaget added. His diagram of the model is circular, with four components or stages. At the top is "Concrete experience"; then, moving clockwise, the learner comes to "Observation and reflection," then proceeds to "Formation of abstract concepts and generalization" at the bottom of the circle, continues to "Testing implications of concepts in new situations," and finally moves back to "Concrete experience." In what follows, I will use his model to elaborate how CAT experiential learning functions in contrast to what is too often typical in college education. (I disagree with how Kolb the psychologist describes the nodes of "concrete experience" and that of "observation." It seems to me that the "concrete experience" of a novice is distinct from that of an educated observer, who can experience more in a particular situation. But that discussion is for another time.)

David A. Kolb writes that "learning, change, and growth are seen to be facilitated best by an integrated process that *begins* with here-and-now experience followed by collection of data and observations about that experience" (21, italics added). Experience may be the *ideal* starting point, but in thinking about learning through City as Text, I have come to see that, in order to understand college-level honors education, it is advantageous to enter the process elsewhere, as I hope to make clear in what follows.

It is vital to see CAT in terms of what it is not. Much of college education stresses what happens at the bottom of Kolb's circle: formation of abstract concepts and generalization. In typical university classes we predominantly study more or less elaborated systems of abstract thought, such as various systems of philosophy, literary theory, statistical methodology, accounting, or engineering. Each major has, I would argue, its set of "boxes," its periodic table of the elements, a way of classifying the world for disciplinary purposes, and concomitant methods for manipulating these categorized entities. Perhaps college educators rightly make these intellectual frameworks the major focus of education. We try to get students to think like sociologists, artists, physicists. Nor is it entirely abstract. We do try to show them

how implications are drawn from these conceptual systems, using both old, staged experiments and newer situations. We train them to gather data, write up the results, reflect upon them, distinguish empirical and normative issues, and finally move back to encapsulate new findings or replications in terms of the abstract conceptual systems—as in Kolb’s circle schema. What Kolb terms “concrete experience” is narrowly focused concreteness.

Most college teachers, I think, have a genuine commitment to their own discipline and think that there is something good and right about at least one of the approaches within the field (even after the traumas of graduate school). We think our discipline’s concepts and methods can be used fruitfully to understand our world better. Unfortunately, I think that all too often our students, and ourselves as well, may inadvertently become locked within our disciplinary frameworks. For example, in my Introduction to Philosophy class, I teach freshmen to think philosophically, and my colleagues are teaching them to think like economists or biologists or criminal justice majors. Then, when I have these students several years later in my Honors Colloquium, they find it difficult to see people as people rather than “observing subjects” or “enumerating behaviors” or “calculating agent cost-benefit ratios.”

Learning how to classify and “put labels on things” is an important step, I believe, on the way to framing experience in terms and propositions that we can in turn analyze using those wonderful abstract systems. But our students may become unable to observe fully or to reflect broadly on their experience rather than on conceptualized aspects of their experience. In Kolb’s terms, such students have “concrete experience,” but too often it is abstract-driven experience.

Of course, our honors students typically have been, from elementary school through college introductory courses, rigorously learning how to put experiences into boxes and learning to do it quite well (not to mention learning to jump through hoops). Many of us have had the experience of sitting around a table with our students in an interdisciplinary honors seminar, encouraging them to “think outside of the box,” and being frustrated at how hard that is for them. I marvel that I thought one classroom seminar exhortation would enable my students to set aside years of education with a contrary message.

The problems we see in our students arise in part because it is hard to follow the simple four stages of Kolb’s model without getting stuck in a rut. He quotes Piaget about the adolescent who ultimately “returns to a more active orientation that is now modified by the development of the reflective and abstract power that preceded it” (24). But it is hard for the student and, yes, for the scientist or scholar to be open to new concrete observations that do not fit into our sometimes painfully learned abstract frameworks.

In terms of Kolb's cyclic model, the problem is not just that some students go through only some of the four stages, as he seems to imply, but that they do it in a too restricted fashion, often circling only within the realm of "abstract concepts and generalization" under their professors' direction ("compare and contrast the theoretical approaches of X and Y"), and we too often have them move through the other three stages in a rather narrow, even perfunctory manner. If we could trace students' academic thinking over time, recording each rotation through the process with a pencil on paper, I suspect we would discover that, instead of tracing a number of circles, our students' learning would look like a basket: a fairly dense container at the bottom, where the various conceptual moves of their major occur, and then a few narrow lines going through the other three stages of Kolb's model—hardly what Kolb desires for experiential learning.

We need to expand the circle of learning and make it more supple. All too often, students formulate, with nudges from instructors, some straightforward, commonplace suppositions from their major courses, write down the results they experience in a prescribed fashion, and make some perfunctory reflections. It is a commonplace at my institution that we need to expand our students' horizons, as if this were simply a matter of increasing the diameter of their thinking. In my philosophy classes my role is often to get students to slow down and pay closer attention to the subject, experience what is close at hand, experience it more concretely and then reflectively. As an exercise in my Existentialism class, they have to observe or recall a few significant moments and describe them as they think Sartre or de Beauvoir or Levinas would. They nearly always cover too much at too little depth. At these times, my students remind me of my children racing through a museum only noticing the big flashy items in displays.

What to do? One can try various means of getting students to put aside their preconceptions and to observe. I call this "decrustifying," making limited patterns of thinking more supple or, if necessary, breaking them open. My colleague in art brings pinecones and flowers to class; the chemist brings students into the lab to do experiments with water samples from local sources—all good, but still in one place.

Get out of the seminar and walk about. Walking slows us down, giving us time to notice, then to reflect, and then to walk some more. And it is not simply walking; it is walking together and talking with one's fellow peripatetic students. A stroll together can open us up to differences as we realize that the literature major, the business major, the biology major do not notice the same things—just like their professors—and we can share our learning as process and result. We become peripatetic friends, as faculty in CAT Institutes will attest.

Walks around a neighborhood or an ecological community work effectively precisely because they are not abstract, but specific. They have rich texture in locales that are essential to rich learning. As the students continue to move about, they notice other aspects of a place, that what seems true of a scene from one perspective becomes less obvious as one moves about. A building looks one way from close up on one side, another from farther away in relation to its surroundings on the other side. The hearing-impaired student or faculty member comes forth as an acute observer of a dimension others might not have noticed. The fluidity of people moving through a neighborhood, of birds wading through a stream, is multiplied by the students' perspectives and helps to keep the group from coming to any premature closure. It is practical epistemology.

A complication to all this is that the students should do explorations in small groups. Two or three seems to be a good number of people to approach a resident walking a dog and engage her in conversation. Five is already too many in my experience. But then the students have to be out on their own without the teacher—without me—hovering over them, giving them that nudge, explaining some key theoretical insight. They have to learn on their own! This complication is not a drawback but a strength—quite different from what I thought as a graduate student about the Peripatetics not all being able to hear Aristotle.

And there is a special aptness to exploring specific places. Plazas, neighborhoods, marshes, and hammocks are, as we explore them, structuring places, not static but growing, decaying, and rebuilding. Certainly that was the case in both of our Institute sites: Miami Beach and the Everglades. The facilitators drew neighborhoods on the maps and sent us out. The groups—like typical honors students—transgressed boundaries and crossed streets to talk to more inhabitants and explore unintended buildings. Around South Beach, we began to see how the area is an accumulation of the layers of 1920s resort, 1950s retirement community, and 21<sup>st</sup>-century gentrification revival, each eroding or tearing down parts of a previous era. We noticed evidence of Jewish and Cuban communities waxing and waning and of the *nouveau riche* now in ascendancy. In the Glades, we observed patterns being laid down over time, recycling. We could discern, with some nudges admittedly, how the layers of *periphyton* altered as the water level lowered, with snails feeding, snail kites preying on the snails, and alligators gathering as surface water became scarcer, as dikes were built.

Although I am in general skeptical of claims about “today’s students” as if they were a different species from other generations, there is something about CAT as learning that perhaps we are only now simulating electronically. The other David Kolb, the philosopher, explores this connection in his

work both using and reflecting on new media. For example, as he wrote both a book and a hypertext on the same subject, he reflected on the differences that the two modes of representation induce. He echoed a CAT slogan when he pointed out that a “popular model for hypertext is: Exploration!” (1998). Aristotle’s students did have one technological advantage over our students: as an anonymous reviewer pointed out, papyrus was expensive and they lacked ballpoint pens, so they were not so busy trying to write down every word that they were not paying attention to what he was saying. I have seen CAT students grouped around a area resident with one student talking and the rest scribbling in their notebooks—not really a conversation.

Kolb the philosopher suggests that much current academic thinking rests on tired dichotomies such as fact/value or “a related but less famous dichotomy of passive data facing active forces, or passive content manipulated by active subjectivity” (1998). In my philosophy classes, I find students oscillating between an epistemic pole of factual truths typically validated by science and a pole of subjective determinations where belief is sufficient to create truths, and then back. They have no good models for what might be in between. Classes suffer from “too limited a diet of examples,” as I believe J. L. Austin once said.

CAT supplies a remedy. CAT is a geographic analogue of a really good hypertext. Both are “edgeless”; you can go in a great variety of directions. “Places are a wonderful topic for broaching these issues, since places are emphatically factual yet also socially meaningful and historically changing. They show us the way we are thrown into already operative dimensions of linked possibility within the process of self and social identity and change” (David Kolb, 2006). CAT involves exploring communities that are not neatly circumscribed, that observers have to recognize mentally not in some entirely subjective manner but out of almost too much material, almost too many structures. They are polymorphous communities; they are mixes of subjective and objective that give students new examples of how to learn.

A motto of Mitchell Wolfson, Jr., the founder of the Wolfsonian Museum of Florida International University in Miami Beach, which hosted our NCHC Faculty Institute, suggests a similar understanding: “What man makes, makes man.” The museum’s collection “encourages us to ponder the cultural, political and aesthetic value” of designed objects during the years 1885–1945 (Wolfsonian Museum). CAT can be an essential part of “complexifying” our students’ thinking so that they learn in a more flexible, active, complicated, ambulatory fashion, neither amorphous nor what I call “unimorphous” but richly polymorphous. Then students can move through the psychologist Kolb’s circle of learning in an increasingly deeper, more complex, yet more flexible fashion. Instead of Kolb’s simple circle or a basket, I picture a wreath made out of twigs and wires, all interwoven in intricate fashion.

## ROBERT A. STRIKWERDA

Perhaps Aristotle took his students walking in the Lyceum not simply because it was convenient or cheap. Perhaps the Socratic dialogue on friendship, *Lysis*, begins there for a reason. Recent archaeological exploration indicates that the Lyceum, which was a little bit beyond the Athenian city wall, was used for military exercises, religious gatherings, and meetings of the Athenian assembly. It had a gymnasium building and roads or running tracks for athletic training. It had some “large open spaces and shady groves of trees, bounded roughly by [two rivers] and Mt. Lykabettos to the north. A series of roads led to the Lyceum from in and around the city. . . . Irrigation channels were constructed to keep the area green and wooded” (Morison).

Perhaps Aristotle knew a great place to do City as Text when he saw one!

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks Peter Machonis, Devon Graham, all the participants in our 2006 Faculty Institute, and all the members of the NCHC Honors Semesters committee for their pleasant fellowship, good discussions, and brisk meetings. He also thanks Penny Weiss for her editorial comments. An earlier version of this paper was presented at Florida International University on January 14, 2006.

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The author may be contacted at

[rstrikwe@iuk.edu](mailto:rstrikwe@iuk.edu)



# **Portz-Prize-Winning Essay, 2006**



DARRIS CATHERINE SAYLORS

# **The Virgin Mary: A Paradoxical Model for Roman Catholic Immigrant Women of the Nineteenth Century**

DARRIS CATHERINE SAYLORS

2006 NCHC PORTZ SCHOLAR

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT CHATTANOOGA

## **INTRODUCTION**

**T**his paper identifies and discusses several examples of Marian paradoxes to better understand how constructions of Mary as the primary model of feminine religiosity affected Roman Catholic immigrant women. Such paradoxes include Mary's perpetual virginity juxtaposed with earthly women's commitment to family (and the sexual relationship implicit in marriage) and the classist elements inherent in the True Womanhood model related to Mary. The four cardinal virtues of the nineteenth-century American model of True Womanhood—piety, purity, submission, and domesticity—parallel nicely those emphasized in the figure of Mary. For this paper, I shall focus on the virtue of purity particularly as related to Mary's virginity.

I contend that Mary as a model of feminine religiosity is ultimately incompatible with the paradigm of True Womanhood. Because she contrasts so strongly with earthly women for whom she is alleged to be an ideal model, she over-fulfills the requirements of True Womanhood in ways that other women could never achieve, even if they are expected and strive to do so. This project examines the problematic correlation of the Virgin Mary with the True Womanhood model of the nineteenth century as the two affected Roman Catholic immigrant women; thus, it explores the implications of Mary as incompatible with the paradigm of True Womanhood and of Mary as a paradoxical model of feminine religiosity in general, especially given that men and women respond differently to her.

The nineteenth century is an appropriate, even necessary context within which to examine Mary as a paradoxical model of feminine religiosity

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because the True Womanhood model emerged during the nineteenth century in the U.S., Mary was declared the patron saint of the U.S. in 1854, and Catholic immigration to North America was prolific during this time. Immigrant Catholic women sought to conform to the cultural norms of their new setting. In doing so, many connected the True Womanhood model with Mary, but this equation was not without its challenges. Although discussing the twentieth century, the historian Jaroslav Pelikan sums up why it is necessary to consider the effects of the intersection between the more secular, cultural model and the religious model of Mary: “Just when the twentieth century was beginning, it was traditionally held that ‘in Mary, we see in the little that is told of her what a true woman ought to be,’ [and] the twentieth century’s dramatic upsurge of interest in the question of exactly ‘what a true woman ought to be’ has likewise been unable to ignore her.”<sup>1</sup>

### TEXTUAL SOURCES ON MARY

The multitudinous social and religious traditions regarding Mary that have emerged throughout the history of Christianity are linked to what are actually very scant biblical mentions of the Mother of Christ. While these brief treatments of Mary are often popularly assumed to be the historical and theological foundations for such traditions, the canonical tradition is clearly not the sole source informing social and religious traditions extolling the Virgin. The biblical references to Mary and the living traditions revolving around Mary are by no means diametrically opposed, but various extra-canonical texts complicate the influence of the Marian texts by challenging or suggesting radically different narrative accounts compared to those of the canonical Gospels. It is important to recognize that Mary’s legacy emerges from a tangled web of brief, limited insights gleaned from official church documents along with rather cursory Scriptural accounts as well as from tradition. It derives from extended, Marian-centered accounts within unofficial texts and from living traditions that simultaneously reflect, selectively coalesce, and expand upon available written sources. One contributor to *Mary in the New Testament*<sup>2</sup> suggests a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in the derived nature of her legacy:

In facing any issue in Christianity that has roots in the NT, one must take into account both the evidence supplied by the NT writings themselves, composed 1900 years ago, and the subsequent cultural and ecclesiastical traditions which have influenced Christian interpretations of those writings. The problem of intervening traditions is particularly acute in the instance of Mary, the mother of Jesus, for mariological attitudes in the post-Reformation West have been sharply divergent.<sup>3</sup>

Before exploring the emergence, formation, and implications of living Marian traditions, it is important to consider the early Christian texts that discuss Mary, both canonical and extracanonical, in order to understand the basis for constructions of the Virgin. Though scholars typically investigate thoroughly issues of authorship, chronology, gospel formation, and history alongside discussions of the extra/biblical texts' contents, I shall focus on information about Mary that early Christian sources provide internally rather than contextualizing these accounts with extrinsic information beyond the scope of this paper. I shall also give particular attention to discussions of Mary in the canonical and extracanonical texts that deal with her uniquely female attributes—as virgin, mother, and wife—in order to establish an understanding of Mary as a prime model of female religiosity.

### THE CANONICAL TEXTS

Mary is discussed in all four Gospels, which collectively “constitute the major witness to Mary in the NT,” but Paul does not refer to Mary by name despite the fact that his writings constitute the largest corpus of NT writings by a single author.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, I shall focus on references to Mary within the Gospels, relying heavily on the scholarly observations within *Mary in the New Testament* as well as in Beverly Roberts Gaventa’s *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*.

Gaventa argues that “whatever the aims of Matthew’s teaching gospel, the curriculum devotes scant space to Mary.”<sup>5</sup> Matthew mentions Mary but a few times, including her in the genealogy of Jesus and in discussions of Jesus’ ministry. Ultimately, Gaventa argues that “Matthew’s characterization of Mary consists entirely of positioning her within the genealogy (in Matthew 1) and alongside the infant Jesus (in Matthew 2).”<sup>6</sup> She also notes that Mary’s only role in this particular Gospel is that of mother, that her ultimate function is to fulfill the prophecy of birthing Emmanuel, and that she is the first figure in Matthew to “receive the salvation inaugurated in Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup> It is also important to note that Mary’s virginal conception of Jesus is mentioned only in Matthew even though the subsequent maintenance of her virginity is not addressed. Mary is no longer referred to as a virgin once the birth narrative reaches Christ’s birth; instead, she is referred to as Jesus’ mother, reinforcing Gaventa’s claim concerning Mary’s secondary, subordinate characterization. Nevertheless, the discontinuance of references to Mary as virgin does not necessarily imply any absolute conclusions about the status, length, or ultimate theological implications of Mary’s virginity.

This issue is potentially problematic because other textual sources, such as the Protoevangelium of James (which will be presented later in this section), discuss Mary as a perpetual virgin, one who sustains virginity through

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conception, birth, and beyond. In contrast, texts such as Matthew's Gospel refer to Mary's virginity as sustained only within the conception of Jesus and do not address the status of her virginity after this point. Furthermore, Mary is perhaps best known in various living religious traditions as the "Virgin Mary," implying the sustained status of her virginity, which is naturally called into question when textual information either does not affirm this status or does not directly confront the issue at all. The issue of perpetual virginity can become a real problem for earthly women, particularly Roman Catholic mothers, who obviously do not have the ability to sustain their virginity during conception, birth, or afterward. This fact entails a critical distinction between Mary and earthly women based on a destructive overvaluation of virginity within the realm of feminine religiosity. Mary's virginal purity is paramount to her role as the ultimate model of feminine religiosity and figurehead of the paradigm of True Womanhood, but earthly mothers are completely unable to maintain this virginal purity to the extent that extracanonical and canonical sources suggest that Mary does. Mary's virginal purity thus stands as an original yet unattainable symbol of complete and perfect Christian womanhood.

If Matthew's Gospel is as limited with regard to information about Mary as Gaventa claims, then Mark offers even less about her. The few times Mark even mentions Mary are only in relation to Jesus' family. Rather than illuminating the figure of Mary, Mark's passages serve only to raise implicit questions that complicate the biblical understanding of her. According to K. P. Donfried, the reference to Jesus' family in Mark 6:3 "gained Marian significance only in later centuries as Christians debated whether Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus."<sup>8</sup> The reason this issue arises is that the passages discussing Jesus' siblings do not definitively identify them as also born of Mary. The question of Mary's continuing status as virgin is not posed merely in an attempt to problematize such biblical passages out of sheer curiosity or opposition. As previously noted, this issue becomes very real when attempts fail to reconcile biblical passages that discuss Mary's virginity in equivocal terms with living religious traditions regarding Mary's virginity as a model for earthly women. Donfried notes that "the continued virginity of Mary after the birth of Jesus is not a question directly raised by the NT" and that "it cannot be said that the NT identifies them [Jesus' siblings mentioned in Mark 6:3] as blood brothers and sisters and hence as children of Mary."<sup>9</sup>

Though neither Mark's text nor any other New Testament text may raise the issue of Mary's virginity directly, the problems noted in the discussion of Matthew's text are compounded by Mark's mention of Jesus' family. Matthew's text does not directly address the continuing status of Mary's

virginity in relation to Jesus, nor does Mark's in relation to Jesus' siblings, all of whom were possibly and arguably born of Mary. The problem presented here is simple, but it has far-reaching implications for earthly women unlike Mary. If Mary was able to maintain her virginal purity, seemingly her most valued physical and spiritual trait, before, during, and after the birth of Jesus (or at any point during His term of gestation), then her virginal status trumps the physical and spiritual capacity of all earthly women. Moreover, if Mary was also able to maintain her virginal purity at any point before, during, and/or after the birth of any children following Jesus, whose personhood and conception/birth could be considered exceptional and not regulated by normal physiological constraints, then she and her unflinching virginity become all the more unattainable for earthly women seeking to fulfill the legacy and standards she left behind for them.

Luke's Gospel might be considered a more promising source for information on Mary as it includes several passages that depict Mary both within Jesus' infancy narrative and, more importantly, within the narrative of Jesus' public ministry. As John Reumann notes, "The Lucan Marian material is more abundant than that of any other NT writer."<sup>10</sup> As he also mentions later in this text, one issue of scholarly contention and narrative significance is whether Mary was one of Luke's living, first-hand sources for much of chapters One and Two of his Gospel. Because "Mary is the only human being who could have had personal knowledge of what is narrated in 1:26–38," some suggest that she is at least one of the eyewitnesses to whom Luke makes reference just before he begins the infancy narrative.<sup>11</sup> Despite this understandable and wishful possibility, however, "the majority of scholars today would have serious questions about the overall historicity of the Lucan infancy narrative," so these scholars tend to assume that modern audiences encounter not the memoirs of Mary herself transmitted intact by Luke but rather a narrative constructed wholly by Luke without direct reference to Mary's version of events.<sup>12</sup> Though this portion of the Lucan Gospel may not directly relate to issues involving Mary's virginal purity and how it affects earthly women, the scholarly debates raise important questions concerning the narrative representations of Mary and the absence of her own voice first-hand.

Christian audiences must recognize that the Mary we encounter in the biblical texts was not transmitted by the Mother of Christ herself but by limited contemporary secondary (perhaps tertiary) and later (notably male-authored) sources that likely sought and received none of their information from Mary herself. Although Mary is to be the ultimate living model of feminine religiosity and to serve as the figurehead of the True Womanhood model of nineteenth-century America, no first-hand and direct accounts of her lived experiences are to be found in the biblical texts. Women seeking to imitate

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Mary must rely upon narratives that depict her at best in a secondary fashion and through the perspective of male scribes of the time. These facts raise many questions concerning the literary representation of Mary. The most important problem is that an impossible and unattainable Marian model of virginal purity was ultimately constructed and transmitted by male authors and sanctioned by church fathers. Furthermore, if the living presence of Mary's voice is absent from biblical texts, then a hazy portrait of Christian womanhood is painted with no clear place for women's lived experiences and vocal/textual traditions. Nonetheless, the supreme image of the Virgin Mary stands as an implicit reminder to Christian women of the standards they should, but ultimately cannot, fulfill.

Another central issue involving Mary within Luke's Gospel concerns the depiction of the annunciation. Some scholars have observed that the notion of Mary's virginal conception of Jesus in Luke is not as explicit as that presented in Matthew's account. As John Reumann notes:

it is not obvious to all that Luke did intend to describe a virginal conception [. . .] This future conception could be understood to take place “. . . in the usual human way, of a child endowed with God's special favor, born at the intervention of the Spirit of God, and destined to be acknowledged as the heir to David's throne as God's Messiah and Son.”<sup>13</sup>

Though most scholars positing this possibility assume that Luke intended to describe Mary's virginal conception of Jesus, they acknowledge that this claim cannot ultimately be demonstrated. Concerning Chapter Two of Luke, John Reumann also observes that “there is no reference to the virginal conception; and if we had just chap. 2, there would be no way of knowing that Jesus had not been conceived by Joseph and Mary in the normal way.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the idea of the virginal conception of Jesus originated, as Reumann notes, in the Lucan Gospel, and the problem in tracing this tradition back to Luke concerns how it was transmitted to Luke in the first place. Some scholars connect the Lucan virginal conception with passages in Isaiah 7, although “overall the points of contact between [. . . the two] are not specific enough for us to posit Lucan dependence upon Isaiah.”<sup>15</sup> Because scholars cannot definitively identify a source for the tradition of Mary's virginal conception of Christ behind the Gospel narratives, they turn to “the possibility and even probability of a pre-Gospel acceptance of the virginal conception.”<sup>16</sup> This uncertainty echoes the problems involved in imposing a ubiquitous standard of Mary's virginal purity upon all Roman Catholic single women of the nineteenth century based solely on unclear accounts and differing notions of Mary's virginal conception.

Since Mary's first-hand, personal attitude toward her virginity and virginal conception of Jesus is not revealed in these texts, it is impossible to demonstrate a simple understanding of the virginal conception tradition so often taken for granted in the later tradition. The issue of authentic voice and representation of Mary problematizes the transmission of Marian traditions to modern communities of Roman Catholic women. It is confusing and frustrating today that rigid, absolute standards of virginal purity were expected of earthly women when the origins and practical application of these standards were never addressed consistently, much less exhaustively, by the authors who gave us the Marian traditions. A more critical view suggests that early theologians and Christian practitioners unjustifiably seized upon an enigmatic and appealing, though not fully or consistently substantiated, Marian tale and tradition of unwavering virginal purity. Additionally, modern Christian communities would come to transform this Marian quality into an absolute and omnipresent standard dictating women's overall cultural participation and religious expression.

Beverly Roberts Gaventa's evaluation of the Lucan Gospel yields a more realistic portrayal of a Mary who performs three separate but interconnected religious roles: "Mary appears as a disciple, perhaps even as the first disciple [. . .] In the power words of the Magnificat, she becomes not only a disciple but also a prophet [. . .] Mary's third role in Luke–Acts, that of mother, appears to be her most direct and obvious, but in fact it emerges as the most complex."<sup>17</sup> Though Gaventa does not focus critically on the concept, origin, and transmission of Mary's virginal conception, she recognizes that Mary's role as mother of Jesus is as integral to her biblical and theological importance as it is complex and problematic. The fact that Gaventa seeks to complicate previously simplified notions of Mary's maternal role(s) suggests the importance of a more critical understanding of the scant biblical passages, particularly those she discusses within the Lucan Gospel. This sort of understanding might help modern theologians and faith participants not to accept at face value the daunting Marian benchmark of lasting and impeccable virginal purity. Furthermore, Gaventa's claim that Mary emerges in Luke as the first disciple holds within it the potential for Christians, particularly Roman Catholics, to dramatically re-envision Mary's typically secondary, supportive, and subordinate roles as depicted in the biblical texts—a vision that might allow women to seek a more authentic understanding of Mary's own person and voice rather than reliance on received tradition that assigns Mary narrowly to a realm of austere sexual purity. Despite these positive possibilities for a Lucan Marian vision, the Gospel of John once more reduces Mary to a secondary role without voice or active agency.

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In the Gospel of John, Mary does not even appear by name but as a peripheral figure mentioned only in her maternal role in relation to Jesus. As Gaventa notes, the absence of an infancy narrative within John as found in Luke and Matthew raises the question of whether we should “infer that the evangelist is unaware of the stories about Jesus’ miraculous conception.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, she suggests that perhaps John thought of the stories of Mary’s virginal conception of Jesus as problematic or offensive. Ultimately, the depiction of Mary in John is limited, expressed only in exclusive relation to Jesus Christ, although Gaventa notes that many, if not all, other characters in the Gospel, including males, were presented only in relation to the Messiah as well, precisely because “John’s is a story solely about Jesus.”<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, Mary’s full and individually asserted personhood is inaccessible in John’s account. Her critical spiritual role as established only in relation to Jesus suggests that, for other earthly women to emulate her properly, they must fulfill Mary’s already unattainable model as inactive, secondary agents of spiritual rectitude. If Mary’s religiosity is affirmed in relation to Jesus, the ultimate embodiment of man, then earthly women must affirm and express their religiosity in relation to earthly men (who obviously fall short of Jesus’ personhood and spiritual standards), thereby limiting women’s direct and active roles as Christians. Though Jesus and presumably all Christian (Roman Catholic) men may assert their religiosity individually, the very personhood and Christian identity of women is essentially overtaken and re-directed by Christian men. For women who define the more social/cultural aspects of their Christian religiosity only with regard to or against that of men, efforts to emulate an already problematic feminine model are complicated.

K. P. Donfried also discusses elements of John’s Gospel that undercut Mary’s role as an individual. As he discusses the significance and implications of Jesus’ address to Mary as “Woman” in John 2:4, he notes that “for Jesus to address his mother in the same way as he addresses the Samaritan woman (4:21) and Mary Magdalene (20:13) may mean that he places no special emphasis on her physical motherhood.”<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, “the address ‘Woman’ has been seen as a symbolic evocation of the role of Eve in chap. 3 of Genesis,” a correlation that would obviously extrapolate negative connotations of Eve’s faults upon Mary.<sup>21</sup> Mary’s character as related to Eve would be further tarnished when contrasted with the previously established features of obedience, piety, and purity she developed before, during, and shortly after Jesus’ birth (depending on which textual account one consults). Not only is the Marian paradigm of virginal purity unattainable in many ways for earthly women, but even this elusive, yet positive spiritual model becomes tenuous within these passages and threatened by the seeming parallel between Eve and Mary. This suggestion places women problematically between two

extreme standards of feminine religiosity. Women should not aspire to the condition of Eve, who succumbed to her own pride and earthly desires over those of God. If Eve's sinless purity, inherent in her before the fall, is the quality thought to be represented by Mary, then this quality seems to have been lost with Eve's fall; however, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception suggests that Mary shares Eve's original pre-fall sinless-ness while, at the same time, any vestige of this quality instilled in Mary is unattainable for other earthly women. Interestingly enough, other passages in John's Gospel depict Mary as a symbol of the church; clearly, the evocation of both Eve and the church present conflicting metaphorical constructions of Mary that modern theologians and faith participants would have to reconcile in aspiring to Mary as a model of feminine religiosity.

This brief discussion of Mary in the Gospel texts does not expose the nuanced complexities involved in assessing Mary's earthly and spiritual role(s) as intended for earthly women to emulate. The passages noted, however, should appropriately acknowledge the complications that arise within these biblical constructions of the Mother of Jesus. Such depictions influence, even if they do not cause directly, often paradoxical modern Marian traditions. The Gospels' collective, interdependent depictions of Mary certainly raise more questions than they answer for modern faith participants. Mary's virginal purity has long been extolled as a ubiquitous standard of feminine religiosity, especially as co-opted by the True Womanhood model of nineteenth-century American Christian culture. However, the historical and (biblical) textual authorities specifically concerning Mary's virginal conception of Christ are far from uniform. Even if agreed upon within early Christian communities, the sustained status of Mary's virginal purity and the implications of this purity for earthly women are seldom entertained at all within the Gospel texts. Nonetheless, virginity has been upheld above all of Mary's earthly and spiritual qualities as a litmus test of feminine religiosity. It is difficult to find a functional, realistic, and practical space in which Roman Catholic women may live and express themselves as earthly women who cannot traverse the fine line between virginity and maternity in quite the seamless and simultaneous fashion that Mary seemed to have mastered. Although early Christian authors portraying Mary would clearly like us to believe she navigated this challenge with apparent heavenly blessing, ease, and impeccable grace, physiological reality denies this achievement to all others.

Additionally, Mary's own voice is at best transmitted through traditions largely dictated by men. At worst, her voice is squelched to the extent that we might admit to having neither received nor retained any vestiges of the true, historical Mary or her living Christian spirit. In the latter, more dismal case, we must rely on male constructions of the most integral and best-known

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female biblical figure who inevitably became, for better or worse, the dominant religious model for Christian womanhood. Needless to say, these inconsistencies have affected the lived experiences of earthly Roman Catholic women for whom Mary is a problematic and incompatible model as the overqualified and quintessential “True Woman.”

### AN EXTRACANONICAL TEXT

The Protoevangelium of James is an early Christian text, an extracanonical source that speaks more of Mary than all of the canonical texts combined. Early scholars gave the text the title of “Protoevangelium” or “Proto-Gospel,” “reflecting the fact that the story takes place prior to the narrations of Matthew and Luke.”<sup>22</sup> As Beverly Roberts Gaventa notes, the text is not well known outside scholarly communities, which is unfortunate given the wealth of information it provides about Mary. Gaventa explains that the Protoevangelium demonstrates “the first evidence of Christian interest in Mary herself,” especially in contrast to the New Testament, which “exhibits no interest in Mary as such, but only in Mary as a character in the story of Jesus.”<sup>23</sup> Gaventa also cites other early Christian writings besides the New Testament texts that show little or no interest in Mary. Perhaps the most interesting and pertinent topics concerning Mary that the Protoevangelium discusses directly are those which, if addressed at all, are presented unclearly and inconsistently within the canonical texts. This extracanonical text suggests that Mary remained a virgin even as Jesus was born and seemingly affirms even her post-partum virginity.<sup>24</sup> The Protoevangelium maintains a refreshing focus on the Virgin Mary, tracing her life from birth to her dedication in the temple to her courtship with Joseph to her giving birth to Jesus.

Nevertheless, the text’s depiction of Mary’s perpetual virginal purity is problematic for earthly women. The Protoevangelium was never officially codified by church authorities for inclusion with other canonical biblical texts, but its portrayal of Mary, though perhaps more sensitive to and interested in the Virgin than any other text of its kind and time, still creates an impossible standard of feminine religiosity for women to fulfill. Even if Roman Catholic immigrant women of nineteenth-century America were ever able to turn to this text as a source of information about Mary (and it is highly doubtful that they could or did ever access the text), they would have encountered a brand of sustained virginal purity they could never physically emulate. Thus, the author of the Protoevangelium spends the time and exerts the literary and theological energy deserved by a figure such as Mary while he also further removes her as a model for Christian womanhood from a practical, earthly context in which all other earthly women must exist and func-

tion; unlike Mary, they are without the supernatural benefit and quality of (or the capacity for) perpetual virginity and resultant spiritual purity.

Gaventa observes that questions of Mary's virginity prior to conception, during birth, and following Jesus' birth became controversial later in the development of Christianity. These controversies emerged both within the Christian community and between Christians and non-Christians. Apparently, points of contention that arose concerning Mary's virginal status (as discussed in Christian sources) stemmed less from the Gospel texts than from arguments over the correct interpretation of Isaiah 7:14.<sup>25</sup> Discrepancies among interpretations surfaced as theologians differed over the variant renderings of this passage as presented in both the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament texts) and the Hebrew Bible (original rendering of the Old Testament texts). The Septuagint's translation of the original Hebrew passage clearly suggests that a virgin will conceive, whereas the Hebrew Bible's version of this passage suggests that she is merely a young maiden and not necessarily a virgin. Thus, the various constructions and interpretations of Mary's virginity in early Christian sources are confusing and problematic enough, and these controversies are exacerbated by tension between Christian and non-Christian interpretations. For these reasons, the same issue of unanimity concerning Mary's virginal purity emerges within discussions of the Protoevangelium as within those of the canonical Gospel texts. This fact clearly demonstrates that early Christian writers and theologians were not in ready agreement with each other over Mary's virginal status, even if later textual and lived religious traditions suggest otherwise. Once more, absolute and unrelenting standards of virginal purity imposed on Roman Catholic women are called into question by the disputed status of Mary. Despite these conflicting textual accounts and interpretations of the texts, it is obvious within the True Womanhood model of the nineteenth century which view of Mary's virginal purity came to dominate Marian thought for a sustained period of time. During this time, Mary's supernatural quality would gain a pervasive influence over and set a high standard for expressions of feminine religiosity.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF RECEIVED MARIAN TEXTUAL TRADITIONS**

Arguments over the status and theological significance of Mary's virginity still occur, and it seems that an overt connection between her virginity (whatever its status and significance) and earthly and spiritual purity has been sustained so as to link these two qualities inextricably for earthly women to emulate as one. Although current Roman Catholic Church doctrine may affirm at least Mary's virginal conception of Jesus, modern lay readers are

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likely to become confused by the various complex, inconsistent, and often challenging passages concerning Mary's virginity. Women especially might be unclear concerning the exact nature and course of such heavenly virginity that they are expected to emulate. Mary's virginity is connected with notions of purity in terms of moral behavior, conventions of ritual purity, or a general spiritual attitude and demeanor.

The inconsistencies and obscurity surrounding her virginal purity, however, inevitably trickled down to the lived religious experiences of nineteenth-century Roman Catholic immigrant women. After all, these women lived in a country dominated by social conventions that co-opted the religious figure of Mary as the figurehead of America's mainstream cultural model of True Womanhood. The women had historically encountered the Virgin Mary within their native religious heritage, but they were forced in the nineteenth century to re-envision her as the ultimate paradigm for the various female cultural roles they were expected to fulfill as well. These circumstances forced women to construct both religious and secular (social and cultural) self-perceptions based on Mary as she exemplified the True Womanhood model. In this process, the simple virginity-purity models imposed on women and the controversial textual discussions of these models complicated the modes and examples of feminine religiosity available for them.

Arguments over the interpretation of Mary's virginal purity within the various texts mentioning Mary might by themselves be dismissed as mere issues of literary transmission and authorship. In the context of lived religious experience, however, these problems affect real notions and standards of cultural/social and religious purity. For better or worse, this purity has been conveniently linked with notions of biblical, Mariological virginity that are often unclear and highly debated. Furthermore, notions of Mary's virginal purity are discussed largely in relation to men and have been historically transmitted only by male authors/scribes. Though the cultural model of True Womanhood separately categorizes purity and virginity, the two are inextricably linked in the figure of Mary, the ideal model of feminine religiosity and the exemplar of True Womanhood ideals. Just as Mary's virginal purity and spiritual submission allowed her to be blessed among women so she could carry the son of God, so such standards are imposed upon subsequent generations of Christian women despite differences in historical, cultural, and even religious contexts. Thus, constructions of Mary as a paradoxical figure place women in a religious and cultural bind in which they are expected to emulate a model that was not systematically and unilaterally expressed or interpreted and that was transmitted by and largely for the benefit of men. This imposition by authority blatantly ignores the personhood, lives, experiences, and voices of Roman Catholic women themselves. Instead, it would seem that

Christian men would be the primary beneficiaries of a dual social/cultural and religious model that relegated women to the traditional domestic sphere and upheld constricting, oppressive standards concerning female sexuality.

Because Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century had little choice between a religious model and a cultural/social model when it came to assimilating into American culture, these complex and paradoxical models complicated their efforts toward social and religious naturalization. Although allegedly natural and therefore expected, women's purity and virginity as stipulated by the True Womanhood model and by Mary herself resulted in an internal struggle for Roman Catholic immigrant women. The True Woman image exemplified by Mary posed a dichotomy between a religious ideal and the reality of the earthly domestic sphere in which women were expected to operate. With the canonical and extracanonical sources of Mary as a religious backdrop, it is necessary to assess the paradoxical nature and implications that arise from the inherent tension between Mary's model of religiosity and the True Womanhood model. Mary exemplifies, complicates, and overfulfills the requirements of the nineteenth-century True Woman, a situation that problematizes Roman Catholic immigrant women's earnest attempts to assimilate American religious and cultural/social conventions, both of which refer back to (problematic) constructions of Mary. As is easily discernable already, this process produced a challenging mode of secular and religious being for these women who both could and could not fully emulate the cultural model while simultaneously emulating Mary.

### **EXPANSION OF TEXTUAL SOURCES: MODERN MARIAN TRADITIONS**

Most living and past Marian traditions have expanded greatly upon Scriptural accounts of Mary. Often communities focus on a particular aspect of Mary's character as the galvanizing virtue of their congregational purpose, iconic veneration, and/or their religious traditions. Marian traditions that arose in America during the nineteenth century help illuminate the paradoxical role Mary came to play within Roman Catholic immigrant communities.

Marian devotion experienced considerable growth during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America, a time marked by large-scale immigration. As Susan Hill Lindley notes, "Catholic faith was central to the identity of most immigrants, but it was a faith tied to the distinctive ethnic traditions they had left. Ethnic identity was symbolized and reinforced by devotion to a particular saint," such as the Blessed Mother Mary.<sup>26</sup> By the mid-twentieth century, however, American Catholicism experienced a decline in devotional practices, according to some scholars. The faith tradition also experienced a shift in ideology, resulting in the emergence of distinct forms

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of Mariology, according to other scholars. This section of my paper will examine selected ethnic expressions (Italian, Cuban, and American) of Marian devotion and will explore the alleged phases of popularity and subsequent decline and/or mutations of such expressions in each tradition as well as proposed explanations for these phenomena. The selected ethnic expressions include: Italian Marian devotion displayed at the annual *fiesta* of the Madonna of Mount Carmel in New York; Cuban devotion toward Our Lady of Charity; and American devotion toward Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Pittsburgh. Particular attention is given to the role of women in American Marian devotion because of the diverse and often contested ways in which the figure of Mary presents a model of female religiosity, a phenomenon that may be linked to the rise and decline of devotional practice.

Timothy Kelly and Joseph Kelly, in their article “Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Gender Roles, and the Decline of Devotional Practice,” discuss devotional practices involving a painting of the Madonna and child. They document participation in devotion as having begun in the late nineteenth century, reaching a peak during the 1930s and 1940s, and going into a rapid decline in the 1950s. The authors speak specifically of the twenty years following 1930 when Catholic women particularly frequented St. Philomena Church in Pittsburgh’s East End in order to take part in the novena to the painting of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, who was “perhaps the most popular religious icon of the twentieth century.”<sup>27</sup> Forty-four parishes and convents in the Pittsburgh diocese were offering their own weekly novenas by 1939.<sup>28</sup> The Our Lady of Perpetual Help painting “was a great solace and support, a power of unequalled value to those in pain or suffering. A person resigned to suffering, or who aspired to resignation, could find no better refuge than Our Lady of Perpetual Help and no better access to her than through the weekly novena at St. Philomena parish.”<sup>29</sup> In 1950, however, participant numbers began to decline, and attendance was reduced to only ten percent of the 1950 average over the next two decades.<sup>30</sup>

Kelly and Kelly suggest linking the decline in American Catholic devotional practices to “a much broader transformation in American Catholic religious sensibility that began in the wake of World War II and continued throughout the 1950s.”<sup>31</sup> They propose that

changes in participation levels in the Our Lady of Perpetual Help devotion indicate that American women’s ideology of gender may have changed before the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s [. . .] Catholic women who once embraced a ritual that affirmed their roles as passive nurturers increasingly rejected that feminine ideal. That they did so in the years before the rebirth of feminist movement suggests that they had

begun to redefine their lives earlier than we previously believed.<sup>32</sup>

Kelly and Kelly seem to suggest that a significant, observable decline occurred in Marian devotional practices with reference both to the Our Lady of Perpetual Help painting and to pan-American Catholic devotional practices. They further posit that this change resulted from a major ideological shift concerning women's views of their own religious and secular roles. Despite these claims, they admit that explaining the decline is complicated: "Catholics all across America appear to have abandoned devotional rituals by 1980, and the decline in this Pittsburgh parish likely fits this broader trend. But most studies identify the Second Vatican Council as the cause of the decline in American devotional behaviors, and thereby suggest that the decline only began after 1962."<sup>33</sup> However, the authors identify causes that may have led to such a decline during the decade preceding the council.

Kelly and Kelly suggest that Our Lady of Perpetual Help emerged as a devotional icon following a century's worth of heightened devotional expression in America. They also noted that the "devotional climate" of the time was dependent upon support mainly from women. In this instance, women's ideological shift during the fifties and sixties might have altered this climate to the extent that patterns of devotional practice at the very least changed and at most began to decline and even disappear. According to Kelly and Kelly, the image of the Virgin seemingly encouraged Catholic women to endure their diasporic cultural settings prior to the mid-twentieth century. Even so, they apparently began to "reject the novena's representation of power" and sought "control in the temporal world," a process that in both principle and practice eventually diverted women away from the Virgin and her influence as time progressed.<sup>34</sup> Kelly and Kelly claim that "only when that 'feminine' role [that Mary embodied and that her image promoted] began to change would this particular dimension of Our Lady of Perpetual Help devotion diminish in its appeal to women, and at that point it would likely begin the kind of slide from popularity that we know it experienced in the 1950s."<sup>35</sup> A major impetus for the shift in women's religious ideological consciousness was that "women's increased participation in the labor force began to enable women to envision a route to mastery over their material lives, and to move them to reconsider, and even shed, those cultural experiences rooted in a less autonomous life."<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, "the present trend toward greater equality and independence for women, implying as it does a weakening of the foundations upon which the prerogatives of male dominance in marriage were based, has led many wives to be less tolerant and long-suffering [as the image of Mary had encouraged them to be] than they have been."<sup>37</sup>

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In his book *Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, Robert Orsi tells the story of “a religious celebration, the annual *fiesta* of the Madonna of Mount Carmel on East 115<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City, and of the devotion to this Madonna which flourished among Italian immigrants and their American-born or -raised children who lived around her.”<sup>38</sup> Apparently, “the devotion to la Madonna del Carmine” has a venerable history in southern Italy, where the annual *fiesta* is celebrated in much the same way as it is in New York,” and Orsi emphasizes that “the immigrants sought to reproduce the devotion in their new home, introduced and integrated their children into it, and marched through the streets of New York behind their Madonna.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, “Southern Italy’s strong attachment to the Madonna is related by and large to the matriarchal character of its peasant society.”<sup>40</sup> Because the Italians of Harlem have identified the *domus* as what “the people themselves claimed, implicitly, or explicitly, as the foundation of their understanding of the good and the basis of their moral judgment,” Orsi focuses on the dynamic relationship between home and family as the cultural and religious basis for their particular expressions of Marian devotion.<sup>41</sup> Because women have been so often relegated to the domestic sphere, especially within the nineteenth-century True Womanhood model, the connection between women and the home parallels conveniently the connection between the home and Mary. Therefore, correlative expectations are imposed upon earthly women that demand they fulfill the domestic standards set by Mary.

As Orsi previously noted, the Virgin’s statue on 115<sup>th</sup> Street “was a visible link between Italy and East Harlem.”<sup>42</sup> The procession in the *fiesta* was meant to foster a sensibility of remembrance of traditional religious processions in Italy, and the annual *fiesta* provided an entire week in which participants could honor this heritage and renew themselves as Catholic Italian-Americans.<sup>43</sup> Thus devotion to the Blessed Mother served as a mediator for religious and ethnic identity. The Madonna was approached by devotees seeking healing and help for all manner of family and household dilemmas, ranging from common, minor troubles to major life hardships. The poor sought her healing for colds and dental problems, and many families sought her guidance over (often multigenerational) familial problems.<sup>44</sup> “One of the central meanings of the annual *fiesta*, then, was the power and authority of the *domus* over the lives of individuals and its resilience to their anger.”<sup>45</sup> As Joseph A. Varacalli notes, some scholars posit that displaying images such as the Madonna statue served “to emphasize the sacredness of the *domus*.”<sup>46</sup>

Extending beyond the *domus*, the celebration of the *fiesta* also helped to establish a bridge between the home/family and the larger Italian community in East Harlem. Establishing the Madonna’s image on 115<sup>th</sup> Street itself was an act that physically grounded the religious identity of Italian-

American participants in their geographical setting. This resulted in a “sacralization of Italian Harlem” because Mary resided there and because the “devotion absorbed the geography into itself so that no distinction can be made between the religious event and the setting.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, as Orsi notes, “By celebrating the Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street, the Italians claimed the neighborhood for themselves.”<sup>48</sup>

The devotional role of women in honoring the Madonna seems to be anchored in a connection between the devotee and the Virgin in a relationship that defined much of the Italian-American community’s perceptions of women. Orsi goes so far as to say that the devotion to the Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street “was a women’s devotion” in that it directly involved women participants and illustrated the role of women in larger Italian culture. Varacalli’s text discusses Mary as appealing particularly to Italian peasant women because of her vast knowledge and experience in “ultimate spiritual glory and earthly tragedy” and because she “was seen as the one who could best understand a mortal mother’s hopes, fears, and concerns for the family and surroundings.”<sup>49</sup> Orsi acknowledges the mixed blessings that the connection between the Madonna and Italian women produced: “at the same time that the devotion offered women . . . consolation, it reaffirmed those aspects of the culture which oppressed them: the source of their comfort was also the source of their entrapment.”<sup>50</sup> This troubling combination of liberation and limitation resulted from a number of factors, namely the ultimate male control of women’s limited opportunity to assert their private power in the public sphere and the expectation of women to bear the responsibility of penitence for the community.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, the image of the Madonna and participation in devotional rituals served both to give women additional space in which to express themselves religiously and to place on them additional burdens of expected action and attitude.

Susan Hill Lindley provides another perspective from which to view models of female religiosity and Catholic women:

The characteristics promoted by the church for the laity were those identified in the nineteenth century as natural for women: emotionalism and sentimentalism, docility and obedience to authority, represented by the church’s hierarchy and clergy. Yet we should not conclude that certain religious values and activities were simply imposed on immigrant women by the church’s hierarchy or by American culture. Particular familial and religious roles for women were part of the ethnic heritage of many immigrants and were embraced and endorsed by women themselves. Religious devotion to God and especially to Mary . . . helped Catholic women preserve their identity and

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provided a source of comfort, strength, and meaning in a world that was often harsh and bewildering.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, Lindley warns against viewing all religious values and activities as imposed on women, and she recommends understanding the traditions as also preserved by women themselves within their ethnic heritage. She views ethnically grounded roles for women more positively than the dichotomous terms in which Orsi speaks of Italian-American women's roles in relation to the Madonna; if nothing else, these two views suggest the complex implicit and explicit, and public and private, effects the Virgin had on Italian American women's roles. Depending on the perspective one assumes, Mary may be seen as liberating, limiting, or a paradoxical mixture of both. These paradoxes attest to the understanding that Mary, even as a simple and integral piece of Roman Catholic religious culture, complicated arguments for women's traditional cultural roles. Though women could perhaps look to Mary for hope and endurance, it seems apparent that the male-dominated culture looked to Mary for reinforcement of women's roles that arguably benefited men most.

The Madonna also served as an image of stability for a people experiencing inner and outer turbulence as a diasporic people. Simply knowing that her statue would remain on 115<sup>th</sup> Street provided Italian-Americans from Harlem with a reference point for their religious and cultural heritage and identity even though the community composition fluctuated over time. During the 1950s and 1960s, *cara Harlem*, referring to the religious solidarity of Italian-Americans within Harlem, began to disappear, but "what continued to exist of it, in reality and in memory, existed in relation to the Madonna."<sup>53</sup> Orsi notes that "continued participation in the devotion, even from a distance, offered the people who moved away some continuity and social mobility," and he suggests that "what is left of Italian Harlem seems to be clustered around the Madonna."<sup>54</sup>

In support of Orsi's claim, a pastor of an Italian Harlem parish is recorded as having written the following in 1953: "Many people who were once living in the neighborhood but now are far away will remember the Church which is associated with the earliest memories of their life, will remember the Statue of the Blessed Mother at whose feet they poured their hearts at the time of their first joys, their first sorrows."<sup>55</sup> As Orsi again notes the apparent decline during the 1950s of "the Madonna's power," he asserts that her devotees will remember her statue. As evidence of the decrease in devotional practice, he notes fewer reports concerning divine graces in bulletins of local parishes, and he states that "many of those which are printed have a crude quality of bartering about them. In 1947, for example, a woman wrote into the church from Brooklyn asking the priests to light one candle in gratitude

for a grace received and another 'because I am expecting another favor.' The fear and trembling before the holy in its place is gone, replaced by a wager."<sup>56</sup> These examples echo notions suggested by Kelly and Kelly of women envisioning "a route to mastery over their material lives" as they gradually discard notions of passive acceptance and endurance in favor of active pursuit of material wellbeing. In other words, women during the 1950s shifted their petitions to Mary from seeking the strength to endure to seeking for themselves material benefits that would aid them in their everyday lives.

Orsi notes that the Italian-Americans who still came to the *festa* during the 1950s and 1960s participated in a very different sort of procession. Apparently, the annual feasts of this time saw "A greater emphasis on order and decorum [. . .] as the clergy attempted to control what they saw as the less acceptable features of this devotion; and there was at last a chance of their succeeding in this. . . . The meaning of the *festa* is interior, controlled, a matter of the heart and not the street. The people have come not to march and eat and cry in the hot streets, but to go to church."<sup>57</sup> He notes again that the Madonna of East Harlem had lost her "power of the past. . . . The Madonna had been relegated to a subordinate position, the handmaid of the priest who founded the order in charge of the church on 115<sup>th</sup> Street."<sup>58</sup> Again, this situation seems to support Kelly and Kelly's argument for a shift in religious ideology that effected a decline in Marian devotional practices across the United States during the nineteenth century.

Salvatore Primeggia, though observant of a definite change in Italian-American Marian devotion during the mid-twentieth century, claims that "a distinct Mariology arose" that flourishes "as strong as ever among the third and fourth generations" of Italian-Americans.<sup>59</sup> Primeggia suggests that "throughout Italian-American parishes today, formal and cult adoration of the Madonna continues to flourish."<sup>60</sup> Robert Orsi explains this preservation of religious expression: "the women in the community believed that Mary had suffered the pains of childbirth, that she had menstruated, and that she worried constantly about her child. They felt that she could understand them because she had shared their most private experiences. . . ." <sup>61</sup> Orsi posits a statement extending Primeggia's claim:

As they insisted on a personal God who could know the hidden sorrows of their lives, the Italians of East Harlem revealed a sense of the insufficiency of a male God. Women seemed to doubt that a male God could understand their needs and hopes and so they turned to another, complementary divine figure whose life was one of suffering for her child, a story that resonated deeply with the economy of Italian-American family life.<sup>62</sup>

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Though Primeggia does not identify a decline in devotional practices of Italian-Americans as Orsi and Kelly and Kelly do, his suggestion of “a distinct Mariology” that arose during the time that many other scholars note as a time of significant decrease in devotion seems to support Kelly and Kelly’s argument of a change in “religious sensibility, a shift in ideology,” though this shift certainly differs from that which they reveal in relation to the Pittsburgh Catholic community. In other words, perhaps what Primeggia defines less as a decline in devotional practice and more as the development of “a distinct Mariology” demonstrates, if not a decline in devotional practice and the support of Mary’s more traditional model of female religiosity, then a shift in the religious ideology and identity of Italian-Americans that resulted in different, rather than diminished, devotional practices. Orsi’s observation of the changed form and content of the annual Italian feasts also supports this conjecture.

Thomas Tweed’s account of the Our Lady of Charity image presents a view of twentieth-century Marian devotion that both complements and contrasts the previous two studies because the Cuban Madonna’s image was not brought to the States until September of 1961: “The statue of Our Lady of Charity that journeyed from Havana to Miami had sacred power for her dispersed devotees, even though it was not the original image.”<sup>63</sup> Apparently, the “Golden Age” of Cuban Catholic history in general occurred from about 1750 until 1850, earlier than the swell of Catholic devotional practices for the Italian-American and Pittsburgh communities. Also, since “most observers, native and foreign, still found the [Cuban] institution extraordinarily weak” and because of the time during which the Madonna’s image was brought to the States, this Cuban expression of devotional fervor experienced a surge of popularity right about the time when the other traditions’ practices seem to have been declining.<sup>64</sup> “Cuban exiles in Key West and New York had appealed to Our Lady of Charity during the tumultuous 1890s,”<sup>65</sup> but in 1959 a large number of exiles and migrants fled Castro’s Cuba and came to the U.S. “That almost unprecedented migration transformed the cultural landscape of Miami.”<sup>66</sup>

The devotees of Our Lady of Charity in Miami connected her “with the collective identity of the Cuban diaspora and the fate of the island nation.”<sup>67</sup> Tweed notes that, though “informal domestic piety” toward the Virgin continued before and after the mass migration to Miami, “organized public devotions to Our Lady of Charity . . . began shortly after the first waves of migrants arrived from Castro’s Cuba.”<sup>68</sup> After a permanent building was erected in place of the provisional chapel housing the Shrine of Our Lady of Charity, “more and more Cubans came to homage and petition the national patroness.”<sup>69</sup>

Women's devotional patterns in the Our Lady of Charity Shrine differed from the Pittsburgh and Italian Harlem shrines in attendance and frequency. Documenting the predominantly female participation in Cuban religious practice, Tweed claims that "the patterns have altered somewhat in exile . . . *men* attend and participate more, especially at the shrine."<sup>70</sup> Tweed suggests that this pattern was established because of the Virgin's connections with national identity: males shared a devotional connection to the Madonna because they most often served as Cuban independence fighters. Tweed still notes, however, that "women are more likely to express other personal concerns and visit when no public ritual is scheduled."<sup>71</sup>

All three cultural expressions of Marian devotion—Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Pittsburgh, the Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street in Italian Harlem, and Our Lady of Charity in Miami—illustrate distinctive ethnic practices. To the devotees of all of Mary's manifestations, her image seems to impart a particular sense of identity, both religious and ethnic. The older shrines in Italian Harlem and Pittsburgh suggest evidence of a shift in American Catholic ideology, particularly for women. Though Roman Catholic immigrant women could certainly turn to Mary for ethnic solidarity and religious and cultural preservation, Mary was also a common source of oppressive American cultural norms for women. These standards were succinctly embodied in the nineteenth-century True Woman, the dual cultural and religious model that often relegated and limited women's experiences to the domestic sphere. The variant manifestations of the shift in ideology enrich the complex heritage of American and immigrant expressions of Marian devotion. While the shrine from Cuba and its growing popularity seem to be more circumstantial and more related to ethnic matters of politics and society, the decades of the 1950s and 1960s are clearly a time of change for American and immigrant devotional practice, if not religious ideology. The empirical data concerning the Italian Harlem and Pittsburgh shrines point to some major, wide-ranging transformations in devotion that seems to result from a common change in ideology. Overall, these three instances of ethnic Marian devotional expression provide small pieces of the overall puzzle of American Catholic devotional practices regarding the Blessed Mother. If nothing else, they complicate previously simplified notions of Mary's role as an entirely positive exemplar for female religiosity, of the general role Mary has played in American Catholicism, of devotional practice patterns in the U.S., and of ethnic expressions of devotion.

## THE TRUE WOMANHOOD MODEL OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

As Susan Hill Lindley suggests in *"You Have Stept Out of your Place:" A History of Women and Religion in America*, three models dominated feminine religiosity in America in the nineteenth century. The images of the good wife, the Republican mother, and the "true woman" described and prescribed the socially and religiously acceptable roles for women.

The image of the good wife arose during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries from within the Puritan community. Portraits of the good wife come from ministerial literature of the period; these emerged during a time when women tended to exceed men in church membership and activities. For this reason, the good wife model was largely concerned with women's religious behavior in all areas of their lives under the guidance of their husbands.<sup>72</sup> The image and role of the Puritan good wife gradually evolved into that of the Republican mother during the time of the American Revolution. As citizens of a budding America, women needed and desired to contribute to their growing nation. According to Lindley, "Republican Motherhood represented both continuity with and change from the colonial ideal of the 'Good Wife.'" <sup>73</sup> A woman was expected to fulfill her social and religious roles primarily within the home by influencing the religious and moral character of her family, but, at the same time, her knowledge and insight could extend into the public and political sector during the Republican period.

Lindley suggests that the Republican Mother model of the later eighteenth century, though integral as a social and political model for women, was a transitional model for women, following the colonial good wife model and preceding the "incredibly pervasive" cult of "true womanhood"; the two later models were chiefly concerned with feminine religiosity as expressed in a larger cultural setting.<sup>74</sup> "The Cult of True Womanhood," the primary ideal Americans espoused during the nineteenth century, prescribed four "cardinal virtues" for women: a "true woman" aims to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic. The True Womanhood model provided strict guidelines for women in the nineteenth century, both Catholic and Protestant, nuns and laity. The model was grounded in religious principles, but its application also concerned all-encompassing elements of secular, earthly, and domestic life for women as well.<sup>75</sup> These virtues were to be cultivated by all Christian women in America. However, the virtues were crucial for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the early to mid-nineteenth century who sought assimilation into their new American and largely Protestant environment(s).

Immigrant Catholics coming to the States between 1820 and 1850 were largely responsible for establishing Roman Catholicism as the largest Christian group in America, a fact that holds true at the present. Among some groups, Roman Catholicism has maintained traditional and cultural ties to Mary that reach back to early Christian thought concerning the Virgin. These ties have also accommodated uniquely American manifestations, particularly among immigrant communities. For this reason, Roman Catholic immigrant women claim an important role in demonstrating the connection between the True Womanhood model, largely a social and cultural paradigm, and Mary, a paradigm of feminine religiosity. In their efforts to acculturate themselves to/within the dominant social model of the time, Roman Catholic women eventually combined Mary's model of feminine religiosity with the True Womanhood model as it seemed the greater American culture wished for them to do. This blending of spiritual expectations concerning Mary with social and cultural expectations concerning the somewhat more secular True Womanhood model produced what I call a sort of dual cultural-religiosity paradigm.

Within this paradigm, cultural and religious roles for women are inextricably linked; women are expected to consolidate their interests and efforts by channeling all their energy toward a directive they cannot call wholly their own, even if this directive claims to combine their native heritage and traditions with American cultural standards in a mutually beneficial manner. This cultural-religiosity paradigm manipulated Roman Catholic immigrant women's traditional reliance upon Mary as a source of religious identity that could be used to draw these women further and further into the cultural roles that a largely prejudicial Protestant America felt were appropriate and necessary for them. This dual model seemed to function well because it seemed on the surface that these women would benefit both religiously and culturally from submitting to both models simultaneously within their new American cultural/religious setting. In this way, the paradigm touted misleadingly its ability to enable Roman Catholic women both to assimilate into American culture and to preserve their religious heritage, particularly pertaining to Mary, who was conveniently co-opted as the figurehead of the American True Woman model. In a more positive understanding, Lindley notes (as previously cited) that "Religious devotion to God and especially to Mary and the saints [. . .] helped Catholic women preserve their identity and provided a source of comfort, strength, and meaning in a world that was often harsh and bewildering."<sup>76</sup> As will be discussed, this dual cultural/religious model for women thwarted their ability to effectively and thoroughly emulate the virtues of the models separately; perhaps they seemed similar enough to blend seamlessly.

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Despite some degree of pervasive Protestant hostility toward immigrant Roman Catholic women, Susan Hill Lindley asserts that the latter “had a unique position among American Christians, for their tradition provided not one but two respectable roles for women: wife and mother; and the honored single life of a religious sister.”<sup>77</sup> These roles, exemplified by Mary, easily parallel the cardinal virtues prescribed by the True Woman model of the nineteenth century. Lindley later discusses Roman Catholic women’s interaction with this model: “middle-class Catholic women, like their Protestant sisters, found ways to use or reinterpret the image to expand their concerns and activities, even as they insisted they agreed with the ideal.”<sup>78</sup> Thus Roman Catholic women, particularly immigrants, utilized both the model they knew in Mary and the one to which they were introduced in True Womanhood in order to navigate their social, cultural, and religious relations with “native” American neighbors. The progression from the Puritan good wife to the True Woman of the nineteenth century culminated in a manner that necessitated the co-opting of the Virgin Mary as a model of female piety in order for Roman Catholic women to thrive in America and successfully assimilate dominant cultural value systems of the time.

This dual cultural/religious model also raised issues of male versus female spirituality, sparking debates over innate and cultivated religiosity that continue today. Over the course of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, popular cultural and religious views of women’s spirituality changed dramatically. As Lindley discusses, the view of women as the spiritually weaker sex descended from the sinful Eve fully evolved into the view of women as innately more spiritual and moral. Although some Puritan leaders went so far as to assert that women’s gender-specific experiences (of sexuality and reproduction) made them naturally more likely to participate in and respond to religious devotion, it was not until the advent of the “true woman” image that women *as women* became more devout.

The notions of submissiveness and domesticity, as Lindley notes, were not new standards for the nineteenth-century woman. But the notions of piety and purity ascribed to her are newer and more far-reaching in their implications for women. In adapting to American culture and the national True Woman ideal, immigrant Roman Catholic women learned notions of natural piety and purity that would have immediately and understandably evoked the image of Mary. Aspiring to emulate the Virgin Mary as an example of these cardinal virtues would have allowed these women to distinguish themselves from Eve’s model of feminine religiosity—that of disobedience, moral impurity, and impiety. In this way, immigrant Catholic women could conform to dominant religious standards in a manner that preserved their religious heritage, particularly elements of Marian devotion, while also satisfying the

social and cultural standards of nineteenth-century America. This process entailed both benefits and risks for these women. Though preserved Marian traditions, the figure of Mary herself was manipulated as a sort of convenient pawn within American culture's move to put women in their place via the True Womanhood model.

The notion of purity was especially important for these women not only because it was one of the four cardinal virtues of True Womanhood but also because it was the motivation for and result of Mary's virginity. Barbara Welter, in her seminal article on "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," discusses the importance of purity for American women of the time: "Purity was as essential as piety to a young woman, its absence as unnatural and unfeminine. Without it she was in fact, no woman at all, but a member of some lower order."<sup>79</sup> Just as the religious virtues of women may be tested by earthly immorality and satanic influences, so women's purity may be threatened, even assaulted, by men's innate, voracious sexual drives and desires. In this way, the piety modeled by Mary and the purity extolled in the True Woman combined to women's seeming advantage; together these virtues and the models that best illustrated them could help Roman Catholic women define and defend themselves. This empowered women to affirm their religious identity and to seek a distinctive American identity that seemingly combined the best of both their native traditions and new American cultural standards.

### **MARY AS PARADOXICAL AND INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE MODEL OF THE "TRUE WOMAN"**

To view Mary as paradoxical and incompatible with the model of the "True Woman" is exploratory in nature and based in part on criticism written in the twenty-first century. This understanding results from rhetorical analysis, relying on historical and ethnographic insight when available. Because primary sources from Roman Catholic immigrant women have been nearly impossible to locate, it might seem as if this paper leaves as little room for their voices as some of the texts previously noted leave for Mary's own voice. The lack of such primary sources stems in part from the fact that women religious (nuns) were the only Roman Catholic women of the nineteenth century who had the time, energy, and justification for recording personal testimonies and memoirs. This fact attests all the more to the challenging situations in which lay immigrant women found themselves. They had families to care for and domestic responsibilities to fulfill while women religious were privileged to have more individual and collective spiritual matters as their primary concern in life. Nonetheless, I do not wish to squelch lay women's voices, which are already limited in number and difficult to transmit

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effectively. My analysis may appear to force upon these women a personal, cultural, social, and religious consciousness they may very well not have had the ability or inclination to cultivate. I have not found any sustained examination of how the religious paradigm and the social/cultural paradigm came together for women despite several ethnographic sources that briefly discuss Mary and the True Womanhood model in relation to one another. My sources often acknowledge the paradoxical application of both models for women but tend to treat the issue as a small part of a larger struggle for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century.

For this reason, much of the following section will expand on limited conversations about Marian paradoxes that appear in cited source materials. This section is intended only to conjecture about a more complete picture of the myriad challenges faced by these immigrant women. Much more work could and should be conducted on this topic, using primary sources from nineteenth-century Roman Catholic immigrant women themselves. This study is but the first step toward an adequate analysis of two fundamental and tangible issues concerning the real-life situations of these women and the models they were expected to fulfill.

First, as already discussed in the extra/canonical source section, it is critical to understand that the biblical portraits of Mary that have dominated many Marian traditions scantily and inconsistently portray a Mary whose virginity seems crucial to her heavenly and earthly status but is ambiguously denoted, defined and extrapolated as a model for all other women. The very fact that Mary is “a simple heroine who left no diaries or personal testimonies”<sup>80</sup> strongly suggests a basic problem of voice: Mary is to be the ultimate religious (and social/cultural) model for earthly women, yet she herself in no way communicates the origin and significance of the qualities that earned her all her various titles and praise. This issue of voice is reflected to some degree in one study conducted by Colleen McDannell. Discussing Catholic women’s literary writings and publications within a nineteenth-century context, McDannell notes that “Catholic women, although they produced devotional poetry, analytical articles, and domestic fiction, rarely presented their own religious attitudes.”<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the equivocal depictions of Mary’s biblical virginity beg critical questions for earthly women. They leave them with no clear answers as to the exact content and duration of Mary’s virginal purity. Moreover, while the principle of Mary’s virginity is widely accepted and known, it seems easier for earthly women to articulate than to emulate.

Second, the True Womanhood model of the nineteenth century presented a dilemma for women whether viewed in conjunction with the Marian paradigm or not. Mixing virginal purity with expectations of fertility within

marriage further complicates an already circumstantially problematic situation. Marriage and sexual submission within that sacrament were in stark contrast with the virtue of sustained purity within the True Womanhood model. Virginal purity was expected of women prior to marriage, and they were expected eventually to marry and produce children. This tension created a fundamental dilemma for women: no segue or solid bridge was provided in transition from one to the other. Virginal purity was necessary and expected, just as was marriage, but the two logistically cannot coincide. This conflict creates a problem for women: virginity and marriage are mutually exclusive. Furthermore, this reality pits earthly women against Mary, who is extolled for apparently maintaining her virginity and maternity.

Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century may never have expressly acknowledged, understood, and dealt with these issues of Marian paradox as someone from a contemporary context might do. However, these paradoxes are inherently fixed in the biblical passages portraying Mary, in discourses theologizing Mary, and in other sources that have no clear connection to Mary herself. On a basic level, there are problems concerning both the True Womanhood model and constructions of Mary, so it is understandable that the union of the two for the interests of Roman Catholic immigrant women seeking to adapt to American culture, society, and religious norms would create only further problems.

As noted earlier, constructions of Mary's virginity provide the most complex set of paradoxical religious and cultural norms for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century and even for such women today. Theologies and doctrines that emphasize Mary's virginity filtered through the True Womanhood model codify her virginity in terms of both institutionalized religious requirements and American socio-cultural requirements for women. Despite the unclear and inconsistent nature of biblical texts regarding Mary, virginity is often claimed as a sort of prerequisite for women's ultimate spiritual development and immigrant women's efforts to exemplify the American True Woman. Hence, it is imperative to examine the implications of Mary's paradoxical virginity for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century. My purpose is to better understand how the figure of Mary influenced them and fit into both their secular and religious lives.

### **VIRGINITY JUXTAPOSED WITH MATERNITY: ETHNOGRAPHY, HISTORY, AND RELIGIOSITY**

In order to connect constructions of Mary's virginity in official (Roman Catholic) church documents, such as the papal encyclicals, with the virginal purity characteristic of the True Womanhood model, we must turn to ethnographic, historical, and religious studies of scholars who specialize in

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nineteenth-century Roman Catholic beliefs and practices in America. As Ann Taves notes, “Marian devotions [of the mid-nineteenth century] focused on Mary as simultaneously symbol of purity (virgin, immaculately conceived) and fertility (mother-hood) and as grace-filled mediator.”<sup>82</sup> In support of this notion, Robert Orsi’s research on the Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street and other ethnographic studies previously cited demonstrate that a complicated Marian paradigm was indeed constructed for women within nineteenth-century Roman Catholic devotional practices. These more localized examples illustrate the problematic constructions found within the rhetoric of the papal encyclicals. Mary was presented within multiple contexts as a mixed metaphor of sexual purity and of fertility. An unquestioning responsibility to family was also thrown into the mix of rigid expectations for Catholic women.

Taves also notes a further complication for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the mid-nineteenth century. Because these women seemed more inclined to Marian devotional practices than men, they were all the more susceptible to and accepting of the multiple conflicting models of feminine religiosity presented therein. Taves discusses this complex, nuanced situation:

At a time when women spent most of their lives enmeshed in family relationships, such devotions may have provided a source of solace and a means of repressing resentments about their familial relationships and responsibilities. The relational character of the devotions, their emphasis on obedience and devotion to idealized supernatural patrons, and their tendency to evoke feelings of dependence corresponds closely to the stereotypically “feminine” role which nineteenth-century women were expected to assume in marriage.<sup>83</sup>

Taves’s exploration of the patterns of women’s Marian devotion alludes to the True Womanhood model of the nineteenth century, which dictated this “stereotypically ‘feminine’ role [. . .] women were expected to assume in marriage.” In this way, Roman Catholic doctrine combined with American cultural standards to construct an ideal represented by the figure of Mary that was then imposed upon these immigrant women and manifested in their lived religious traditions. In other words, the emphasis of nineteenth-century Marian devotions went hand-in-hand with the more social/cultural standards of the time, both of which focused on purity and virginity as dominant modes of women’s religiosity and general personhood. This melding may have benefited some men and women as they sought cultural and religious conformity and status. It is understandable that immigrant women attempted to satisfy a multitude of religious and cultural standards by aspiring to Mary in order to assimilate to American conventions. However, her pure virginity leaves

essentially no room for the physical and sexual identities Roman Catholic immigrant women assumed as earthly women conforming both to social/cultural standards of that time and to traditional religious roles as pious, dedicated mothers and wives. This combination of roles implicitly challenged and negated the status of virginity.

Mary F. Foskett notes in her article “Virginity as Purity”:

Whereas a married Jewish woman can be expected to engage in sexual intercourse with her husband without compromising her sexual purity, Mary clearly cannot. Her virginity is absolute—the liminality of her sexual status is removed. An end in itself, Mary’s virginity appears to signal a particular kind of purity.<sup>84</sup>

Foskett notes further a major departure of Mary’s “brand” of virginity from that available to earthly women. She argues that “Mary emerges less as a moral agent who must actively resist threats to her virginity and more as a sacred object that is dedicated to the Lord, celebrated by the people and protected (mostly) by men. She resembles more a cult object than a priestess in whose care the sacred things are placed.”<sup>85</sup> Foskett’s observations are profound and seductive but need some unpacking. Foskett’s comparison of Mary to a married Jewish woman shows Mary to be a sort of one-of-a-kind, unattainable model of virginal purity. The Jewish woman (or, indeed, any married woman) is expected to engage in sexual intercourse as both a wife and potentially procreative being; this action and identity are expected and socially/religiously sanctioned but in conflict with a sustained notion of purity as defined solely by virginity. Furthermore, “Mary’s virginity signals a particular kind of purity” because her sexual limits are removed. In essence, Mary ceases to reside upon the ambivalent line between virginal purity and expected, natural sexual engagement because her sexual status itself is removed, thereby removing any limits associated with this status. Even if earthly women remain virginally pure, they, unlike Mary, do not have a physical choice to remove from their sexual potential.

Foskett’s second observation is particularly problematic because none of its nuanced implications bode well for women. Even Roman Catholic women who may have had more “moral” agency than Mary must endure and sustain themselves through threats to their virginity, the sacred object placed in their care. If this agency is interpreted as a positive, even empowering notion, then the real reason for respect afforded to these women is disembodied from them and commodified in the object of sexual purity. This disembodiment serves both to confuse the real, physical sexual expectations placed upon women and, paradoxically, to hold them responsible for an

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object that will eventually be sacrificed in the course of nature. Even if this agency is to be celebrated among earthly women, their inescapable carnality inevitably separates them from their ultimate paradigmatic figure. Foskett's notion of Mary as a sacred object also reduces any vestiges of Mary's humanity, with which earthly women might feel connected, to an objectified sexual quality that is disembodied even from her. Even Mary's prized virginity and personhood are protected mostly by men, thereby further reducing female agency and female religious identity. This formula distances Mary, her virginity, and also the problematic relationship between earthly virginity and fertility from Roman Catholic women on many levels, serving to disempower them and provide overly complex and unattainable models of feminine religiosity. Furthermore, this formula objectifies women's sexuality and then places it in the protection of the very men who also might threaten and assault the virginal purity of women. According to Mary's example, Roman Catholic women are expected both to trust and distrust men, who subsume within themselves the agency denied women and then mount allegedly natural, impulsive attacks on women's defenseless, yet crucial, sexual purity. Each complex and convoluted layer of this scenario disenfranchises women. Although they are touted as privileged and blessed by their virginal purity, these women's prized quality will ultimately be either stolen by ravenous men<sup>86</sup> or destroyed by their husbands in marriages that replace virginity with maternity.

In reconnecting Mary's problematic virginity with the True Womanhood model of the nineteenth century, it is important to return to Barbara Welter's argument concerning the paradox of virginity and fertility: "Purity, considered as a moral imperative, set up a dilemma which was hard to resolve. Woman must preserve her virtue until marriage and marriage was necessary for her happiness. Yet marriage was, literally, an end to innocence. She was told not to question this dilemma, but simply to accept it."<sup>87</sup> Here one can see a direct correlation between the inherent paradoxes of the True Womanhood model and the virtues extolled in Mary noted by Taves. The cultural/social model and religious model in and of themselves are in conflict. Roman Catholic immigrant women sought to merge their normative religious tradition (Mary included) with new American cultural standards in order to adapt more easily to the dominant societal norms. However, the dominant paradigms these models offered were complicated. Roman Catholic women could turn to Mary for solace in troubling times, but they could never fully exemplify the extreme, heavenly, and disembodied virginal purity for which she is extolled. Nonetheless, the True Womanhood model, combining both social/cultural and religious norms, highlights Mary as an ultimate exemplar. The True Woman herself must deal with conflicting, simultaneous pulls of

virginity and fertility, and Mary's rather de-humanized example of virginity leaves little to no room for women to be human. These institutionalized standards of virginal purity seem to have kept women of the time in an endless cycle in which they could never quite succeed, for Mary is both Queen of Heaven and an unattainable model that eludes earthly women.

### **THE CLASSIST NATURE OF TRUE WOMANHOOD MODEL EXEMPLIFIED BY MARY**

One might expect that the Marian paradox of virginal purity and simultaneous fertility would have caused nineteenth-century Roman Catholic immigrant women to increase family sizes. After all, this would be a natural result of adhering to a model that they could fulfill only in this manner (as opposed to emulating Mary's brand of virginal purity). The immigrant status of these women, however, strongly affected their socio-economic standing within an increasingly industrialized nation shaped by a middle-class standard of living. According to Colleen McDannell,

The nineteenth century also saw the decline of the large American family. In 1800 the average number of children born to a woman before she reached menopause was 7.04. By mid-century, this number dropped by 23 percent to 5.42, and by the end of the century, to 3.56.<sup>88</sup>

The fact that family sizes decreased is, according to several scholars, evidence that these women, handicapped by the classism of American culture, could not fulfill all the various, conflicting standards imposed upon them by religious figures extolling Mary and social/cultural figures extolling the True Woman. Immigrant women particularly were disadvantaged socially and economically and therefore did not have the time, energy, desire, or ability to pursue these problematic cultural-religious paradigms. Privileged, upper-class women could obviously not fulfill simultaneous standards of virginity and maternity either, but at least some of them benefited from economic resources that allowed them more time for personal spiritual development and the pursuit of such lofty ideals. For lower-class immigrant women, the socio-economic realities of American life during the nineteenth century did little to accommodate a pursuit of divine standards for women.

As Susan Hill Lindley notes:

In its typical and most limiting form, the cult of True Womanhood was inherently class-biased. Immigrant women surely valued home and family and their roles therein, but few had the luxury of full-time domesticity, and their own ethnic

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traditions about female roles within the family did not necessarily fit an American cultural ideal. Furthermore, middle-class Catholic women, like their Protestant sisters, found ways to use or reinterpret the image to expand their concerns and activities, even as they insisted they agreed with the ideal.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, the inherently classist elements of the True Womanhood model, especially in combination with the paradoxes of the Marian paradigm, can be understood as profoundly problematic for Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century.

### **CONCLUSION: THE IMPLICATIONS OF MARY'S INCOMPATIBILITY WITH THE MODEL OF THE "TRUE WOMAN"**

"Women found the Madonna's azure cloak, so ceremoniously draped over their shoulders, a heavy one."

—Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*

Ultimately, Mary is highly overqualified for the nineteenth-century True Womanhood model and thus incompatible with the True Womanhood model. Mary represents the culmination of complementary religious and cultural ideals, but these ideals are wholly contradictory in practice for all other women. As figurehead of the dual paradigm of religiosity and True Womanhood, Mary offers a model for nineteenth-century Roman Catholic immigrant women that they could pursue but never fulfill. It is most important to note simply and straightforwardly that women cannot emulate Mary's simultaneous virginity and maternity. Because Mary's virginal purity seems to be the singular quality that allows her to carry Jesus, this same quality has been expected of other women in order for them to fulfill both their earthly and spiritual roles. However, because earthly women can in no way be both virgin and mother at the same time, a situation unfolds for them in which they cannot achieve on earth what they are allegedly expected to aspire to in heaven. Even if the social/cultural model of the True Woman is understood as more practical and immediately achievable for women, this model is still problematic and is represented, especially in its religious elements, by Mary herself. Mary and the True Woman are incompatible with the lives of women and with each other.

Many scholars discuss the tendency for men to perform devotions to the Virgin Mary more often than women during the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Though they document this phenomenon as a casual observation, it seems to me that this tendency was probably linked directly to Mary's serving as an overqualified model of Christian womanhood.

Though Mary was important to women devotees, the paradoxical model she provided for them complicated many aspects of their material/physical and spiritual lives. However, because the figure of Mary is constructed in the biblical texts and in Christian sources such as the papal encyclical letters only in relation to Jesus, it is understandable that men even more than women might look to her for guidance and nurturing. After all, she is a pillar of support for men, but she serves as a daunting model for women, highlighting their inability to fill the mold she left behind for them. It is also possible that Mary was more appealing to men than women because she provided justification for men's assertion of their authority over women in both secular and religious realms. As previously noted, Mary was constructed in a literary and faith tradition by men and for men. This tradition not only excludes the perspectives and experiences of women, but it engenders men's manipulation of women's consciousness-shaping and personally formative life activities. It is cruelly ironic that men might be more attracted than women to the embodiment of the figure who is supposed to offer the ultimate representation of feminine religiosity as well as social/cultural virtue. This scenario does not make sense for women on a fundamental level, and it reminds one of the complicit role Christian men played in sustaining Mary as the preeminent model for women throughout the centuries.

It is difficult to offer a provisional resolution to the difficult dilemma in which Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century seem to have found themselves. Their particular historical and cultural context gave way to new and different challenges from their Christian faith, especially concerning Mary's role in their tradition. Events such as the confirmation of Mary as patron saint of the United States in 1854 would seem to have advanced Mary's status as an exemplar of feminine religiosity. However, the institutionalization of Mary, as espoused by proponents of the True Womanhood model or as patron saint of the U.S., has reinforced traditional and often oppressive roles for Roman Catholic women. At best, Roman Catholic immigrant women of the nineteenth century were given a complex and often contradictory model of social/cultural and religious being. Thus, the ubiquitous and often romantically simplified image of Mary appears to have actually complicated life and modes of religiosity for these women. The paradoxes they encountered in Mary might help contemporary Christian audiences gain understanding of how Mary is constructed for both men and women today. Though the solution does not seem to lie in disposing of Mary entirely, Marian paradoxes do necessitate re-envisioning how the Mother of Christ speaks to modern women.

As written accounts of Mary are still dominated by male interpreters, it seems crucial that women's voices concerning her should be excavated from

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the past and amplified in the present so Catholic women of the future can claim a Mary—she who speaks to their own earthly and religious experience rather than to those of the men dictating the transmission and application of her tradition.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>2</sup> This text is the result of a sustained Lutheran-Catholic dialogue that was compiled in this one-volume collaborative work. Aside from the editors themselves, many scholars contributed individual portions, often in the form of distinct chapters within the book as a whole. For this reason, I shall reference the work according to individual contributors and their individual contributions, followed by title and publication information for the collective volume itself. It is referenced on the “WORKS CITED” page according to the editors involved, while the footnote references throughout the paper will, again, refer only to specific contributors and their specific contributions.

<sup>3</sup> P.J. Achtemeier, “Presuppositions of the Study,” in *Mary in the New Testament*, Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and John Reumann, eds. (Mahwah, NJ: Fortress Press, 1978), 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> “Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” Mark 6:3 (NKJV). K. P. Donfried, “Mary in the Gospel of Mark,” in *Mary in the New Testament*, 65.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>10</sup> John Reumann, “Mary in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles,” in *Mary in the New Testament*, 106.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-111.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 72-73.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

<sup>20</sup> K. P. Donfried, “The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John,” in *Mary in the New Testament*, 189.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, 106.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>24</sup> “A virgin hath brought forth, which is a thing contrary to nature,” 4:16. “Protoevangelium of James,” 24-37, in *The Lost Books of the Bible* (New York: Bell Publishing Company, 1979), 34.

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- <sup>25</sup> “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” (NKJV).
- <sup>26</sup> Susan Hill Lindley, “*You have Stept out of your Place:” A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 201.
- <sup>27</sup> Timothy Kelly and Joseph Kelly, “Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Gender Roles, and the Decline of Devotional Practice,” in *Journal of Social History*, 32, no.1 (1998): 1. Infotrac. Gale Group. 12 April 2005.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>38</sup> Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), xxxix.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, xlv.
- <sup>40</sup> Joseph A. Varacalli and Salvatore Primeggia, *The Saints in the Lives of Italian-Americans: An Interdisciplinary Investigation*, eds. (New York: Forum Italicum, 1999), 76.
- <sup>41</sup> Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, 168.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-69.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 174-76.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.
- <sup>46</sup> Varacalli and Primeggia, *The Saints in the Lives of Italian-Americans: An Interdisciplinary Investigation*, 82.
- <sup>47</sup> Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, 180.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.
- <sup>49</sup> Varacalli and Primeggia, *The Saints in the Lives of Italian-Americans: An Interdisciplinary Investigation*, 76.
- <sup>50</sup> Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, 205.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 211-16.
- <sup>52</sup> Lindley, “*You have Stept out of your Place:” A History of Women and Religion in America*, 203.
- <sup>53</sup> Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, 185.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-86.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>59</sup> Varacalli and Primeggia, *The Saints in the Lives of Italian-Americans: An Interdisciplinary Investigation*, 89.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup> Orsi, *The Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street*, 227.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

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- <sup>63</sup> Thomas Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 15.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.
- <sup>72</sup> Lindley, “*You have Stept out of your Place:” A History of Women and Religion in America*, 24-25.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-58. Lindley’s volume dwells primarily upon Protestant women in nineteenth-century America. For this reason, I thought it unnecessary to re-articulate how the Cult of True Womanhood functioned within Protestant communities. Thus, I will focus on how the True Womanhood model affected Roman Catholic women.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.
- <sup>79</sup> Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1800-1860,” in *Dimity Convictions* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 23. This essay was originally published in *American Quarterly* in 1966.
- <sup>80</sup> Elizabeth Abbott, *A History of Celibacy* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000), 60.
- <sup>81</sup> Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 137.
- <sup>82</sup> Ann Taves, *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 39.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.
- <sup>84</sup> Mary F. Foskett, “Virginitiy as Purity in the *Protoevangelium of James*,” in *A Feminist Companion to Mariology*, 67-76, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 71.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.
- <sup>86</sup> As Barbara Welter notes in her argument concerning women who submit to the True Womanhood model.
- <sup>87</sup> Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 27.
- <sup>88</sup> McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, 8.
- <sup>89</sup> Lindley, “*You have Stept out of your Place:” A History of Women and Religion in America*, 198.

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The author may be contacted at

[darrisjane@yahoo.com](mailto:darrisjane@yahoo.com)

# About the Authors

**Larry Andrews** is Dean of the Honors College at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. Holding a Ph.D. in comparative literature from Rutgers, he has published translations of Russian poetry and scholarly work on nineteenth-century Russian and French fiction and on African American women's fiction. He is a member of the NCHC Publications Board and the *Honors in Practice* Editorial Board, served as president of the Mid-East Honors Association, and recently completed a term on the NCHC Board of Directors.

**Ryan Brown** graduated from the Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne Honors Program. He has served on the program's governing council for six years and has served as a program advisor since 2003. He is currently finishing an M.A. in professional communication.

**Joyce W. Fields** is Assistant Director of Honors and Director of the Child and Family Studies Program at Columbia College, Columbia, S.C. She earned her Ph.D. in family relations from Florida State University with research interests in value consensus in the family system and gerontology. She has published in the areas of children's literature and the depiction of family, racial and ethnic identification in young children, and a variety of pedagogical issues such as teaching in student groups and the use of popular culture in the college classroom.

**Bruce Fox** is Director of the Honors Program and Professor of Forest Management at Northern Arizona University. He earned his Ph.D. in natural resources from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and B.S. in forestry and Master of Forestry degrees from the University of California, Berkeley. He has worked as a lumberjack, a field forester, and a consultant in the forestry and aerospace industries.

**Annamarie Guzy** is an associate professor of English at the University of South Alabama and holds a Ph.D. in rhetoric and professional communication from New Mexico State University. She currently serves on the NCHC Publications Board and was recently elected to the NCHC Board of Directors.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Robert Holm** is Director of the Institute for Research and Scholarship at Butler University. He earned his M.S. and Ph.D. in biological sciences from Northwestern University and B.S. in biology from the University of Miami, Florida. He has worked as a biologist for the U.S. EPA and an environmental manager for municipal and county governments in Florida and Indiana.

**Sriram Khé** is Director of the Honors Program and Associate Professor of Geography at Western Oregon University. He earned his Ph.D. in urban and regional planning from the University of Southern California. He is currently obsessed with using autoethnography in any research he does in geography and honors.

**Rosalie C. Otero** is Director of the University Honors Program at the University of New Mexico and Associate Dean of University College. She is a past president of the National Collegiate Honors Council and the Western Regional Honors Council. She is currently serving as Executive Secretary-Treasurer of WRHC. She is also an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor and co-author of *Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook* published by NCHC in 2005. Dr. Otero is the author of several articles in *Forum for Honors, Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, and the inaugural edition of *Honors in Practice*.

**Jeffrey A. Portnoy** directs the Honors Program at Georgia Perimeter College in Atlanta and is a professor of English. He has served on the Executive Committee of the Southern Regional Honors Council. He was President of the Georgia Collegiate Honors Council in 2000–2001 and was recently elected Vice President of that organization. He is a member of the *JNCHC* Editorial Board and General Editor of NCHC's Monograph Series. During his tenure as co-chair of NCHC's Publications Board, that group initiated *JNCHC* and *HIP*, refocused the mission of *NHR*, and increased its commitment to publishing monographs.

**Darris Catherine Saylor** is a graduate of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga's Honors Program, where she has served as the Student Assistant Director for the past two years. As an undergraduate, she majored in English and religious studies and minored in women's studies and Greek. She will pursue a Master of Divinity degree program this fall at Harvard University's Divinity School. She has attended the four most recent NCHC conferences, delivering student-led presentations each year with fellow delegates. At the 2006 NCHC conference in

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Philadelphia, Saylor presented her undergraduate honors thesis as one of three annual Portz Scholars.

**Shana M. Shaw** is currently finishing her second year of the doctoral program in educational psychology at the University of Texas. Her research interests in gifted education include underachievement among students of high ability and evaluations of gifted education programs. Additionally, she teaches an undergraduate class in the Department of Educational Psychology.

**Robert A. Strikwerda** is Director of the Honors Program and Associate Professor of Philosophy at Indiana University Kokomo. He received his Ph. D. at University of Notre Dame. Along with Larry May and Patrick Hopkins, he was a contributing editor of *Rethinking Masculinity: Philosophical Explorations in Light of Feminism* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1996). He has also written on topics in the history and philosophy of social science as well as applied philosophy. He was one of the facilitators, along with Peter Machonis and Devon Graham, of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee's Faculty Institute "Miami Beach and the Everglades" in January 2006.

**Mary K. Tallent-Runnels** is a professor of education psychology at Texas Tech University. Her research has been published in such journals as *Gifted Child Quarterly*, *Roeper Review*, *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *Review of Educational Research* and *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*. Her research interests include attitudes toward gifted learners and children's future concerns.

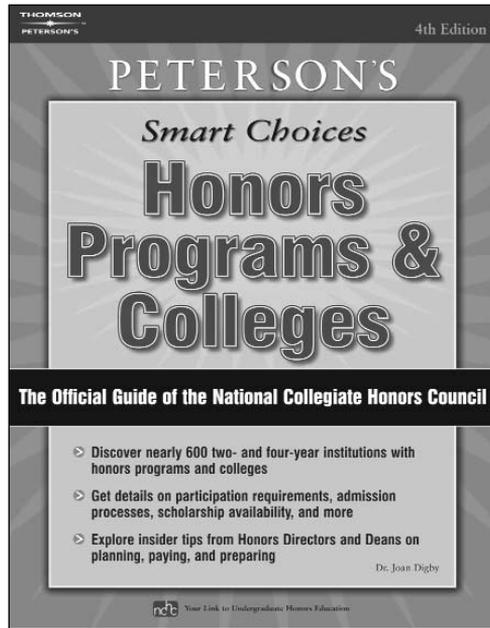
**David Taylor** holds a B.S. in geology and an M.B.A., and he is pursuing a doctorate in higher education administration at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. He has been affiliated with residential housing at KSU for the past seven years. His research interests include marketing and program assessment, conflict management theory, and employee-organizational fit.

**Julie A. Thomas** is an associate professor teaching courses and leading professional development in elementary science education at Texas Tech University. She co-led a PT<sup>3</sup> grant to support faculty development in teaching with technology and has extensive experience in gifted education with coordinating and evaluating K-5 gifted programs and advising university honors programs.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Anne M. Wilson** is in her third year as Honors Program Director at Butler University. She is also a faculty member in the Department of Chemistry teaching organic chemistry. Dr. Wilson has mentored over fifteen students in undergraduate research in her eleven years at Butler, resulting in four publications with student co-authors. She has also been involved in interdisciplinary efforts through the Honors Program, teaching “Food” and the sesquicentennial course “150 Years of Butler University.”





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*Beginning in Honors: A Handbook* by Samuel Schuman (Fourth Edition, 2006, 80pp). Advice on starting a new honors program. Covers budgets, recruiting students and faculty, physical plant, administrative concerns, curriculum design, and descriptions of some model programs.

*A Handbook for Honors Administrators* by Ada Long (1995, 117pp). Everything an honors administrator needs to know including a description of some models of Honors Administration.

*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.

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

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

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

*NCHC Handbook*. Included are lists of all NCHC members, NCHC Constitution and Bylaws, committees and committee charges, and other useful information.