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Editor's Introduction

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Ada Long

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The opening essay of this volume—"What Do We Belong to If We Belong to NCHC?"—manages to corral the spirit of the National Collegiate Honors Council without reducing it to a simple formula that would break it. In this slightly revised version of his 2016 presidential address at the Seattle conference in October, Jerry Herron of Wayne State University acknowledges the complex commitments and multiple roles that members bring to the conference as well as the rich variety of services they provide to each other within just a few days. He then takes his audience to "the quiet at the center of all that rackety good stuff." What he finds there is "a sense of belonging—belonging to each other and to an idea—that makes this outfit of ours truly wonderful and unique." Longtimers in the NCHC will know exactly what Herron is talking about; newcomers surely left the conference with a feel for it; and both groups will recognize the singularity of this feeling among the wide array of their other professional organizations: the feeling of "belonging to something that calls us out of ourselves."

Having relished this sense of belonging, readers can then get down to work and consider a policy matter important to all NCHC-member institutions. Philip L. Frana of James Madison University and Stacy Rice of Northern Virginia Community College make a compelling appeal for all two-year and four-year institutions to develop sound and detailed articulation agreements, which they prefer to call *memoranda of understanding*. In "Best Practices in Two-Year to Four-Year Honors Transfers," they provide a rationale and roadmap for developing such agreements, using their own experience and the experiences of other colleges and universities to describe what they consider best practices. A well-constructed honors document includes specific requirements for eligibility, policies for implementation, and descriptions of benefits, for each of which the authors provide their recommended guidelines. As they point out, the increasing numbers of two-year colleges in recent years as well as the encroachment of for-profit companies into the articulation arena call for new efforts to create sound and transparent procedures for transfer, which can both enhance the quality of education for honors students and ensure the integrity of honors at both two- and four-year institutions.

Readers needing to find new ways to expand their honors curriculum at a time when budgets are tight and administrations are reluctant to add costs

might want to consider the strategy that Kathy A. Lyon adopted at Winthrop University. In “Leveraging a Modest Success for Curriculum Development,” Lyon describes how she parlayed a low-cost, one-hour seminar program into an ambitious set of three-credit-hour, interdisciplinary honors courses. Lyon describes the importance of laying the groundwork for such a gambit by fostering positive relationships with higher administrators and by listening carefully to all the comments, even the most off-handed, made by teachers in the honors program. With these two commonsense practices in place, and then with a stroke of good luck, Lyon was able to turn a modest curriculum into an ambitious one that has pleased all the stakeholders in honors education at her institution.

Each of the next four essays provides an innovative idea for an honors course on a single campus that that might be replicated at other institutions. In “Encouraging Self-Reflection by Business Honors Students: Reflective Writing, Films, and Self-Assessments,” Stephen A. Yoder describes an act of serendipity akin to Kathy Lyon’s: in his case, a rereading of *The Moral Imagination*, edited by Oliver F. Williams. The book’s subtitle—*How Literature and Films Can Stimulate Ethical Reflection in the Business World*—suggested the idea for an honors course based on the book’s nine central themes, a course that Yoder then developed in the business school of the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Yoder describes the eleven films he selected, the way he approached their themes in the context of business ethics, and the multiple strategies he used to elicit in his students the emotional intelligence and self-reflection that are key to leadership in business and wisdom in life.

In “Interdisciplinary Teaching of Theatre and Human Rights in Honors,” Maria Szasz describes the rationale, background, and teaching methods of a course she designed and taught at the University of New Mexico, a course that focused on treatment of human rights themes in fourteen twentieth-century plays. She explains the importance of teaching human rights topics to honors students and the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach to both human rights and theater before illustrating the class’s approach in studying Athol Fugard’s *Master Harold* . . . *and the Boys*. The approach includes performance analysis and also history, biography, and autobiography in exploring, for instance, “why the South African government banned the play in both written and performance form.” Among the many benefits of the course, Szasz stresses the value for honors students of developing a deeper understanding of human rights issues, like apartheid, by feeling emotionally connected to them.

Emotional connection is also a key element in the course that Nadine Dolby of Purdue University describes in “Critical Experiential Education in the Honors Classroom: Animals, Society, and Education.” Drawing on the pedagogical philosophy of experiential learning, Dolby assigned day-long interaction with a single animal and reflective assignments as primary strategies—along with visits to farmers’ markets, role-playing activities, and other hands-on activities—to create an intensive, emotionally compelling, and life-changing dimension in an honors seminar that at the same time used the more traditional modes of critical analysis and scholarly research. In this “context of critical experiential education,” Dolby writes, “my class prompted students to apply what they had learned to creating changes in the way that humans interact with animals.” Students also made connections between the treatment of animals and the way humans treat each other, ultimately seeing the need to make the world “a more humane and just place.”

Justice and decency are also themes of “Got Privilege? An Honors Capstone Activity on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” by Patrick Bahls and Reid Chapman of the University of North Carolina Asheville. The essay describes a project that Bahls has incorporated in his honors section of the course *Cultivating Global Citizenship*, in which he has the students design and deliver a workshop on diversity, equity, and inclusion for faculty, community partners, and each other. Students work in teams throughout the semester leading up to the culminating event, which depends on the talents and interests of the students and which might include role-playing, videos, poster sessions, privilege walks, and “safe spaces.” Among the many benefits of this workshop is that it acknowledges “the students’ agency, asking them to position themselves as leaders and experts in their respective disciplines rather than passive objects on which social forces act,” and it offers “an opportunity for them to practice authentically engaged citizenship.”

In “Academic Socialization: Mentoring New Honors Students in Metadiscourse,” Gabriella Bedetti of Eastern Kentucky University describes the results of her research study—focused on three consecutive iterations of her course *Succeeding in Honors* from 2014 to 2016—of techniques for helping students hone their thinking and speaking skills through metadiscourse, “defined as talk about the ongoing talk.” In addition to describing these techniques, Bedetti illustrates what works—and what works better—through longitudinal comparison of the evolving course curriculum. Based on her research, Bedetti concludes, “In an expert discussion, metadiscourse helps speakers decenter their perception long enough to make a connection

with others. Metadiscourse helps the speaker focus. It also encourages the speaker—rather than the teacher—to restate and contextualize ideas.” The long-term benefit of learning these rhetorical skills is that “students gain independence, develop leadership, and enact cognitive responsibility.”

The final essay in this volume is “Honors Students’ Perceptions of Language Requirement as Part of a Global Literacy Competency.” Katelynn Malecha and Anne Dahlman begin by describing the competency-based honors program at Minnesota State University and then the competency of global literacy before zeroing in on the topic of the language requirement. The language requirement is part of the larger global literacy requirement designed to assure “ability to lead and serve in a multicultural world through increased self-awareness of one’s own culture and its relationship to others [and] deepened understanding of other cultural perspectives.” The authors designed a research study to find out if students perceived that, rather than just studying a foreign language, they were learning about “culture, prejudice, membership, cultural interactions, perspectives, and non-verbal and verbal communication.” While the results showed that students unanimously agreed with the goals of the competency and for the most part acknowledged the value of learning a second language, they did not always feel that the value of a second language compensated for the challenge of learning it. Given the rarity of language requirements in higher education these days, the results seemed encouraging, at least to this editor.