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# JNCHC

## JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL

Spring/Summer 2005

Vol. 6, No. 1



### In This Issue

#### STUDENTS IN HONORS

*With Essays by:*

JOAN DIGBY

BERNICE BRAID

ANNMARIE GUZY

JEFFREY A. PORTNOY

AMY BASS

MICHAEL K. CUNDALL, JR.

CHERYL ACHTERBERG

JAY MANDT

MEL PIEHL

ROSALIE C. OTERO

MEGAN MCWENIE

EMILY WALSH

K. CELESTE CAMPBELL



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL

VOLUME 6, No. 1

### JNCHC

Honors Program

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HONORS EDUCATION

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# JNCHC

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**JOURNAL OF THE  
NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL**

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

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## **STUDENTS IN HONORS**

### **JOURNAL EDITORS**

**ADA LONG**

**DAIL MULLINS**

**UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM**

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## **EDITORIAL POLICY**

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

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

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Dedication photography by John Howarth

# CALL FOR PAPERS

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

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

The following issue (**deadline: March 1, 2006**) will be a general-interest issue.

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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

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

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

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

Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at [adalong@uab.edu](mailto:adalong@uab.edu) or, if necessary, 850.927.3776.





DAVID MOWRY

## MEMORIAL DEDICATION



### FAITH GABELNICK

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

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

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



ADA LONG

## Editor's Introduction

ADA LONG

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

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

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

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

## ADA LONG

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

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

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

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

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

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

## ADA LONG

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

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

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

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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



# **Forum on Honors Students**



JOAN DIGBY

# The Age of Imitation

JOAN DIGBY

LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY: C. W. POST CAMPUS

In recent years I've been somewhat perplexed to discover that my honors freshman literature classes are far more receptive to Pope's "Essay on Man" than Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." Through most of my teaching career, the reverse was the norm, but a number of changes in popular taste have led students away from Romantic originality and led me to these reflections on contemporary culture which may, I hope, have some wider implications with respect to current issues in teaching and learning.

In the original spirit of the "essay," I would like to try out these ideas and invite response. In essence, I have come to believe that individualism and creativity have lost their currency and that we are in a new Age of Imitation. If this seems to you like the eighteenth century revisited, then you may already be on the same wavelength. If not, then I ask you to indulge me in a little background to set the stage for my reflections.

In 1774 Mark Akenside published a poem entitled "The Pleasures of Imagination," which put forward some radical ideas about poetry and originality. For most of his century, poetry had been the offspring of conscious imitation. Aspiring poets were thought of as apprentices trained to read the greats in Greek and Latin, study their rhetoric, cut their teeth on epic and imitate Homer and Virgil. No one expressed this better than Alexander Pope, the reigning master of Enlightenment poetry. Attempting to train critics to proper judgment, he wrote:

You then whose judgment the right course would steer  
Know well each ANCIENT'S proper character;  
His Fable, Subject, scope in every page;  
Religion, Country, genius of his Age . . .  
Be Homer's works your study and delight,  
Read them by day, and meditate by night.

—"Essay on Criticism," I, 117-20; 124-25

All this comes at the end of instructions about how to "follow Nature." Pope's conclusion was that Nature and Homer were the same, so it was wise to copy after Homer. As a poet, he took his own advice, rendering Homeric epic into closed couplets, taking up a subscription and earning enough money to be recognized as the first Englishman to make his living from writing poetry. For Pope and his contemporaries, the great body of literature that came before them was a wellspring of learning that issued from a bedrock of natural laws; he refers to this in one of his most frequently cited couplets: "A little learning is a dangerous thing; /Drink deep or taste not the Pierian spring" (*EC*, II, 215-16). By methodic, rational imitation of

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the ancients, writers could acquire sound judgment, or “true Wit.” This was frequently seen in opposition to undisciplined flights of self-indulgent “Fancy,” which implied false judgment, embarrassing personal expression, mere ornamental wit and, worst of all, bad taste.

Akenside, though still admiring of the ancients, unchained “Indulgent Fancy” (I, 10) from this negative spin and gave it a good name. He cited Shakespeare as its greatest proponent and argued that fanciful poetry is a source of unconstrained delight. Undoubtedly his generation had grown bored with pedestrian imitation, which he called “dull obedience” (I, 34) and needed both freedom and inspiration. So he called on Nature’s “kindling breath” to “fire the chosen genius . . . string his nerves. . . imp his eagle wings” (I, 38-40) and let him soar. In a sense, Akenside’s poem liberated both Prometheus and the ravening eagle. It called for rebellion and originality. Within twenty years of its publication, William Blake had completed the metaphor that gave flight to the Romantic imagination. His “Proverbs of Hell” are open rejections of everything Pope stood for. Blake’s devilish self declared, “The Eagle never lost so much time as when he submitted to learn of the crow”; “No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings,” and finally “When thou seest an Eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius; lift up thy head.” (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 1790).

It remained for Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth to formulate the critical theory of originality which defined the new Romanticism. Their collaboration, *The Lyrical Ballads* (1798), rested on the agreement that poetry should observe an essential “truth to nature” heightened by “the modifying colours of imagination.” Wordsworth emphasized the language and emotions of ordinary people; Coleridge concentrated on the ability of imagination to give the supernatural “the semblance of truth.” Coleridge reflected on their original intent in his *Biographia Literaria* (1814)—cited above—where he went on to propose a more elaborate theory of “organic unity”—a belief in structural integrity that lasted until the Deconstructionists of the 1980s took a hammer to poetry and then tried to read the fragments. According to Romantic theory, personal life experience could finally replace ancient epic as the stuff of imaginative poetry—or even become a new model of epic as in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, which is an epic history of his own development as a poet.

Thus Romantic poetry became a form of first person expression, a poetry of the individual and original “I,” an impassioned self who was no imitator. Coleridge’s practice followed theory. No lines express this better than the visionary self-projection that comes at the end of “Kubla Khan”:

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

—*KK*, 49-53

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There was a time when students found “Kubla Khan” among the most enticing poems in the canon, whether it was because of drug culture or wanderlust or the visionary imagery in contemporary song is hard to say. In the 1970s it seemed a stone’s throw from these flashing eyes to the demonic esprit of young Mick Jagger or from the “damsel with a dulcimer” (*KK*, 37) to the solos of Hendrix and the lyrics of Dylan. But that day is over, and what was original now seems, among students, too exotic and strange. In recent years, as I have said, they prefer to believe with Pope that straying into unknown territory can lead to danger and that “Whatever is, is Right” (“*Essay on Man*,” I, 294).

The fading of originality has been “blowing in the wind” for a long time, and we should have seen it coming. The playwright Caryl Churchill did, when she wrote about the stock market crash of 1987 in a closed couplet comedy called *Serious Money*, which invited direct comparison with the South Sea Bubble of 1728 and the satires of Alexander Pope and John Gay. We had another chance last year, when Dan Brown’s *The DaVinci Code* gave us a puzzle with the clue—you guessed it—“A. Pope.” It was the only mystery I have ever solved!

But still there is the bigger mystery: why did the twentieth century, full of discovery and originality revert to an Age of Imitation? I am not talking simply about literature but worldview. “I Can’t Believe It’s Not Butter” epitomizes an embracing of imitation that is at the core of contemporary taste. Possibly it began with imitation grape Jello and whatever Carvel might be. By now, salads adorned with imitation bacon bits and coffee whitened by non-dairy imitation cream are the norms. Whole food eaters, the last believers in Coleridge’s “organic unity” as applied to lifestyle, might very well be the last Romantics. The rest of our culture is sucking down imitation foods the same way that they rally round the street hawkers to buy fake Gucci and Coach bags or made in Hong Kong shirts with phony Lauren polo players. The rest of our culture is gathering at Starbucks back into a clubbish coffee house society of the in-crowd, bound by style and taste in ways that are strikingly similar to the world of the early eighteenth century.

As in that world, imitation is once again the comfort zone, and nobody knows this better than the manufacturers of popular culture. Hence *Troy*, a media age remake of Homer, is as true to our times as closed couplets to Pope’s—featuring Brad Pitt, the hero of workout and martial arts and Troy itself, a stage set of pure fantasy fit for an audience unable to locate the historic city on a map. This *Troy* becomes us, killing off Agamemnon before Achilles and thus leaving no tragedy for Clytemnestra to enact. Like the eighteenth century (during which *King Lear* was given a happy ending), we are averse to tragedy, reading enough of it in the news. So here comes comedy, song and satire in the style of eighteenth-century ballad operas, the latest of which is Stephen Sondheim’s remake of Aristophanes’ *The Frogs*.

Did I say remake? We are awash in film remakes: *The Manchurian Candidate*, *The Lady Killers*, *Psycho*, *The Stepford Wives*, *Eighty Days Around the World*, *Nosferatu*, *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *Shall We Dance*, *King Kong*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *War of the Worlds*, *The Pink Panther*—to name just those that trip off my tongue. What motivates remakes may not simply be the paucity of original scripts or good writing as many have supposed, and which may in part be true. There

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is also the real possibility that originality is too far from the comfort zone or simply not wanted. Give them the choice of a trip to Kubla Khan's enchanted garden or Disney's Magic Kingdom and they will take the one that predictably empties out into the gift shop. Who needs a "savage place" that empties into a "sunless sea"! People want what is safe, what they already know and therefore are able to judge against a reliable yardstick. Hence the taste (as in the eighteenth century) for repetition and for sequels: *Shrek 2*, *Kill Bill 2*, *Matrix 3* and *Planet of the Apes* who knows how many!

We can guess how many times people are watching these same entertainments. The current advertisement for *Phantom of the Opera* features audience members who have seen the show a dozen times or more. With what glee they must have lain in wait for the new film version release in theaters last Christmas and in DVD format within months thereafter. This is not an audience that craves originality. With the purchase of films on DVD, one must suppose that the same movies are played again and again, like songs, for comfort. And like children with fairy tales, this audience wants exact duplication of the known—nothing new or different.

Where does this leave us with respect to teaching? For all of my academic life, I have stressed the importance of students doing original work, from first-year essays to honors theses. For most of those years students understood exactly what I meant by this. Now they seem a bit puzzled; some don't really know what I mean at all or what, in fact, it means to be original.

Of course I am not arguing that there is no original student work now or that there are no imaginative students. Both exist, and honors still cultivates these qualities. But the blank stares that also come from honors and other students suggest that we may be rowing against the tide and that we should be paying more attention to a major shift in sensibility. Imitation, I believe, has gained significant ground over originality in shaping cultural values and with them student behavior.

That students have trouble understanding what it means to be original is really not their fault. Everything in the culture trains them to imitate. Think, for example, about how students in high school are taught to write the "five paragraph essay": introduction, three "body" paragraphs, and a conclusion that essentially restates the introduction. When they come into my honors English course, getting them to stretch the discussion of a work beyond the single paragraph is horrifying to their sense of order. Getting them to push their argument to a genuine conclusion that is not a rehash of the introduction takes months. The mold is so ingrained that thought hardly enters into the formula—much less *original* thought. Indeed, the five-paragraph essay includes what they have been taught is "research": sterile, formulaic citations from secondary sources dropped into paragraphs like fruit into 50s Jello molds—tasteless and meaningless. Jello at least is more easily shaken than the students from this rigid format.

I have had many discussions with my faculty about the rigidity of honors students.

This extends beyond their written work into a reticence that may individually have something to do with shyness but socially has much more to do with self-image in a group and the fear of being different. Same is the Game! And whether this means working in Windows or wearing Gap clothes, everything around them cultivates

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sameness. So it shouldn't be surprising that students want to say the *right* thing and give the anticipated answer. They are most comfortable repeating the patterns their professors have presented. In short, they have been cultured to imitate rather than risk expressing ideas of their own.

And where would original ideas come from in this age? Everything around us teaches students to copy. They Xerox book pages and articles as instructed. To be sure, one very important difference between our age and the eighteenth century is that we are not much of a book culture any more. So rather than make copies of book pages, students much more naturally go to the Internet for their "research." What they find, of course, are more examples of imitation. On any given topic, the first few entries will take them to websites with pretty much the same information and perspective. From this, they easily conclude that "Whatever is, is right," and so they see everything on the Internet as simply "common knowledge," TRUTH, which they believe is free to use—without citation.

Thus, along with the disappearance of originality as a value is the disappearance of intellectual property as a concept. That is why students feel so free to plagiarize. They can't grasp the idea that actual people presented their own unique thoughts, thoughts that belong to them. So long as students see all websites as posted facts all equally true and there for the picking, then the discrimination among ideas will remain hopelessly muddled. It was hard enough to get them to take a stand on books and argue against the printed word, which seemed true in its age. How much harder it is to get them to argue against words in hyperspace that have equal probability of coming from faculty, high school students, or companies selling papers as if they were just helping out. What's the difference, they think. It all looks alike and therefore must all be true.

In general, the plagiarism that has evolved from this perspective is a *pastiche* of sentences and paragraphs taken (and sometimes altered) from various sources. The form itself goes back to eighteenth-century aesthetics and the taste for compositions formed from a loose medley of sources linked together in a style that deliberately imitated a particular author or musician. Our students are consummately familiar with the musical variety, which they much admire as a genre called "Sampling," a genre that raises the question of copyright in the same way as other varieties of plagiarism. It is not surprising that an Age of Imitation should find this habit of composition comfortable. The *pastiche* is their quilt, their security blanket. Rather than taking it away from them, I suggest, we must adapt to working with the taste. That means teaching proper citation of works quoted but most of all teaching students to go beyond the elements of *pastiche* by developing their own controlling prose style. In this effort Alexander Pope's "Essay on Criticism" can provide a useful model. Students uncomfortable with the pressure to be original can grasp perfectly well the possibility of writing,

What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;  
Something, whose truth convinced at sight we find,  
That gives us back the image of our mind.

—II, 298-300

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They can do that, and in the process they can develop a prose style that has much greater clarity (Pope's "true Wit") than the one they started with. In my own program, shifting the emphasis from originality to clear thoughts well expressed might be a matter of survival. Each year more students seem to withdraw from honors when faced with the thesis. The prospect of doing research and writing an "original" fifty-page study has become utterly overwhelming, and it was not until I started thinking about their habits of mind that I began to understand why.

While English is my field and I can describe the current state of mind most easily with reference to my own subject, it is clear that the propensity toward imitation extends across disciplines and throughout our culture. I am describing not complaining about this. We simply are, as I see it, in an Age of Imitation, and we need to address this by teaching to the age rather than struggling against it. Certainly there are some disciplines in which imitation will get students no place. The sciences come to mind because without original thought there can be no breakthroughs. I would like to say that the arts demand originality, but my colleagues in art complain of students appropriating imagery ("sampling" again) without reference—in fact, plagiarizing from past masters. Oddly enough, one of the most popular courses among my advanced honors electives is one entitled "Creativity in Business," with a reading list as long as a short book, all having very little to do with business and much to do with the history of ideas. It would be greatly ironic if Business, which has always been an uneasy bedfellow with honors, could show us the way to useful adaptation.

That imitation itself might have a transforming effect on a person or a culture seems perfectly clear from some recent models in business. Think of outsourcing. In India the imitation of an American or British accent can help a person get a job in one of the outsourced airline or credit card companies that are swelling Mumbai. Just as eighteenth-century Scots learned a London accent to gain employment and elevate their station in the world, so individuals in India are inventing their future by accent imitation. On a global scale the imitation of American culture has inspired development in some countries and unleashed the wrath of others. We can't take any of this back, and so we have to deal with it and go forward to see where these patterns of imitation will lead us.

I came to this conclusion last year when my very best student in a long time, a Marketing major with broad interests in literature and the arts asked me to look at the draft of his Valedictorian address. The first few paragraphs froze me like Medusa's stare. His theme was theft, framed in a series of thank-you notes to professors whose ideas he had stolen over the years. I couldn't believe it, nor could the head of Public Relations who had also seen the draft. Together, we did everything we could to urge a different route, but he would not be shaken, insisting that "theft" had a positive connotation as he intended to deliver the speech, and that we needed to believe that tone would make everything right. In the end, he won and we sweated the day. But as he delivered his speech, it was soon clear that the audience thought him clever, witty and moral, a builder on the bedrock of ideas "taken" from his faculty. His tone carried the positive message he intended.

Then I remember an old NCHC saying—that we come to the annual conference to "steal ideas for our own program." Indeed, acknowledged imitation is a pattern we



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have practiced for decades and incorporated into our own creativity. We were not the first to use this strategy. There are many variations on the commonplace “Plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery,” of which Picasso’s (alleged) turn of phrase, “Bad artists copy. Great artists steal” is perhaps the most famous. Certainly his theft of visual forms—African masks, for example—led him into uncharted territory in modern art, and despite his appropriated imagery, no one doubted Picasso’s originality. When I went on my own little search to verify the historic truth of this remark, friend Google led me to another string of applications. I typed the phrase and there I was among design studios, Dylan defenders, hackers’ networks and business planners who had turned the expression into a personal logo. Each had taken inspiration from imitation. I rest my case.

That being said, I find myself in the oddly oxymoronic business of cultivating “inspired imitation,” which requires considerable invention. In my first-year honors writing courses, I am having the students deliberately imitate the styles of various authors on subjects that interest them, and I find that it helps them become conscious of structure and vocabulary in their own work. There is nothing like a Miltonic paragraph on the hellishness of dormitory living to make them see the utility of rhetoric and assist their own evolution of written style. In my more advanced course, I have taken to another paradigm that sends them back to primary texts and diminishes their attachment to book and Internet sources. I create assignments based on the laboratory “unknown.” Essentially, they are required to choose a poem that we did not discuss in class and explicate it by reference to poems by the same author that we did read and discuss. In effect, this requires them to create a *sequel*—one of their favorite forms—to previous classes, and since they are now comfortable with the works we read together in class, they are ready to go off on their own without secondary sources and the inevitable *pastiche*.

Of course one can only go so far without teaching methods of research, particularly in an English department that requires a research paper by spring of the freshman year and an honors program that requires a 50-page thesis in the major. So library instruction including Internet research is part of the freshman curriculum. But my instinct has been to shift my emphasis from working with material to working with a mentor. On the freshman level I have added a “dedicated” honors librarian, a person they can consult to work with them and show them the proper use of sources. For the thesis, they develop a mentoring relationship with the professor who takes them on for one full semester of research before they even enter into the thesis term. This means they are constantly discussing their findings with a professor and annotating their sources. Most important, they come to know a faculty member who shares their interest in a topic and with whom they can discuss their findings. This is the key: working with a person so that no matter what printed or Internet sources finally come to play a role in the work, the student’s ideas and handling of these sources are discussed.

This is particularly important because this Age of Imitation includes a great deal of isolation, by which I mean students who work alone at home on their computers. Some of their shyness comes from this and much of their insecurity about revealing ideas of their own that they did not find on-line. More and more I try to get students

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to go on “field trips” together—explorations modeled on City as Text©—and have them answer questions working together to find solutions. Group projects, I find, make them more open to trying out what might well be original ideas and including professors in the group. As a result of such group dynamics they are much more ready to do their advanced work with a mentoring professor who does not seem a stranger.

I can remember a time in NCHC (more than a decade ago), when we made a strong stand against producing student “clones” who would turn into the next generation of US. We talked many of them out of the academy and into the broader world, as we still do. But getting students to imprint on their mentors and, in a sense, “imitate” us may have a very different resonance in this particular age. Our students at this moment like models and find models extremely helpful. They are not rebellious and they are, to my thinking, very grateful for what we can show them about how to learn. So it might not be such a bad thing for us to “clone” at least our methodology (if not us) and see whether they can fly with the implant in order to arrive at something original.

It is impossible to predict all the forms of originality that this Age of Imitation will yield. If we are looking for originality in the Romantic, Coleridgean sense, we may be disappointed or unprepared to recognize the very different manifestations that will emerge through adaptation and evolution. I am certain that many of my colleagues have already invented creative adaptations that we can profit from. I encourage their reply and discussion. Meanwhile, I suggest, it is most important to acknowledge and work with the current taste for imitation that exerts itself as possibly the most powerful shaping force in our culture and on our students.

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BERNICE BRAID

# The Age of False Positives

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Years ago, when I was beginning to develop field-based learning methods and experimenting with City as Text© as an integrative seminar, I learned a lot from the insights of Parker Palmer. His presentation at AAHE, a talk he called “Community, Conflict and Ways of Knowing” (published later, in 1988, in *CHANGE Magazine*) was a catalyst for those of us in NCHC who were refining the structure of “explorations,” linking them to extended seminar discussions and applying them to research projects, especially in Honors Semesters. Two passages in particular resonate with Joan Digby’s article on students today and remind me just why Palmer’s thoughts were so startlingly on target:

I do not believe that epistemology is a bloodless abstraction; the WAY we know has powerful implications for the WAY we live. I argue that every epistemology tends to become an ethic, and that every way of knowing tends to become a way of living. I argue that the relation established between the knower and the known, between the student and the subject, tends to become the relation of the living person to the world itself. I argue that every mode of knowing contains its own moral trajectory, its own ethical direction and outcome.

This statement rang true to me then, and still does now, when I think of how much it reflects the reality of who comes into our classes. Students who are good test takers, who have cast the world in somewhat simplified terms so that they can retrieve ‘answers’ quickly on timed exams – much like the monolithic simplifications their television screens project, as Digby says – come to us and we reward them: good test scores earn good scholarships and a seat in honors. Students come at a stage when they are still deeply dualistic and concrete in their perceptions of self and the world. What they see as either/or we reinforce, claiming with some pride that we ask them to see “both sides of the question,” often pretending that questions are clear and easy, always suggesting that “both” represents some kind of analytical breakthrough, despite lived evidence to the contrary in a world of complex propositions and hopeless contradictions. And we – the entire academy – are especially prone to reward students in this way and to reinforce their dualistic thinking during that freshman year when professors are so keen to “give information” and make sure students “get the right answer.”

Pedagogical practices and the presentation of complex material as if it can be simplified without distortion come to mirror the culture students bring with them. When they deal with material that refuses to be simplified, they fall back into the

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received worldview they originally brought with them from high school: what Palmer calls the false objectivism that they acquired as teenagers and that becomes a kind of mental haven when the literary and theory courses refuse to resolve into an either/or, when their science classes talk about unknowns and uncharted territory.

Digby suggests that sending students out into the world, as in *City as Text*© explorations, to pull from three-dimensional life the unmediated, raw materials out of which they need to shape an understanding of some problem or set of questions is a way to get them to think beyond received wisdom, to challenge themselves and each other, and to develop a voice of their own. Writing to “imitate” the styles of many is a way of experiencing voice and of finding out that no one of the imitated pitches or vocabularies quite matches what is going on in their own heads. The exercise itself pushes students to see that what they do when they accept other people’s insights is to “try on” viewpoints and ways of thinking – but the very consciousness of this process must push them, psychologically, to look back at their own modeling and see it is just one of several possible styles of thought or expression. The effect of a whole series of such try-ons can be liberating as well as revelatory.

Another strategy to jog students out of their comfort zone is to structure courses around a theme and deliberately examine it from the viewpoints of several disciplines – a curriculum design widely practiced in honors programs, though not necessarily elsewhere. When students witness readings of a single text dissolving into multiple statements, they become nervous, to be sure; but out of that nervousness might come a tentative willingness to see what happens when they scan the same text with their own eyes and try to figure out why they read it as they do.

If students display discomfort with the subtle, indicate they have no sense of irony, tremble with horror not of the vacuum but of the ambiguous, what might sensitive instructors do to utilize that discomfort, absence, horror as an occasion to learn? Systematic questioning like “What difference does it make?” and “What makes me think so?” pushes students to find some evidence for whatever it is they want to argue. Quickly enough they learn that finding citations on the internet or even in print is not identifying evidence. Maybe they need to write a thesis on what has NOT been examined or concluded, or make suggestions about what inquiry needs to be undertaken to conduct a genuine examination when no such inquiry yet exists. The second passage in Palmer that speaks to us about how to teach – indeed how to recognize those students Digby describes – as well as how to learn is this:

I want to argue that it’s a TRAINED schizophrenia [what students have acquired as their way of seeing the world]: It is the way students have been taught to look at reality through objectivist lenses. They have always been taught about a world out there somewhere apart from them, divorced from their personal lives; they never have been invited to intersect their autobiographies with the life story of the world. And so they can report on a world that is not the one in which they live, one they’ve been taught about from some objectivist’s fantasy.

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I would like to think that the great advantage in honors programs is that they provide an arena in which discussion can evolve over time, in which speakers come to hear what others who disagree with them are saying, and in which they learn to hear themselves differently. I would like to think that focused discussion permits contextualizing so that students come to see the persistence of point of view, even in analysis, and therefore to recognize the lack of absolute objectivity – and the consequent need to apprehend multiple viewpoints in order to see objects and ideas whole.

The lectures they hear – treated as texts – are/can be/should be as open to rethinking and restating as any book they read in preparation for class. The papers they write, if they have chosen topics that connect with the lives they actually lead, can/could/should become texts for precisely the same sort of rethinking and reconsidering as all other texts in their lives. Somewhere at the heart of the learning we call “honors” there needs to be a commitment to developing perspective – the one intellectual faculty so sorely missing from the world today.

Perspective is what makes the enterprise “liberal education,” a term which among other things suggests the capacity to be liberated from imitation and sycophancy. No doubt the forces Digby describes are indeed at play in our academy, as they are in our entire culture, but if so they are in evidence at least as much among faculty as among students. The challenge is to come up with assignments that provoke new ways of seeing and thinking, which this discussion might well generate among us in NCHC.

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ANNMARIE GUZY

# Originality Is a Risk

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I am a teacher of composition and technical communication by vocation, but one avocation of mine is horror, and I occasionally teach a class on horror literature and film. If one is taking films to task for endless, derivative sequels and remakes, as Joan does, then horror is certainly no exception. Many people view the genre with another kind of distaste, decrying its graphic representations of violence and sexuality. Horror is messy and dangerous, and it sends the message that risky behavior is punished with death or worse.

In short, horror isn't *nice*.

I first taught my Horror class as an honors seminar, with enrollment limited to 15 honors students. The final assignment was a seminar paper relating horror themes to topics in their majors. The students produced some interesting projects, with pre-medical students gravitating toward *Frankenstein* and mad scientists, computer science majors exploring artificial intelligence gone wrong, and so forth.

I taught the class again as a special topics course with open enrollment and a cap of 40, and honors students could contract for honors credit. Once again, the honors students wrote well-organized, well-developed final papers, but compared to papers created by the non-honors students, these papers were, for the most part, dry academic prose.

In composition parlance, they were *nice* papers.

The non-honors students took more risks, not only with the topics upon which they wrote but also the ways in which they broke from the organization and format of traditional academic papers, such as introducing subsections with poems, incorporating hand-drawn illumination within the text, or simply changing font styles. A psychology major wrote the paper as a series of journal entries by a therapist assigned to diagnose and treat Freddy Krueger, the razor-gloved antagonist from the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films. The student placed a Post-It note on the final page, noting that the journal had been found by police twenty-four hours after the last entry had been made, the doctor having been slashed to death.

On the whole, honors students did not contribute to class discussion as frequently as the non-honors students. Perhaps it was because the non-honors group included more people who could be classified as punks or goths, and they might have felt a closer connection to the material (conformity of appearance within their own subcultures is an irony to be addressed elsewhere). Their iconoclasm, however, went far deeper than their fashion sense; they asked different kinds of questions and weren't afraid to challenge contemporary perceptions of sexuality, religion, and other taboo subjects.

In contrast to the images projected by the punks and goths, much of the sense of self-worth for honors students comes from successfully navigating through and being rewarded by the educational apparatus. In an era of endless testing and cookie-cutter curricula, honors students learn to value the GPA, the SAT or ACT score, even the dreaded five-paragraph

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essay. High school seniors who reach the personal interview phase of honors program admission tend to speak politely and dress appropriately. Only one of my interviewees has broken “uniform,” wearing a black t-shirt and jeans, and no one has worn studded black leather or layers of black eyeliner. It wouldn’t be respectful.

It wouldn’t be *nice*.

But what happens when we take away that safety net of academic conformity? Are honors students willing to take the risks associated with originality?

One honors student in the Horror class was an art major who had multiple piercings and worked at a local tattoo parlor. Other honors students rarely spoke to her, and she engaged in more conversation with non-honors students, several of whom she knew from off-campus circles. She asked questions that probed the material in unusual ways, and she was willing to question authority, including my own, which in turn stimulated me and blazed new trails for class discussion. In her final paper, she related ritual scarification in contemporary body-art, such as tattoos and body piercings, to body-based horror, like the sadomasochistic *Hellraiser* films.

In general, however, honors students tended to be less certain when faced with this break from the traditional academic assignment, asking if a topic was *really* okay to write about and seeking my reassurance and approval. One recurring question for me has been whether students who elect to participate in an honors program are necessarily the brightest but rather those who have mastered the academic game: show up everyday, do your homework, give the teacher what she wants.

Be *nice*.

More non-honors Horror students seized the opportunity to create something original, seemingly saying, “This frees me from a format with which I have had limited success.” Honors students, however, sometimes grow uncomfortable when we alter or remove the formulae which they have mastered, worrying, “I don’t know how to earn an A for this.” Students may consider risk-taking a threat to GPA and scholarship money, but I believe that the discomfort runs deeper: non-conformity is a risk to their self-esteem and self-image. Who am I if not the person who writes the best paper or earns the highest score in the class?

As teachers, if we address a growing lack of originality in honors students’ work, then perhaps we also need to address the assignments themselves. You may protest, however, that we must teach students to meet certain disciplinary standards, and we must adhere to such standards ourselves for professional development. I would counter that this positions us in exactly the same risky place we want to put our students regarding originality: our professional image is at stake, just as theirs is.

In the end, if we don’t want rote regurgitation or plagiarism, and if we want students to break from their conformity, then as teachers, as Frank Aydelotte might say, we need to break the academic lockstep. If a component of an honors student’s academic success truly is learning how to give teachers what we want, then the onus is on us to change what we want and then actively promote and support original thought in our honors students’ work.

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JEFFREY A. PORTNOY

# Intimations of Imitation: Honors Students and their Alps

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Joan Digby's "The Age of Imitation" reads like Joan herself: shrewd, provocative, and astute in her observations. I found her remarks compelling on both the personal and professional level as I think about the current generation of students and the society in which we move.

The dialectic between the Romantic poets and the Augustans was one that I traversed. As an undergraduate English major in the late 60s and early 70s, I found in the Romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth and Coleridge, voices within the canon that resonated with my sense of the world at the time and the profound mysteries of life. (Of course, Shakespeare is always the exception to everything, even for the eighteenth century). I didn't need no stinking professors with badges to plumb the depths of *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* or *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*. (Ah, yes, the certitude of youth.) Wordsworth and Coleridge—like Dylan, Hendrix, and Morrison—were not speaking, lying actually, from the Nixon White House. Their message was soulful, cosmic, intense, inward, transcendent. I suspect that Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats played no small part in inspiring me to remain engaged with literature and ultimately to attend graduate school after several years in the business world.

How ironic then that graduate school found me immersed in the literature of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century. The closest I came to a course on the Romantics was studying Austen and Blake, two authors claimed by both sides of the sensibility divide. The appeal was probably twofold. I came to understand how to write and by extension perhaps how to read à la Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*. As masters of their craft, few can compete with the luminaries of the eighteenth century: Pope, Jonathan Swift, and Samuel Johnson. Pope never missed an opportunity to emend a poem, however subtly, when the opportunity arose, and Maynard Mack's *The Last and Greatest Art*, a collection of Pope's manuscript revisions, is a remarkable testament to that. These authors were part and parcel of my metamorphosis into a writer and editor although all too often, in the morass of grading flawed student papers, my working life has stranded me on Grub Street, not the Ivory Tower, to struggle as a hack editor and critic. Into the graduate school mix of those writers came two brilliant scholars and teachers of the eighteenth century, J. Paul Hunter and Martine Watson Brownley, who shared their insights into writing—in particular the flaws in my writing—along with my experience of being thrown into the composition classroom as an instructor having to guide others.

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What emerged for me is a pedagogy that emphasizes and demands revisions from students in the context of peer editing and studying published works. For each of the composition papers students write for me in Honors English, I hope to see three, four, or even five formal drafts through the entirety of the semester although the number of students who take full advantage of the opportunity to benefit themselves and their grades seems to diminish each year. Joan notes that she employs strategies in her classroom to help students “become conscious of structure and vocabulary in their own work.” When exercised properly, revision does exactly that. Of course, my expectation is that students—by diligently searching for the best word, phrase, example, or quotation—will transcend craftsmanship, discover what they really think about a topic, and thus approach some originality of thought and insight. Too often, I have found that students in my honors writing courses emerged from high school without being pushed hard in the direction of originality or complexity of thought, relying instead on the formulaic three-point thesis, five-paragraph essay as if all the world could be segmented into three equal pieces. Unfortunately, high school teachers ply their trade in the trenches for their students, and indirectly for college professors, while beset by bureaucracy and burgeoning classrooms. To receive work from future honors students that has relatively clean prose, a modicum of structure, and some notions of an idea is a respite and not a stepping-stone for a work in process. Beleaguered high school teachers cannot devote the attention to the details of these competent essays that college instructors can. Thus college composition, particularly in an honors environment, can be disconcerting for students; essays once returned with gratitude and an A in high school are now deficient when it comes to offering a strong thesis statement, textured prose, and a convincing body of supporting evidence. Fortunately, most honors students respond to the demands with hard work rather than despair.

A secret to good writing, or at least one Zen adage applicable to good writing, comes down to three words: Attention. Attention. Attention. The problem with revision is that it demands that writers sustain their engagement with a topic through time and that kind of effort is foreign to many students in a culture where immediacy is the expected norm. Internet research too often is about the search and the speed of the search: the clicking from one location to another more than the substance of what is found, especially if what is offered is weighty and lengthy. And if Joan is correct in her assertion that “this audience wants exact duplication of the known—nothing new or different,” the comfort zone of such repetition seems to be away from books. In a far-from-scientific poll of my students this term, I asked them about the artistic and cultural works they found compelling and to which they returned time and again. Films, television, electronic games, and music were at the top. That many mentioned *When Harry Met Sally*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Princess Bride*, and the film version of *The Lord of the Rings* was somewhat comforting. (*Seinfeld*—good—and *Friends*—I’ve never seen it—were also frequently mentioned.) Rereading books was barely a tremor on the landscape of their choices.

The fascination with the familiar, the retelling of known stories, was a characteristic of oral cultures. Scholars like Walter J. Ong have often likened the modern age of instantaneous, immediate communication and response through computer

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technology to a secondary orality. Perhaps the onslaught of the new results in a necessary retreat into the familiar. Wisdom and knowledge in oral cultures are often aphoristic and poetic to promote remembering. Eighteenth-century couplets and Pope's valuation hearken back to these qualities: "True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest, / What oft was *Thought*, but ne'er so well *Exprest* . . ." (Essay 297-98). After Shakespeare, Pope is the most quoted English writer although many know not that they are quoting Pope. The difficulty comes for contemporary students, even if they are circulating in a New Age of Imitation, when they have to push beyond that which is quickly apprehended. Pope offers succinctness and true wit about learning. All of us know: "A little Learning is a dang'rous Thing. . . ." Many of us know the full couplet: "A little Learning is a dang'rous Thing; / Drink deep, or taste not the *Pierian* Spring. . . ." But the essence and the complexity of Pope's understanding emerge in the complete verse paragraph:

A little Learning is a dang'rous Thing;  
Drink deep, or taste not the *Pierian* Spring:  
There shallow *Draughts* intoxicate the Brain,  
And drinking largely sobers us again.  
Fir'd at first Sight with what the *Muse* imparts,  
In fearless *Youth* we tempt the Heights of Arts,  
While from the bounded *Level* of our Mind,  
*Short Views* we take, nor see the *Lengths behind*,  
But more *advanc'd*, behold with strange Surprise  
New, distant Scenes of endless Science rise!  
So pleas'd at first, the tousing *Alps* we try  
Mount o'er the Vales, and seem to tread the Sky;  
Th' Eternal Snows appear already past,  
And the first *Clouds* and *Mountains* seem the last:  
But those *attain'd*, we tremble to survey  
The growing Labours of the lengthen'd Way,  
Th' *increasing* Prospect tires our wandring Eyes,  
Hills peep o'er Hills, and *Alps* on *Alps* arise!  
—Essay 215-32

While Pope is always cognizant of the long journey and struggle in producing art, in *The Prelude* Wordsworth immediately turns to the imagination in response to his own crossing of the Alps:

Imagination—here the Power so called  
Through sad incompetence of human speech,  
That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss  
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps  
At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;  
Halted without an effort to break through;  
But to my conscious soul I now can say—  
"I recognize thy glory:" in such strength

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Of usurpation, when the light of sense  
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed  
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,  
There harbours whether we be young or old.  
Our destiny, our being's heart and home  
Is with infinitude, and only there....

—6.592-605

Honor students are not inclined towards silent toil and meditation as they traverse the mountains of their own educational journey. If we do not feel their pain, we certainly hear about it. They are likely to remark upon their displeasures and their burdens. Education and its responsibilities, we must remind our students, are not loathsome obligations but treasures to celebrate and use. Albert Einstein said of education: "Teaching should be such that what is offered is perceived as a valuable gift and not a hard duty."<sup>1</sup> The task of judging their ascent, while less labor intensive, remains precarious. We must wonder whether our students are trudging a beaten path or discovering for themselves something new. Looking at the written text, Joan puzzled over the validity and quality of her Valedictorian's theme of theft "framed in a series of thank you notes to professors whose ideas he had stolen over the years." That tricky business of tone, which the Valedictorian successfully negotiated, captivated the audience, but the test over the long haul is whether such thievery resonates internally. In a Romantic Age, we might anticipate that the imagination is the synthesizing agent. In an Age of Imitation, perhaps repetition itself becomes the vehicle. Given the quality of political, religious, and cultural discourse these days, promoting an appreciation of eighteenth-century morality, wit, and satire, of Pope's "Prospect" view, might be of great service to our students and society.

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Kate Bruce for this quotation from her Presidential Address at the 2005 Annual Meeting of the Southern Regional Honors Council.

AMY BASS

# The Art of the Mash-up: Students in the Age of Digital Reproduction

AMY BASS

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History has never had a convenient mechanism of organization. The measurement of time we call the decade, unfortunately, does not work. The sixties, for example, in many ways began in 1955 with the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, and in other ways began in 1963 with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. They did not end on December 31, 1969, as we would have liked them to, because the Black Panthers and the Radical Feminists, as well as many others with sixties sensibilities, would have much to say going into the 1970s. Further, few could question the fact that the greed that personified the 1980s remained solely in that decade, or that only the 1920s “roared.”

Thus, historians, particularly cultural historians, tend to rely on chronology far less than others likely think we should. And because of that, we generally hate to personify the character of a generation, making for a tricky task of defining historical trends while avoiding vulgar generalizations. However, it is a worthy endeavor, for how else to explain the election of Richard Milhouse Nixon in the visibly revolutionary year of 1968? It also proves useful when responding to Joan Digby’s argument that the eighteenth century was an Age of Imitation, considering that the nineteenth century cultural landscape was dominated by the art of minstrelsy, likely the most imitative of performative styles and the forerunner of “mechanical reproduction,” as phrased by Walter Benjamin.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as cultural critics from the Frankfurt School to Benedict Anderson have theorized, the twentieth century is not so much an age of imitation, but rather a continuation of the reproduction of *representations* of reality that now permeate our postmodern sensibilities. To specify that any particular age is of particular imitation, and thus that our students follow suit, is to believe that there is an age of authenticity somewhere out there, or an “*our* culture” in the words of Digby, something that postmodern critique has dispelled and that globalization has rendered obsolete.

I am new at the honors thing – I am the first to admit this. I took the reins of a once-glorious Honors Program in the fall of 2003, becoming its fourth director in

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969). Of its relationship to periodization, Benjamin writes, “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence.”

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four years. The senior class had but three students left in it from the 15 that had entered four years previously. The juniors were weary, the sophomores were wary, and the freshmen were too busy unpacking to notice much. But with open arms they welcomed me, taught me, talked with me, and learned from me. I studied the history of the Program with them, discussed what worked and what was no longer working, and put it all back together in a year's time. Because of this process, I quickly grew to know this set of students – honors students – in a way I had known none before. I learned of their curricular desires, their social needs, the rhythms of their academic goals. They helped me better and stabilize the Honors Program, but in the process they gave me an unparalleled view into their lives. As it happened, I was teaching my seminar on youth culture concurrently with this process and, thus, I took notes.

If I had to generalize about what marked these students, I would say they lived in an age of immediacy, a time when the speed with which stocks are traded can crush the global economic system; travel can be booked from your living room and your boarding pass printed before you pack your suitcase; and students can “instant message” each other in class, crib an entire paper from a Google search, and demand an instant response from your own email account in the wee hours of the morning. With this immediacy come a large worldview and a terribly independent culture under the umbrella of global corporate dominance, dependent largely on what we could call, to reword Benjamin, the Age of *Digital* Reproduction. Students “blog” their feelings to the wired world, reinstating the art of journal writing in a public way, revealing high stress levels (jobs, family, school) with fewer words, as children of the internet age allegedly have significantly thinner vocabularies. They craft underground musical culture via the process of downloading, ensuring that while *Billboard* heralds Usher or Britney Spears as top-sellers, college students bestow success upon the likes of Modest Mouse and The Postal Service and Hoobastank and Quasimoto years, if ever, before they hit *Billboard's* radar. They make friends, find partners, and join organizations on Craig's List, extending their social circle from the confines of campus to the entire online community.

Perhaps most significantly, I have noticed that their political conversations define postmodern realities. They are tremendously well-voiced in a range of issues, particularly those of the global economy, i.e., The World Bank. But rather than argue about *whom* to vote for in any given election, they argue over *whether* to vote at all. Their political identity came of age in a moment of tremendous uncertainty regarding the legitimacy of the system, particularly with the national elections of 2000 and 2004. They have grave doubts, as perhaps we all should, over whether it really matters who sits in the Oval Office, and they seem to prefer to conceptualize change at a global, albeit grassroots, level rather than a national one. They wonder about the idea of role models, particularly in terms of the ethics of the most powerful and “successful” in the contemporary moment: “Will Ken Lay ever go to jail?” one wondered in my “Race and Ethnicity” seminar last fall, following a discussion of the racial unbalance in America's prisons.

So where does that leave us? Perhaps rather than considering our students as imitators, we should make a distinction that borrows a framework from the evolution of rock and roll as the predominant commercial musical form, speaking a language

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that students could perhaps embrace. While Pat Boone “covered” and “whitened” rhythm and blues artists such as Fats Domino to carve corporate success in the music industry in the 1950s, becoming the exemplar of musical *imitation*, others, like Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry, stylized something new, becoming the archetypes of musical *innovation*. Thus, rather than seeing our students as those who *sample*, as Digby put it, we should see them as those who *appropriate*, ones who borrow, as so many have done before them, to create something of their own. Rather than the act of imitating, then, let us consider the art of the mash-up, a musical form in which a vocal track from one song is superimposed on the instrumental track of another via computer, bringing together the diverse sounds, audiences, genres, and decades of Destiny’s Child’s “Bootylicious” with Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit”; Missy Elliott’s “Get Ur Freak On” with Joy Division’s “Love Will Tear Us Apart”; or—and this may be my favorite—Eminem’s “The Way I Am” with a remix of the theme song from “Bob the Builder.” This classically bootlegged culture is created by students with powerful computers who have challenged and changed ideas of originality, ownership, and, indeed, (and in a very Foucaultian manner, might I add) the very idea of author. The mash-up represents a moment in which *everyone* is the creator, but only those in the know are the audience, as it is creation that purposefully remains open only to those who look for it. As faculty, then, we have to look for it, and when we do, we are rewarded.

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# Responsibility and Imitation

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In my discipline there are typically two kinds of reviews. The first is sharply critical of the author's conclusions, argumentative techniques, and overall style. The second usually involves a brief summary of the author's points and then goes on to engage the project in a variety of ways: some critical, some conciliatory. I choose to adopt the latter form as it seems that Digby brings to the fore issues that should concern educators in Honors.

Digby's essay begins with a brief historical/literary narrative that provides a backdrop against which we can understand the issue she will discuss. We quickly realize that she worries imitation has become more important than creation in modern students. She argues that, as a result of this adherence to imitation, the very notions of truth, authorship, and creativity have become perhaps meaningless. If truth is what we take to be represented by the most prevalent information on the web, then certainly we ought to be worried. If authorship is a matter of who can cut and paste the most information into an easily digestible format, then the creativity seems to be more about marketing and consumption than developing new forms of expression. Perhaps I am stating her conclusions too strongly, but I think the tenor of her paper is not too far from this.

However, her main worry is not the attitude our age has about imitation but rather that this practice and exaltation of imitation constrains students, honors students in particular, from undertaking projects (senior theses) or engaging their course materials in new and possibly provocative ways. Imitation limits almost exactly what honors education seems to promote. If imitation is the main activity and even honors professors, the vanguard (perhaps) of high academic achievement, practice imitation in shaping pedagogical structures meant to involve the student in active and inspired academic projects, then certainly it is difficult to expect the student to do anything more than what we do. A cursory look at television will show how much we try to identify with a certain look or lifestyle. Imitation can offer success, as the valedictorian's speech exemplifies all too well.

I think that Digby offers us some interesting points to think about, but I think the pessimism, especially with regard to imitation, is overstated. I think we ought to look at one of her examples a bit more closely and, I think, see that the problem isn't so much imitation as responsibility. I want to talk briefly and somewhat loosely about responsibility and imitation and note that the practice of imitation need not lead to the limitations Digby laments. Responsibility in imitation can help students learn.

Digby laments that imitation has become so rampant, so deep in our popular culture, that popular music can be entirely driven through the use of "sampling."<sup>1</sup> However,

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<sup>1</sup> Not to insult anyone's intelligence, but sampling is a practice where a musician samples a portion of another song (a drumbeat, bass-line, hook, etc.) and then places it into a new context as either the driving force of a new song or as an additional layer to a composition. The practice has been concomitant with the rise of hip-hop and rap music.

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sampling itself, an example we will explore a bit here, is not straightforwardly problematic. Rather the use to which sampling is put within the new work and the absence of suitable recognition might be problematic. There are plenty of examples of songs where sampling constitutes most, if not all, of the material used for the song, but even this is not so troubling when you think about it. Sampling, in modern music, is often used to reshape older tunes in new and interesting ways. Sampling in a piece does not necessarily make the song badly derivative. Often the new creation takes the sampled segment into exciting new areas that can be creative, interesting, and original.

This point cannot be stressed enough. The practice of sampling itself is not the problem. The problem occurs when the new tune is wholly derivative or there is neither something new brought onto the scene nor adequate recognition of the original author. Truly groundbreaking sampling uses bits and pieces of songs and takes the themes within those elements and spins them in new directions. This isn't so different from musicians turning to birdsong for inspiration or jazz musicians incorporating a segment of someone else's song in their own solo. If the sampling is noted in the liner notes of an album or due credit is given, then the practice is responsible. The sampling artist furthers creativity in taking the sampled portion in a new direction. Sampling itself can be a form of musical expression that is as creative as traditional compositional authorship.

The trick for us is how we teach our students to understand, be aware of, and cite their sources—to appreciate how much the work or exercises rely on copying the work or style of another. If the sampling or imitation is done in such a way that the students attempt to pass off the work as their own, then this is troubling and Digby has every reason to worry. But if these are exercises that introduce students to methods that might help them become more conversant in a certain discipline and if the mimetic nature of the activity is made known, then this seems quite reasonable. If we are training our students to be thoughtful, then we have a responsibility to make them aware, at some point and in some meaningful way, exactly what they are doing and to what end. If we don't make this clear, then we have failed, in part, to fully educate them.

Overall, I appreciate the issue that Digby has brought to our attention. Her use of literary history as analogue and backdrop is informative on a number of levels. Her worries, however, seem overstated. If we wish for our honors students to be original and creative, then maybe we ought to be up front about the mimetic exercises we use to help educate them. Being aware of the "point" of the class is often helpful in allowing the students to understand the material in a new light. It equips them with another view of which they can be aware. In as much as imitation ought to be responsibly done, we ought to be responsible in teaching our students as well.

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CHERYL ACHTERBERG

# The Ages of Imitation, Authenticity and Originality

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Joan Digby has offered us a wonderful opportunity to think about our students and ourselves in constructing an education for them. Her essay took me back to my own freshman year when I read Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "The Birthmark." I think it might have been the first formal paper that I wrote in college, and it left an indelible imprint on my mind: The only truth is paradox. It seems to fit this case. Our students are and are not different than those in the past, and we, their instructors, are neither more nor less than our predecessors. If the classics teach us anything, it is that humans have not changed much over the last few thousand years. Who are we to think that in our present age (a decade?), we have changed when all the others haven't?

That said, Dr. Digby has a point. Our current college students do seem enamored of imitation, and honors students are by no means immune. I would like to further explore *why* that might be so. Some of our students might be lazy. Others are probably busier than young people in the past. They begin lessons in everything from gymnastics to social graces from pre-kindergarten days through high school peppered with community service, a varsity letter in some sport, an instrument, a handful or two of AP classes, and a Kaplan course to prepare for the SAT examination. Every evening is "booked." This is not to excuse the *pastiche* of sentences and paragraphs that Digby describes, but our students may have lives too full to devote much time to the habits of mind or creative production. Another explanation alluded to by Digby is that imitation is easier now than before because of the Internet. Certainly, the popular and professional literature abounds with stories of plagiarism (the purest form of imitation?), and many of us, unfortunately, have had personal experiences confronting it. Some students who 'imitate' in this fashion plead ignorance. Perhaps so. Yet, it is possible that some of Dr. Digby's students may be using imitation as a time-worn method of learning, practiced intensively today in music and art but also more broadly in every society known to human history.

The human development literature amply describes the role of imitation in learning and maturation in both the cognitive and social realms. Adolescents are especially active imitators, beyond their immediate family circle, as they begin to form their own individual identities, transferring an isomorphic identity from family to peer group before evolving into a separately defined, individual entity. Our first-year college students are still in the grip of those transitions. Imitation from that perspective, then, is a stage that is normative, important, and valued. In other words, imitation is a normal learning behavior, but the imitator needs to be encouraged to move past mere imitation into a more authentic, individual, and adult role. Out of authenticity, originality *might* emerge (without it, originality is unlikely ever to emerge).

## THE AGES OF IMITATION, AUTHENTICITY AND ORIGINALITY

Yet, there are a few (new?) developments to wonder about, specifically the ubiquity of professional performance (due to the commonplace of mass media) and a unique peer influence created by the effects of mass day care. Of course, this is utter speculation, but consider these ideas for a moment. The ready accessibility of “first rate” performance, whether it be dancing, singing, writing, acting, etc., sets a bar so high that no one wants to see, hear, indulge or tolerate anything less. As Dr. Digby noted, “People want what is safe, what they already know and therefore are able to judge against a reliable yardstick.” For one filled with the insecurity of adolescence and the yearning to prove oneself, the risk of performing at any lower level is more embarrassing and perhaps less well accepted than in the past. In the second case, many, if not most, of our students have had prolonged experiences in the day care environment where the primary reference points tend to be individuals within their own age group. Of course, school environments do this as well. In other words, the current generation of students have had pushed upon them horizontal reference points more often than the vertical reference points that exist between people of different ages. If younger, an individual can look up to someone with more experience, perspective, and history who might share or model behaviors, values, expectations and a realistic learning trajectory from poor to good to excellent. If older, the individual can, in effect, teach as well as learn something (hopefully through reflection) from that teaching. Without the balancing exposure to vertical reference points, our students might be ‘super-saturated’ with horizontal references and an expert-oriented performance culture. In combination these strong social forces may cultivate or reinforce more pronounced habits of imitation that, in turn, are exacerbated further by a market economy catering to a social (horizontal) niche! Hence, *Shrek 2*, *Kill Bill 2*, *Matrix 3*, etc.

None of this speculation relieves us of the problem, however. From an educator’s perspective, it is incumbent upon us to assist these students as they climb out of “the age of imitation” and into the age of originality or maturity, evolving from passive recipients of knowledge to active meaning makers. This is central to the purpose of higher education. We would hope that honors students would go one step further and ultimately become scholars themselves, generating new knowledge that contributes not just to themselves but beyond, perhaps even to all of humanity.

There is the old saying, “If we do what we have always done, we will get what we have always got.” The implication is that we need to change if we are not satisfied with our results. Ironically, I think the discomfort expressed by Dr. Digby is that she is *not* getting what she has always gotten in the past. If our students have changed, then I think we must ask ourselves if we do not also have to change. I think there are two choices. We may continue to teach and act as before and change the goals or outcomes of our efforts—a solution I find unpalatable. Or, as Joan Digby also suggests, we must change what we do if we are determined to stay constant with our goals. Changing what we do may require different texts and different pedagogies, as well as different ways to frame our teaching “problems” and “solutions.” What better place to conduct the experiment than in honors?

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JAY MANDT

# Imitation, Economic Insecurity, and Risk Aversion

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There is an ingrained notion in American culture that *individuals* are responsible for their circumstances. In the Great Depression, people blamed themselves for unemployment, as if somehow their personal character flaws, rather than a breakdown of the national economy, had caused them to be laid off. At a visceral level, Americans reject the idea that they are in the grip of vast forces beyond their control.

I note this because, when I ask students why so many of their honors peers underperform academically and seem shy about undertaking intellectual adventures, they *always* reply that it's because their fellow students are "lazy." One great merit of Digby's "The Age of Imitation" is that it offers a cultural, not a moral, explanation for this kind of behavior. But Digby's description of the present moment in cultural history offers little by way of an account of how we came to it. I want to offer some suggestions in that direction.

I begin with another snapshot. The February 21<sup>st</sup> issue of *Time* featured a cover story on "What Teachers Hate About Parents." The story highlighted the extraordinary increase in the rate of parental interventions on behalf of their kids—not just inquiries about how they're doing, but attacks on the very idea that Junior could be anything but a stellar performer. Or consider Patrick Allitt, the Emory historian, in his delightful *I'm the Teacher, You're the Student*: Allitt reports that parents frequently call Emory faculty to complain that they aren't paying tens of thousands of dollars in tuition for Cs (let alone Ds or Fs). For these parents, the problem is not their son or daughter's performance, but the grade assigned to that performance. Many parents expect "success," not achievement.

There have always been overprotective parents, and mistaking marks of success for real achievement is an age-old problem. What seems to have changed is the degree. With so many parents behaving this way, we have a generation of young people often shielded from the consequences of their own mis-performance, inexperienced at fighting their own battles, who have, as a consequence, less occasion to learn from mistakes, less skill in dealing with relative failure, fewer occasions to confront their limitations, and less reason to take responsibility for themselves. These unlearned lessons make it harder for students to do what we expect of honors students. Without the requisite skills of maturity, talented students can only see an honors thesis as a mountain impossible to climb, and even honors coursework as too demanding. Aggressive, overprotective parents do their sons and daughters no favors.

## IMITATION, ECONOMIC INSECURITY, AND RISK AVERSION

But I doubt that overprotective parents are the nub of the problem, however much they contribute to their children's retarded academic development. Protectiveness is a response to perceived risk or danger. If a whole generation of parents has become highly protective of their kids, it is likely that they have done so in reaction to changing life circumstances and not that a whole generation has, individual by individual, lost their moral compass where child rearing is concerned. So, what has changed? Many commentators have remarked that ours is a risk-averse society. That may explain obsessive interest in child car seats or helmets for bike riders, but how does it explain the attitudes reported by *Time*? If we believe the reports, parents of many school children are overprotective of *success*.

I think some demographic trends are instructive here. Today, a majority of American kids live through a divorce in their pre-college years; a large portion of American kids grow up with only one parent; and, as average family size shrinks, a much higher proportion of kids are "only children." Divorce leaves many kids emotionally damaged or vulnerable, and it very often leaves the custodial parent struggling economically. Children of single parents, on average, suffer from various disabilities: poor parental supervision if a parent is working two jobs to make ends meet or has several children to deal with, lack of a gender role model in the home, and economic difficulties, to name only the most obvious. And the only child not only lacks siblings to test him or herself against but is notoriously the most likely to have overprotective parents. A disproportionate share of school children are "underprivileged"; a much higher percent of children than of the population at large is below the poverty line; children of immigrants, legal and illegal, form a much higher percent of the school-age population than immigrants represent in the total population.

All of these factors tend to leave a young person "at risk." For the poor child, the basic necessities of life may be lacking or sub-standard; for children of divorce, even when economic problems do not arise, there are often emotional scars; racism retards the development of children from some backgrounds. Even "privileged" children with two parents often pay for their advantages: overprotective parents retard the child's development, and a too-privileged upbringing all too easily leads to a sense of entitlement that defies the principle that everything worthwhile in education needs to be earned the old-fashioned way, by hard work.

Looming over these varied family situations is economic insecurity. Most one-earner families face it. And in the 1990s, working-class and lower-middle-class families faced it as the 90s boom lifted the incomes of upper-middle-class and wealthy families but left others stagnant or declining. Today, these same income groups are the most likely to face rising health care and educational costs as employers cut benefits, and they are the most threatened by job out-sourcing.

How do families facing economic insecurity, or other disabilities, view the prospects of a very talented son or daughter? I suggest that the *rational* response is to make sure that the kid doesn't blow the opportunity his or her talent represents. What does that mean? When one's parents are mired in a dead-end situation, "opportunity" means, I think, choosing the "sure thing" instead of the dream, seeking an education for success, not for enlightenment, and, above all, not making "mistakes." "Security" becomes an over-riding consideration and risk management not just a

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tactic but a life-philosophy. When universities face budget cuts, faculty draw back from adventurous projects and focus on primary goals and well-trod paths. They look after themselves first, working to improve their vitas, growing anxious about course enrollment, and worrying about their teaching evaluations. Anxious, insecure faculty are not the ones who delve into new fields of inquiry or take on adventurous research projects with no guarantees of success. Our students behave no differently.

For a number of years, our program recruited students through breakout sessions at Freshman Orientation. One year, we experimented with the two halves of our message, the appeal to intellectual adventure and academic challenge on the one hand, and the program's "safety net" of services and support on the other. We discovered that the "adventure" message made eyes light up but led to few applications while the "safety" message left eyes dull but won us many applicants. The outcome is only counter-intuitive if you forget the most common life experiences of the current generation and the overarching search for security. Today's students have more riding on "success" than ever before but are often less equipped than former generations to achieve it. (The manifold failures of many public schools are another part of this story.) Their divided souls make sense: their hearts may tug in one direction, but their heads calculate that a different goal is, if not better, then wiser.

There are many reasons for today's students not to be risk takers and not to go out of their way looking for challenges. Many can't afford a "mistake," and others lack the skills to tackle the challenges we would engage them in. In this context, Digby's discovery that students appreciate imitative excellence much more naturally than creativity makes sense. It fits easily with a loss of confidence and a safety-mindedness born of years of stress, retrenchment, and declining prospects. Models fit for imitation are already *proven*; creative expression is a crap shoot. In good times, talented people can't imagine failure; in bad times, survival itself can seem a kind of success. I find my students quail at the thought of criticizing one another. But theirs is not the solidarity of a long march to the promised land. It feels more like people huddling together against the elements (me). If there is a generosity of spirit here, there is also a kind of stultifying self-restraint. Are they afraid of showing up their compatriots or of not showing them up? Is it fellow feeling or self-doubt? I suspect it's both. Even those who haven't been beaten up by circumstances have friends with bruises. The finer spirits among them are sympathetic and surely cannot help but think that, but for a few breaks, there stand I. Ours is not an age of heroes.

I often tell students that they should aspire not just to meet but to set the standards. Joan Digby says my proposition is hardly intelligible to most of my listeners. Maybe she's right. The question is: what does all of this say about how we must teach?

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MEL PIEHL

# The Hopes and Fears of Post-9/11 Years

MEL PIEHL

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In 1998 Arthur Levine and Jeannette Cureton wrote in *When Hope and Fear Collide: A Portrait of Today's College Student* that the current college generation they had studied was “wearied by the enormous pressure they face economically, politically, socially, and psychologically. At the same time, they are energized by a desire to enjoy the good life and make their corner of the world a better place. This is a generation in which hope and fear are colliding” (17).

We have recently graduated a class of college seniors for most of whom the events of September 11, 2001 occurred within a few weeks of their arrival on campus. If hope and fear were colliding in 1998, one might suppose that on September 11 fear must have won a decisive victory and that current college students—including those in Valparaiso University’s honors college, Christ College—would have turned decisively toward those outlooks and behaviors associated with social anxiety and dread of the future: disillusionment, defensiveness, caution, and above all a quest for security and a safe “haven in a heartless world.”

Yet this is by no means the case. Many of our “best and brightest” students, while decisively and perhaps permanently sobered by the terrible terrorist attack on the United States and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, have not been individually or collectively traumatized into passive or fortress-building psychological or social postures. Instead, many seem to cherish those core values of faith, family, friendship, community, and democratic liberty that sustained them in the days and weeks following September 11, values that they see as extremely precious even as they appear more fragile and vulnerable than ever before. And they look for ways to sustain and build those connections in their own lives and in the lives of others even as they struggle with the issues of career, intimate relationships, and social autonomy that Jeffrey Jensen Arnett of the University of Maryland at College Park identified with the stage of “emerging adulthood” in an *American Psychologist* article, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from Late Teens Through the Twenties.”

While it would be an exaggeration to say that hope has won some kind of strategic victory over fear, there is among a great many of our honors students—largely Midwestern, middle-class, seriously religious, and strongly connected to family—a sense of earnestness and openness and even innocence that seeks to affirm and reassert their core values in a social and cultural environment that seems less dismissive of them. As one of our junior students told us, “While there are many reasons to

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be anxious, there is a deep commitment among honors students to improve the world in whatever way each can." Reports of the "death of irony" in the wake of September 11 may have been exaggerated, but it does appear that students living outside the centers of ironic and self-consciously avant-garde attitudes are less inclined to take their cues from the media and other sources and more inclined to look toward local exemplars of what it means to lead a significant life.

The most visible manifestation of these inclinations is the continuing intensification of the impulse toward personal volunteering and social service, both at home and abroad. Programs that Christ College affirms or actively supports, like the deployment of pre-medical arts students during their spring break to medical clinics in Central America, are highly popular and over-subscribed. Many students look for volunteer or internship opportunities that will actively aid underserved communities while testing their own vocations for health professions, church-related vocations, or areas of technology and science that seem to address social needs. One of last year's seniors performed a summer internship to develop environmentally sound dairy farming and is now taking a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship to the University of Minnesota where he will pursue environmental engineering. The student-led World Relief Campaigns sponsored by Valparaiso University's chapel have grown more extensive and sophisticated in their conception and public visibility, addressing forms of Third World development that are recognized in places like the *Wall Street Journal* in Roger Thurow's April 2005 article on famine relief, "In Battling Hunger, a New Advance: Peanut-Butter Paste."

Whether such far-visioned manifestations of outreach among largely tradition-oriented honors students represents only a temporary blip or prefigures a wider social development is hard to say. Only a small minority of students actively seek professional careers designed to address directly the grand international and national problems of terrorism and war—though it may be revealing that one of our talented seniors has won the highly competitive German Chancellor Scholarship to pursue Middle Eastern and Arabic studies in Berlin, with the ultimate aim of improving America's cultural and political posture in the Middle East. More students wrestle with finding what they call a "balance" between career goals, social responsibility, and personal satisfactions. And a small minority seem actively to shrink from the pressures and burdens that press upon them from "the world," in the form of "the job market," unsettled personal relationships, escapist distractions, parents, and college professors and advisors. For that small number of students, the cross-currents of hope and fear that Levine and Cureton identified have grown even stronger, producing either an uncertainty bordering on paralysis or weathervane behavior that turns with any momentarily prevailing wind.

It can also be said that college honors students, like American young people generally, are no longer as distinctively segregated by their age cohort as generations past from the wider experiences of their culture, community, or nation. Many of the markers that once set youth apart from their elders, like music and pop culture, are now part of American culture generally, and what divisions remain run more along lines of class or ideology or race than of age. In my experience, more students actively welcome intelligent adult engagement with their intellectual, moral, and religious

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lives than at any time in the recent past. They no longer feel that adults are interfering or intruding on their freedom; rather, they seek wise support, guidance, and assistance in an uncertain world. Almost all our students are enthusiastic about the depth of personal engagement with religious and philosophical texts in our first-year program (they read Aristotle, the Gospels, St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Mencius, and Kant, among others). As Alexander Astin of UCLA has recently said, "There are large numbers of students who are involved in spiritual and religious issues and who are trying to figure out what life is all about and what matters to them. We need to be much more creative in finding ways to encourage that exploration." (Bartlett A40)

It is therefore a good time to be in places of higher education that are still committed to the liberal arts and to the development of intellectual, moral, and spiritual virtues. We have an opportunity with today's honors students to develop academic and co-curricular programs that can speak to their deep issues and real concerns while preparing them for productive lives. Most college-age students are surely still in a stage of "emerging adulthood," with all the attendant moral and social issues. But the days of viewing them as somehow "other," residents of a foreign territory distinct from the time and culture we all share, seem to be fading if they have not already passed.

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ROSALIE C. OTERO

## What Honors Students Are Like Now

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I recently received a letter from one of our Honors alumnae. Zoë wrote: “I’m doing it again! I’ve decided to run another marathon in support of the Leukemia Society of America in Anchorage, Alaska. Five years ago, I undertook a great challenge when I successfully completed the marathon in San Diego, running 26.2 miles in just over 4 1/2 hours. Although training in Alaska has proved challenging—getting up in the dark to confront freezing temperatures, snow and ice, while trying to avoid running into moose (which, believe it or not, happens often), the challenges that I’m encountering are nothing compared to the struggles faced by those who are racing for their lives against serious illnesses.”

I sat back and thought, “This is definitely an honors student.” Why is that? What is it about honors students that make them unique?

I looked at the 2005 graduating class for ideas. I’m listing just three students and a small sampling of the kinds of activities they were involved with during their undergraduate careers, but they are not unique in their engagement and accomplishments. All of the graduates have similar portfolios.

Catherine is a Foreign Languages major (she’s learning Russian, French, Italian, Spanish, and Chinese). She spent a semester at the St. Petersburg Polytechnic University in Russia and plans to attend Law School to specialize in International Law. She is also a flamenco, ballet, and jazz dancer and instructor.

Liz is an English major with a Political Science minor. She was a member of the College Green Party and NARAL Pro-Choice. She’s been published, studied in France and Spain, and will be living in Arusha, Tanzania, after graduation working as an apprentice to a UN lawyer at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. She wants to become a journalist.

Mario is an Education major with a Communication Arts endorsement. He is a non-traditional student. Mario is co-founder of the Speech and Debate Society at UNM. He has been published and did original research on magical realism as a McNair Scholar. He will be teaching high school in Georgia or Arizona and working on a Master’s.

## WHAT HONORS STUDENTS ARE LIKE NOW

I find that Honors students ask probing questions that tend to differ from non-honors students' in-depth of understanding and frequency. They all have interests in many areas. Many honors students either can't settle on a major until their sophomore or junior year or they come to the university already focused on their goal. I find the first kind easier because they are more open to possibilities and are interested in taking a variety of courses. These students, however, do need additional guidance and advising in order to complete their undergraduate program in a timely manner. I find the second group more problematic because they are so focused in one area that their interests are limited to activities and classes that are associated with that field. Helping them think in different ways and about broader topics is challenging.

Honors students are opposed to "banal" academic coursework. As one student wrote, "Generally during the semester, the average student is reluctant to explore subjects and material not specifically required by courses despite deep interest in doing so." I have found that honors students do not enroll in courses merely because they are required. Most of the honors students enroll in courses that will challenge them, make them think, teach them something. Sometimes they have to take courses that are boring or too large, but even in those courses the honors students find ways to discover new information. They also engage in learning beyond the classroom. They are involved in clubs, student government, volunteer activities, campus and community events, and jobs.

Through the years, I have encountered some differences in each entering class. Their communication styles and expectations are different. They often have different attitudes about their studies and life, and their comfort level with technology is surprising. Even their views regarding such things as loyalty and authority are different.

In my early years in honors (late '80's and early '90's), I found honors students to be superachievers. Many of them grew up in single-parent families and took on adult responsibilities early in life. They were often dedicated to people, projects, ideas and tasks rather than longevity and lifetime employment. They were parallel thinkers, independent and resourceful. They accepted change. They looked for flexibility. When I gave an assignment, they wanted to know if they could do something else instead. They wanted to be engaged and were happy to be affiliated with honors. Students in my classes wanted frequent feedback—"How am I doing?" "How can I do better?" What they wrote most frequently in their exit evaluations was how much they hated the bureaucracy of the financial office or the advisors or the administration. During exit interviews they frequently lamented: "Bureaucracy has made my learning experience difficult and frustrating."

Honors students in more recent years seem to be more cheerful and deal with things with humor. They are less influenced by hype and status. They are more optimistic and inclusive in their approach to life. They really enjoy collaborative learning and working in groups. Most of them are selfless and volunteer for numerous projects both on campus and in the community. These students have been using computers since pre-kindergarten. They are e-learners and are used to instant communication. Many of the students are into extreme sports and want to do everything quickly. They value speed.

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Honors teachers have to be in touch with the changing perspectives and values of each new generation of students. Those who see themselves as facilitators of learning can find a great deal to offer the students. This role requires honors faculty to have skills in both their subject areas and in the management of learning. In addition, honors faculty are flexible. They are always looking for new and challenging strategies to teach their students and make provisions for original research, independent studies or investigations, internships, mentorships, and collaborative projects.

Honors students are curious and learn early on to make the best possible use of the resources available while becoming fully responsible for their own learning. They have a real passion for knowledge. They want to understand, and, for the most part, they want to make a difference. They are willing to test themselves, go beyond expectations, and run real or metaphorical marathons that will benefit others as well as themselves.

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**Portz-Prize-Winning  
Essay, 2004**



MEGAN MCWENIE

Portz Prize-Winning Essay, 2004

# Seeing Nature: Ansel Adams in the Human and Natural Environments of Yosemite

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Wallace Stegner once hailed the legacy of Ansel Adams as bringing photography to the world of art as a unique “way of seeing.”<sup>1</sup> What Adams saw through the lens of his camera, and what audiences see when looking at one of his photographs, does indeed constitute a particular way of seeing the world, a vision that is almost always connected to the natural environment. An Ansel Adams photograph evokes more than an aesthetic response to his work—it also stirs reflections about his involvement in the natural world that was so often his subject. Audiences experiencing his work participate in a deliberate conception of wilderness, the national parks, and especially Adams’s ultimate inspiration, Yosemite. Much has been made of Adams the “legend,” the “master,” and the great icon of creative photography, but this aggrandizing obscures the man behind a mask of greatness. While Adams was undoubtedly a master of both the art world and environmental activism by his middle age, during his youth he was a great equivocator. He bounced from school to school, from music to photography, from mountaineering to poetry. At different points in his adolescence and early adulthood, it seemed as if he might devote himself fully to any of these pursuits. Why then did he choose photography? Why did the natural world become the most recurrent subject before his camera? How did these choices influence Adams’s cosmic vision of the natural world, a vision that would shape the minds of generations of Americans?

The answer is a complicated one, with roots in family upbringing, economic realities, artistic philosophy, and personal ethics. His art emerged from a tangled maze of influences but was firmly rooted in the valley floors and mountain peaks of Yosemite National Park. Here Adams encountered a unique locale through which to define his relationship to both human society and the natural environment. He was able to do so because Yosemite was an amalgamation of two seemingly opposite settings, where wilderness and civilization, human intellect and the natural scene united in a distinctive mixture that maintained permeable boundaries and wary co-existence. From the parallel worlds of human and wild space, Adams synthesized his own vision of Yosemite—an image he popularized with generations of Americans. His

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<sup>1</sup> John Russell, “Ansel Adams, Photographer, Is Dead,” *New York Times*, April 24, 1984.

## SEEING NATURE: ANSEL ADAMS

photographic images of Yosemite, however, deliberately did not include the human element that had been so important in creating the man that Adams became. The tension between the Yosemite that shaped Adams and the image of Yosemite that he offered to the world is indicative of broader dichotomies in the way Americans intellectualize human and wild environments as separate spaces.

In Adams's first visits to Yosemite, he was very much the city kid coming to a conveniently transposed urban environment amid the natural splendor of a national park. Adams first got the urge to visit the Sierra when sick in bed. Confined within the four walls of a darkened room, the self-described "hyperactive" fourteen-year-old funneled all his nervous energy into reading James Hutchings's *In the Heart of the Sierras*. The imaginative youth "became hopelessly enthralled with the descriptions and illustrations of Yosemite" and with its "romance and adventure"; Yosemite represented a place of excitement and vigorous action for the teenager. He compelled his parents to make Yosemite that year's vacation destination, and the Adams family became a model of typical American tourists seeking their annual entertainment. In June of 1916, Ansel and his parents "boarded the early morning train in Oakland, bound for Merced and El Portal. The car was full of people—fanning elders, active and inquisitive children."<sup>2</sup> Traveling by train and bus, surrounded by middle-class vacationers like themselves, the Adams family arrived via modern transportation into a "natural" world where all the comforts of urban civilization were replicated. They stayed in Camp Curry, a concessionaire of the National Park Service, in Tent 305. It may not have been their comfortable home in San Francisco, but it offered an experience not too far from the conveniences of the city. Writing to his father the next summer, Adams's description of arduous hikes into the high country appear on Camp Curry stationery, featuring a picturesque view of Yosemite Valley with majestic trees surrounding tents, playing courts, and fashionably attired travelers; the caption reads, "Tennis and Croquet at Camp Curry," no doubt appealing to the vacationer seeking the outdoor experience with the maximum in human comforts.<sup>3</sup> How is it then that the young tourist in this not-so-wild nature became the Sierra enthusiast?

Adams's transformation from vacationer to seasoned outdoorsman is a story of "coming to belong," of becoming a recognized part of the human community in Yosemite. The human society at Yosemite was a unique juxtaposition of permanent settlement, transient population, and wilderness locale. These seemingly irreconcilable forces fluctuated with the season and the popularity of outdoor recreation. Although the National Park Service was created by Congress to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects" of the nation, Yosemite National Park often functioned in ways not compatible with the protection of scenery and natural objects.<sup>4</sup> Permanent human constructions in Yosemite were obvious steps away from

<sup>2</sup> Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1985), 8, 41, 42.

<sup>3</sup> Ansel Adams (AA) to Charles Adams (CA), 22 June 1917, Correspondence, Ansel Adams Archive (hereafter AAA), Box AG 31:1:1, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson.

<sup>4</sup> "A Brief History of the National Parks Service." *National Parks Service Net*. 16 June 2003. U.S. Department of the Interior. [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/kieley/index.ht](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/kieley/index.ht)

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this principle. Entrepreneurs operating concessions like the Stoneman House, the Awahnee Hotel, Camp Curry, and Best's Studio joined the employees of the newly formed National Park Service to make up the year-round population of Yosemite. Some had lived there for decades, like David and Jenny Curry, who had arrived in 1899, or Adams's future father-in-law, Harry Best, who settled in Yosemite in 1902.<sup>5</sup> Park service employees were likely to live there for a few years before relocating to another position. Besides these permanent residents, there was also a large population of outdoor enthusiasts, many of them members of the Sierra Club, who spent significant time in the park. They either stayed in the facilities of the concessionaires or, more likely, camped themselves in excursions to the farther reaches of the park and high country. This population was generally bound by an ethic of vigorous physical exploration of the Sierra in a manner conforming to a particular set of values about the preservation of wilderness. The least stable part of the human community in Yosemite was necessarily the tourist element, which could swell the park's population by the thousands, and eventually millions, in the summer months, leaving it almost unpopulated in the winter. Adams began his integration into the Yosemite community as a member of the last group. He eventually joined the ranks of Sierra Club members who spent their summers there before finally becoming a permanent resident after his marriage in 1928.

Returning each summer after that initial visit in 1916, first with his mother and then as an independent adolescent, Adams moved away from the tourist label by demonstrating to the more permanent fixtures in Yosemite a devotion to the outdoor experience and a growing sense of what was appropriate behavior in this distinctive locale. His letters to his father back home in San Francisco detail his enthusiastic exploration of the natural world outside the busy confines of the Valley.<sup>6</sup> With youthful pride, Adams proclaims, "In 9 Days I have walked 145 miles...I have been to the top of Nevada Falls 5 times and lugged my two cameras and tripod to the top of North Dome and back in 4 and one half hours."<sup>7</sup> Adams delighted in these long treks through the wilderness and in his increasing knowledge of the trails around the Valley. That personal commitment to becoming familiar with Yosemite also gained him the respect of the pillars of the Yosemite community. While Adams was there in 1918, another vacationer got lost hiking, and the owners of Camp Curry asked him to join the search party. A letter to his father detailing this event captures Adams's pride in the Currys' recognition of him as more capable in the wilderness than some green tourist.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 92-93.

<sup>6</sup> The term "the Valley" here refers specifically to the Yosemite Valley, the main tourist destination in the much larger Yosemite National Park. This term mirrors Adams' own language in describing Yosemite Valley.

<sup>7</sup> AA to C&OA June 4, 1918, Correspondence, AAA. For elaboration on Adams' hiking and exploring activities while a teenager in Yosemite see AA to CA & Olive Adams (OA), 30 May 1918; AA to CA, 21 April 1920; AA to CA & OA 27 April 1920; AA to CA, 23 June 1923, etc., Correspondence, AAA.

<sup>8</sup> AA to CA, 4 June 1918, Correspondence, AAA.

## SEEING NATURE: ANSEL ADAMS

Adams had become a local fixture, familiar enough with the territory to be considered an expert, and it was this ability that gained him the notice of experienced mountaineers like Frank Holman, the Park Superintendent, and members of the Sierra Club. He was only seventeen, but Adams felt as if three summers in Yosemite had made him a man. His growing command of mountaineering introduced him to a select group of people who also shared in this privileged knowledge. While Adams was no swaggering braggart, his letters express a sense of personal pride in being accepted by the (mostly male) masters of the mountains. In 1919, Adams learned that the custodian position at the Sierra Club's LeConte Memorial Lodge was opening, so he joined the organization and won the job. Adams applied partly as a way to finance his yearly return to Yosemite in the summer, but also because his contact with Sierra enthusiasts was increasing as he became less and less a one-time tourist and more a member of the permanent Yosemite community.

Adams marked the summer when he started working in the LeConte Lodge at the age of eighteen as his first real encounter with wilderness, but this designation also highlights the paradox of a civilization encroaching upon the world of nature. Adams's introduction to the wilderness ideals of preservation began in LeConte Lodge. There, members of the Sierra Club would drop by throughout the summer for conversation or to give talks at the nearby amphitheater. The Lodge also boasted a library with books on mountaineering, geology, and conservation, many of which Adams read and reviewed in the *Sierra Club Bulletin*.<sup>9</sup> It was within the walls of a permanent human structure that wilderness as a defensible principle first formed for Adams. Here he built an environment that he supposedly left behind in San Francisco resurfaced in the natural world. Adams spoke of getting the "mountain fever" while confined in that "miserable pile of bricks and bootleg – the city," but upon arriving in what would seem to be the opposite environment of the miserable city—Yosemite—he headed directly for another "pile of bricks" at the Lodge.<sup>10</sup> To deal with this seeming contradiction, Adams began to conceive of Yosemite as the natural world invaded by human structures, enterprises, and greed. But there was for him still some definite designation of wild land that could be found, if only one could get far enough from the excesses of civilization.

To guarantee a place apart for wilderness, Adams increasingly distinguished between "the Valley" and the "high country."<sup>11</sup> This attitude is especially evident in a letter from 1920, in which he compared the Valley to San Francisco: "The roads are like Market Street and Camp Curry like a city Hotel Lobby. I...get into the high

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<sup>9</sup> For examples, see: Ansel Adams, "Review of *Anthology of Alpine Literature*," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 11, no. 3 (1922): 315-316; "On High Hills," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 24, no. 1 (Feb 1929), 298.

<sup>10</sup> AA to Virginia Adams (VA), 11 March 1927, Correspondence, Ansel Adams Archive.

<sup>11</sup> Similar to the usage of the term "the Valley," "high country" refers to the higher elevations of Yosemite National Park, which the majority of tourists do not visit because of the steep hikes necessary to climb out of the Valley. High country is synonymous with "high Sierra" and simply "the Sierra" and will be used accordingly throughout this paper. It is important to note that whereas the Valley refers to a specific location within Yosemite National Park, high country can refer to any of the higher elevations of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, both inside and outside of park boundaries.

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Sierra as fast as I can for the floor of the Valley is one big parking station, and I want to enjoy the upper country as much as I can before it follows in the path of commercialism that has spoiled the Valley.”<sup>12</sup> And so he sought out the high country under the tutelage of the old mountain sage Frank Holman, who made Yosemite and the Sierra his Spartan retirement spot. It was Holman who took Adams on his “first High Sierra Trip...my introduction to true wilderness.”<sup>13</sup> The increasing intellectual dichotomy Adams imagined between the Valley and the high country drew heavily on the opinions of the older man. The disgust Adams felt for the Camp Curry garbage burned in Stoneman Meadow stemmed in part from Holman’s disapproval of the situation. Adams wrote to his mother, “Mr. Holman is so mad he could eat Supt. [Superintendent of Yosemite National Park] Lewis alive” and related his own anger thereafter.<sup>14</sup> Adams’s former admiration for Camp Curry as a pleasant vacation spot disappeared as he became more enmeshed in the community of Yosemite devotees.

The Sierra may have been his refuge from the corruption that too many people and too much development had brought to the Valley, but for all the moral superiority he expressed, Adams himself participated in the human infiltration. Besides his early residence at Camp Curry, which he eventually reviled for its desecration of nature, Adams continued to participate in the human alteration of Yosemite. On a plateau behind LeConte Lodge, he and Holman and a few regular visitors built a small camp complete with shelving units and a stove, but their semi-permanent construction was fifty feet above the disenchanting Camp Curry, closer to the Sierra’s purity than the Valley’s deformity.<sup>15</sup> Though they brought the built environment into the high country that he held sacrosanct, Adams’s improvements conformed to his understanding of acceptable behavior in the wilderness, behavior that kept it wild. This may seem contradictory, but Adams probably felt that his building was a slight infringement when compared to the development that tourism and industry promoted, like in Camp Curry. To gain insight into how Adams adopted this way of thinking, it is important to consider the dominant influences that contributed to his idea of wilderness.

Adams’s original desire to join the Sierra Club was a literal fulfillment of the club’s initial mission statement of 1892: “To explore, enjoy and render accessible the mountain regions of the Pacific Coast.”<sup>16</sup> The Sierra Club made the mountains accessible to him by providing him a job in Yosemite, thus allowing him to finance his stays in the park and his enjoyment and exploration of the Sierra Nevada. Only slowly did a secondary, but ultimately more influential, purpose of the club begin to act on Adams: the dissemination of a philosophy of how one should relate to nature. While he was never the adulating admirer of John Muir that many of his fellow members were, as an active member Adams could not have escaped exposure to the principles of preservation expounded by that great prophet of wilderness.<sup>17</sup> Recalling

<sup>12</sup> AA to CA, 2 June 1920, Correspondence, AAA.

<sup>13</sup> Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography*, 48.

<sup>14</sup> AA to OA, 16 July 1920, AAA.

<sup>15</sup> AA to CA, 10 July 1920, AAA.

<sup>16</sup> Renée Haip, “Ansel Adams: Forging the Wilderness Ideal,” in *Ansel Adams, New Light: Essays on His Legacy and Legend*, ed. Michael Read, 75-83 (San Francisco: Friends of Photography, 1993), 75.

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in his autobiography the isolation of the Sierra, “where one can come to terms with solitude” as a transforming experience, Adams echoed Muir’s basic premise of the restorative value of the personal experience in wilderness.<sup>18</sup> If Adams did not advertise himself as a disciple of Muir, he was obviously familiar with his writings and outlook. Perhaps he could never relate to the aura of John Muir as the “Great Man” and preservationist icon because, unlike many fellow Sierra Club members, Adams never met Muir before the club’s founder died.

Adams did relate more closely to some of the other larger-than-life personalities in the Sierra Club with whom he had personal contact. Adams credited his “first idea of conservation as such” to his first meeting with William Colby—who followed Muir as leader of the Sierra Club—when Adams was seeking entry into the organization and work at LeConte Lodge. Colby invited Adams to accompany the more veteran members for a few days on the annual Sierra Club High Trip in 1920. Traveling with the giants of the Sierra Club—prominent businessmen, eminent scholars, acclaimed mountaineers—at the age of eighteen, Adams experienced his “basic introduction to the conservation world.” The ideas that he had read about in the LeConte library came to life in the environment that had fostered them. Ideas on the page became vivid when they emanated from the men and women who wrote the books that Adams had read and that had shaped the very values of the conservation movement. Adams recognized in later life that this world had to be expressed “in different terms from the natural world, because the conservation world is the world of people.”<sup>19</sup> Even when hiking up a granite face thousands of feet above and many miles distant from any permanent human structure, the conservationists brought the human world with them into the wilderness. And how could they avoid this incursion, these revelers in nature? For all their principles of defending nature, most still lived in San Francisco or other cities and came to Yosemite for their dose of the wild.<sup>20</sup>

While Colby provided Adams with early opportunities, it was Joseph LeConte II whose generosity was more influential with the young Sierra Club inductee. LeConte, the son of the famous Berkeley geologist for whom LeConte Lodge was named, was a respected explorer and topographer in his own right. In 1924 and 1925, LeConte invited Adams to accompany his family to Kings Canyon to explore the Sierra outside of Yosemite. LeConte was valuable not only in providing this broadening experience for Adams, but also as an early model of the mountain photographer. The evolution of Adams as an accomplished photographer is evident in

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<sup>17</sup> Biographer Mary Street Alinder notes that Adams did not consider Muir a “mentor” in *Ansel Adams: A Biography*, (New York: H. Holt, 1996), 29. For a contrasting discussion of Muir’s influence on Adams’s wilderness philosophy that takes Alinder’s analysis into account, see Jonathan Spaulding, *Ansel Adams and the American Landscape: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 50.

<sup>18</sup> Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography*, 48.

<sup>19</sup> Ansel Adams, *Conversations with Ansel Adams*, interviewed by Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun (Berkeley: The Regents of the University of California, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, 1978), 588, 594.

<sup>20</sup> For the most detailed account of these trips, see Anne Hammond, *Ansel Adams: Divine Performance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 6-10.



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his early pieces in the *Sierra Club Bulletin*. In the early 1920s, dozens of photographs by Adams in this publication show beautiful Sierra scenes. Other pieces by both LeConte and Adams detail their Kings Canyon excursions. Adams's photographs from this period capitalize on the same elements of size and distance that are evident in LeConte's pieces. Over time, Adams would surpass his mentor by achieving a distinct creative vision in his work, but he owed much to the tutelage of this older mountaineer.

While Colby and LeConte may have been awe-inspiring models of the conservationist cause, the campfire—as the center of Sierra Club indoctrination—made the deepest impression on the young Adams. At the campfire, initiates would be treated to the particular mythology of the Sierra Club. They might hear “the legend of Ansel Adams' mule,” learn about “the ethics of our primitive cafeteria,” or recognize the hikers who scorned donkeys as “the real elite.”<sup>21</sup> Besides these amusements and entertainments, the campfire was a place for reflection on the wilderness around them. Here Adams would have heard the exchange of competing views on conservation, preservation, and the national parks. At the campfire he secured the friendship of Cedric Wright, who had previously been a slight family acquaintance but who became a fast friend on these Sierra Club outings. The campfire, which seems so fundamental to the wilderness experience, again draws our attention to the collapsing boundaries between the human and natural worlds.

The campfire was the intellectual center of human incursion into the wild, where the exchange of ideas and the replication of civilization, albeit only slight, occurred. How did the Sierra remain wild with packers, campers, and donkey trains? Writing about the 1931 High Trip, Adams unwittingly exposed this paradox in his figurative writing for, in preparing a fire, “you are aware of the rich magic of the Sierra dusk; the world flames with consuming fiery light and quickly smoulders to ashes of cold and amethystine gray.”<sup>22</sup> In the human action of creating a campfire, the elements of the natural world around Adams began to take on human characteristics as it warmed shivering hikers and facilitated the dissemination of ideology. What had been the pristine nature of the “Sierra dusk” became tainted with the “consuming fiery light” of the human presence in the natural world. The fire not only destroys wood collected by the campers for fuel, but it also leaves a physical scar on the wild in the residue of soot and ashes. The physical invasion of the campfire is also a location for the intrusion of human ideas, intellectual exchanges that often concerned the notion of pristine wilderness while simultaneously despoiling that wilderness with their very presence in it. This might not be a glaring violation, such as those perpetrated by Camp Curry, but the Sierra Club campfires that Adams participated in still blurred the lines between the human and natural environments. Adams's language reveals the

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<sup>21</sup> For discussions on the importance of the campfire outside of Adams's own correspondence and recollections, see: Jesse M. Whitehead, “With the Sierra Club in 1927” *Sierra Club Bulletin* 13, no. 1 (1928), 11; Jonathan Spaulding, *Ansel Adams and the American Landscape: A Biography*, 54; Jesse M. Whitehead, “With the Sierra Club in 1927,” 14; Ansel Adams, “Retrospect: Nineteen-thirty-one,” *Sierra Club Bulletin* 17, no. 1 (1928), 2; Ansel Adams, *Conversations with Ansel Adams*, 233.

<sup>22</sup> Ansel Adams, “Retrospect: Nineteen-thirty-one,” 2.

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persistence of the conflict that he sought to leave behind in the Valley—the inundation of wilderness by the supposedly separate human world.

For all his devotion to the Sierra as his place of annual retreat and the hub of his personal relationships, Adams offered little commentary on his personal feelings towards Yosemite in either his early writings or photographs. From his first summer in Yosemite at age fourteen until he began writing to his friend Virginia Best in 1922, his letters were mostly directed to his father or occasionally to his mother or aunt. These messages are hardly distinguishable in their repetition of similar details of day-to-day existence: that he was happy and safe, had enough funds or didn't, went on hikes X, Y, and Z, and was getting great photos. The meticulous accounts of Adams's hiking excursions were primarily concerned with distance, navigation, and destination, but not at all with the environment traversed. His photographs from this period, many of which he sent along with his letters home, present an accurate and pleasant recording of the hikes, but there is as yet no real creative spirit in these pieces. The most revealing commentary he offered on the world around him came in a letter to his father about a storm, in which there was "something very wonderful" that seemed "to have done me more good physically and mentally, than the finest walks in the sunshine." Adams broke off this discourse by closing: "Well, there are some things that cannot be put into words."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, he was unable to articulate any feelings he might have had on the Sierra to his parents; perhaps the barrier of Victorian formality that he attributed repeatedly to them in his autobiography prevented such openness.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps located as they were in the urban world of San Francisco, Adams felt that his parents would not understand his connection to the wilderness of the Sierra. As for his photographs, Adams himself noted that, "A great deal of my early work, to the best of my knowledge and belief, had really no creative intention except to record a lot of beautiful things I saw."<sup>25</sup> The vast majority of his photographs before the late 1920s, many of which appeared in issues of the *Sierra Club Bulletin*, captured appealing scenes while conveying as little as his letters did. But this reticence to articulate his feelings on Yosemite would diminish as his relationship with Virginia Best grew. Correspondingly, his verbalization to Virginia of these feelings on nature would parallel Adams's simultaneous development of a defining principle to guide the creative content of his photographs.

The banal details of Adams's letters to his parents became introspective emotions in his letters to his future wife, Virginia. Although not yet engaged to Virginia, in a postcard to her in 1922 he was able to say more than he ever had to his parents, reflecting on "The remoteness of these lovely places...it is all a delicious procession of unearthly experiences discounting civilization and chronological time."<sup>26</sup> Here is the first articulation of what Adams valued in Yosemite besides hiking and beautiful

<sup>23</sup> AA to CA, 30 June 1920, AAA. For examples of Adams's writing to his parents, see Boxes AG:1:1:1 and AG:1:1:2 which contain all "Family Correspondence."

<sup>24</sup> For example: Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography*, 10, 34, 41, 80.

<sup>25</sup> Ansel Adams, *Conversations with Ansel Adams*, 320.

<sup>26</sup> AA to VB, 17 July 1922, *Ansel Adams: Letters and Images, 1916-1984*, ed. Mary Street Alinder (Boston: Little, Brown, Co., 2001), 22.

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scenery: the separation from civilization that the remote reaches of the Sierra offered to him. As he and Virginia become more deeply involved, engaged for the first time in 1923, Adams was able to confide in her these evolving attitudes toward the natural environment. While he could record the smallest geographical movements of his treks through the Sierra for his parents, only with Virginia could he give a reason for those journeys, namely that Adams felt “All aspects of nature lead to elevation and knowledge.”<sup>27</sup> Adams later attributed this openness to feeling “...a rightness about the two of us. We were comfortable together. My letters of the period express...an introspective analysis at a simple, but deeply felt level.”<sup>28</sup>

Adams’s comfort with Virginia originated in part from their common interests: music, art, and Yosemite. As the daughter of Harry Cassie Best, a landscape painter operating as a concessionaire in the park since 1902, Virginia had grown up in Yosemite amid the grandeur of granite monoliths and the operations of everyday human business.<sup>29</sup> In his choice of confidante and bride, Adams clearly chose someone who belonged to Yosemite, but to which Yosemite? Virginia might have represented for him either the commercial center of the Valley (Virginia’s home) or the ideal wilderness of the high Sierra. Perhaps Adams forged a third alternative: that Virginia was a part of the world, far from urban development, that he was beginning to think of as more his home than his native San Francisco. Although Yosemite would also become important to Adams as the primary source of his personal income, he conceived of Yosemite as home because it was the location of Virginia and the natural world. This physical grounding in Yosemite as a place where he definitively belonged would soon become related to Adams’s developing philosophy of both art and conservation.

In his early twenties, Adams began to look beyond the traditional Sierra Club campfire rhetoric on wilderness in an attempt to crystallize his own personal philosophy. Unsatisfied with Muir as a foundation upon which to build his own principles, Adams nevertheless found his philosophical muse within the Sierra Club. While Adams was heavily influenced by the living legends of the Sierra Club like Colby or LeConte, it was from a member of his own generation, Cedric Wright, that he would discover a broader philosophical context in which to situate his feelings about the natural environment. Twelve years Adams’s senior, Wright was still one of the Sierra Club’s young set; he was as well known for his prominence in San Francisco art circles as he was for his affiliation with the Sierra Club. He and Adams connected over their mutual passion for the music profession and amateur photography as well as their enjoyment of intellectual sparring and the discovery of new thinkers in the world. Through Wright Adams learned of authors like Edward Carpenter who offered new approaches to wilderness and life that older members of the Sierra Club were unlikely to know or appreciate. Art historian Anne Hammond identifies Wright as the most probable owner of the copy of Carpenter’s *Towards Democracy* that Adams

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<sup>27</sup> AA to VB, 22 Sept 1925, *Ansel Adams: Letters and Images, 1916-1984*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography*, 80.

<sup>29</sup> Mary Street Alinder, *Ansel Adams: A Biography*, 53. Alinder credits Yosemite as the deciding factor in Adams’s eventual choice of Virginia as his bride after their broken engagement and flings with other women, 56.

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borrowed to take with him into Kings Canyon with the LeContes in 1925.<sup>30</sup> In Kings Canyon, away from the riotous fun of the Sierra Club outings, Adams had the opportunity to pursue Carpenter's words in relative solitude; in some dramatic synthesis of personal isolation, the power of the high country, and the ideas expounded by Carpenter, a life-changing experience emerged for Adams. Here the worlds of human intellect and wilderness collided as Adams brought philosophy with him into the high country, and he left this setting with a new understanding of wilderness.

Adams committed this experience to the page in writing to his fiancée; he sent his new ideas on wilderness back to what was the ultimate image of the natural world for Adams: Virginia in Yosemite. To her he proclaimed that "the Carpenter book has established a real religion in me." Adams credited this spiritual discovery to "Reading it, as I have done, in the mountains."<sup>31</sup> Carpenter became for Adams a spiritual foundation for the collection of loosely associated ideas on human existence and the natural order that he had synthesized from his parents, friends, icons, and fellow Sierra enthusiasts. Adams's deep connection to the Sierra and wilderness finally gained a philosophical articulation: "I look on the lines and forms of the mountains and all other forms of nature as if they were but the vast expression of ideas within the Cosmic Mind."<sup>32</sup> *Towards Democracy* offered more than just a justification for wilderness; for Adams, Carpenter also provided a guiding principle for the relation of wilderness to Adams's other great passion in life, artistic expression. Art historian Anne Hammond identifies Carpenter's principle of the "continual transformation of all things" as "one of the cornerstones of Adams's philosophy of process."<sup>33</sup> Adams saw this transformation of all things in nature as constituting a unity in and of itself that was gratifying to the human soul. In an exemplary poetic paean to sea and earth, Carpenter proclaims, "Great sea—whose music continues to-day the same as then...O grasses shivering just for all the world as now...changed are your words O grasses...go forward, go ye ever forward." The elements of nature here are the same as in the past, yet they change in their movement forward through time, and this leaves Carpenter "satisfied."<sup>34</sup> This idea of process became integral to Adams's photographic technique, as other Carpenterian themes would govern Adams's relationship to the most recurrent subject before his camera, the natural scene.

As Adams's philosophical conception of wilderness—building on Sierra Club tradition and Carpenter's theories—began to solidify, so too did his dedication to photography as a serious creative and professional endeavor. After 1925, Adams came to the realization that music was not a viable career path, so he redirected this artistic impulse into his passion for photography. This new artistic venture had grown simultaneously with his love of Yosemite. He had received his first camera during his first summer there, a Kodak Box Brownie, which he used ceaselessly, perfecting his

<sup>30</sup> Anne Hammond, *Ansel Adams: Divine Performance*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> AA to VA, 3 Aug 1925, *Ansel Adams: Letters and Images, 1916-1984*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> AA to VA, 22 Sept 1925, *Ansel Adams: Letters and Images, 1916-1984*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Anne Hammond, *Ansel Adams: Divine Performance*, 10. For further explication of Adams's philosophical debt to Carpenter, read Hammond's first chapter. She also usefully distills Carpenter's theoretical premise into a good summary from his very poetical and scattered text.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* (New York: M. Kennerly, 1922), 178.

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craft.<sup>35</sup> Writing to Virginia in 1927 he announced: “My photographs have now reached a stage when they are worthy of the world’s attention. I have suddenly come upon a new style.”<sup>36</sup> This new style that Adams had stumbled upon is the subject of much celebration by historical commentators; on April 17, 1927 Adams shot *Monolith, The Face of Half Dome, Yosemite National Park*, pushing his photography from hobby to art. Adams recalled this “first true visualization” in his autobiography as depicting “not the way the subject appeared in reality but how it *felt* to me and how it must appear in the finished print.”<sup>37</sup> Critic Anne Hammond gives the best representation of what Adams accomplished in *Monolith*; in combining the “cliff-face with a fragment of the Sierran panorama that included the distant Tenaya peak, Adams conflated in a single image Yosemite Valley with the High Sierra.”<sup>38</sup>

In *Monolith* Adams managed to collapse the boundaries between the Valley and the Sierra—symbols of human society and wilderness preserved—despite his tendency to conceive of these two locales as separate. *Monolith* was also the fulfillment of the creative desire Adams first expressed to his father in 1920: to “interpret the scenes hereabout through an impressionistic vision. A cold material representation gives one no conception whatever of the great size and distances of these mountains.”<sup>39</sup> Adams was able to offer that interpretation of natural grandeur to the world by publishing the photograph as a frontispiece in the *Sierra Club Bulletin* in 1931 and in countless reproductions throughout his life. What had been impossible at age eighteen became Adams’s talent at twenty-five; those seven intervening years had equipped Adams with a keener connection to Yosemite and a definitive philosophical approach to it that made *Monolith* possible.

Forging ahead into photography as a profession, Adams made two crucial decisions: he chose creative photography over commercial, and he chose the natural scene as his primary subject. While Adams accepted commercial assignments throughout his career, the bulk of his commercial work is from his early years before his creative endeavors generated enough income to support his family. Adams saw commercial work as a means to an end, for his eventual goal was to achieve the life of an artist not subject to any employer who might interfere with Adams’s artistic vision.<sup>40</sup> This artistic impulse was closely tied to the spiritual affirmation Adams found in the writings of Edward Carpenter, who articulated the achievement of an elevated state of being through connection to the unity of universal transformation. For Adams, that universality was in the natural scene. Carpenter’s ideas allowed Adams to fuse his twin passions of artistic expression and wilderness experience into a single impulse that constituted a path through life. It is then no surprise that Adams’s photographs were primarily concerned with the natural scene. In his autobiography, Adams wrote that this was intentional, that he had “chosen to stress”

<sup>35</sup> Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography*, 43.

<sup>36</sup> AA to VA, 25 April 1927, *Ansel Adams: Letters and Images, 1916-1984*, 30.

<sup>37</sup> Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography*, 60-61. This particular photograph is treated at length by Alinder, 58-49; Hammond, 41-42; Spaulding, 66-68.

<sup>38</sup> Anne Hammond, *Ansel Adams: Divine Performance*, 12.

<sup>39</sup> AA to CA, 8 June 1920, Correspondence, Ansel Adams Archive.

<sup>40</sup> Ansel Adams, “Commercial Photography,” *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography*, 130-149.

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nature in his career. But an even more calculated choice on Adams's part seems to have been his depiction of pristine wilderness to the exclusion of any human presence.<sup>41</sup> Adams further stated in the preface to his autobiography "that the worlds of nature and of people have been closely involved."<sup>42</sup> While this statement may seem to foil all attempts to argue that Adams did not conceive of boundaries between the human and natural environment, the broader body of his writings do not support his general adherence to that notion. Reflecting later in life, he may have seen people and nature as involved, but this does not negate the separation he envisioned between them throughout most of his life. Despite this recognition in his autobiography, Adams continued to convey a sense of separation between human society and the last bastions of wilderness, whether that designation could apply to Yosemite as a whole or merely the high country.

In choosing to show only that smallest part of his beloved Yosemite in his creative works—that which was most wild and pristine—Adams set up a particular way of seeing the national parks, and even more broadly the natural environment, as divorced from the human world. Renée Haip affirms this power in Adams, whose "photographs depict the national parks as Americans believe them to be—as 'wilderness areas.' Adams' images present an ideal; they build expectations within us."<sup>43</sup> Devoid of human traces, Adams's photographs are no less artistic achievements, but they do take on a different significance in their historical influence. If they can make people see the parks as "wilderness," audiences are liable to forget the very human communities that often exist in them, communities in which Adams was an active member. Historian Alfred Runte, who is no great fan of Adams as a cultural figure, notes that Adams's art "lured millions of Americans to Yosemite in hopes of duplicating the monumental images that he...found so compelling."<sup>44</sup> But in visiting Yosemite, or any site Adams photographed, visitors cannot crop their visual perspective as Adams the photographer could, ignoring the human presence in the natural environment. Standing at the exact spot where *Monolith, The Face of Half Dome* was photographed, one would see the vista captured by Adams but would need only to look left into the Valley below to see a small human settlement at the heart of a national park.

Gazing at a similar mountaintop panorama in Yosemite at the turn of the twentieth century, John Muir asked William Colby, "Won't it be wonderful when a million people can see what we are seeing?"<sup>45</sup> Millions upon millions have enjoyed the captivating views of Yosemite since Muir asked this question, his prophecy fulfilling itself many times over. But the masses that come to enjoy the wilderness and isolation that Muir so valued and that Adams so ideally represented in the images he offered to the world have eroded the wildness of Yosemite. This deterioration can in

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<sup>41</sup> In the hundreds of photographs by Adams published in the *Sierra Club Bulletin* capturing natural scenes of the Sierra, only one reveals any human presence, a photograph of hikers summitting Drawbridge Peak against a snowy mountainside.

<sup>42</sup> Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography*, vii.

<sup>43</sup> Renée Haip, "Ansel Adams: Forging the Wilderness Ideal," 75.

<sup>44</sup> Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography*, 244.

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part be attributed to the intellectual distinction between the human and natural worlds that Adams represented in his photographs, and which the American public readily consumed. Many continue to see Yosemite and other wild lands in the United States as they are represented in Ansel Adams photographs. They ignore the entanglement of the human and natural worlds that was so present in Adams's own life. Why do these distinctions, ignored or otherwise, matter? They matter because Ansel Adams's vision is a cultural phenomenon, both as recognizable popular art and as a way of thinking about the natural world that was his subject. The very act of projecting an artistic work to an audience is a human act that takes place within the boundaries of civilization; even if its subject is nature, the work of art is human.

While Adams's photographs open up a space within that civilization for the promotion of the preservation of wilderness, they simultaneously invade the supposedly wild with the intrusion of human intellectual discourse. In the very act of promoting a vision of wilderness preserved, Adams's photographs expose the role that human beings play in positing the value of preservation and their involvement in the actual application of those values. By participating in the cultural exchange about the worth of wild lands in the ways Adams did, we involve ourselves in wilderness just as much as when we physically enter nature. Human beings bring their environment with them, whether in the form of intellect, companionship, a sleeping bag, or a backhoe. Comfortable distinctions like the one Ansel Adams makes between the Yosemite Valley and the High Sierra trap current Americans into an idealized vision that makes it easy to overlook what is actually happening in the wilderness that vision celebrates. Recognizing the varieties of ways in which the human environment and natural world are involved, as Adams did not, might allow us to generate a new understanding of wilderness that will continue to protect the fundamental worth that Adams and generations of Americans have placed upon nature preserved.

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# **Research Essays on Honors Students and How to Support Them**



CHERYL ACHTERBERG

# What is an Honors Student?

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*“There still persists an uneasy feeling that the young intellectual is standoffish, unrealistic, noisy, nonconformist...There also exists the opposite view...intelligent, talented, creative, self-confident, poised, articulate, brilliant.”*

—Robertson, 1966

Honors programs and colleges are commonplace in U.S. higher education today with programs in 60% of all four-year institutions and over 40% of all two-year institutions (Baker, Reardon, and Riordan, 2000). The research literature about honors education and/or honors students, however, is sparse (Achterberg, 2004; Long and Lange, 2002; Reihman, Varhus and Whipple, 1995; Roemer, 1984). Hypothetically, experience of nearly a century should generate recognizable patterns (Cohen, 1966a). The purpose of this paper is to review what literature exists to describe honors students, and it ends with a normative definition of an honors student. It necessarily focuses on traditionally-aged students due to lack of information about adult learners as honors students.

## REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

It is important to point out that, while the NCHC has described the desired characteristics of honors programs (Cummings, 1994), there is no such definition for honors students. Rather, the term *honors student* is generic and relative or relational to other students within a single institution (Stoller, 2004). There are few characteristics of honors students that can be standardized, measured, or uniformly compared across institutions. There is, however, a certain ideology associated with honors and honors students, namely that honors students are in some way “superior” to other students in their home institution (Cohen 1966b; Robertson, 1966); “high ability” and “best and brightest” are also commonly used descriptors (Austin, 1986; Geiger, 2002; Shushok, 2002). This ideology forms the rationale for creating separate organizational structures based on academic or personal merit within higher education (Berger, Berger, and Kellner, 1973). Galinova (2005) described this ideology or belief system as a “rational mythology” of honors educators because it is a “theoretically articulated proposition of social reality,” unquestionably accepted as a truth even in the absence of evidence. These beliefs might also be called a paradigm (Kuhn, 1970) as they are widely shared and they have gained an “indisputable authority” that has permeated higher education in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## WHAT IS AN HONORS STUDENT?

There are literally tens of thousands of honors students in the U.S. (an estimated 35-36,000 honors students attend Big 10 institutions alone). Who are they? Or more specifically, what characterizes honors students? Honors students are obviously selected. That said, they can be defined by selection criteria (Geiger, 2000; 2002), if nothing else. Yet, selection criteria vary widely across institutions, so honors students are also variable from one institution to another. The most common kinds of selection criteria used are grade point averages and standardized test scores (SAT or ACT). Hence, Tacha (1986) summarily concluded that honors students are excellent test-takers with high psychometrics, but what do the numbers signify? There are no “bright lines” above which a student is formally recognized as an honors student nor below which he or she is not. The numerical cut-offs vary by hundreds of points depending on institution (Geiger, 2000; 2004; see Digby, 2002 for numerous examples).

The rationale behind GPA and test score criteria is that the numbers reflect academic aptitude both in a single day (in the case of the exam) and across time, usually 3-4 high school years (in the case of GPA) (Stoller, 2004). Either way, that leaves us with honors students as mere numbers on a page, an irony given that honors education is designed specifically to *not* treat the honors student as a number (Cohen, 1966a; Austin, 1986). Adding insult to injury, Schwartz (2005) asserts that students in the upper academic strand at highly selective institutions (and, presumably, highly selective programs within institutions) differ so little from each other that the numbers are, in effect, meaningless. For example, he suggests that any random fifth of the applicants for the first-year class at Harvard would be indistinguishable from those actually selected into it.

Test scores represent only a single dimension of academic superiority (Geiger, 2000). Nonetheless, students with high grades and test scores tend to have a variety of other associated characteristics evidenced by their high school and college transcripts. Namely, they are *able, accelerated and advanced*. Honors students are *able* in that they are intellectually capable of college-level work and beyond. Honors students are *accelerated* in that they have moved through the high school curriculum more quickly than traditional students and may even have ‘skipped’ grades prior to college (Austin, 1986). They are *advanced* in terms of more in-depth courses and reading and they often start with advanced academic standing in college. For example, honors students in my own institution typically start their first semester with 12-40 college course credits completed by either Advanced Placement (AP) credits or direct college enrollment.

In college, Pflaum, Pascarella, and Duby (1985) noted that honors participation had a positive effect on students’ academic achievement and success. However, the most scientific study of honors achievement to date was conducted by Shushok (2002). He compared two groups of students (n=86 in each group), one of honors students (average SAT of 1339 and average high school GPA of 3.96) and one of matched honors-caliber students (average SAT of 1339 and average high school GPA of 3.95) in one institution. All students received full merit scholarships. After one year of collegiate study, the groups were no different in gains in critical thinking skills, but honors students had significantly more experiences with faculty and greater gains in general education; liberal arts; science and technology; persistence to

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second year; and college GPA. Astin (1993) also noted that the honors students in his survey of 25,000 college students in 217 four-year colleges were more likely to persist to graduation, interact with faculty, enroll in graduate school, and have a stronger desire to make a theoretical contribution to science.

In sum, the characteristics of high ability, acceleration, and advanced work or standing should be evident both prior to collegiate study and throughout their collegiate years where, ideally, the accent is placed on advanced study. Advanced standing provides honors students with choices of 1) finishing their college degree program more quickly than other students, 2) using the time more creatively to take a broader array of courses, 3) completing multiple majors, minors, and/or study abroad, or 4) taking a lighter course load each semester. These options fuel, in turn, the next observable set of characteristics described below.

Honors students tend to be more *eager*, *exploratory*, and *experienced* than their non-honors counterparts. Honors students are expected to be highly motivated, self-directed learners (Aydelotte, 1925; Austin, 1986; Cohen, 1966b). Long and Lange (2002) use the term “strong academic focus” to describe them; Younger (2004) calls them “exceptional.” This eagerness may also be expressed through high expectations of themselves and their collegiate experience. Long and Lange’s (2002) study of 360 undergraduate students (142 honors and 214 non-honors) is one of the most comprehensive studies to date on this subject. They note that the honors students in their study were more likely than non-honors students to prepare for class, ask questions in class, rewrite a paper, or discuss academic ideas with a professor outside of class. Shushok’s (2002) study supports these results as well, more for males than females and for minority students than non-minority students enrolled in honors.

Honors students also tend to be more experienced than their non-honors counterparts. This is largely a function of their more extensive extra-curricular or co-curricular activities. Long and Lange (2002) reported that the honors students in their study were significantly more likely to work for pay on campus, participate in co-curricular activities, and complete volunteer committee service, and they were less likely to watch television, attend social parties, or exercise than non-honors students. Many honors students start their collegiate studies with a well developed international perspective, commitment to any number of causes, leadership aspirations, and/or a strong public service orientation. These values have long been a part of honors education (Cohen, 1966a) and are amply demonstrated in examples by Digby (2002). In terms of exploration, and referring again to Long and Lange (2002), their honors students were more likely to attend a guest lecture or participate in an art activity than non-honors students. Astin (1993) also noted a greater disposition toward artistic interests. Another important indicator may be study abroad experience. In my institution, over 40% of honors students go abroad vs. only 11% in the general Penn State-University Park student population.

There is also some evidence to suggest that honors students may be more inexperienced than their peers in some realms. For example, Long and Lange (2002) found that honors students consumed fewer alcoholic beverages, drank alcohol on fewer nights per week, and spent less money on alcohol than non-honors students.

## WHAT IS AN HONORS STUDENT?

It is important to separate academic or intellectual prowess from the social and emotional aspects of the developing individual (Lerner et al., 2003). These three aspects of self do not grow at the same rate or even at the same time. Advanced standing in one arena does not guarantee advanced standing in any other area of development. Robertson (1966) noted that “bright young men and women experience the same self-questioning, the same anxieties, the same social triumphs and failures, the same problems of choice, the same difficulty meeting deadlines as do all other young men and women...” (p. 52). I might add they also experience the same romantic difficulties, distractions and yearnings and probably a larger number of competing demands or ambitions. Sometimes they get themselves in trouble as well, with the law or otherwise. Test scores, as O’Neill (2005) noted poignantly, do not predict happiness. As Digby laments in this issue (2005), they don’t necessarily predict creativity or risk-taking either. Finally, it is worth noting that honors students are afflicted at times with family crises, health crises, and, contrary to some assumptions, financial woes—just as our non-honors students are. In other words, honors students (typically) are young adults, and they must cope with all the challenges that other young adults deal with.

Shushok (2002) found that honors and honors-caliber students did not differ significantly on personal interaction with friends, interest in theater and the arts, participation in sports or clubs, or satisfaction with college. Yet, Astin (1993) found that honors students uniformly demonstrated higher gains in interpersonal and intellectual self-esteem with small positive effects in “virtually all areas of satisfaction and other areas of self-reported growth.” These apparent contradictions may be due to differences in selection criteria, student characteristics, honors programming, institutional variation, or a combination of factors.

Numerous personality traits are described in the literature. Palmer and Wohl (1972) asserted that honors students are more ambitious, motivated, and introverted, and they score higher on autonomy in personality tests than non-honors students. Grangaard (2003) asserted that honors students do not score any differently on achievement, deference, or orderliness scales (but his sample size was only nine students in a two-year community college). Jenkins-Grieman (1986) noted the often paradoxical nature of honors students in that as a group they tend to be highly able, enthusiastic, task-oriented, and inner- or self-directed students but simultaneously may also be shy, fearful, or risk-adverse. Honors students are also determined and persistent but impatient, especially with bureaucracy (Robertson, 1966). Long and Lange (2002) assessed the personality constructs of “Openness to Experience” and “Conscientiousness” and found that, on average, the honors students in their sample were more open to new experiences and scored slightly higher on the conscientiousness scales. Again, with no data about the selectivity of these students, it is difficult to generalize to all (or any) other honors populations, and the authors themselves noted that the results, while statistically significant, might not be substantially different in this case.

Honors students may well be affected by a Hawthorne effect as well. That is, the mere selection process may change them in some fashion, and, in that change process, they may become more like each other (Smith, 2005). Or alternatively,



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honors students may be affected by the “Pygmalion Effect,” where a faculty member’s beliefs about a student create the behaviors and abilities that the educator had anticipated from the student, i.e., a self-fulfilling prophecy (Shushok, 2002). Others (Geiger, 2002; 2004; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; McKeachie, 1986) emphasize the importance of “peer effects,” i.e., membership in a high achieving group. Anecdotally, nearly all practitioners in honors education can share stories about the importance of an honors designation or recognition to various students. Indeed, for some students this recognition appears to be a primary motivator. Long and Lange (2002) also noted a great concern over grades in their study linking that concern to a “sense of identity and self-worth.” Schwartz (2005) had no data but went so far as to assert that many or most honors-caliber students are more interested in succeeding than in learning, in “satisfizing” than in “maximizing.”

In summary, honors students are not a homogenous group (Cummings, 1986) either within or across institutions, and it is misleading to presume otherwise. Honors students from similar institutions (with similar selection criteria) are more likely to be similar to one another than are honors students from very different institutions (or even similar institutions with different selection criteria for honors). However, honors students also share much in common with other, non-honors students.

## CONCLUSION

It is inappropriate and misleading to stereotype honors students. Firm conclusions about them should be held as suspect because empirical data about honors students are in extremely short supply. So, we circle back to the beginning. What is an honors student? We can draw five conclusions from the existent literature.

- 1) They are not a homogeneous group with a set of absolute or fixed characteristics. This is due in large part to the varying criteria used for selection *across* institutions.
- 2) They have much in common with other non-honors students of their own age group (for the traditionally aged and probably, also, for the adult learner although there are no data about honors students in the latter category).
- 3) They are (or should be) academically superior to their non-honors counterparts *within* any given institution.
- 4) Honors students are probably little different today than the honors students of yesteryear because the honors ideology and programming has changed little in the last forty years. However, this notion is untested.
- 5) More research is needed to understand how honors students develop academically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and as leaders relative to their non-honors peers.

## WHAT IS AN HONORS STUDENT?

There are abundant anecdotes (Reihman, Varhus and Whipple, 1995) and a generous amount of rhetoric available about honors students, but there is a severe lack of descriptive evidence, comparisons, or empirical data based on respectably-sized samples. Broader use of Astin's (1993) input-environment-outcomes (I-E-O) model might be an important early step in this research where honors outcomes are documented controlling for the characteristics of students upon college entry and the types of programs and coursework that students experience in their honors study.

The key question each institution must answer in practice, within its own context, is whether the honors students within the institution are sufficiently different from other students to necessitate and justify differences in the pedagogical, curricular, and personal advising experiences offered to them.

Sperber (2000) made his infamous (at least to honors administrators) assertion that all students deserve the same attention, class size, and pedagogies that honors students receive, concluding that if all students can't have such, then none should. Defying all understanding of learning styles and the obligation of public education to meet the needs of a heterogeneous population including remedial and special needs groups, Sperber missed the point about honors entirely. Honors students, regardless of how the general student population is or is not taught, need to be separated (at least part of the time) because they respond differently and learn better with other highly motivated, "like-minded" students (McKeachie, 1986; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Geiger, 2002; 2004), just as remedial or differently-abled students learn better in certain courses designed for their needs. By definition, there are fewer honors than traditional students within any general, public, higher education institution. If, however, the institution is populated by large groups of honors-caliber students, then they are taught like the general students in other colleges and universities. Harvard, for example, has courses of over 300 students, as less selective public universities do.

The most important ingredient of an honors education is serious intellectual work. A fundamental rationale for honors programs or colleges is that these students are both sufficiently the same as each other and different from the non-honors student to justify a separate learning track, based on their peculiar learning needs, aspirations, and background preparation. The honors learning track should be different in both pedagogy and content. From the very beginning of honors education, flexibility in meeting course work requirements was considered fundamental (Aydelotte, 1925). Cohen (1966a) further emphasized that honors education should be dynamic, more complex and more fluid than traditional education and ideally tailored to each student. McKeachie (1969) noted years ago that "bright students learn better than other students in a highly participative process." Most honors courses/curricula emphasize seminar-type coursework. Honors students should also be engaged in decision-making processes—they need to have a certain measure of autonomy (Cummings, 1986)—but they also need to learn to work effectively in teams, make oral presentations to large groups of people, initiate contact with people of different status, age, and cultures, and be comfortable in a variety of contexts.

One of the key elements in honors education should be to shift the first-year honors student from a focus that emphasizes primarily acceleration (moving faster through the same content) or enhancement (more of the same kind of content/material) to a

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focus on enrichment (different or more in-depth content). Acceleration may be part of enrichment, but it is not an end in itself nor should it be. Instead, honors course work should be “richer in theory and practice” (Cohen 1966a), more rigorous, and also more integrative, cross-disciplinary, critical, comprehensive and, above all, intellectually challenging.

Let me finish by saying what I believe an honors student should be based on my personal experience with over 3000 honors students in the last eight years. This perspective was developed at a large public research university, so it may not pertain to all students who are, at present, referred to as “honors students.” Nonetheless, an honors student should be: a highly motivated, academically talented, intrinsically-inspired, advanced, and curious student who has broad interests, a passion for learning, and excitement about ideas. The student should also be sufficiently different or unique from the institutional norm as to need, indeed require, a different, more challenging curriculum and other learning opportunities to satisfy his or her drive to learn, know, and do.

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EMILY WALSH

# Athena, Telemachus, and the Honors Student Odyssey: The Academic Librarian as an Agent in Mentored Learning

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## ABSTRACT

This study considers how librarians can develop mentoring schemes that enhance intellectual discourse among honors students. The author defines mentored learning; identifies the need for integrated information support in honors curricula; outlines a project that has employed a mentored learning model; and examines how a mentored learning program may assist in promoting high achievement and low attrition in honors programs. This paper was presented at the 39<sup>th</sup> annual NCHC conference in November 2004.

## INTRODUCTION

The journey is a common metaphor to represent our heroic and not so heroic life passages. In higher education, the passage is a distinctly linear one, building competencies that channel students across intrepid waters towards a “commencement.” The honors student journey, if well-traveled, is both a solitary and communal one.

In this paper, I introduce the concept of mentoring as a learning tool for the honors experience. Part One considers how librarians, as ambassadors to the evolving universe of recorded knowledge, can develop mentoring and mentor-like schemes that improve and enrich intellectual discourse among honors students. I will define mentoring and mentored learning; identify its various functions and goals; examine the library’s role in the learning community; and describe the need for integrated information support for honors curricula.

Part Two highlights the architecture of *The Athena Project* at Long Island University / C.W. Post Campus where mentored learning practice has been used for practical benefit in structured learning environments. These include program-specific orientation strategies; course-specific bibliographic and information literacy instruction in the classroom; and assignment-specific, individual tutoring in (and out of) the library.

## ATHENA, TELEMACHUS, AND THE HONORS STUDENT ODYSSEY

I will conclude by summarizing the mutually inclusive benefits of mentored learning practice and positing how a formal mentoring framework may assist in the promotion of high achievement and low attrition in honors programs.

### PART ONE MENTORED LEARNING AND THE LIBRARY

When Odysseus went off the fight the Trojan War, he entrusted his son Telemachus to the tutor Mentor. The teacher later revealed herself as the Goddess Athena, patroness of the arts and industry, and accompanied the youth when he went in search of his missing father. (Van Collie, 1998, p. 36)

To understand mentoring, I begin with its history. The original term “mentor” occurs in Homer’s epic *The Odyssey* where, in the absence of a father, Telemachus is educated and guided in every facet of his young life. Mentos assists Telemachus on his journey to find his father and, most importantly, teaches Telemachus to think and act for himself (Kay, 1990). Homer gave us the name “mentor” in 725 B.C., a term that today has come to mean someone with more experience who teaches someone with less experience. This aspect of mentoring has led through the years to the word *protégé*, from the French *protégere*, meaning one who is protected by a person of experience and influence. In modern times, however, the typical Mentos-Telemachus model or mentor-protégé relationship has changed considerably. In this discussion, I use the term “mentor” in a broad, dynamic and metaphorical manner. In the context of higher education, “mentor” is defined as an active, knowledgeable, and intellectually agile person committed to keeping the teaching and learning of students in focus and guiding students by example to be dynamic learners.

Innes and Flavin (1999) define mentored learning as “a student/teacher partnership that incorporates the intellectual curiosity and desire of two individuals with common interests as they investigate a specific area of study” (p. 41). As distinct from academic advisement, which is mostly one-directional and often one-dimensional, the mentored learning relationship goes beyond a single reference encounter and espouses a holistic approach to learning. Because life in the library is both static and dynamic, library faculty members might synthesize otherwise incongruous research experiences to create bridges of relevance and ever-expanding points of reference across academic disciplines. Over the course of a single academic year, for example, the honors librarian and first-year student might grapple with *Macbeth*, examine water tables in Africa, dissect the Dow Jones, and explicate Jung. Unlike an advisor, the librarian enjoys a close and rich history of student interest and aptitude, enjoining the honor student on his/her journey throughout a diverse curriculum.

One major obstacle of mentoring relationships in education is that the mentor, not the protégé, typically sets the agenda (Sandler, 1992). This orientation to mentoring is pantomimic of the fundamentally hierarchical and didactic relationship of teacher/student that is evident in the standard college classroom. The library, however, offers a relationship beyond the classroom that is a kind of learning partnership. It is in the role of learning *partner* that library faculty can offer a curricular



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capaciousness to honors study. While the classroom teacher is an expert pedagogue within a defined discipline, the academic librarian's knowledge base is expansive.

Librarians are great generalists – we know a *little* about a *lot* of things. Often, when approached for research help, the librarian will not possess the subject expertise to dive right into the project. A partnership is established early in the reference interview, an exchange where the librarian probes the student for specific information on a topic. In this first and vital encounter with the student, the librarian frequently concedes a kind of ignorance regarding a subject. This “leveling” with the student tends to temper student anxieties and is quite effective in initiating an adventurous and collaborative approach to research.

The purpose of co-mentoring in a learning environment is to ensure that the two participants approach an intellectual project in which they are mutually interested and about which they have similar background knowledge. For the academic librarian, this requires an agility of mind, humility in ego, and enthusiasm for learning. This relationship is unique in the academy because it allows the student to break out of the hierarchy and the librarian to break into the curriculum. Implicit in *The Athena Project*, the mentored learning relationship in the library is a long-term, fluid, and sometimes passive tutorial that affords the honors student an empowerment in research, as best evidenced in senior thesis work.

Meggison and Clutterbuck (1995) illustrate this concept of “engaged passivity” by elaborating on Homer's representation of Mentor as an earthly form taken by the goddess Athene. When Odysseus returns from his wandering, he and his son Telemachus are faced with their final challenge. Athene does not use all her powers to give them victory but continues to put their strength and courage on trial. Athene withdraws, taking the shape of a swallow to perch on the smoky beam of the hall. “The power of this image is that it puts mentors where they need to be, out of the action, looking on and encouraging, rather than taking over and doing the work for the learner” (Meggison & Clutterbuck, 1995, p. 28).

The honors student journey includes a series of destinations that I describe as sojourner goals. The primary goal of mentored learning is to develop dynamic students who cultivate a learning community for others, both within and beyond the honors program. A major goal for the librarian/mentor in an honors program is to help establish a community of learners in which the librarians themselves are learners and instill learning in others—across academic disciplines and levels of study. This is a long-term engagement with the honors student. From freshman orientation to senior thesis work, the librarian/mentor guides and challenges the honors student to think critically in retrieving, interpreting, and synthesizing information.

Just as the sojourner is a temporary resident, so too are our honors students. The ultimate function of mentored learning is to provide an atmosphere, in and out of the library, for dynamic learning. This involves academic and psychosocial development, requiring strong librarian/instructor/honors program director relationships, and it invariably leads to greater satisfaction with the honors experience.

## PART TWO

### “NO PROCRUSTEAN BED”: *THE ATHENA PROJECT*

To best illustrate the library’s role in a mentored learning model, let us consider what mentored learning is *not*, as Altounyan (1995) did in borrowing from another Greek myth. Procrustes, who lived in a cave, often invited visitors to extravagant banquets. At the end of the evening, Procrustes urged his tired visitors to stay the night. If the visitors were too short for the bed, Procrustes put them on racks to stretch them until they fitted better. If they were too long, Procrustes chopped off the bits dangling over the end of the bed.

Unfortunately, like Procrustes’ abode, many academic libraries endure a cavernous-like presence on campus—either spatially or psychologically or both. For some students, entrance into the library is a formidable trip in and of itself. For others, the collection is overwhelming. And for many, it is just a domain of arrogance. But for those of friendly exploit, the academic library is the locus for an intellectual orgy of sorts, where students may feast alone or with others on information that it is appropriate and nourishing, offering fertile ground for new ideas.

The image of the Procrustean bed can be applied to two aspects of mentored learning in the library. First, the academic library offers a rich banquet of information and scholarly support. Often, however, the library’s role in the academy is one devoid of context. Service is frequently administered like fast food. Instruction tends to be prescriptive, template and stale. In many libraries, there is a tacit “cookie cutter” approach to research. “Want this? Look here.” “Want that? Look there.” Students, tired by an exhaustive and self-directed feast on inappropriate resources, often put their research to rest on beds unfitting to the assignment. There are few apertures for a proactive, in-your-face, “come along with me” kind of attention.

Second, mentored learning is not cutting people or ideas down to the size that is the preference of the educator or requisite of the organization. Mentored learning in the library is colorful and individual, extending well beyond the bibliographic encounter. Likewise, in this scheme a mentor is not only a tutor who focuses primarily on the task at hand but also an agent focused on individuals and their development. Often, the library mentor will act as a cerebral sparring partner, challenging student assumptions about information, authority, or representation throughout the duration of honors study.

Ragins (1989) suggests that “mentoring relationships may be more likely to occur in organic than mechanistic organizations” (p.16). Compared to corporate culture, institutions of higher learning can be considered organic in structure because we have fewer hierarchical levels and more collaborative networks than mechanistic organizations. *The Athena Project* grew, organically and informally, from a single interest in affecting the research experience of academically gifted students.

Below is a description of three distinct facets of mentored learning practiced in our honors program.

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### **TYPE I: PROGRAM-SPECIFIC ORIENTATION**

Our honors program seeks to provide its students with a course of study designed to help them realize their potential in and out of the classroom. Across a liberal curriculum of traditional and innovative studies, the honors program objective is one of enrichment and critical thinking, not acceleration. Beginning students, a diverse group of many ages and nationalities, are the beneficiaries of enriched advisement their first year. The assignment of a freshman honors advisor, coupled with special orientation sections in the College's freshman orientation program, helps to create a unique decision-making community that is both academic and social.

Upon entering the university, each honors student participates in a 10-week orientation program. In this orientation, the students are introduced in a seminar-type format to various facets of campus and academic life. Both incoming freshmen and transfer students are introduced to the library, its resources, and their librarian/mentor within the first weeks of university study. The orientation sessions conducted by the librarian/mentor are designed to introduce the students to:

- the individual serving as "personal librarian,"
- the collective expertise of the library faculty,
- the precepts governing the organization of recorded knowledge in a university library, and
- the complexities inherent in academic research.

This is a conduction, or "heating up," of the post-secondary research experience as well as a pragmatic circuit of the library facility and briefing on its effective access and usage.

In this forum for acculturation, the librarian/mentor conducts written *Interest Inventories* to gauge students' early academic interests and research perceptions. These inventories are retained on file with the librarian/mentor for later consultation and notation regarding student contact, course of study, and specific research activities across disciplines. This documented growth in research activity, interest, and experience is then shared with the student at the senior thesis/tutorial level. In several ways, this documentation provides a cartographic portrait of the mentored learning experience, providing a map of a student's ideological origins, direction, mile markers, wanderings, and destinations over a course of four years.

### **TYPE II: COURSE-SPECIFIC BIBLIOGRAPHIC & INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTION**

Like many large university libraries, ours supports the information needs of thousands of full- and part-time students in a comprehensive range of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degree programs. Library activity is reflective of this broad constituency—subscribing to hundreds of electronic databases; handling a print collection of over a million volumes; managing several thousand periodical titles; organizing satellite multimedia collections in the arts; and maintaining an opulent but grossly underutilized rare book and special collections archive.

## ATHENA, TELEMACHUS, AND THE HONORS STUDENT ODYSSEY

Full-time tenured library faculty hold advanced degrees and academic credentials outside of their discipline. Subject to the high student-to-librarian ratio existent in most institutions, librarians are limited in the ways they might lend their expertise in pedagogical support. Because service is directed to satisfying such a high number and diverse range of information needs, little attention can be made to the “whole” student. Librarians often see students on a need-to-know basis, answering specific questions and identifying information sources (often automated) appropriate to the assignment in hand. In this way, the library becomes insular and task-specific.

In calling for a more “information literate” student, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (Ratteray, 2000) has advocated partnerships across academe. Over the last decade, library initiatives in bibliographic instruction and information literacy have sought to bring the library into the classroom and cultivate a context for effectively using information. In terms of improving student efficacy in research, however, these amplified initiatives often fall short of their intent. Eadie (1992) argues that course-related instruction is simply an oral bibliography and that the generic library instruction session often trivializes information gathering and confuses the student. Tiefel (1995) cites several complications inherent in course-related instruction, including lack of faculty cooperation and a push/pull contention for instructional “authority.”

In a single semester, large-library bibliographic instruction programs will teach research sections for over 100 different syllabi across many different disciplines. These sessions seek to detail information sources and services specific to a particular discipline, course, or research agenda. For several reasons, these research assemblies tend to be parochial in approach and function within a rote focal framework. Many sessions have no pre- or post-consultation with the instructor regarding content or outcomes. Some sessions include beforehand a cursory review with the instructor regarding session objectives or special concerns. Sometimes the instructor will not even be present for library instruction. In the worst scenarios, the library fills a slot on a syllabus if an instructor has a schedule conflict and cannot attend his/her class. In this type of context, there is little room for the cultivation of relationships, either intellectual or social.

Mentoring/learning relationships are also course-specific, but contextually rich. There is a continuity and familiarity in library instruction, where one librarian is seen repeatedly in the classroom but in different contexts, a better strategy than assigning librarians to bibliographic instruction programs based on availability rather than subject specialty or resource expertise. Also, the librarian/mentor is always building on a student’s past research experience and current competencies. In this way, mentored learning practice in coursework emphasizes a *process* rather than an immediate purpose and helps to achieve a balanced program that assists students in the effective transference of library knowledge from one course to another. Instructors consult with the librarian/mentor early in the design of their research or writing assignments, sometimes in the formation of the syllabus, to invite contextually congruous research experiences for the students and a directive clarity for collaborative instruction.

Much of the honors curriculum involves writing-intensive coursework. This kind of work necessitates a careful approach in the arrangement and administration

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of library services. Curiously, we have found that mentored learning strategies help facilitate students' understanding and avoidance of plagiarism. Because the librarian/mentor keeps an active watch on course-specific research work as well as individual student interests and competencies, the mentored learning model has been called upon to support various stages of a writing project. The librarian/mentor may review and validate student drafts or provide written commentary to students and instructors regarding resource allocation or citation. Again, by cultivating an understanding of the *process* of scholarship, mentored learning moves beyond the act of simply surveying literature and citing sources. We believe that a conceptual foundation for academic research laid early in the honors curriculum inevitably enhances instruction and outcomes in each stage of academic development.

### **TYPE III: ASSIGNMENT-SPECIFIC INDIVIDUAL TUTORING**

For the student and librarian, confronting an explosive information universe (not wholly unlike Odysseus and Telemachus facing hundreds of suitors) requires true strategic and tactical cunning. The terrain of the information landscape in the freshman year will be much different in the senior year of study. Rapid developments in information storage and delivery, commercial acquisitions of electronic resources, and migratory patterns in academic publishing prompt continual realignments in our collective approach to academic research.

Content, even in the more static disciplines, is masked by the ways in which information is represented and delivered to the student. The way we look for literary criticism today, for example, will be much different four years from now. The changing face of information can be scary to both students and classroom faculty. The effective conduct of research, in and outside of the academy, requires the ability to think critically and independently. The proliferation of aggregate systems, intuitive search engines, and third-party paper mills invariably affects the ways in which we conceive of information as "capital." One-on-one, personal, and successive research experiences with students are vital for the effective transfer of knowledge and synthesis of ideas.

A requirement of every student in the honors program is the completion of a tutorial and a thesis, which are done in the student's major with the help of a full-time professor from that major. Students who do not complete the tutorial and thesis do not graduate with the honors citation on their diplomas. For the mentored learning relationship, this is a capstone experience in research. Much like course-specific instruction, the librarian/mentor meets with the advising professor and the senior student early in the design of the project. The student and advising professor commence with a meeting plan, and the student and librarian/mentor meet according to this rigorous schedule. This instructional triad has proven to be helpful to students and advising professors alike in that the nuts-and-bolts requirements of the research component are wholly attended to and locally directed while at the same time different learning styles are accounted for and honored. Without this cooperative guidance, students tend to underutilize and misuse information, often favoring citations to information over the "end information" itself.

## ATHENA, TELEMACHUS, AND THE HONORS STUDENT ODYSSEY

The locus of control is changing throughout honors curricula, as is the concept of “residency” within library collections, and mentored learning practice involving the library may help to create an improved setting that accounts for different learning styles and that guides developmental learning through uncharted courses. For our students studying abroad, email contact with the librarian/mentor can provide a kind of anchor in research, helping students obtain the information sources they need to support their studies abroad. This project has just begun to explore initiatives in “telementoring,” which include asynchronous and “real-time chat” provisions in campus Honors Lounges and dormitory computing facilities that would thread together social and learning environments.

### CONCLUSION

Mentoring, like learning itself, is about structural and personal relationships. The process of mentoring dynamic honors students involves more than a single mentor, more than a single setting, and more than passive students. A mentored learning model in education calls for changing roles among students, teachers, and librarians. Technology can be a key transforming element, offering unlimited new ways of learning and communicating *in relationship*.

Guides and travelers come to the journey in two ways, by chance or by mutual choice in planning the journey together. Although typically students seek their own mentors or mentors emerge, informal mentor relationships do not serve the growing need for dynamic learners in a rapidly expanding world where *information* is often mistaken for *meaning*. Institutional support for a formal mentoring program in the honors program is requisite for cultivating learning communities within an institution. This necessarily involves organizational planning, mentor selection and training, mentor/student pairing (or opportunities for mentor/student selection), and evaluation. Within the framework of a formal mentored learning program, institutions might promote higher achievement and lower attrition in honors programs.

The voyage associated with any kind of learning experience is not a placid one. However, mentored learning relationships are mutually beneficial and can ease the voyage by providing dual support in approaching intellectual challenges and cognitive “storms.” For the librarian/mentor, the mentor relationship helps avoid isolation (often, academic librarians feel themselves to be on the periphery of curricula) and encourages collaboration with teaching faculty on dynamic learning and curricular innovation. Librarian/mentors gain new insights through reflective discussions and fresh opportunities for serendipity. Mentoring practice affords its participants reflective time to evaluate intuitive processes. By working within the honors program, mentors gain a network for ideas and opportunities to modify their experience in the academy. Not only are more ideas generated in terms of course content and curricular direction, but librarian/mentors gain a sense of relevancy and influence within the institution, which can be meaningful and motivating.

The benefits of mentored learning to an honors student may seem obvious and include developing a greater insight into the process of scholarship, learning practical tricks in information excavation, and expanding one’s circle of reference. I have

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found, however, that honors students gain more subtle benefits: exposure to new ideas and approaches in research; confidence in information seeking behavior; and adeptness at trusting in what is self-evident. Students have, undoubtedly, become more *creative* in adapting ideas from the literature in many disciplines.

Mentored learning practice is not a panacea for plagiarism, nor is it a remedy for complacent, bored, or needy students. It is not a strategy for validating the role of the librarian within academe. Instead, it is a mutually *inclusive* program that provides the academic and social support necessary to help honors students successfully complete their course of study and transfer marketable discipline-specific skills to the workplace. The mentor's support can be vital for transforming the research endeavor in the academy and affirming the tacit role of the library on the lifelong journey beyond commencement.

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K. CELESTE CAMPBELL

# Allocation of Resources: Should Honors Programs Take Priority?

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Two of the major challenges facing higher education in the 21st century are the determination of priorities and the allocation of shrinking resources to reflect these priorities. Many colleges and universities, when blessed with sufficient funds during the last half of the 20th century, dedicated resources to develop honors programs (or similar honors colleges) to attract and nurture academically talented undergraduate students.<sup>1</sup> Substantial funds are required for honors programs to offer benefits such as small classes, special honors advising, and honors housing. In addition to annual funding, other resources are needed to operate a successful honors program, such as faculty time for honors courses and physical space for classrooms, offices, meeting rooms, computer labs, and study areas.

Today's climate is different from the era of widespread honors program creation. Institutions no longer have enough resources to fund all existing programs. According to McPherson and Schapiro (2003), "Public colleges and universities in the United States have been on a financial roller coaster in recent years because of dramatic changes in the fiscal environment of the states" (p. 1157). A recent plunge that began in the 2001-02 academic year threatens to be as deep or even deeper than the serious slide of the early 1990s. Institutional leaders are confronted with difficult decisions as they allocate resources that are inadequate to meet the needs of all programs. They are forced to prioritize, and those programs that do not surface as priorities must be modified or eliminated.

This essay addresses the question: Are college honors programs important enough to be considered priorities that receive institutional funding and other resources? Although there are thoughtful educators who argue against supporting honors programs as institutional priorities, the arguments in favor of such support are ultimately more persuasive. Much can be learned, however, from arguments against honors programs, and this essay presents some of the strongest of these arguments. Rather than ignoring or dismissing such positions, honors administrators must use them to gain insight for improving their programs, securing wider acceptance of their programs, and helping to ensure that their host institutions remain fully aware of the crucial and diverse value of their honors programs. This essay is intended to assist honors administrators as they strive to position their programs as deserving priorities within their institutions.

## ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

The colleges that choose to allocate substantial resources to honors programs do so because they see the value of the programs to serve not only students but also the institutions themselves. One example is the University of Minnesota, which, although confronted with economic challenges, is currently considering a plan to *add* an honors college, closing two other longstanding colleges in the process (its General College, which provides services to students who need remedial assistance, and its College of Human Ecology). This plan is intended to help the university better focus its resources, compete for top students and faculty, and improve its status as a top research institution (Hebel, 2005).

Honors programs clearly assist with the recruitment of high-ability students, and honors administrators must find ways to measure and document this role so that it can serve as solid evidence of the value of their specific programs to their institutions as a whole. For example, new freshmen enrolling through the Honors College at Oklahoma State University complete a brief survey that includes the question, "In selecting OSU as your university, how important was it that you were accepted into the Honors College?" The response results are documented in the Honors College annual report and are distributed to appropriate university personnel. The 2003-04 annual report (OSU Honors College, 2004, p. 8) shows that 44% of new honors freshmen indicated that their acceptance into the Honors College was "very important," 48% said "somewhat important," and only 8% said that Honors College acceptance was not an important factor in their selection of universities.

One reason that the recruitment of honors students is important to colleges is that research indicates that these students, who typically are at the top of their high school classes and have high ACT or SAT scores, are more likely than average students to persist in college and to earn their degrees quickly. Because graduation rate is frequently seen as an important indicator of institutional quality, colleges need to attract the types of students who are most likely to finish a degree. The literature on honors programs rarely focuses on graduation rate. However, a few isolated studies do exist. Lucas, Hull, and Brantley (1995) performed a study at William Rainey Harper College in Illinois to determine the effect of their honors program on students who had participated. They found that the students who had completed at least one honors course had a higher graduation rate than did the general student population (37% versus 31%). Similarly, the 2002 Program Completion Rate Report from St. Cloud State University in Minnesota shows that students who participated in their honors program had higher completion (graduation) rates than did the rest of the student body: the six-year completion rate of honors students was 72%, while that of the university at large was 39% (St. Cloud State University, 2002). Finally, Astin's (1975) longitudinal, national study focusing on college dropouts found that "Participation in honors programs is uniformly associated with improved chances of college completion" (p. 103).

Colleges value their honors programs not only because they attract top students but also because they generate interest from donors. For example, two-thirds of the \$300 million pledged to the University of Arkansas by the Walton family, "the largest gift ever promised to a public institution of higher education" (Pulley, 2002, p. 1), was designated to develop an undergraduate honors college there. Cleveland State

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University likewise received a total of \$2 million from two separate donors in 2003 to fund honors program scholarships (Gazette, 2003), and a recent \$1 million gift to Rowan University was dedicated to enhance academic and research activities for honors program students (Rowan University, 2004).

At the state level, honors programs are seen as weapons for fighting against academic “brain drain,” where bright students are lured out of state to attend prestigious colleges and do not bring their expertise back to their home states after college. Long (2002) contends that honors programs allow states to funnel funds to the goal of retaining top students without drastically disturbing the existing college structure or mission. These funds are used for programming and operational expenses as well as scholarships for honors students. Although few would argue with the assertion that honors programs combat “brain drain,” this author could locate no evidence that collegiate honors programs keep students in their home states. Similar evidence does exist, however, in states that have instigated merit-based scholarships in order to retain top students. The HOPE Scholarship in Georgia, for example, has decreased the flight of top students to out-of-state institutions. The scholarship covers tuition, fees, and book expenses for qualified residents who attend in-state public colleges and provides subsidies for in-state private colleges. During the first seven years after the instigation of the HOPE Scholarship, 1993-2000, the number of Georgia residents with SAT scores greater than 1500 who remained in the state for college rose from 23% to 76% (“A Celebration of HOPE” as cited in Cornwell, Mustard, & Sridhar, 2003).

In addition to the benefits that honors programs bring to their institutions and states, these supportive programs also provide benefits for students. In fact, institutional and state benefits are realized as by-products of the primary work of honors programs: facilitating the success and enhancing the overall satisfaction of students. Research suggests that students participating in honors programs improve their writing and critical thinking skills (Bulkowski & Townsend, 1995; Tsui, 1999); increase their intellectual self-esteem (Bulkowski & Townsend, 1995; Lucas et al., 1995); and report high levels of satisfaction with their college experience (Byrne, 1998; Shushok, 2002). Is it any wonder, then, that honors students should have higher college retention rates and graduation rates than do non-honors students (Astin, 1975, chaps. 5 & 8; Lucas et al., 1995; St. Cloud State University, 2002)?

Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement proposes that students learn and succeed in college by becoming actively involved in their education. Astin’s work points to several aspects of the college environment that facilitate student involvement, and many of these are the very aspects that characterize honors programs: an engaging and challenging curriculum; individual interaction with faculty; opportunities to reside on-campus, such as in honors residence halls; and participation in social and organizational activities like those sponsored by honors programs. Small class size, which Gibbs and Lucas (1996) found to be positively related to student performance, is a fundamental component of honors programs and a further encouragement for students to become involved in their education. Likewise, on-going counseling on academic performance, such as the advising provided by honors programs, is another type of student involvement that has been shown to increase retention (Turner & Berry, 2000).

## ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

Yet in spite of such evidence of the positive effects of honors programs, not all educators are in agreement regarding their value as institutional priorities. The arguments against honors programs stem largely from the feeling that they are elitist—that they isolate the top students from the rest of the academic community, that they lack diversity, and that they are at least partly responsible for the growing extent to which merit-based scholarship and programming funds are taking precedence over need-based awards and other deserving programs. Some educators feel that the allocation of funds for honors programs is made at the expense of the larger student body. Sperber (2000), for example, contends that

Schools publicly promote their excellent and well-funded honors programs and never mention their deteriorating regular undergraduate education ones—as if somehow the flashy honors colleges compensate for the poverty of ordinary classes. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the enrichment of already affluent honors programs increases, and the impoverishment of regular undergraduate education also continues.

—Sperber, 2000, p. 148

The concept of elitism runs contrary to the mission of some institutions, particularly in the environment of open access that is the foundation of the community college. As part of their qualitative evaluation of an Illinois community college honors program, Bulkowski and Townsend (1995) disclosed the roots of anti-honors sentiments from document analysis and interviews with faculty who were opposed to the establishment of the program. What emerged was the belief that the honors program would represent elitist values, segregate students according to ability, and tend to serve students whose demographic characteristics (age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) were not representative of the student body as a whole. Other research provides grounding for such beliefs. Lucas et al. (1995) examined the demographics of honors students at William Rainey Harper College over a five-year period. When compared to the general student body, the students in the honors program tended to be younger and less likely to belong to a minority group. The percentage of African Americans and Hispanic honors students was less than half the percentage of these groups present in the college at large.

In his summary of his longitudinal work on college persistence, Astin (1984) states that the findings of his study “suggest that honors participation enhances faculty-student relationships but may isolate students from their peers” (p. 303). Such isolation can produce feelings of resentment on the part of non-honors students—a finding from the qualitative research of Bulkowski and Townsend (1995). Some honors program administrators openly combat this perception of isolation and separation. According to Freddy Davy, director of the Honors College at Hampton University, “We make a conscious effort not to be elitist, not to be separate.... The primary goal for honors here at Hampton is to affect the academic climate of the university as a whole” (Hamilton, 2004, p. 30). The policies of the Honors College at Hampton are designed to accomplish this goal. For example, after honors students have enrolled,

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remaining spaces in honors classes are open to the general student body with the understanding that these students must be willing to meet the challenges and expectations of the class. Another example is the requirement that honors students who are doing projects to fulfill honors contracts in their non-honors major classes must present their project results to the class. The Honors College also publishes a listing and description of all honors contract projects so that faculty and students throughout the university may benefit from student research ideas (F. Davy, personal communication, April 18, 2005).

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, we turn again to the primary question: Are honors programs important enough to be considered priorities that receive institutional funding and other resources? The leaders of each college will ultimately make this determination for themselves, and it is the job of the honors director (or dean) to ensure that the evidence pointing to the benefits of honors education is more persuasive than the misgivings of those who are against it. Will honors programs survive and thrive, or will other deserving competitor programs take precedence? Honors directors can play a crucial role in distinguishing their programs as priorities by taking the following steps.

1. Become informed about honors-related research and the benefits that honors programs bring to their students, their institutions, and their states—and contribute to such research.

Although the body of research focusing on honors programs is small, this essay highlights some examples of studies that confirm the benefits honors programs bring to the students who participate in them as well as to the institutions and states that house them. More honors-focused research is needed, particularly multi-institutional research that explores the value of honors programs and the effects of honors program participation on student development. When compared to other areas of higher education, relatively little published honors research exists, and much of what exists is neither available in libraries nor accessible through widely used search processes. (A 2005 search for the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* produced the following results: ERIC—Six articles from the Spring-Summer 2000 issue; OCLC FirstSearch—Five libraries worldwide that own the item; Proquest—publication not found.) One of the current challenges facing the honors community is to discover meaningful ways to measure, analyze, evaluate, and make public the effects that honors programs have on their students and their institutions. Such data would help institutional decision-makers determine whether honors programs are important enough to be considered priorities that justify the allocation of funds, personnel, space, and other resources.

2. Set up methods for documenting and evaluating the local honors program to assess whether it is deserving of priority status.

Before funds and other resources are allocated, individual honors programs should be evaluated to assess their quality and effectiveness. Such evaluation may be

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conducted internally on an ongoing basis and/or by external evaluators in a less frequent but more formal format. In order to validate their existence and build a case for future survival, honors programs must set up routine internal processes to assess and document their work. Examples of important areas for assessment are using annual surveys to measure student satisfaction with courses and advising, calculating the retention and graduation rates of honors students, and tracking honors alumni to determine how their post-graduation lives are different from those of non-honors students (particularly academically equivalent non-honors students). The National Collegiate Honors Council provides general standards of assessment that can help colleges evaluate their honors programs (Basic characteristics, 2000), and work is currently underway on similar standards for honors colleges. Although at this time no national, formal honors program evaluation or accreditation process exists, the NCHC web site provides a list of recommended site visitors who can assist with an evaluation or review of an honors program by serving as consultants or external reviewers.

3. Thoughtfully examine the local honors program in light of the arguments that honors programs promote various forms of elitism.

Honors administrators must be sensitive to and learn from the anti-honors arguments presented in this essay. The term that encompasses these arguments, elitism, is associated with preferential treatment of a privileged, closed group. Honors programs may be perceived as elitist in the sense that participants who meet designated academic criteria are afforded enhanced faculty contact, early enrollment, and other privileges. Honors directors may simply need to accept the fact that some people will always hold the opinion that this constitutes academic elitism. What directors must not accept is the exclusion of any group of people based on or stemming from non-academic criteria. In the Supreme Court decision from the University of Michigan law school affirmative-action case, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote, "In order to cultivate a set of leaders with legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry, it is necessary that the path to leadership be visibly open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity" (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003, p. 332). The honors programs of this country serve to educate talented, qualified students who hold the potential to become leaders in finding cures for disease and solving other problems of society. It is the responsibility of honors administrators to ensure that their programs are "visibly open" to all academically qualified students. This means that they must take steps to attract a diverse student body by targeting some of their recruiting efforts to minority students, non-traditional students, and others who may be missed by general recruiting methods. Honors directors should initiate collaborative efforts with campus multicultural offices to implement strategies for increasing effective minority recruitment. Honors administrators can attract international and non-traditional students (who are often missed by honors programs during their initial campus enrollment) to their programs by extending personalized, individual invitations to join the honors program to students who perform well during their first semester of college (rather than basing eligibility solely on college entrance criteria). These actions,

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along with other efforts such as sponsoring inclusive campus-wide speaker series and tutoring programs, will contribute to the visible openness of honors programs and will help combat the elitist stereotype, thereby securing wider acceptance of honors programs.

4. Make a conscious and consistent effort to ensure that the crucial-ly beneficial work of the honors program is visible.

If an honors program is to become an institutional priority and maintain this priority status, its work and value must be visible. The honors administrator must cultivate and maintain lines of communication with institutional decision-makers and make sure that appropriate people receive information such as evaluation reports, annual reports, and notices of special honors student achievements that support the honors program. (See the "Responsibilities" section of the NCHC *Handbook for Administrators* (Long, 1995) for practical suggestions for effective administrative communication.)

This essay has examined some of the arguments for and against the inclusion of honors programs as top institutional priorities that warrant the allocation of scarce resources. It has also stressed the importance of research, documentation, and evaluation, but such efforts are futile if they remain secret. Instead, they must be used to inform institutional leaders about the crucial role that honors programs play in supporting student success, recruiting top students, attracting donor attention, and elevating the overall environment and status of the institution.

## NOTES

1. To provide a perspective on the prevalence of honors programs, 802 institutions were members of the National Collegiate Honors Council as of December 2004 (NCHC, 2004).

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