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# The Wisdom of Our Elders: Honors Discussions in *The Superior Student*, 1958–65

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The modern honors movement that arose in the 1950s was propelled and supported by the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS) and its newsletter, *The Superior Student*. This first honors serial publication, now relegated to the misty past and unknown to most honors deans and directors, merits examination. Its value lies not merely in its historical interest, but in the usefulness of its discussions of the same issues that arise currently in honors programs, conferences, and publications.

One of the consistent premises that emerge from the ICSS newsletter is the recognition that the wide diversity of honors programs appropriately reflects the diversity of institutional cultures and their varying stages of readiness for an honors approach. At the same time, however, the ICSS through this publicity organ advises certain desiderata—in evolving versions—of a “full” honors program. These desiderata are, of course, the forerunners of today’s “basic characteristics” of honors programs and colleges promoted by the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), the organization that succeeded the ICSS. This balance between tolerance of diversity and the upholding of ideals or standards seems the most salient aspect of the wisdom of our honors elders.

This essay offers first a descriptive analysis of the periodical and its development for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with it. (See Appendix for a partial list of holdings for this periodical.) The second section evokes the historical context for the ICSS and its newsletter by drawing on statements appearing in the newsletter itself. The following and main section analyzes the key themes of the articles. Only a few of today’s issues are absent from these early honors discussions—for example, computer technology, alumni relations, and fundraising. That the following themes were discussed at the outset of the honors revival may seem surprising: international honors, advising, selection of students for creativity and motivation, honors in the visual and performing arts, gender, talented Black students, and even accreditation of honors. The analytical section includes discussion of various start-up

issues faced by new programs and of what later would become the “basic characteristics.” In the process, a number of eloquent arguments and nuggets of wisdom will emerge that may prove useful to current honors leaders as they make their case for an honors education.

## DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

The Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student was conceived at a conference organized by University of Colorado honors director Joseph W. Cohen in June 1957 at Boulder, Colorado and was created with the support of a three-year, \$125,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation received in January 1958 by its applicants at the University of Colorado. The committee’s general mission was to serve the cause of the “superior student.” Its office opened in February 1958 with Cohen as committee director. (See Rinn, 74–75, for a useful historical summary of Cohen’s contributions.) The eleven charter members of the committee represented almost entirely large state universities. The committee carried out its mission through four activities: (1) providing a clearinghouse of information, (2) holding conferences, (3) visiting various campuses as consultants, and (4) encouraging stronger relations between university honors programs and both high schools and graduate schools. Carnegie renewed the founding grant for an additional three years, and in the final year the committee made plans for transition to a self-supporting professional organization.

The first issue of *The Superior Student*, the newsletter serving as a “clearing-house of information,” was published in April 1958. By the final issue in the summer of 1965, the publication had completed forty-seven issues (including one double issue) in seven volumes, as follows:

- Vol. 1    7 issues    April 1958–January 1959
- Vol. 2    9 issues    February 1959–January 1960 (Nos. 4 & 5 a joint issue)
- Vol. 3    9 issues    February 1960–January 1961
- Vol. 4    9 issues    February 1961–May-June 1962
- Vol. 5    6 issues    September-October 1962–September-October 1963
- Vol. 6    4 issues    November-December 1963–May-June 1964
- Vol. 7    4 issues    November-December 1964–July-August 1965

The newsletter appeared primarily during the academic year, and over the course of its publication it shifted from a monthly to a quarterly. In the final year, the ICSS was planning for the newsletter’s successor to be a quarterly (7.1 [November-December 1964]: 2).

The newsletter was mailed to institutional presidents, deans of arts and sciences colleges (where honors programs at first typically resided),

interested faculty, university libraries, honors directors, chairs of honors committees, leading education journals, and even a few major national newspapers and magazines. The mailing list comprised primarily four-year state universities—the ICSS’s target audience—but included a number of private institutions. From an initial mailing list of 2,500, circulation grew to 4,000 within two issues, and editor Cohen reports in the fourth issue that he is adding a dozen or so to the list every week (1.4 [October 1958]: 13). By the end of the second volume (January 1960), he reports a mailing list of 6,000 and an additional 200 requests coming in each month (2.9: 1). By October 1961 the circulation had reached 9,000 (4.5: 3).

The format of the newsletter is octavo in size, and the cover design remains the same throughout its publication. The masthead features a lower-case title and, under a superimposed “ICSS,” a logo of an owl taken from a fifth-century B.C.E. Athenian tetradrachma coin—the owl of Athena, representing wisdom and intellect (1.1 [April 1958]: 16). The background color of the logo varies from issue to issue. Contents are listed on the left side, and the beginning of the editorial introduction appears on the right. Issues typically run twenty to thirty pages; the shortest (1.5 [November 1958]) is fourteen pages, and the longest (6.1 [November-December 1963]) seventy-two pages. A number of later issues run thirty-five to forty pages.

Typically each issue begins with a one- or two-page introduction or editorial, continues through the several articles that form the heart of the matter, and concludes with a “Notes and Comments” section. “Nuts and bolts” articles—“what we do in our honors program”—predominate; I counted 189 of these. Next in prevalence come essays on general honors issues; I counted 119, but separating the two types of articles is a bit artificial because nuts-and-bolts articles usually allude to or argue more general issues. At least thirty-one articles report ICSS activities such as conferences, site visits, grants, policies, surveys, and changes of personnel. Only five articles (aside from summaries of student conference panels) are written by students, and, in addition to about thirty-four short notices of publications, three or four review articles appear. Some twenty-one articles deal with high school topics and liaison activities with college honors programs broader than just one program’s report. About ninety articles or notes concern other higher-education groups, conferences, and initiatives. Of the individual-program, nuts-and-bolts articles, 55% come from public institutions, 45% from private. Of the brief “notes and comments,” 62% come from public, 38% from private institutions. The number of contributions from private institutions is a bit surprising given the ICSS’s primary focus on state universities as needing the most attention in developing honors programs.

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Several trends in content occur over the run of the newsletter. Issues become longer and are published less frequently. Later newsletters give more attention to publications, including government reports, relevant to honors. The third volume offers a new feature called “Issues in Honors,” and the fifth volume presents a new “Dialogue” section devoted to letters, opinions, and responses to previous articles. The “Notes and Comments” section is later renamed “Honors Notes.” Increasingly the newsletters (twelve in all) center on a single theme, such as honors in the arts, assessment and evaluation, student selection, or the impact of honors on the rest of the institution, the theme of this issue of *JNCHC*. In 3.9 (January 1961) appears the first “Inventory” of honors programs (4–40), with key characteristics of each, followed by several supplements in later newsletters—surely a forerunner to *Peterson’s Smart Choices: Honors Programs and Colleges* (Digby). Occasionally in the last two years a newsletter offers a lead essay and published responses to it (e.g., 6.2 [January-February 1964], on evaluation), much in the manner of the current *JNCHC* with its “Forum” sections. One newsletter in 1963 (5.6 [September-October]) reprints in a twenty-one-page special insert a keynote address from an international conference on physics in general education. Twice such inserts are printed on green paper. The longest newsletter devotes forty pages to reports of high school programs for superior students state by state for twenty-two states (6.1 [November-December 1963]). Some annual and cumulative indexes appear, most of them including an extremely helpful index by topic in addition to author, title, and institution indexes. Newsletter 4.5 (October 1961) announces that henceforth the serial will be indexed in the *Education Index* (32).

The last issue of Volume 5 (No. 6 [September-October 1963]) announces the retirement of editor Joseph Cohen, “a condition of the Carnegie Corporation grant for the book on honors” that he is to edit (39). (This book appeared in 1966 as *The Superior Student in American Higher Education*.) The final two volumes of newsletters are edited by Philip I. Mitterling, the new ICSS Director. In its last year (1964–65), the ICSS, having now been a dues-paying organization for two years, is announcing its continuation not as part of an existing higher education association as originally planned but as an independent organization still headquartered in Boulder (7.1 [November-December 1964]: 1–2, 26; 7.3 [May-June 1965]: 1–2). This organization, named the National Collegiate Honors Council, soon distributed a summary of honors programs and in fall 1966 sponsored its first annual conference. (NCHC also published the proceedings of its first three annual conferences.) The newsletter was to be continued as a quarterly journal, which eventually became the *Forum for Honors*, first appearing in fall 1970. Published originally in five issues per year, the *Forum* shortly became a quarterly. In another

decade the NCHC began publishing its *Newsletter*, which with VI.4 (Winter 1985) was renamed the *National Honors Report*.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Why did the new honors movement or honors revival arise when it did? Foremost in the minds of many of the authors in *The Superior Student* were the national ferment caused by the Soviet launch of Sputnik in the same year as the Boulder conference (1957) and by a broader sense that the massive influx of students into higher education institutions was not matched by attention to the *quality* of their education. Talent was being wasted. In an essay in the final volume entitled “Unsolved Problems in Honors,” Robert Clark, president of San Jose State College and ICSS board member, declares, “In the past generation the most serious problem in public higher education in this country has been the neglect of the superior student” (7.1 [November-December 1964]: 5). As causes for “the rapid spread of honors programs,” perhaps “the most significant development of this generation in public higher education,” he cites two “accidents of history”: first, Sputnik I and II, which “awakened the American public . . . to the necessity for more rigorous academic standards in all levels of education”; and, second, the huge increase in the number of students (5–6).

The ICSS mission statement that opens the first newsletter reflects this awareness, defining as its goal:

. . . to serve the cause of the superior student in a time of controversy and great soul-searching in the world of American education. We believe that the problem of the superior student must have an important place in the educational inquiry that is now going on. (1.1 [April 1958]: 1)

Cohen cites the “weak and ineffective form” of most existing honors efforts and notes that in the previous decade educators “recognized that swelling enrollments can endanger the quality of education, unless steps are taken to strengthen the qualitative influences within their institutions” (2). The same newsletter notes a recommendation by the forty-eight educators who had met at the seminal June Boulder conference on the superior student that state universities warrant emphasis because they need “to take special measures to preserve and improve quality in the face of the oncoming tide of new students” (10).

In the third newsletter, Cohen puts the matter even more forcefully: “At a time when unprecedented numbers are about to engulf our institutions, [...] strengthening of quality may be the salvation of our educational future” (1.3 [June 1958]: 2). Later newsletters refer to the concern for quality amid

“landslide enrollments” (2.6 [October 1959]: 3) and to the misplaced pride universities take in large enrollments and achievements in sports at the expense of quality (2.2 [February 1959]: 1).

In the context of the early Cold War, the Soviet lead in the space race was deeply disturbing to Americans and prompted urgent calls for better training in science and technology and improved preparation of future national leaders. A reprinted address by the vice president and director of the Fund for the Advancement of Education calls for a new clarity of educational goals comparable to that of the Soviet space venture and declares that the United States is “on the threshold of a new era in American education” (1.7 [January 1959]: 4). Others refer to “the crisis of educational world competition” (1.5 [November 1958]: 6), the “recent emergence of trained intelligence as a key factor in the current international power struggle” (2.4 & 5 [May & June 1959]: 2), and remedies to the neglect of the talented before Sputnik that were “merely accentuated by that event” (5.2 [November-December 1962]: 9). Typically authors call not just for better education in science and technology but for better science literacy among non-science majors and better humanistic rounding for science students. In the context of an urgent need for leaders in an age of disintegrating values and consensus, Cohen advocates a balance between general and departmental honors—breadth of general knowledge and depth of specialization—and, in fact, “depth in breadth” through honors interdisciplinary colloquia (3.2 [March 1960]: 1–2).

The ICSS was also riding the wave of numerous activities and reports by national education groups and by foundations concerning the need to pay more attention to talented students. Many of these activities found mention in the pages of *The Superior Student*. For example, the first newsletter, in reporting Carnegie Corporation grants to the Universities of North Carolina and Arkansas honors programs, quotes Carnegie’s 1957 annual report on the need for “a greater effort . . . to provide differential programming for different levels of ability, in order that the ablest young people may make the full progress of which they are capable” (1.1 [April 1958]: 5); the report also notes the disproportionate energy and resources already given to the poorest students. Another early newsletter reprints a portion of the section on “Excellence in Democracy” from the Rockefeller Brothers Report on Education, *The Pursuit of Excellence* (1.4 [October 1958]: 2–3). The 1959 Conant report on American high schools comes up repeatedly in discussions of high school programs for the superior student. One newsletter in 1959 prints excerpts from the President’s Science Advisory Committee Report recommending a “nation-wide effort . . . to pay more attention to the academically talented students . . . and to the unusually gifted students” (2.7 [November 1959]: 8). Other newsletters allude to or discuss National Science Foundation grants for

undergraduate science education, Ford Foundation grants for the improvement of teaching, the rise of the Advanced Placement program and the National Merit Scholarship program, and projects undertaken by the National Education Association for increasing attention to superior students in the public schools. Brief reports recur on various state (e.g., Oregon and New York) and national conferences (e.g., the Washington Invitational Conference on the Academically Gifted in Secondary Schools) devoted to the superior student. Several issues respond to the recent publication of C. P. Snow's controversial *The Two Cultures* by asserting that honors curricula offer the remedy, a bridge between sciences and humanities.

The sense of wasted talent permeates discussions of what education means in a democratic society, prompting articulate arguments against charges of elitism in honors initiatives and redefining "egalitarian" education. My subsequent thematic analysis develops this issue further. Some articles also focus on specific victims of waste—underprivileged youth, women, and Blacks. One entire issue reports on an ICSS-Southern University Conference on the Gifted Negro Student (3.3 [April 1960]), including a seminal address by historian John Hope Franklin. Widely recognized is the need to improve teacher education as a way to raise the level of education nationally for the global competition to which public opinion was newly awakened.

The ICSS and its newsletter stand out for responding positively to these challenges of the age. In the reprinted opening statement at the ICSS Western Invitational Conference in April 1960, Frederick H. Jackson, Executive Associate of the Carnegie Corporation, credits the ICSS with the "mushrooming" of programs for superior students in American public universities:

As I look at American undergraduate education throughout the country, programs for superior students strike me as being one of the liveliest and most interesting of current developments. . . . When the history of higher education in the 1950's and 1960's is written, I believe that the honors movement will appear as one of the more significant developments of these two decades. The ICSS has been at the very center of this movement. (3.5 [April 1960]: 3)

Joseph Cohen says early on, responding to the previous "mishandling" of the ablest students and the danger of having come "perilously close to dereliction in the pursuit of excellence" (1.5 [November 1958]: 2),

Our educational institutions are ready for, and urgently need the type of Honors program that will help them find, save, challenge, motivate, mature and if possible bewitch the

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promising, the gifted, the superior, wherever they are to be found. (4)

Clearly the urgent societal pressures for improvements in education to meet what was conceived of then as the challenge of global leadership provided fertile ground for the burgeoning of the honors movement.

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The dramatic flowering of honors in the late 1950s and the 1960s appears in the intermittent reports in *The Superior Student* of the multiplying numbers of new programs during the newsletter's years of publication. In the January 1961 issue (3.9), for example, Cohen compares his inventory of honors programs with Frank Aydelotte's lists of 1925 and 1944. He finds among contemporary programs much greater variety of institutions, more extensive programming, the new approach of beginning honors with freshmen, and the spread of honors across the campus to professional majors. He notes that most of the current 198 honors programs had begun within the past five years (3).

The newness of honors programs meant that Cohen spent an inordinate amount of time corresponding with institutions and traveling to consult with faculty and administrators about fledgling honors programs or about starting new honors programs. *The Superior Student* reports on these consulting activities, and its articles pay frequent attention to start-up issues. Thus, the first themes I have chosen to highlight in the following analysis reflect such concerns: how to deal with charges of elitism, what models to follow in designing a program, how to select students, and where to start in creating a program. Subsequent themes reflect issues faced by programs once they are in operation: the impact of the program on the university, preparation of students for graduate school, and the evaluation of honors programs.

### EDUCATION IN A DEMOCRACY: ELITISM?

The very first issue of the newsletter addresses the need to give special attention to superior students. Robert Bishop, an administrator at the University of Pennsylvania, argues that such students have two basic needs: engagement and liberation. Not to serve these needs "indicates a lack of concern with the advancement of the finest qualities in the moral and intellectual life of our society and may jeopardize the future of the potential leaders of that life" (1.1 [April 1958]: 3). He laments that "in our efforts to create in America a kind of education which is designed—and rightly so in a democracy—to be offered to all the people, the gifted have not been properly challenged to procure an education which can command their high talents" (3).

The democratic principle of education for all, “frankly devoted to the mass production of commonplace types,” neglects the talented. For a “democratic society . . . to survive, [it] must create a real leadership from within itself” (4). This approach might be called the “future leaders” argument: yes, a democracy needs to give everyone access to education, and it may even offer special attention to laggards to raise them to a common standard, but it must also produce great leaders from among its ablest students. This view seems, in fact, to *defend* the need to create an elite rather than to argue *against* any supposed charge of elitism.

Reporting on the 1957 Carnegie Corporation’s annual report, the same newsletter cites the growing consensus among “‘leaders in higher education that a greater effort must be made to provide differential programming for different levels of ability, in order that the ablest young people may make the full progress of which they are capable’” (1.1 [April 1958]: 5). The Carnegie report notes the extraordinary funding and attention given the nation’s weakest college students and records as an initial remedy Carnegie’s grants to the Universities of North Carolina and Arkansas for programming for superior students. This approach might be called the “correct-the-balance” argument. The apparently egalitarian educational system is already giving extra attention to the worst students, so why not also to the best?

The third newsletter takes on directly for the first time the accusation of elitism in large public universities attempting to establish honors programs. Dudley Wynn, Arts and Sciences Dean at the University of New Mexico, finds that such attempts often encounter the view that singling out “any student for special attention or privilege is per se undemocratic” (1.3 [June 1958]: 3). He argues that ability grouping should not “automatically be called undemocratic,” that it is possible “to expand opportunity for some without limiting it for others,” and that a pluralistic democracy and its “multiple purpose” schools can offer “the highest and most intensive cultivation of the mentally superior” (4). At the same time he warns that honors programs should not grant privilege without responsibility and should not “wall off” their students from the rest of the campus (4). This approach might be termed an “equal-opportunity” argument; democracy does not mean the same education for all but the opportunity for all to develop their potential as far as they can.

This argument characterizes most of the further discussions of the elitism accusation in subsequent issues of the periodical. In a newsletter devoted to the ICSS Southern Invitational Conference in Louisville in 1958, Alvin C. Eurich, Vice President and Director of the Fund for the Advancement of Education, argues that “[we] must redefine the concept of equality within our tradition to mean equal opportunity for each child to attain his maximum

maturity in dealing with intellectual matters and in any special talent he may possess” (1.7 [January 1959]: 7; pardon the generic masculine pronoun here and elsewhere). In a later essay entitled “The Cultivation of ‘The Proud Mind of Man’: Education and Leadership in a Democracy,” history professor Max Savelle of the University of Washington states that people are not equal in intellectual endowment and that educational institutions should

provide for every individual the maximum of education that that individual can assimilate. This would mean that the superior student, the so-called “fast learner” would be spotted early in the course of his schooling and would be given every opportunity to proceed as rapidly and as deeply as he might be capable of doing. (2.3 [April 1959]: 2)

He then refutes the elitism argument as based on a faulty notion of democratic equality: “the cultivation of every individual . . . to the utmost limits of his individual capacity, is the true meaning of democracy in education” (3). The natural result would be a *desirable* leadership elite needed to preserve a democratic society.

The February 1960 newsletter, devoted to the college-high-school liaison for the talented, summarizes a Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching discussion by its trustees at the Foundation’s 1959 annual meeting. The group echoes the increasingly popular approval of ability grouping: “the bright student must not be held back to the pace of the less bright but must be allowed to run at his liveliest pace”; differential treatment . . . [will] enable the academically talented youngster . . . to explore the full range of his own intellectual abilities” (3.1 [February 1960]: 4). Democracy cannot afford to waste talent. Opposing forces must be resisted “with energy and determination.” A few months later Robert Angell, Director of the Honors Council at the University of Michigan, affirms these ideas in his reprinted keynote address (“Issues in Honors”) at the 1960 ICSS Western Invitational Conference in Berkeley. He notes the contradiction between the view that it is undemocratic to single out the best and the general acceptance of the common practice of doing just that in college admissions. He finds a “dead-level theory of democracy . . . a mistaken theory” (3.4 [May-June 1960]: 18).

Historian John Hope Franklin gives the equal-opportunity argument a different twist in a keynote address and seminal essay (“To Educate All the Jeffersonians”) in a newsletter devoted to the 1960 Southern University-ICSS Conference on the Gifted Negro Student. Both the ideal of universal education and the recent trend of honors education have been tragically limited by their practice of “education for whites only”:

Perhaps nothing has blighted the drive for universal education in the United States more than the simultaneously held contradictory notion that universal education should be confined to white people. Perhaps nothing has made a caricature of the current drive to identify and encourage the academically talented more than the concurrently prevailing practice of segregated education and cultural degradation that makes such identification and encouragement extremely difficult if not impossible. (3.3 [April 1960]: 5)

A subsequent report of a conference panel focuses on this complex task of identifying and developing, instead of wasting, the talent of the “culturally deprived” (12–15). Despite the equal-opportunity enthusiasts, a “level playing field” still does not exist.

James Robertson (University of Michigan, ICSS Executive Committee) affirms both the equal-opportunity argument and the correct-the-balance argument in a reprinted address at the 1962 Association for Higher Education conference (“Talents Which Perish Without Use”). With enthusiasm he says that the interest in

challenging our students to use their full intellectual power . . . really means that American education for the first time is becoming fully democratic. In effect, it is now willing to pay the price for providing equal opportunity for *all* levels of our young men and women, to give the promising young man as much attention as we have been lavishing on our remedial student and on those with special athletic prowess. (4.8 [March-April 1962]: 2–3)

Two years later, new editor Philip Mitterling clinches the case: “The American tradition of free compulsory education for all has to mean the complete development of the talents of the individual” (6.1 [November-December 1963]: 2). Meanwhile, Cohen, in summarizing twenty-five institutional site visits, expresses a reassuring view that honors organizers and leaders “refuse to agree that there is a basis for this fear [of elitism]” (3.7 [November 1960]: 21). He also offers a sidebar comparison in the next issue between a paragraph from Frank Aydelotte’s 1925 *Honors Courses in American Colleges and Universities* and a paragraph from a report to the faculty by the Honors Council Chairman at Winthrop College, John Eells, Jr. Aydelotte claims that honors “need not mean any curtailment of the quality of teaching enjoyed by the average student,” but Eells goes further in arguing an additional reason why honors does not cultivate snobbery or elitism, the “most ungrounded

charge” against honors programs: “It serves as a pilot program for the entire institution, establishing . . . techniques and procedures which can be invaluable in non-Honors as well as Honors situations” (3.8 [December 1960]: 6). He asserts that an honors program confirms the importance of the library, aids inter-departmental collaboration, resists anti-intellectualism on campus, and “helps a college to call its soul its own” (6). This new argument refutes the ivory-tower view of honors and sets forth its positive impact on the institution as a whole, a theme taken up below and again the subject of the Forum in this issue of *JNCHC*.

Insofar as anxieties about honors as elitist still surface from time to time, these early arguments bear reviving. Most institutions still spend far more staff and financial resources on remedial programs and athletics than on honors programs. Many in our institutions also still think, almost resentfully, that advising for honors students is unnecessary (“They’re smart; they can take care of themselves”). Within some large state universities education faculty stand firmly against “tracking” not only in the public schools but also in universities. Finally, the preference for funding remediation over honors can be tainted by an economic motivation: amid fiscal difficulties, institutions may choose to trim or cut honors in favor of maintaining strong enrollment and retention of the less prepared for their tuition revenue; honors students are not as likely to drop out.

### THE HEALTHY DIVERSITY OF HONORS PROGRAMS

As elitist accusations succumbed to cold-war urgencies and honors programs mushroomed, such programs tended to look different in different institutional settings. This rich diversity is a recurring motif of ICSS director Cohen’s summaries of visits across the country, and it also appears in the dozens of “nuts-and-bolts” articles that dominate the pages of the newsletter. Whereas the few honors programs in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s consisted of guided reading, a thesis, and an external exam for upper-division students, often in private liberal-arts colleges, these burgeoning new programs took a wide variety of shapes and sizes and included students in all four years and in large public universities. The ICSS assumed the role of fostering both experimentation and pragmatism: whatever you can manage to do within your institutional context, do it!

In an early report on site visits to fourteen institutions in the South, Cohen sees as positive indicators these schools’ experimentation with programs for freshmen and sophomores, their concern to expand beyond arts and sciences majors to those in the professional schools, and their ability to complement existing specialized and isolated departmental honors programs (1.3 [June 1958]: 19). Two years later he reports that ICSS members have visited

127 campuses, attended 42 conferences and meetings, corresponded with 350 institutions, and acquired hundreds of program descriptions (2.9 [January 1960]: 1). Clearly he and fellow committee members were well informed about the honors scene across the country.

This contact with so many honors programs generated a practical wisdom at the ICSS. Instead of proposing a Procrustean, *a priori* pattern for programs that he visited, Cohen favored a Protean empirical wisdom in his approach. In the very third issue of the newsletter, his editorial, “No Royal Road,” reports his being struck by the diversity of approaches in fledgling honors programs as reported in his survey of four hundred institutions: “Each school has designed its program to suit its own needs and problems” (1.3 [June 1958]: 1). Such diversity reinforces “a basic assumption that went into the founding of ICSS: There is no one correct way to design or run an honors program.” He cites the report of the June 1957 Boulder conference that gave rise to the ICSS:

“There is no royal road to an honors program. The hope that one can devise a foolproof honors program which can be packaged and exported for use on any campus is delusory. Institutional differences and the practicalities of each campus must be faced frankly in creating a successful honors program.” (1)

A year later, reporting on a round of site visits in the Northwest, Cohen replies to a “frequently repeated question . . . whether it is necessary to wait to start a program until all phases of it could be established or whether a step by step approach could be used” with the current ICSS operating assumption: “The answer, was, of course, that one starts where and when one can and works toward a complete program” (2.7 [November 1959]: 23). At the Conference on the Gifted Negro Student two years later Cohen reiterates his opposition to fixed national standards for honors programs, arguing a flexibility to begin “with the best students available on every campus and aiming at the attainment of programs which will eventually achieve something recognizable everywhere as first-rate” (3.3 [April 1960]: 12). Again, in a 1961 summary of ICSS accomplishments, he espouses a pragmatic approach: “we have insisted on doing something and on learning by doing” (4.5 [October 1961]: 3). Warning of the “danger of an ‘Honors lockstep,’” he voices the honors mission in the broadest terms:

We have learned that our task is the creation of an effective and visibly motivating climate of intelligence and imagination in the undergraduate scene—an esprit and a style appropriate to

the fullest engagement, an atmosphere that will release the disciplines into the quick of the good student's life, that will encourage and foster an intuitive as well as an analytic dimension and keep the disciplines from becoming "cribb'd, cabin'd and confin'd." (3-4)

At the same time that Cohen is eager to support any fledgling effort, he recognizes that the ultimate test of an honors program is to become well-established and to create a high-quality education (2.9 [January 1960]: 2).

The defense of diversity has remained a constant in honors discussions ever since, as has the reality of this diversity as new programs constantly come into existence. The countervailing argument that national quality standards are nevertheless necessary also owes much to the earliest positions taken by the ICSS, starting with a list of desiderata first formulated at the 1957 Boulder conference.

### **"BASIC CHARACTERISTICS"**

The first issue of *The Superior Student* offers eleven "suggestions" for "building an Honors Program" arising from the June 1957 Boulder conference of 48 educators (1.1 [April 1958]: 11). These forerunners of the NCHC's "Basic Characteristics" of fully developed honors programs and colleges begin with a caveat in keeping with the ICSS's affirmation of a healthy diversity: "Honors programs need to be adjusted to the problems and practicalities of each campus. There is no fool-proof program that will work everywhere." The remaining ten points, briefly paraphrased, are that honors programs should:

2. be developed with faculty support, not by administrative fiat;
3. be the "epitome" of liberal arts education and not be separated from the rest of the curriculum;
4. have a secure budget and be institutionalized;
5. start preferably in the freshman year;
6. have thoughtful policies for admitting, retaining, and advising students plus good record keeping;
7. have a central meeting place and student library privileges;
8. have degree requirements that can be modified as needed;
9. have an evaluation process for program improvement;
10. have strong liaison with high schools; and
11. be widely publicized on campus and beyond. (11)

This combination of flexibility and guidelines appears soon in Cohen's seminal essay "On Honors Programs." He begins by defining honors very broadly as "whatever may be done in colleges and universities on behalf of the more able student"; institutions "urgently need the type of Honors program that will help them find, save, challenge, motivate, mature and if possible bewitch, the promising, the gifted, the superior, wherever they are to be found" (1.5 [November 1958]: 4). He couples this permissive definition, however, with advice partially echoing the eleven points listed above. A similar short list of advice comes from the ICSS 1958 Southern Conference steering committee, which emphasizes administrative support, faculty quality, high-school liaison, and self-criticism (1.7 [January 1959]: 17). Reporting the following year on an ICSS survey, research analyst Anna Owen's focus on honors budgeting lists categories that reflect desiderata; e.g., honors teaching as part of faculty load, facilities, library support, remuneration of directors, faculty rewards, and scholarships (2.4 & 5 [May & June 1959]: 5–9).

By the October 1959 newsletter, the eleven original "suggestions" have become fourteen "points" that Cohen, in his keynote address to the ICSS Eastern Regional Conference, couches as "an inventory of some of the very specific procedures which on analysis I find being most advocated throughout the country. I present them as a kind of check list" (2.6 [October 1959]: 4). He acknowledges that some of the points are still controversial but modestly asserts that "we seem to be sure of many of these guidelines for action." He presents the list tentatively as a question: "Do the following, in fact, constitute the proper answer to those who ask how to meet the responsibility of the college to its superior students?" (4). What is striking here is his presentation of the advice as a consensus drawn empirically from practice and his reluctance to sound prescriptive. The list of imperative statements can again be paraphrased briefly—at the expense of their richness—as follows:

1. Identify and select students early with a variety of techniques.
2. Start programs immediately upon admission and accept latecomers.
3. Make programs, including counseling, continuous over four years.
4. Formulate programs in terms of both general college work and the area of concentration.
5. Make programs flexible through special and varied curricula and use advanced placement and acceleration as needed.
6. Make programs highly visible as models of excellence.
7. Use appropriate pedagogical methods—small classes (5–20), primary source material, selective coverage and active student engagement, independent study, advising by faculty, terminal examinations.

## THE WISDOM OF OUR ELDERS

8. Select most appropriate faculty.
9. Reduce general requirements to give students flexibility in honors.
10. Use evaluation devices to test both means and ends.
11. Use students as research apprentices to best faculty.
12. Use students for advising and orientation.
13. Establish an honors center with library and lounge.
14. Institutionalize programs with appropriate ongoing budget. (2.6 [October 1959]: 4–5)

Two newsletters later Cohen again embraces the tension between flexibility and best practice: “although programs can be and have been started at any point, the ICSS believes that it is always best, where possible, to start with the freshman year” (2.8 [December 1959]: 1). Reporting on site visits a year later, he adds additional advice on the importance of consulting students and having a student liaison council. He also notes that one dean “affirmed that the ICSS had effectively convinced the country of the validity of the fourteen points” (3.7 [November 1960]: 21).

The next iteration of desiderata occurs as an appendix in the newsletter indexing the first three volumes (4.1 [February 1961]: 23–24). The fourteen points are repeated, but a new item #11 is inserted specifying a student council as liaison with the honors council, to be constantly kept informed and consulted on “evaluation and development” (24). The list is now titled “Major Features of a Full Honors Program” and ends with the appropriate caveat that has continued in spirit to this day: “the inauguration of an Honors program need not await the above full implementation but can be started where feasible and proceed in the direction of a full program” (24).

The final iteration of these “major features” appears in the May-June 1963 newsletter (5.4), prefaced by an explanation of changes (9). The list now contains sixteen items, having been augmented not only by further explanations but by some interesting new ideas. Although advising by faculty rather than full-time non-teaching advisors remains a strong point, a clause is added to suggest that the institution’s professional advisors should include honors specialists. Two other points added under #7 are differential advising for men and women “in the light of the steeper erosion of talents after graduation among the latter” and “embodying in the program the required differentialia between the creative and the formally cognitive approach” (5.4 [May-June 1963]: 11). This item also urges study abroad and summer institutes. Finally, the list includes a new inserted item #15, which recommends a closer relationship between the honors program and the graduate school.

The only significant final reference to the sixteen “features” occurs in Philip Mitterling’s editorial (“The Tenth Point”) in the January-February 1964 issue (6.2). The new editor opens by noting that these “major features of a complete honors program have been debated, delineated, and described” and that most programs “are based on these established recommendations” (6.2: 1). He is puzzled, however, by the “lackadaisical” efforts at evaluation, the tenth point on the list. I will return to the theme of evaluation and assessment at the end of this discussion, but for now I call attention to the close connection between the list of desiderata and the issue of evaluation.

Although Mitterling reports that the sixteen features have been widely “debated,” little controversy over their application appears in the pages of *The Superior Student*. The controversies that do occur center on other themes, such as the general vs. the specialized approach or whether the visual and performing arts belong in honors. The seemingly widespread acceptance of the sixteen points may rest on several causes. First, the ICSS presented them as ideals toward which to strive, not as necessities for legitimization. As evident in site visits, conferences, and editorials, the ICSS preferred to nurture start-up honors efforts with gentle consultation rather than prescribe definitions and methods. No pressure existed at the national level. Second, the very newness of the honors revival meant that most programs perforce focused on the one or two features that would get them started, e.g., faculty approval, a minimal curricular requirement, a freshman seminar, and the right to select students. Third, institutional variety and complexity, including state universities’ lack of experience with honors, placed obstacles in the path of honors efforts, made beginning programs vulnerable, and created a patchwork of practices—the healthy diversity that Cohen recognized and approved at the outset.

During the years of the ICSS newsletter the sixteen features seem to have been eagerly embraced as ideals. All the more striking, then, is the bitter controversy that surrounded the NCHC adoption of the “Basic Characteristics” later, the addition of a second list for honors colleges (though less controversial), and subsequent addition of new planks and proposed changes in wording. The controversy becomes understandable, however, when the basic characteristics are linked to the question of assessment and accreditation, as they are currently. A healthy diversity of honors programs persists, and for the moment the Protean and the Procrustean, the shape-shifting and the prescriptive, forces are held in tension.

## STUDENT SELECTION

One of the start-up issues first confronted by fledgling honors programs was how to recruit the appropriate students for the program. In an early newsletter, Cohen sets the tone for the discussion by emphasizing the intense

competition among colleges and universities for the best high school students (1.6 [December 1958]: 1). The next newsletter summarizes an ICSS conference session on the subject of student selection. Participants stress the need for early identification of talented students, preferably as early as the first year of high school, and the use in college honors recruiting of multiple measures—not only grades and intelligence tests but also teachers' assessments of "mind and personality traits" such as excellent memory, abstract thinking, ability to apply knowledge to experience, curiosity, honesty, goal-directed behavior, articulateness, variety of interests, physical well-being, and sound values (1.7 [January 1959]: 10). College recruiters need to locate the gifted "with the same zeal used in finding the athletically gifted."

The topics of early identification and multiple measures characterize most of the later discussions. Several newsletters pay special attention to gifted Black students and other "underprivileged" students, noting the limits of biased standardized tests (2.4 & 5 [May & June 1959]: 3; 3.3 [April 1960]: 13) and acknowledging the need in some cases to provide remedial support (3.3: 14). In a later newsletter, the National Merit Scholarship Corporation reports expanding its research to identify the superior underprivileged student by studying socioeconomic status, gender, and school quality (5.3 [January-February 1963]: 7–8). Other authors call for attention to intellectual curiosity and creativity (Angell, 3.4 [May-June 1960]: 20) and the need to separate the "grade-getter" from the creative thinker by whatever means are available (3.5 [September 1960]: 6).

In the final volume of the newsletter, a special issue devoted to the problem of student selection summarizes the challenge. Editor Mitterling calls for varied measures beyond test scores and grade point averages, including assessments of creativity, personality, and motivation (7.2 [March-April 1965]: 2). A lengthy article by Benno Fricke of the University of Michigan evaluates various techniques of selection. He expresses dismay at the excessive use of the interview, "one of the most confidently used but least valid procedures devised for judging human beings" (3). He argues that interviews "rarely improve the accuracy" of other methods, partly because of the subjectivity and difference of opinion among interviewers. He also points out the limitations of extra material submitted in a candidate's dossier and of standardized tests of academic ability. He calls for assessment of creativity and motivation with the aid of a questionnaire—for example, the Achiever Personality scale embedded in the Opinion, Attitude, and Interest Survey used at Michigan. Honors programs, he says, should use a combination of SAT/ACT, high-school record, and indicators of creativity and motivation. An essay by John Holland of the American College Testing Program argues

that honors programs need first to define their program goals and their criteria for student success in order to know how to select students who will succeed (16–17). Another article on creativity warns against seeking students preoccupied with grades at the expense of the “creative nonconformist” (41).

From these discussions apparently even newly established honors programs at this time saw attrition as a problem and in the selection process were often relying just on standardized tests and records of academic performance. Striking is the call by many newsletter authors for a variety of methods beyond numbers, especially ways of ascertaining motivation, intellectual curiosity, and creativity. Ironically, as honors programs grew in size over the following decades into populations of hundreds or even several thousand students, relying on the numbers became increasingly the norm because of the sheer number of candidates and the lack of staff time or resources to use other measures. Thus the call for attention to motivation, interest in ideas, creativity, and special talents seems timely today.

## PROGRAM DESIGN

Choosing the kinds of academic programs to offer these students dominates both general discussions and nuts-and-bolts articles in *The Superior Student*. I will select only a few major strands in these discussions for focus, particularly those critical for start-up programs at that early stage in the history of honors education. One of the first topics discussed is the issue of reconciling breadth and depth, which is related to the tension between general honors and departmental honors, the latter having been historically dominant. In the third newsletter, Robert Angell (University of Michigan) advocates “The General Approach,” which avoids overspecialization, encourages student community, and enables first-year students to become engaged immediately. Various techniques would support this approach, such as discussion and lab sections, interdisciplinary courses, summer reading, and a senior integrative course (1.3 [June 1958]: 5–6). The opposing view appears in an adjacent article, “The Departmental Approach,” by Ray Heffner, Jr., of Indiana University, in which he laments the excessive number of general courses in arts and sciences and in the major that keep students from the rewards of deep specialized research (7–8). In the next newsletter, Edward Najam (Indiana University) attempts to reconcile the two views by calling attention to their common goals: “Does not the one advocate a broadly educated scholar with a special area of interest, and the other a specialist with a broad background?” (1.4 [October 1958]: 4). Both he and Heffner warn against treating undergraduate honors students as graduate students.

A student panel report from the ICSS Berkeley conference (April 1960) affirms the complementary value of both approaches. In the context of C. P.

Snow's *The Two Cultures*, the panel advocates interdisciplinary work to provide broader perspectives, along with opportunities for close research relationships with faculty (3.5 [September 1960]: 14). In an interesting editorial (3.2 [March 1960]), Cohen defines "general Honors" as "a continuous, integrated four-year approach outside the major," with "*depth in interdisciplinary study*" (emphasis his), thus transcending the design—still common today—of a two-year general honors curriculum followed by transfer into a departmental program for the thesis (1). The multitude of articles reporting on specific courses, techniques, and programs seems to affirm this balance. The ICSS encouraged new programs to start with first-year students using a general approach in introductory seminars while affirming the traditional climactic importance of the senior thesis on a highly specialized topic in the major. Of course, tensions between well-entrenched departmental honors programs and upstart general honors or all-university programs continued through this period and subsequent decades. A half century later the NCHC position is clear in item five of the "Basic Characteristics" of honors colleges: "The honors college exercises increased coordination and control of departmental honors where the college has emerged out of a decentralized system."

Beyond curriculum design, the more intangible issue of creating a challenging intellectual atmosphere includes aspects of faculty selection, pedagogy, and academic standards. Early on Walter Weir, Acting Honors Director at the University of Colorado, advocates careful selection of faculty for breadth, flexibility, risk-taking, interest in teaching, superior scholarship, and skill at guiding student-driven discussion in colloquia ("The Vital Ingredient: Superior Teachers for Superior Students," 1.2 [May 1958]: 3–4). The same student conference panel cited earlier calls for "direct contact with enthusiastic, exciting teachers" who are "at their best when they [are] teaching outside their specialty and joined with the students in a search for knowledge" (3.5 [September 1960]: 14). A year later Director Cohen reminds readers that their "task is the creation of an effective and visibly motivating climate of intelligence and imagination (4.5 [October 1961]: 3) but also notes in a summary of honors problems the ongoing difficulty of recruiting the appropriate faculty from departments (5–6).

Pedagogy, of course, reflects faculty selection. A session report from the 1960 ICSS Berkeley conference focuses on "Teaching in Honors" and recognizes the challenges of the colloquium style and of interdisciplinary courses as well as of faculty recruitment and reward (3.5 [September 1960]: 15–18). Standards for thought and writing must be rigorous. Generating intellectual excitement in the early years through interdisciplinary courses compensates for their potential dilettantism. A special newsletter devoted to

the colloquium method offers eloquent descriptions of the ideal by Cohen: the colloquium “is a training ground in the Honors outlook”; it is

the generation of living dialogue, the confrontation of ideas and values with all the vigor, sincerity and aplomb of which superior students are, or can become, capable. It is the realization of the art of conversation; the sense of style both in discussion and in writing; the interplay of poise, gravity, humor, passion, controversy; the effective use of what is known and the expression of what is valued within the full swing of divergent viewpoints . . . The faculty learns when to wait and when effectively to interrupt, to erupt, to explode; how and when to exemplify for the students the relevance of their own mature minding amid the clutter of student opinions and gropings; how not to provide them with the answers but to let them work up to the significant questions. (4.2 [March 1961]: 1–2)

Finally, in an editorial entitled “Acceleration Is Not Enough,” Cohen stresses that honors courses require a different kind of teaching, not just a higher regular-course level or more work, a mantra that continues to this day (3.7 [November 1960]: 1–2).

Other issues of program design discussed in various newsletters include how to move honors into the professional schools, devise science courses for non-science majors, conduct specialized advising for honors and for honors women, and prevent thesis students from being isolated from one another. The remaining controversial issue meriting discussion here is the question of whether teacher education and the studio and performing arts are amenable to an honors approach. The September-October 1962 newsletter reprints a keynote address from the ICSS Conference on Honors and the Preparation of Teachers by Edward W. Strong, Chancellor of the University of California, espousing a view “that became a *pièce de résistance* of the conference” (5.1 [September-October 1962]: 14). Strong is “puzzled” to see how honors could be incorporated into the practice-teaching aspect of the education curriculum, even where it is used in other aspects of that program. In answer to a question, moreover, he goes further to exclude honors from the visual and performing arts: music and art theory and history, yes, practice and skill development, no (17–21). He defines the content of honors course work as “inquiry into ideas[,] . . . inquiry into a body of ideas which has a literature” (19).

A lively debate ensues not only with the speaker at the conference but also in a special issue of the newsletter devoted to the arts and headed by Cohen’s editorial, “The Creative and the Cognitive” (5.5 [May-June 1963]:

1–3). Adding fuel to the controversy is an abbreviated address by W. McNeil Lowry of the Ford Foundation, who argues that universities are not training, and cannot train, artists of a professional caliber as well as conservatories and private art schools (4–9). Various essays follow, largely defending what honors can do for the arts and taking positions such as these: (1) Strong’s separation of the intellectual from the creative is simplistic (10–11); (2) universities can emulate private drama schools and recruit creative students just as they do athletes, separate them and support them with facilities and scholarships, and prepare them to sign with professional companies after three years—or let drama simply be part of the liberal arts curriculum (13–15); (3) honors can recruit drama students not only for creativity and energy but also for “responsiveness to intellectual stimuli, an interest in the life of the mind, a susceptibility to historical knowledge as an essential part of the creative life” so that they become graduates who are “mentally disciplined, versatile, and informed” (17); (4) honors can give creative writing students a climate of personal focus, boldness of expression, “serious playfulness,” and “freedom from the constraint imposed by the necessity of surveying, summarizing, ingesting a fixed body of material before the semester’s end” (22–24); and (5) university arts departments are better than professional schools because they produce less narrow graduates (35).

The question of honors applicability to the visual and performing arts remains today largely in the area of the senior capstone or thesis: some honors programs see artistic projects as problematic, but most accept them, provided that the student contextualizes the piece or project with some historical, theoretical, and/or aesthetic analysis. The problem of combining honors and practice teaching, also largely through the thesis, is the education student’s lack of time for a project that occurs simultaneously with the all-engulfing teaching apprenticeship.

### HONORS IMPACT ON THE INSTITUTION

Early on ICSS Director Cohen saw the need to argue for honors programs on the basis of their benefits to the institution at large: “Where honors programs have been soundly established, their influence has been felt by students outside the program, their stimulus has been evident in the morale of faculty members, their effect has been perceivable in the tone and standards of campus life” (1.2 [May 1958]: 1). The honors students bring interesting books and discussion issues into their campus residence, their “knowledge and values” influence campus organizations, and their “questions and arguments brighten classroom discussions,” setting “a standard for others to follow.” Faculty members enjoy both the “stimulus and challenge” of honors teaching and become better teachers in their other courses (2). Especially

when the honors program is large and visible, it “can act as a counter-balance to superficial student activities and the preoccupation with big-time athletics. It can serve as a symbol and a reminder of what an education means and what a university is for” (2). Program advocates must speak to budget-conscious administrators about these larger benefits, the “spillover” effect of honors as “an investment in the total quality of the university” (2). In the same newsletter, the excerpted Vanderbilt honors proposal to the faculty of arts and sciences does just that, aiming “to find ways to better the entire academic structure” (7).

A common criticism honors programs faced, and still face, is that they negatively affect the institution by “skimming off” the best students—and best faculty—from other classes and segregating them, thus depriving the rest of the student body. Acknowledging some truth in this charge in his essay “A Hard Look at Honors Programs: A Critical View,” Hugh Aitken (Economics, University of California) argues that (1) honors programs should not argue their benefits just for the gifted, (2) honors is feasible for the time being only in limited-enrollment institutions, and (3) honors should add courses to the students’ course-load and not remove them from their regular classes (2.1 [February 1959]: 5–6). A reply soon follows, in “A Second Hard Look at Honors Programs,” by Robin Higham (History, University of North Carolina). Oddly, however, Higham tackles only the cost issues, offering several solutions, e.g., amalgamating regular classes into larger lectures and using graduate assistants in them to help the faculty members devote more time to smaller classes of honors students (2.4 & 5 [May & June 1959]: 9–11).

Cohen returns to the issue of segregating honors students, which is akin to the charge of elitism, in a summary of questions raised at a large state university considering establishing an honors program. He responds with practical wisdom gained from countless communications with programs across the country. On the question of whether honors creates “second-class status” for the other students, he claims that, as long as students can move freely between honors and the rest of the campus, “Honors Programs are precisely the most effective feasible means—feasible both in terms of faculty resources and budgetary considerations—of benefiting the whole student body. They provide pilot projects for the rest of the curriculum and concrete versions of more vital approaches to subject matter” (3.2 [March 1960]: 15–16). Here we have a direct foreshadowing of items #7 and #13 of the eventually adopted “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program,” namely the use of honors as a laboratory for concepts and methods that can be spread to the whole institution. In response to the question of “skimming,” Cohen points out that usually only a portion of an honors student’s work is in honors

and cites experiences at Purdue, University of Kansas, and elsewhere that, in the absence of honors students, the students in regular classes actually participate more in discussion and leadership.

Other newsletters mention minor notes such as the use in program evaluation (University of Oregon) of the question of honors impact on non-honors students (6.2 [January-February 1964]: 23) and the impact of honors programs on the library (University of Colorado) as restoring “to the library its role as the learning center of the campus” (6.3 [March-April 1964]: 43). The primary treatment comes, however, in a special issue (7.1 [November-December 1964]) devoted primarily to the question of honors impact on the institution. Mitterling introduces the term “frontlash” to designate the positive spillover effect of honors—“the experimental arm of the college”—on the institution, saying that “[h]onors methods and approaches and their extension to a larger segment of students than the top five percent should become an integral ingredient of institutional commitment” (4). Subsequent articles attest to the frontlash at several institutions. At the University of Southern California, honors colloquia influenced the redesign of the curriculum of the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences so that all students in the first two years take “fewer courses in greater depth and for increased credit” (13). In these four four-hour courses, the instructor “is free to schedule as many class meetings a week and for however many minutes as he believes suitable for carrying out the objectives of his course.” The courses also require more writing, more lab and library time, and more freedom to pursue individual student interests. The “Spillover at Notre Dame” shows that upper-level programs for superior students influenced (1) a change in the lower-division required courses for all students to reduce their lock-step homogeneity, (2) the development of directed readings courses available to all students, and (3) the improved character of student leadership on campus (16–17). The University of Kansas reports some improvements in the tone and culture of fraternity houses and residence halls (19–20). Finally, Winthrop College reports an improvement of the college’s reputation as “a place where people study and learn” and a concomitant waning of the “forces of anti-intellectualism” (22). “The honors program also appears to have had a most favorable impact on the reading habits of our students,” on a new zest for discussion and impatience with lectures, and on an improvement in faculty morale reflected in non-honors classes (22–23). Although negative effects occasionally crop up, institutional reports seem overwhelmingly positive and create an additional argument for the introduction and support of honors programs. In the face of resistance even today, the eloquent arguments in *The Superior Student* and institutional anecdotes ever since, supported by data, must become available to support struggling programs.

## HONORS AND GRADUATE WORK

A minor theme emerges toward the end of the newsletter run, first, if modestly, in articles on the MA-3 programs in education that recruit honors students into combined programs in education. The primary treatment of the topic of honors students in relation to graduate work comes in the penultimate newsletter (7.3 [May-June 1965]), much of which is devoted to this topic. Earlier it seemed to have been a foregone conclusion, an unspoken assumption, that honors exists partly or even primarily to prepare students for advanced study. This last substantive newsletter (before the final index number) contains three interesting articles: a report of an ICSS survey of 101 former students now in their second year of graduate school, a former honors student's assessment of graduate education, and a conference address on the "Honors Program as Preparation for Graduate Study."

The ICSS survey produced dismaying results on honors students' disillusionment with graduate school, which for "a surprisingly large number of these talented students . . . is not simply an extension of undergraduate interests and efforts. It is, instead a discouraging encounter with intradepartmental personal rivalries, seminars that go nowhere, dogmatic faculty, and social isolation," resulting in the acquisition of a "protective cynicism" (7.3 [May-June 1965]: 3). Science students, however, as opposed to those in humanities and social sciences, seemed better acculturated because of their undergraduate science apprenticeship and were more satisfied because of their good financial support, sense of community, and intellectual excitement. The survey included many detailed questions and a list of 62 descriptive terms respondents addressed in terms of both their undergraduate and graduate experience. Research Associate Cuzzort's conclusion notes that honors students have higher standards for graduate work than those reported in studies of non-honors students, and it points to an urgent need for reforms in graduate schools (13).

The Michigan State student's essay, from the perspective of graduate work at Yale, expresses disappointment with the narrow specialization and lack of integration (14-18). Author James R. Anderson finds, with other graduate students, that "the climate of graduate school is deeply hostile to independent thought, and is hurried, even frantic, instead of reflective . . . the net effect [of which] is to extinguish real curiosity and depress or kill one's desire to learn" (14). Lanora G. Lewis's reprinted address at the 1965 Area Honors conference at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro draws on several studies, including the ICSS survey, showing that honors students more often than non-honors students aspire to doctoral degrees, that as graduate students former honors students often regard their undergraduate education as superior to their graduate experience, and that, just as AP high school courses

nudge colleges to enrich their offerings to talented students, so honors programs should nudge graduate programs to reform for greater flexibility and integration (19–21).

The struggle continues to the present. Just as honors programs must not disappoint gifted high school students with first-year colloquia that are less interesting or rigorous than their honors or Advanced Placement high school courses, graduate programs must greet honors students with an advanced level of intellectual excitement and teacher-student interaction guided by the noblest academic values and ideals.

### PROGRAM EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

The final theme for discussion in this essay touches a tender spot among NCHC members today. Very early in the honors revival in the late 1950s, the issue of program evaluation arises. Joseph Cohen, as consultant and editor, insisted from the outset, drawing on item #9 of the Boulder conference's eleven desiderata for honors development, that programs must develop a self-critical habit. By late 1959, however, he reports from a session panel at the ICSS Ann Arbor conference that "on his visits to more than 120 colleges and universities during the past year and a half he had found only a small number of institutions concerned with evaluating the results of their special programs for superior students" (2.6 [October 1959]: 14). He argues that "appropriate" evaluation studies could refute charges of elitism and views that good students can take care of themselves. Members of the same panel report significant evaluation efforts at the University of Kansas and the University of Michigan, in the latter case supported by a three-year Carnegie grant (13), and Michigan distributed a summary of its first faculty evaluation of honors classes at the conference (23–26). Evaluation procedures underway or desired range widely from faculty and student course evaluations through statistical comparisons of grades and test scores to reviews of extra-curricular activities, advising, and alumni surveys, all looking to support honors "value-added" qualities of "better command of a subject-matter field, with a deeper sense of values, and with greater self-motivation for learning and research" (13). The conference steering committee's summary report stresses that "Honors work has to be demonstrated by results" and calls for close examination of student work (21).

Cohen's urgings for evaluation recur in the newsletters. In the October 1960 issue, he reminds readers that "[f]rom its beginning the ICSS has advocated the inclusion of evaluation procedures in every Honors program; and a recommendation to this effect is included in the ICSS checklist of elements for a full program" (3.6 [October 1960]: 1). He plans to publish in future newsletters the results of evaluation programs and elicit suggestions from

social scientists. Reports follow, for example, from Loyola University of Chicago in the same newsletter and the University of Oregon in the 5.4 (March-April 1963) newsletter. Significant portions of the 3.7 (November 1960) and 4.5 (October 1961) newsletters are devoted to essays on how social science research methods can be applied to honors program evaluation. A motif coloring these discussions is the tension between traditional subjective and anecdotal evaluation procedures and the data-based techniques of the social sciences, newly developed to deal with the complexities of educational research and of a program such as honors. Ralph Tyler, director of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, concludes these essays with a proposal for the Social Science Research Council to facilitate honors program evaluation by coordinating with on-campus social scientists invited by honors directors to assist in their evaluation process (4.5 [October 1961]: 25). In the same newsletter, the ICSS Executive Committee lists among its recommendations for future activities (assuming a renewal of the original Carnegie Grant) the establishment of “a research fund to subsidize small-scale local evaluation studies in sums of \$500 to \$1,000” and the publication of a brochure about honors evaluation (28).

The special 1964 newsletter that is devoted to the question of evaluation—“The 10th Point” (title of the editorial) in the “major features” list—came up in my earlier discussion of “basic characteristics.” Mitterling here calls attention to the connection between the sixteen “major features” and the necessity for evaluation (6.2 [January-February 1964]: 1). The articles that follow tackle various aspects of program evaluation and offer glimpses into evaluation processes at specific institutions (University of Oregon, University of Arkansas, University of North Dakota, Hiram College). William R. Catton, Jr., in excerpts from a paper given at a 1962 Conference on Research on Honors Programs, outlines a process of comparison between honors students and non-honors control groups that would take programs beyond mere testimonials (2, 45). ICSS Research Associate Ray P. Cuzzort then discusses the results of an ICSS survey of 117 honors programs (of the 167 invited) on the kinds of evaluation procedures they do or do not use; results included the salient fact that fewer than half the programs were doing or beginning any kind of evaluation at all (5). He asserts that “[t]he problem of appraisal is the problem of professional education” (4, his emphasis) and presents three alternatives: (1) reject evaluation, (2) use subjective opinions of a key person or committee based on discussions with participants, and (3) use data-producing instruments. He concludes that formal evaluation instruments can be useful but that they “will probably never supplant the subjective and often intuitive judgments of key administrative officials” (5). Like current *JNCHC* forum lead essays, Cuzzort’s report then generates several

responses: Robert B. MacLeod (Psychology, Cornell) discusses “Validity Versus Reliability” (11–13); Benno R. Fricke (University of Michigan) argues the importance of assessing in terms of the goals or objectives of the program (13–15); Paul A. Heist (Berkeley) clarifies the distinction between “appraisal of satisfaction” and student “growth and change” (15–17); and Ralph W. Tyler echoes the call for more objective data (17–19). Fifty years later, methods of evaluation of honors programs, if ripened a good deal, still lag behind other honors procedures in sophistication and prevalence.

And now, finally, the issue of accreditation. As the honors movement has matured along with its supportive organization, the National Collegiate Honors Council, some honors leaders find that the balance between healthy diversity and advisable desiderata for all programs should be tipped toward the latter. For them, the “Basic Characteristics” documents can be used not just as a set of ideals toward which to strive but as measuring sticks for awarding accreditation or certification of honors programs by the NCHC. In the last decade or so, the debate over this question has often been fraught with intense feeling. What do our honors elders say about this issue in the early days of the honors revival? In a newsletter (3.5 [September 1960]) devoted to the ICSS Western Invitational Conference at Berkeley in April 1960, the conference steering committee’s summary report ends with a “Concluding Discussion on Evaluation.” Members of this final interchange voice something of the same variety of opinion heard today. One member claims that “Honors programs are concerned with intangibles which resist precise and objective analysis,” but another immediately counters that this attitude is just “an excuse for avoiding evaluation” (25). Cohen then inserts the notion that evaluation “of a most meaningful kind” is constantly being done by faculty members, who know their students best, but, although much standardized educational research “is undertaken for the comfort of administrators and to justify budgets,” objective evaluation must supplement subjective approaches (25). When the question of evaluation leads to a discussion of the “advisability of accreditation of Honors programs themselves,” one member speaks against establishing yet another accrediting agency and suggests that, if such a process is desired, existing agencies should be used. Another member finds that the ICSS’s consulting site visits constitute a sort of informal accreditation that is all that is needed now and “avoids the rigidities of more formal procedures” (26). The absence of further discussion of accreditation in *The Superior Student* suggests a consensus against it at that stage of honors development nationally.

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The liveliness of the newsletter’s discussions over seven and a half years that emerges from this presentation of key themes grows in energy if one

reads the articles I have deemphasized, articles describing, with analysis and often theoretical discussion, activities and procedures in specific honors programs. My resuscitation of these early honors discussions has been eye-opening for me. Not only were most of the issues raised then perennial, as it turns out, but many honors leaders in the early days of the flowering possessed a good deal of wisdom and common sense that can benefit all of us in our continuing struggle to provide the best in honors education for our students.

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**APPENDIX**

**PARTIAL LIST OF HOLDINGS OF  
*THE SUPERIOR STUDENT***

In addition to the NCHC national office at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Kent State University Honors College, the following university libraries contain this honors periodical:

Arizona State University

Harvard University

Iowa State University

Michigan State University

New York University (minus vol. 6)

Northern Illinois University

Ohio State University

SUNY Buffalo

University of Colorado

University of Florida

University of Illinois at Chicago

University of Kentucky

University of Maryland

University of Michigan

University of Minnesota

University of North Carolina

University of Texas

University of Wisconsin