

2013

Honors in Practice, Editor's Introduction

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Long, Ada, "Honors in Practice, Editor's Introduction" (2013). *Honors in Practice -- Online Archive*. 229.
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Editor's Introduction

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This volume of *Honors in Practice* covers a spectrum from visionary to practical, providing an array of inspiration, insights, models, advice, and information in the service of honors education. At the same time, a recurrent motif in many of the essays is the conflict between safety and risk, structured achievement and challenging exploration. This motif, introduced in the first essay, threads its way through much of this volume of *HIP* so that, more than a collection of essays, it provides a discourse on the nature of honors education as a safe haven and a dangerous voyage.

The volume begins with an essay that all teachers, students, and administrators in honors should read and reread when they need renewed inspiration for their chosen work. "In Landlessness Alone Resides the Highest Truth"; or, At Sea with Honors," by Don Dingleline of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, is an eloquent, intricate, and ingenious essay that likens the risky adventure of honors education to the dangerous quest for truth undertaken by Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*. Honors programs, like the *Pequod*, propel students beyond the familiar lands of their majors and professional goals, sending them out to sea where, like Ishmael, they examine that big whale of Truth from all angles, traditions, and disciplines, always seeking but never quite grasping the unknown and the unknowable. Dingleline describes models of honors education that exemplify the highest ideals of community, interdisciplinarity, integrity, and truth-seeking, connecting these ideals to our individual and collective survival. He inspires us to practice and cherish honors "not by clinging to the 'slavish shore' but by heading out to sea."

In "Honors Students as Philosophers and Detectives," Kaitlin A. Briggs of the University of Southern Maine describes how she sends her honors students out to sea by showing them how to think in questions rather than declarations. The question "what do you mean by ____?"—for which Briggs adopts Metcalf and Simon's term "Proprioceptive Question"—becomes the basis for textual analysis, conceptual exploration, layered consciousness, thoughtful conversation, cultural understanding, self-reflection, and exuberant living. For her honors students, the question becomes a way of life as well as a way of generating ideas for research papers or initiating fruitful class discussion. One simple question, Briggs suggests, can revolutionize the way students think, read, and write, pushing them beyond the perimeters of unexamined language and assumptions.

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"To Make the Rest Participate in It: The Use of Contemplative Pedagogy in The Holocaust and the Arts" is a compelling companion piece to Briggs's essay. Richard Chess of the University of North Carolina Asheville also advocates and uses questions to open up understandings of texts that then expand to become understandings of the self, of classmates, and of people from other times, places, and circumstances. The challenge to understand is especially keen in a course like his honors seminar The Holocaust and the Arts. By introducing silence and contemplation into the seminar as well as detailed and precise questions about texts, Chess provides a context in which his students, upon reading *Survival in Auschwitz*, "experienced what Primo Levi wanted his readers to experience: as they became more attentive participants in their own stories, they also became participants in his story." Balancing the risks of empathy and self-inquiry with the emotional sustenance of contemplation allows the students to navigate their way through uncertainty to new awareness.

Kate Wintrol and Maria Jerinic of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, continue the motif of taking on risk in their essay "Rebels in the Classroom: Creativity and Risk-Taking in Honors Pedagogy." The essay describes the ongoing effort of two teachers in the UNLV Honors College to incorporate both creativity and critical thinking into their honors classes, one a freshman-level survey class on western culture and the other an upper-level seminar on Jane Austen. The authors share their thoughts about their readings on risk-taking and their attempts to put theory into practice by taking a critical approach to their previous assumptions and practices. They present ideas on how to reformulate assignments and restructure the classroom experience to encourage students and themselves to venture beyond the familiar—to "head out to sea"—without abandoning high academic standards.

The following essay describes another kind of risk-taking experience. Robyn S. Martin was a teacher in the Grand Canyon Honors Semester hosted by Northern Arizona University and co-sponsored by the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee. Honors Semesters are, by design, risk-taking ventures, bringing together students from colleges and universities all over the country for a deep-immersion, active-learning, place-based curriculum and co-curriculum, often at a culturally and, in the case of the Grand Canyon, physically challenging site. Honors Semesters always include the pedagogical strategies described in *Place as Text* and incorporated within *City as Text*TM. One of these strategies is mapping, and, in "Mapping a Semester: Using Cultural Mapping in an Honors Humanities Course," Martin describes an especially successful application of cultural mapping to the study of the Grand Canyon. The details she provides about the project she assigned to her students can serve as a valuable model for mapping assignments in any classroom context that fosters active learning, site-specific research, creativity, and self-reflection.

The authors of "Engaging Honors Students in Purposeful Planning Through a Concept Mapping Assignment" describe a different kind of mapping that Melissa L. Johnson has incorporated into her honors course First-Year

Experience at the University of Florida. She and two of the students in the course, Stephanie Podjed and Sean Taasan, describe the purpose, design, and assessment of the assignment, which asks students to create a schematic map of their goals, interests, activities, and accomplishments as they move through their first semester in college. Using Mind Meister, students—all science, technology, engineering, and math students—create a visual, digital path that helps them budget their time and shape their undergraduate experience. The assignment can serve as a model within any academic discipline for an assignment that helps students cope successfully with all the options they face when they enter a large university.

In “Honors in Honduras: Engaged Learning in Action,” Trisha Folds-Bennett and Mary Pat Twomey from the College of Charleston argue that the kind of conceptual mapping described by Johnson, Podjed, and Taasan is an approach that comes naturally to honors students, who are typically goal-oriented high-achievers, but that such students often avoid risks and ambiguities. Echoing Dingledine’s essay, the authors advocate “heading out to sea” or, in this case, to Honduras, and, echoing Robyn S. Martin, they describe an active-learning project that encouraged exploration, risk, conceptualization, and reflection. In addition, the authors applied all of these strategies to a service project, embedded within an honors course, that the students conducted during a three-week stay in Honduras, where they worked with and in a youth development program, “applying the abstract principles we encountered in class to a real problem in a nonprofit setting.” The essay, the first of several in this volume dedicated to the topic of service learning, includes a substantial section at the end on ways that other honors programs and colleges can adopt or adapt the successes of the Honduran experience.

Kevin W. Dean and Michael B. Jendzurski, in “Using Post-Study-Abroad Experiences to Enhance International Study,” describe another international service-learning project—this one in South Africa—that is part of the curricular and co-curricular honors program at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. The authors make a case for international study when it includes direct engagement with another culture through service projects and also reflection on and application of the lessons learned when students return to their home campus. The honors curriculum has evolved to incorporate the South African experience into a sequence of two courses, one on leadership and the other on video production. The program has also created initiatives, such as a speakers program and an annual fundraiser, that raise campus-wide awareness of South Africa and of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which is the focus of the students’ service project during their international study. Dean and Jendzurski argue that extending the influence of a study-abroad program beyond the participants is essential to its success.

Stephen A. Yoder describes another service learning project, this one back in the United States, in his essay “Responding to Disaster with a Service Learning Project for Honors Students.” The project was implemented by the

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business honors program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham in response to the devastating tornadoes that ravaged Alabama in April of 2011. Combining “servant leadership” and “social entrepreneurship,” the project involved honors students from the school of business and also from other honors programs in a grant and loan program benefiting survivors of the tornadoes. Students and faculty collaborated with various campus and community groups—including nonprofits, banks, and law firms—to identify applicants, interview them, help them fill out their applications, and then award funds that were provided by local donors. Yoder describes the particulars of implementing this service project and also provides “lessons learned” along the way that will be useful to honors administrators and teachers who might want to initiate such projects on their own campuses.

In “An Honors Interdisciplinary Community-Based Research Course,” David Dunbar, Melissa Terlecki, Nancy Watterson, and Lisa Ratmansky of Cabrini College describe a community-based service learning course that adds interdisciplinary research into the mix. The teachers of the course—a biologist and psychologist—combined the natural and social sciences in a semester-long study of Crabby Creek, a major tributary of Valley Creek in southeastern Pennsylvania. The students and teachers studied stormwater management issues in a way that was mutually beneficial to them and to the Valley Creek Restoration Partnership with whom they worked. The students did chemical analyses to determine stream health after a major renovation of the creek to address stormwater damage, and they also helped to produce an educational brochure for the Crabby Creek community and to inaugurate the first Earth Day celebration in the community. The combination of research methods from two disciplines, active participation in community life, and partnership with a non-profit showed the students some of the complexities, problems, and potential solutions in environmental management.

While several of the essays in this volume of *HIP* have addressed student encounters with cultures beyond—often way beyond—their local campus, James Pfrehm and Robert Sullivan describe a program that encourages students to get to know their own college in “The Cultural Encounters Model: Incorporating Campus Events into the Honors Curriculum.” Their essay provides a cost-effective model for involving honors students in the organization of, as well as participation in, campus-wide cultural events through an honors seminar called “Cultural Encounters with Ithaca.” Creating an incentive for honors students to take an active role in the cultural life of the campus without overburdening their already overextended lives, the seminar gives students the opportunity to “identify, publicize, attend, discuss, and reflect on a number of campus events.” The seminar has also become a model for similar curricular innovations campus-wide at Ithaca College.

Marie E. Leichliter of West Virginia University presents another on-campus program for honors students in “Creating Opportunities for Peer Leadership in Honors Education.” Leichliter first summarizes some of the theories and practices of peer leadership that have developed particularly in the last two

decades. She then describes the array of peer leadership opportunities within the West Virginia University Honors College, where students serve as co-mentors, residence hall leaders, ambassadors, high school delegates, and organizers of the honors community. She argues for the value of peer leadership roles as a crucial element of honors education.

In “Teaching Research Methodologies to Professionally Oriented Honors Students,” Julie Levinson and Richard Mandel of Babson College indicate that honors programs at colleges focused on professional development face a special set of challenges in trying simultaneously to foster intellectual breadth and academic scholarship. The authors describe the nature of those challenges and what various honors programs at such institutions have done to incorporate a rigorous honors thesis in their curriculum. The Babson College Honors Program has devised a curriculum that has successfully met the challenges, teaching students the research methodologies they need to complete honors theses in a wide variety of disciplines outside their majors. They offer their insights and ideas to other programs at professionally oriented institutions seeking to establish a curriculum that includes scholarly research.

All the essays in this volume of *HIP* have so far addressed issues of teaching and learning. The final two essays focus on administrative matters affecting honors directors and deans—matters that nevertheless have a significant influence on the quality of honors education. In “Program Excellence versus Program Growth: Must These Goals Conflict?” Lynne Goodstein of the University of Connecticut describes the consequences for honors of a new president who arrives at the pseudonymous New England University intent on expanding the number of honors students. In an essay that ends up as both a success story and a cautionary tale, Goodstein lays out in detail the steps an honors director can take to adapt to new mandates from an administrator unfamiliar with the history and culture of an honors program and a university. Her conclusion is that excellence and growth can be compatible goals but only with a lot of planning, collaboration, and hard work.

We conclude this issue of *HIP* with “A View from Outside: Some Reflections of an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor” by Robert Spurrier of Oklahoma State University. Spurrier provides the perspectives, insights, anecdotes, and advice of an experienced consultant and evaluator of honors programs and colleges. Having made almost fifty site visits in the past fifteen years, Spurrier describes what he sees as the typical strengths and potential problems of honors education as it is practiced in the United States. He offers advice to honors administrators who seek a site visit and also to site visitors. He especially encourages NCHC members to become NCHC-Recommended Site Visitors and explains the process for doing so.

