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ABSTRACT

Drawing from a literature review and experiences at Moraine Valley Community College, this paper examines the role of the community college honors program in meeting the special needs of superior students; analyzes the characteristics of effective and innovative programs and curricula; and discusses how an honors program can become institutionalized to insure its success. First, the paper considers the egalitarian philosophy of the community college and the recent recognition of the needs of its high-achieving students. Following a delineation of the goals of honors programs, the paper reviews research findings focusing on the needs and characteristics of gifted students. The next sections look at some of the educational experiences that are typically provided in honors programs, including special honors sections, interdisciplinary courses, seminars, and independent study; and examine some innovative curricular approaches being used, such as internships, field projects, study abroad, and core colloquia. Next, the paper discusses the keys to a successful honors program; i.e., establishing an advisory committee to help design and govern the program; naming a program director; gaining institutional support; choosing a good honors faculty; and recruiting, retaining, and rewarding talented students. Methods and outcomes of honors programs evaluation are considered next, followed by conclusions and recommendations for further research. (LAL)

The Role of the Honors Program

in the

Community College Curriculum

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The Role of the Honors Program in the Community College Curriculum

As community colleges have become aware of the reality that the "open door" to education is often a "revolving door," they have conducted numerous studies of non-completers to determine which students were not succeeding within the system. A "major conclusion . . . drawn from the data [was] that the students who are identified as highly able and creative drop out of college as frequently as all other students" (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983, 3). Since high-achieving students are academically capable of moving successfully through the curriculum, it appears that they are not being motivated or challenged by their experiences in college classrooms.

While the community college has traditionally resisted tracking students because of its egalitarian philosophy, the attrition rates of academically talented students seem to demand some type of special programming for them. This paper will examine and describe the role of the honors program in a comprehensive community college in meeting the special needs of superior students. Honors programs presently in existence at Moraine Valley Community College and at other institutions will be analyzed to determine the characteristics of effective and innovative programs and curriculums and to show how an

honors program can become institutionalized to insure its success.

Community College Philosophy and Honors Programs

When the "junior college" began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one of its primary purposes was to provide the first two years of a college education as a step to the senior college or university (Fields, 1962). But as junior colleges steadily increased in number in the first sixty years of this century--from almost none to 677 institutions (Fields, 1962)--they democratized American education by expanding access. As more and more students took advantage of this educational opportunity, "the character of junior college student bodies slowly but inevitably changed. From a selected group, typically resolved to finish collegiate preparation for well-defined purposes, junior college enrollees have become more and more representative of the total population--mentally, socially, economically" (Fields, 1962, 58). Because of this heterogeneous student body, many junior colleges shifted their emphasis from "single-purpose" institutions to become "community-oriented" institutions, offering a wide variety of services to a wide variety of students.

The egalitarian philosophy of the community college became even more evident in the late 1960's when the drive for equality and civil rights had its impact. As a result, many community colleges began non-selective "open door" admission policies in the belief that community colleges must be totally democratic in approach and treat all students as equals (McCabe, 1981).

"Thus when the words 'excellence' and 'community college' /were/ mentioned in the same deep breath, shudders of philosophical inconsistency /ran/ through the body academic" (Bay, 1978, 18).

But while the "new student of the sixties and seventies was often deficient in basic academic skills" (Cohen, 1982, 25), community colleges were also attracting more high-ability students and more returning adult students who were highly motivated toward success. "In a 1974 survey, James Sampson discovered that as many as 20 percent of the entering freshmen at a representative number of community colleges were in the top quartile of their high school classes" (Bay, 1978, 19). Despite the presence of these academically talented students on campus, in 1975 only "47 of the 644 public and private community colleges responding to a national survey had established formal honors programs" (Cohen, 1982, 38). In a survey of honors programs in Illinois community colleges, Piland and Gould (1982) found that only 7 of the 36 respondents had honors programs. Fransworth (1982) notes the "influx of students with exceptional scholastic skills" but states that "the needs of the highly talented still remain largely unaddressed" (32).

In the last four to five years, however, comprehensive community colleges have begun to recognize the needs of high-achieving students and to design special programs for them. Friedlander (1983) notes that the "primary concern of community college educators has moved from the attainment of equity in the sixties and seventies to the achievement of quality education in the eighties" (26). To support his premise, he

cites the increase in membership in Phi Theta Kappa, the national honors society for the community college, and in the National Collegiate Honors Council. One reason Friedlander suggests for this increased interest in honors programs is that they "can assist community college educators in their efforts to attract and retain outstanding students" (26). Honors programs, then, can help the comprehensive community college meet its commitment to make excellence available to all of its students.

Goals of Honors Programs

Successful curricular programs are always designed to achieve clearly defined goals, and a primary goal of a community college honors program is to provide quality education for academically talented students. Friedlander (1983) states that achieving this will help to improve the public image of the community college. The open-door admissions policy, "patterns of courses without prerequisites, non-punitive marking systems, . . . and procedures for recruiting students without regard to prior educational attainment" (Cohen, 1982, 56) have often attracted students who could not succeed in a senior college or university. As these students entered and dropped out because of easy-access and easy-exit policies, they produced a negative effect on the image and reputation of the community college. High attrition rates plus "a trend toward less-than-college-level instruction" (Cohen, 25) combined to make the community college appear to be a second class academic institution. Honors programs can help solve this image problem by providing challenging

learning experiences for high achieving students.

If the community college system is to establish and maintain a reputation of excellence for all students, it must maintain academic balance. Dr. Robert McCabe of Miami-Dade Community College, in a speech entitled "Excellence Is for Everyone: Quality and the Open Door Community College," described the problem:

> With an increased focus on achievement in the community college, it is important that these institutions not become places for only those with poor academic skills. Yet overwhelmed by the problems of the unprepared and the task of providing support to them, the community college has, over a period of time, neglected superior students. These students represent one more aspect of our total diversity, and they can be well served in the community colleges. The superior student is an important asset, not only to other students, but also in building and maintaining a positive public attitude toward the community colleges (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983, 4).

Having an honors program, then, can help the community college emphasize its commitment to excellence for all students as it markets its programs. When scholarship is recognized and highly regarded, the entire institution benefits. Honors programs "challenge faculty, raise academic standards across the board, and generally invigorate an educational institution" (Administrator, 1984, 2).

Another major goal of an honors program is to challenge faculty. As they prepare to teach honors students and courses, they often become more involved in recent scholarship and are more apt to use new theories and new materials in their lectures,

seminars, and laboratories. The positive classroom response from honors students renews the teaching challenge and often reduces the effects of burnout. Friedlander (1983) notes that the "primary incentive for teaching an honors course is to have the professional development opportunity to work with highly motivated and talented students" (27). In addition, the recognition that faculty receive from honors students, their peers, and the administration also strengthens their commitment to classroom excellence. Studies show that "the increased vitality that results from working with superior students spills over into other aspects of instruction as well" (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983, 4).

The primary goal of an honors program is to serve the students themselves. The National Science Foundation reported that "the total number of highly superior students who drop out at one stage or another totals over 125,000 a year. It is particularly pertinent that the greatest loss occurs not in the transition from high school to college but after college entrance" (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983, 3). A formalized honors program offers one viable solution to this high attrition rate among talented students. If capable students are not challenged in the classroom, they tend to become bored. Once they stop attending classes which are simply repeating what they already know, the possibility of their dropping out often becomes a reality. If, however, bright students are challenged by in-depth learning experiences, they are more apt to complete their chosen program. After an honors

program was instituted at Muscatine Community College, the attrition rate in the targeted group dropped from "close to twenty percent in previous years" to "only four percent" (Fransworth, 1982, 33). Piland and Azbell (1984) conclude that "academically gifted community college students need the benefits that an honors program can provide in order to develop their talents" (46). By serving these students well, the community college will truly be fulfilling its mission to bring quality education to all of the students it serves.

Needs Analysis and Characteristics of Gifted Students

To be successful, an honors program must be specifically designed to meet the needs of academically talented students. Van Tassel-Baska's research (1982) on the characteristics of academically gifted students shows that they

1) learn at a different rate from other groups and accommodating that rate is crucial to their development;
2) need programs and services across the span of years that they are in school;
3) need the challenge and stimulation of being together for at least a part of every school day;
4) crave depth in key areas of learning (3-4).

When a community college begins an honors program, it can more effectively provide the programs and services that gifted students need. Special classes, seminars, and other group learning experiences will guarantee that above-average students interact with each other on a regular basis, thereby stimulating the competitive spirit that pushes them to develop their

potential. Because they learn quickly, they can cover the basic concepts more rapidly and then pursue independent study in their own areas of special interest.

Piland and Azbell (1984) state that "gifted students exhibit characteristics which make the availability of a differentiated curriculum a necessity" (14). They identify the following characteristics of gifted students:

> 1) Academically gifted students are very likely to enjoy school and to be successful in most academic areas (Burks, Jensen, and Terman, 1930). These students display many interests and may excel in several diverse or similar areas (Terman, et al., 1925).
> 2) Academically gifted students learn more efficiently and effectively than their peers. They exhibit advanced memory skills and learn very rapidly. The academically gifted excel in synthesis and integration of materials (Plowman, Rice, Sato, et al., 1971). . . .
> 3) Academically gifted students desire flexibility in their course of study. Individual initiative is often the rule rather than the exception (Burks, Jensen, and Terman, 1930; Nichols and Davis, 1964). . . .
> 4) Academically gifted students often show a preference for complexity. Originality, verbal fluency, and the ability to manipulate abstract symbol systems are also frequently mentioned characteristics of the gifted (Seagoe, 1961; Renzulli, Hartman, and Callahan, 1971) (14-15).

These characteristics of gifted students are borne out by an academic profile of 165 students currently enrolled in community college honors programs (Piland and Azbell, 1984) which shows that they are high achievers. At the time of high school graduation, 44.4% ranked in the upper 5% of the class, and 60.5% of the participants scored from 26 to 30 on the ACT. In high school, the majority of them took four years of math (52%)

and English (73%), while taking at least three years of science (61%). In the community college, the students have maintained GPA's of 3.6 to 4.0 (on a 4 point scale) while taking a full academic load and working full-time or part-time. Overall, these students are highly motivated and enrolled in the honors program for "more challenge" (76.7%), "scholarships" (61.5%), and the "increased likelihood of admission to four-year programs" (57.3%).

The results of these studies make it obvious that gifted students are quite different from the "new student" found in the community college classroom both in their attitudes toward and their interest in learning. However, because of the nature of heterogeneous groupings found in most community colleges, bright students are often unchallenged as instructors tend to concentrate on students who are having difficulty understanding course content. Placing honors students in special classes gives faculty members the opportunity to increase the complexity of course content and to move at an accelerated rate, thereby allowing more time for in-depth analysis in key areas of learning.

A study conducted by Cox and Hankins (1983) shows that intellectually gifted high school seniors have definite expectations concerning their college education. The top five educational experiences they desire are

1) participation in activities that will provide experiences similar to future job;
2) participation in small classes that allow for group discussion and individual attention;

3) availability of professors for sharing information and ideas;
4) association with other students who are serious about their studies;
5) participation in accelerated or advanced courses (24).

A strong honors program with appropriate and diverse curricular offerings and a concerned faculty should be able to fulfill these expectations.

Curricular Development in Honors Programs

To produce an honors curriculum that would be based on the identified needs and characteristics of gifted students, Piland and Azbell (1984) suggest that it should include "some or all of the following major elements:

1) Flexible course content. Content should be related to broad-based issues, themes, or problems. Integration of multiple disciplines into the area of study should be encouraged.
2) Flexible curriculum. The development of independent or self-directed study skills should be encouraged in order to promote flexibility. Productive, complex, abstract, and higher-level thinking skills should be the aim of all curricular development.
3) Integrated intellectual elements. Efforts should be made to encourage the development of self understanding, i.e., recognizing and using one's abilities, becoming self-directed, and appreciating likenesses and differences between oneself and others (47).

Curtis (1984) suggests that if an honors program is to be successful, it must include learning experiences which offer "depth of investigation . . . where material is covered in greater detail, where greater emphasis is placed on implications and underlying principles, and where intellectually more demanding

issues and problems are discussed" (4).

The following types of educational experiences are presently being offered in honors programs to provide the challenge and depth of learning that academically talented students desire.

Special Honors Sections - Most community colleges with a large student population offer special sections of courses for students admitted to the honors programs. Because the classes are usually restricted in size, they offer more possibilities for interaction among faculty and students. Friedlander (1982) notes that these special sections differ by offering "more opportunities for creative thought and discussion as well as research and questioning. . . . Students are asked to read more primary source materials, cover the subject in greater depth, and write more papers" (27). Some community colleges also offer accelerated formats in these special sections to condense two sequential courses into a one-semester offering (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983), thereby offering students the opportunity to move more quickly through a program of study.

In-Class Honors - When it is not feasible to offer special sections of courses, many community colleges offer the in-class honors option. Most often those students taking the class for honors credit sign a contract with the instructor, agreeing to complete additional assignments or to participate in extra activities. Friedlander (1982) describes the approach used at Maricopa County's Rio Salado College: "The student and the instructor must complete a Course Evaluation Plan, a form of contract in which the student agrees to do one or more special

assignments in order to earn honors credit. Special assignments might include additional reading, library research, field projects, or class presentations" (27). While this type of honors programming may be the only possibility in a small community college, it can present problems if an approval process and quality controls are not strictly enforced by an honors coordinator or an advisory committee.

Interdisciplinary Courses - Many honors programs want the student to see the interrelatedness of ideas, and so they build their curriculum around a group of interdisciplinary courses. Typical of this type of programming are the courses offered by Long Beach Community College which stress "the unity and diversity of all human knowledge through an exploration of the arts, the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences" (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983, 13). This type of programming is highly recommended for honors students by Piland and Azbell (1984) and by Van Tassel-Baska (1982). Through these courses, students can learn to integrate knowledge and develop the higher level cognitive skills of synthesis, evaluation, critical thinking, and intellectual judgment.

Seminars - In honors seminars, a small group of students explore a fairly specialized topic under the guidance of an expert who may be a faculty member, a nationally known figure in the field, or a visiting professor. This type of programming offers the in-depth learning (Van Tassel-Baska, 1982) and the access to professors and experts for sharing ideas (Cox and Hankins, 1983) that academically talented students need and desire.

Independent Study - This type of programming offers students the opportunity to pursue areas of special interest to them under the guidance of a faculty member. Piland and Gould (1982) note that "independent study . . . and opportunities for research are important academic features for honors students" (26). The flexibility offered by this type of class is highly recommended in a later study conducted by Piland and Azbell (1984). Gifted students are generally self-motivated and capable of working independently to explore research issues. Joseph Renzulli, in his model for gifted education, sees the independent project as a "contribution of worth, which instills discipline, demonstrates ability, and promotes the value of utilizing knowledge. . ." (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983, 13). This type of educational experience also prepares students for the type of independent work they will do at the senior college and university level.

The above types of classes are often the basic curricular compenents of honors programs at the community college level. The types of components used by a particular community college should be determined by the institution's size, philosophy, mission, and the honors students' special needs. Some programs offer students the option of designing an individualized program through independent study, while others prescribe a particular set of courses. Those programs with a comprehensive philosophy often combine a variety of components to let honors students choose the learning experiences that most effectively meet their needs and learning styles.

Innovative Curricular Approaches in Honors Programs

Some community colleges offer more innovative approaches to honors learning, such as internships, capstone projects, field projects, study abroad, core colloquium, and creative arts.

Internships - Since high achieving students want to participate in educational experiences that are related to future job possibilities (Cox and Hankins, 1983), internships should be a part of an honors program. In this type of class, a student can earn credit by working with and studying under the supervision of a professional in a chosen career field. Such a program is offered at Braward Community College where a student may earn three semester hours of credit in a selected discipline while working under the direction of the Scholars Program Coordinator and an on-site internship supervisor (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983).

Capstone Projects - The general purpose of a capstone project is to give gifted students the chance to demonstrate the knowledge and skill that they have gained in the educational process. At Miami-Dade Community College, the Capstone or Sophomore Project "is the culmination of the honors program and provides the opportunity for the Honors student to demonstrate his/her abilities. The student is granted 1 - 3 honors credits within the major, depending upon the magnitude of the project. A project director is assigned to assist and guide the student" (National Collegeiate Honors Council, 1983, 14). These culminating projects offer students unique independent study experiences

which satisfy their "preference for complexity" and demonstrate their "originality" and "verbal fluency" (Piland and Azbell, 1984, 14).

Field Projects - These educational experiences offer the student the opportunity to conduct off-campus research by investigating a problem first hand. Visiting specific sites, talking to professionals in the field, and then reporting the findings and proposed solutions in writing are excellent practice in critical thinking and problem solving skills. At one community college, students can receive honors credit by registering for a field project and a seminar. "While the projects are unique independent study experiences, the seminar brings the honors students together tc discuss their proposals, methodology and anticipated goals, and problems" (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983, 12).

Study Abroad - Study abroad offers honors students the chance to experience a culture first hand by spending time with the people in their native milieu. The travel, combined with tours and other cultural experiences, often offers opportunities for learning far beyond those of the typical classroom. This type of honors program is offered at Miami-Dade Community College where "students complete specific reading and writing assignments before and/or after the travel programs, and participate in orientation sessions" (Link, 1983, 9). Miami-Dade offers eight study abroad programs each summer. The following are typical course descriptions:

Summer Term in France (five weeks of residential study in AIX-en-Provence and one week in Paris). Students may earn a maximum of six credits from among courses offered in Intermediate or Advanced French, International Relations, Humanities, or Modern Language Field Trip and Seminar. The seminar course emphasizes the life and culture of the country visited.

Summer Semester in Spain (three or five and one-half weeks of residental study at the University of Madrid, with two optional weekend excursions to other Spanish cities). Three week participants may earn three credits in the Modern Language Field Trip course. Five and one-half week participants may enroll for six to nine credits in Spanish, Humanities, and/or Social Science courses (Link, 1983, 9).

Core Colloquium - This innovative approach is based on the philosophy that honors students should take a required core of interdisciplinary courses that all share a common theme. In the Core Colloquium at Foothill College, honors students take Integrated Studies courses which focus on the "connectedness" of all learning through an interdisciplinary approach. The courses relate to "several Great Issues: Excellence, Creative and Critical Thinking, The Big Questions, Change, and such current problems as Women's Rights, Nuclear Issues, and Bio-Engineering. /Students/ also take a Future Studies course which projects their interdisciplinary learning into the next decade and century" (McHargue, 1984, 2). The core experiences can help to build a "solid skill base early in the students' college careers, thereby preparing them for increased success in the sophomore level and beyond" (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983, 18).

Creative Arts - While most honors courses are content-based,

academically talented students "also need the arts for the development of high intellectual potential. . . . Therefore, a good honors program should include opportunities for the development of performance skills and aesthetic experiences on an on-going basis" (Van Tassel-Baska, 1982, 8). Miami Dade Community College has developed a Creative Arts Honors Program to serve

> high ability students who are interested in art, dance, drama, or music. . . . The program is designed to offer qualified and motivated students a complete immersion in their chosen discipline. To achieve this goal the students are assigned to faculty mentors who provide individualized attention, guidance and instruction. . . . Another special feature of the program is required exhibition or performance of the students' works in their area of expertise during special events designated for that purpose (Miami-Dade, 1983, 2).

Programs of this type recognize the fact that honors students are often multi-talented individuals. In addition, the arts offer "an excellent opportunity to analyze and synthesize information in the aesthetic domain. [They] build on [the honors students'] strong ability to grasp interrelationships and comprehend meaning at high levels" (Van Tassel-Baska, 1982, 8-9).

By adding more of the innovative curricular approaches to their honors programs, community colleges could add to the depth and variety of learning experiences currently available to honors students. Research is an important part of these courses, and honors students see research opportunities as one of the benefits of enrolling in an honors program. Gifted students want to be

challenged; in fact, "more challenge" was the reason given by 76.7% of the participating students for enrolling in an honors program in the study conducted by Piland and Azbell (1984). They also report that "the honors program participants were somewhat academically challenged (51 percent) or challenged a great deal (43.9 percent)"(46). These statistics indicate that approximately half of the students are not being challenged enough by their course work. This finding highlights the need for ongoing evaluations of courses and programs which should be conducted each semester to insure that honors work is rigorous enough to challenge and motivate honors students. If current curricular offerings are inadequate, they should be modified and/or new courses should be designed for this special and unique group of students.

Implementing an Honors Program

The keys to a successful honors program are establishing an advisory committee to help design and govern the program, naming a director to administer the program, gaining institutional support through board, president, and staff involvement, choosing a good honors faculty, and recruiting, retaining, and rewarding talented students.

The Advisory Committee

An advisory committee, sometimes referred to as an honors committee, is essential to the planning and implementation of a solid program. The committee generally consists of administrators, faculty members representing each academic division,

counselors, a representative from admissions, students, and occasionally community members. Each group performs a specific function. Administrative input and support are necessary when questions of budget and staffing are raised, and administrators can act as liaisons between the college board and the honors program. Involving faculty in planning is important because they should help design and evaluate the honors curriculum. Counselors should also be involved since plans should be made to make special academic advising and personal/career counseling available to the honors students. Having representatives from financial aid and admissions on the committee helps to establish procedures for awarding scholarships if they are available and for registering students who must meet specific program criteria. Since the best judge of a well-made pair of shoes is the wearer, students should also be involved in the planning and implementing of the program. They usually base their input on past honors experience at the high school or college level or on their expectations of how an honors program can help them achieve their potential. Interested community members can help to publicize and support the program off campus. This group planning effort should contribute to a broad base of institutional support that is necessary for a successful program (Piland and Gould, 1982).

The functions of the advisory committee generally include writing the goals of the program, designing the curriculum, suggesting course scheduling, establishing admission and retention criteria, recommending enrichment activities, conducting both

formative and summative evaluations, and recommending program changes or additions. All of these activities are important in creating a program that will fit into the overall goals of the institution and meet the needs of the honors students. Holkeboer (1984) reports that successful programs he studied "were precisely tailored to the mission and character of their institution" (11). A good advisory committee can help achieve this aim.

The Program Director

Another key to the success of an honors program is the selection and appointment of a program director who will be responsible for administering the program. Although there are many administrative functions to be performed, such as staffing, scheduling, and budgeting, the program director should ideally be a faculty member who is respected by his or her colleagues as a competent professional educator. Having a member of the faculty in this position gives other faculty the sense that they have input and control over one of the most important programs on campus. The professionalism of the director is also important because he or she will be representing the college at off-campus recruiting functions where the quality of the program will be judged by his or her reputation and presentation. Piland and Azbell (1984) report that 35% of the honors students they surveyed chose to participate in an honors program because of the honors director. Image, then, must be a prime consideration both on and off campus.

Since the director will be working directly with all students

in the honors program, it is also important that he or she have good human relations skills. Acting as mentor, confidant, advisor, and "cheerleader" demands a particular type of personality. Holkeboer's research shows that all of the successful programs he studied "had exceptionally capable and charismatic directors" (11). It seems obvious that choosing a good director is vitally important to the success of the program.

The responsibilities of the program director most often include chairing the advisory committee, scheduling and staffing honors courses, preparing the program budget, reviewing course proposals and syllabi, coordinating special enrichment programs, communicating information on the program to the president, the board, the administration, faculty, staff, and students, and acting as mentor/ombudsman when problems arise (McKeague and White, 1984). Because of the time and energy required to perform these duties, the director should be given released time or additional compensation. Piland and Gould (1982) recommend that the director be compensated for his or efforts and that the rate of compensation be based on the size of the program and the number of students involved. Supporting the program in this way indicates that the administration believes in the importance of the program and recognizes the types of activities necessary for its success.

Board and Administrative Support and Involvement

An honors program needs the support of the board and the administration if it is to be successful. One way of gaining that support is to convince them--in meetings, memos, and

speeches--that an honors program is a good investment. Holkeboer (1984) lists six reasons why colleges need an honors program:

1) It helps to fulfill a college's mission by encouraging academic excellence and by focusing attention on the values of a liberal education;
2) It is an effective means of recruiting and retaining students of high ability;
3) It buoys faculty morale by encouraging high standards of academic performance; by quickening the intellectual atmosphere on campus; and by stimulating faculty pride in the institution;
4) It helps to recruit and retain outstanding new faculty who are committed to quality in higher education;
5) It . . . opens up new opportunities for grant support;
6) It produces a substantial body of loyal, supportive, and highly professional alumni (12).

These benefits are hard to ignore if the board and administration are sincerely dedicated to quality and excellence.

Administrative support, however, must mean more than budget dollars, although monetary support for released time, distinguished guests, or travel is important. The board and administrators should be actively involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the honors program. They can serve on the advisory committee, they can help recruit by publicizing the program at college and community functions, they can teach in the program and/or serve as mentors or role models, and they can provide the research assistance needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the honors program.

At Moraine Valley Community College, the honors program director regularly reported on the development of the program at monthly board meetings. Board members and administrators

were invited to participate in the welcoming tea for honors students and to join the speakers' bureau developed for enrichment purposes. This kind of involvement and support is inexpensive but invaluable. If the board and administration strongly support an honors program through their personal involvement, it is more likely to become successful. Once the program proves that it can play an important role in the institution, its place in the curriculum will be more secure.

Faculty Support and Involvement

Studies show that "the success of the honors experience and honors programs for superior students is directly proportional to the commitment, skill, and expertise of the faculty involved" (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983, 29). For this reason, faculty members should play an important role in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of an honors program.

Having faculty representatives on the planning/advisory committee gives them a chance to have input into the design of the program. When they help to shape policies and procedures, they develop a sense of commitment to the integrity and success of the program. At Moraine Valley Community College, faculty representatives helped to establish the admission and retention criteria, developed an application procedure, reviewed and approved syllabi, discussed evaluation procedures, and assisted in recruitment activities. They also suggested and participated in development activities to learn how to work effectively with academically talented students.

In the implementation stage of the honors program, faculty function as curriculum specialists and as instructors as they develop and conduct honors courses, seminars, and workshops. To be effective, honors faculty should possess certain qualities:

> It is particularly important that potential honors instructors have both a geniune liking for students and a concern for their students' intellectual development. In addition to being excellent classroom instructors [and] having a facility with a variety of pedagogical techniques, honors faculty should also demonstrate scholarship abilities. . . . Overall, honors faculty should be committed to the objectives of honors. . . (National Collegiate Honors Council, 1983, 29).

Faculty members of this caliber can make positive contributions to an honors program and also help recruit and retain honors students.

As they work closely with students, faculty also function as advisors/mentors by directing projects and independent study programs and by helping students develop their potential. At Moraine Valley Community College, all faculty members were asked to participate in a speakers' bureau which would function as an enrichment activity for the honors program. More than one third of the faculty volunteered to speak to honors students on a wide variety of topics ranging from national politics and poetry to yoga and holistic health. Offering faculty an opportunity to participate in this way has helped to solidify their support for the honors program on campus.

Faculty members should also have a central role in evaluating honors programs. Since "the rigor and challenge of an honors program needs to be assessed continually" (Piland and Azbell,

1984, 47), faculty, as curricular experts, can help develop strategies for conducting both formative and summative evaluations. By participating in this manner, faculty will be more positive about the evaluation process and be more likely to accept the results and use them in planning effective instructional activities.

Two other groups of faculty whose support and involvement are necessary to a successful program are the counselors and the librarians.

Counseling should be an essential part of honors students' programs. "Gifted students should have the opportunity to understand and cope with their exceptionality in small-group sharing sessions, receive training in decision-making skills, and be provided alternative choices around course-taking, colleges, and careers" (Van Tassel-Baska, 1982, 12). Honors students have many more options to consider in making signigicant life and career choices, and effective counseling can be very helpful in this regard. In addition, Piland and Azbell (1984) note that honors students often feel pressured by high faculty expectations and by self-expectations and that increased counseling could help alleviate these problems. At Moraine Valley Community College, two counselors and two advisors have been assigned to work with honors students on personal, academic, and career issues. By working with the honors faculty, they offer students an effective support system as they cope with their giftedness and its effect on their lives.

The library staff is also central to an effective honors program since many honors courses involve independent study

options and since gifted students are interested in research opportunities (Piland and Azbell, 1984). At Moraine Valley, librarians have prepared bibliographies for faculty on gifted students and gifted education and for students on assigned research topics. They have also helped faculty and students obtain special materials for their honors courses through computer searches and inter-library loans. Moraine's librarians also conduct special orientation sessions which introduce students to the research materials and techniques related to the various disciplines. The library is really an extension of the honors classroom, and knowledgeable, helpful librarians can help students pursue their special interests and broaden their perspectives through independent research.

Student Support and Involvement

To gain student support, an honors program must set realistic standards and maintain them in the course work and in the program as a whole. First, entrance criteria must be realistically based on the general characteristics of the native student body. Holkeboer (1984) notes that unsuccessful programs tried to appeal to either "one of two powerful campus constitutencies--the elitist or the egalitarian: [the entrance] requirements were either so restrictive as to allow only a handful of students into the program, or absurdly indiscriminate, so that an honors student was effectively defined as anyone interested in early registration" (11). Most community colleges have established a set of criteria, with the student meeting

any two for entrance into the program. They usually include the following:

1) Rank in high school graduating class which usually ranges from the top 10% to the top 25%;
2) ACT composite score of 25 or above;
3) SAT combined score which varies from 1000 to 1200;
4) High school or college GPA which ranges from 3.25 to 3.5 on a 4 point scale;
5) Ninetieth percentile or better on two or more assessment tests given during college orientation;
6) Recommendations from high school or college instructors or counselors;
7) Demonstration of special ability through auditions, portfolios, essays, projects, or awards;
8) Interviews with honors committee or approval of the honors program director (McKeague and White, 1984).

Being able to combine any two criteria, especially those numbered 5 through 8, permits students who may not have been successful in high school or returning adults to qualify for the program. Once students have been accepted, retention criteria should be established to maintain credibility for the program. Most institutions require that students maintain a

certain GPA, usually from 3.25 to 3.5 or better, and take a required number of honors courses each semester. Once these criteria have been approved by the advisory committee, recriutment can get underway (McKeague and White, 1984).

The first step in recruitment is to widely publicize the program so that prospective students can become aware of it. News articles can be run in community newspapers, district high school newspapers, the college newspaper, and any newsletters on campus. Brochures and flyers should be developed and available at selected places on campus (counseling, the library, faculty offices) and in the community (banks, shopping centers, and libraries).

The director of the program should establish contact, either in person or by mail, with appropriate persons--directors of gifted programs, counselors, faculty--in the district high schools who work with honors students. They can be very helpful in informing their students about the new program since they know the superior students who must--for personal or economic reasons--remain in the area to begin their college work.

At Moraine Valley Community College, the director of the honors program worked with the director of recruitment to establish contact with prospective high school seniors through a direct mail campaign, a series of high school visits, and special campus tours.

In the direct mail campaign, a letter announcing and describing the program, along with a brochure and a response card, was sent to the following groups: district residents who

scored a minimum of 25 on the ACT test; district residents who scored a minimum of 1100 on the SAT test; district residents who were named Illinois state scholars; district residents who were named National Merit Scholar semi-finalists and finalists; district residents who made their high school's honor roll; and district residents who are currently enrolled in honors classes or Advanced Placement classes. The mailing lists were purchased from the respective testing agencies or obtained from the district high schools.

A variation of the recruitment letter was also sent to various student groups already on campus: students on the President's List; students in Phi Theta Kappa, the national honor society for the community college; and students who had applied for or had received the Distinguished Scholar Award, a scholarship awarded by the Board of Trustees to students who have graduated in the top 10% of their high school class. These students are currently meeting some of the entrance criteria and represent a major part of the target group for the honors program.

At Moraine Valley, the director of the honors program also visited the district high schools to talk to both juniors and seniors who were either members of the National Honors Society, students enrolled in honors classes and/or Advanced Placement classes, or students on the honor roll. The main goal was to make them aware of the educational opportunities available in their local community college. Informational packets, including a brochure, a card requesting additional

information, and an application, were distributed to interested students, and extra copies of these materials were left in the high schools with counselors and selected faculty.

Students who expressed an interest in the program were invited to campus to meet with the director, honors faculty, and honors students. Academic advisors and counselors were also invited to address the group on such key issues as transferring to selected college and university honors programs, obtaining scholarships, and choosing from career options. After a presentation on the program's requirements and benefits, the students were taken on a tour of the campus to see the classroom and laboratory facilities and to visit the Learning Resources Center. There was also an opportunity to sit in on honors classes that were in session.

In all publicity and recruiting efforts, the important program features should be emphasized: scholarships (if available); small class size; challenging learning activities which build the cognitive skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation, problem solving, and critical thinking; individualized attention; outstanding faculty; research opportunities in an excellent academic library; a wide variety of enrichment activities; interaction with other outstanding students; and special recognition at college programs and at graduation. Studies of honors programs by Piland and Gould (1982) and of honors students by Piland and Azbell (1984) indicate that these factors are important to students when they are considering a community college honors program.

Once students are admitted to the program, it is important to establish a sense of cohesiveness and camaraderie within the group. This process can be initiated by the program director if he or she also functions as a mentor or advisor by getting to know each student individually and by being concerned about each student's progress toward his or her goals. The director's office should serve as a focal point for the program where students can meet with the director, faculty, and other honors students.

Faculty members should encourage open and friendly relationships among the students in their classes. If a competitive but supportive atmosphere is established in the classroom, students will relate more effectively to each other and to the program. It is also important to maintain a sense of openness, flexibility, and individuality so that all students will feel comfortable in the learning environment. A counselor and an advisor should be assigned to work with the honors faculty to create a "team" to inform, encourage, and support each honors student. If possible, members of these teams should be present at informal meetings of the honors students that should be held several times each semester. These could be luncheon meetings or afternoon sessions at which the director could make any necessary announcements and then a short program could follow. Guest speakers could present workshops on topics of interest to the students, or students could present the results of their research or projects. This will hopefully create a community of scholars who recognize the importance of ideas and who welcome

the challenge of leadership roles.

Whenever possible, the achievements of honors students--from maintaining good grades, doing independent research, and completing a major project to winning a competition or earning a scholarship--should be publicized, and recognition should be given to outstanding students. In addition, any course taken in the honors program should be so designated on the transcript, and if the students complete the requirements of the program, that should also be noted on the transcript and on the diploma.

All of these activities will help to meet the following criteria that Holkeboer (1984) recommends to create "an environment that satisfies /the/ intellectual and emotional needs" of honors students:

1) Provide a format for close interaction between faculty and students;
2) Provide a physical facility in which honors students can learn and socialize together;
3) Encourage experiential learning activities and the adoption of leadership roles both on and off campus;
4) Publicize student achievements in the media and provide other forms of recognition and reward for academic achievement (12).

And so, if the honors program can meet the unique needs of its academically talented students, it will be successful. And if the honors program has the support of the other campus groups--the board, administration, faculty, and support staff--it will become an integral part of the institution, it will help to build the institution's image and reputation, and it will continue to attract and retain highly talented students.

Evaluation of Honors Programs

Evaluation is an essential component if an honors program is to prove its effectiveness in meeting its goals and objectives. If those goals and objectives are stated as clearly as possible and in measurable terms when the program is developed, the process of determining if they have been met can be greatly simplified.

Most institutions with an honors program conduct formative evaluations each semester to gather data on the general perceptions that students and faculty have of the honors program. This type of evaluation tends to focus on "consumer satisfaction," which is important information for the program director and for the advisory committee, but it does not provide information on whether the program is meeting its long-range goals or if it is doing more for its students than other programs on campus. Therefore, a summative evaluation should also be conducted to gather data on the overall effectiveness of the program so that, if necessary, modifications can be made to make the program more successful in achieving its goals and objectives.

In an early study of evaluation of honors programs, Heist and Langland (1966) suggest using "experimental design." They believe that

> only a pre- and post-experience testing scheme can completely fulfill the major purpose of an evaluation project. . . . To assess gain or change, especially that resulting from a particular program, the base point of existing knowledge or skills must first be established. A second, absolutely essential complement to a defensible assessment procedure is the element of control. Thus pre-experience and post-experience tests should be administered to a group of students

> not in the honors program as well as to the honors students being tested (Cohen, J., 278).

This system is based on sound scientific principles, but it was rarely used in evaluating honors programs. According to Heist and Langland, "informal surveys of student and faculty reactions continue to be the most common. . . . More recently, honors program staffs have increasingly surveyed student and faculty opinions and attitudes by questionnaire. Some of these questionnaires have been designed to generate quantitative as well as qualitative data. . ." (Cohen, J., 264). "Quantitative" analysis of the effectiveness of an honors program is obviously necessary in today's educational milieu. Any program must be able to statistically prove its value as it competes for funding and recognition. Most administrators want "hard" data on which to base such decisions as budget, curriculum, and staffing.

In a more recent study of honors evaluation, Austin (1981) describes two kinds of evaluation approaches, the normative and the situational, in his Handbook for the Evaluation of an Honors Program. The normative evaluation is based on national norms and attempts to measure the effectiveness of the program by comparing it to an "ideal" honors program. Using this approach, however, denies the creative differences that occur in programs as they respond and adapt to their own institutional environments. Therefore, Austin recommends the situational evaluation in which the aim is to determine if the individual program is meeting its own objectives. In this type of evaluation system, the basic question is "What opportunities must be made available to the

ablest and most highly motivated students in this institution in order for their educational needs to be met?"(3).

In designing situational evaluations, Austin outlines a series of questions covering the following points: program rationale and objectives; curriculum; faculty; organization and administration; budget; community and identity; recruiting, admissions and retention; recognition; and advisement and counseling (7-13). Answers to these questions produce what Austin terms "a self-study" (4). However, Reihman and Varhus (1984) point out that while the results of such self-examination can "promote a healthy, heightened awareness of program strengths and weaknesses and generally result in . . . a kind of 'recharging' for both the program and its participants," it does "not . . . generate inferences about either program quality or effectiveness" (4). They label the self-study approach a process evaluation which generates data on such points as how smoothly the program is functioning, the number of students and faculty, and the cost of the program. They state that this type of evaluation does not measure the outcomes of the honors program, so they recommend that it be combined with survey research techniques to generate data reflecting the overall consequences of a program.

In describing outcome evaluation, Reihman and Varhus suggest that questions relating to outcomes might include "Has this program made a difference?" and "How effective has this program been in accomplishing its mission?" (4). They note that conducting outcome evaluations is generally difficult because it means

finding both reliable and valid indicators of effectiveness. Also, such an evaluation requires a commitment of time and resources to design, administer, and analyze the results of the evaluation.

Nolan and Gill (1981) suggest that a successful outcome evaluation process should be planned and conducted primarily by the faculty members who teach within the program working in conjunction with the institution's research department. They conclude that "unless program evaluation is integrated into the activities of . . . faculty members, it can never be an effective tool that benefits the students, college, community, and the faculty members themselves" (39). The outcome evaluation model they recommend is based on six steps: definition of program exit competencies, development of questionnaires, distribution of the questionnaires, tabulation of the data, evaluation of the data, and distribution of the conclusions and recommendations (40).

Exit Competencies - Exit competencies are statements of skills or applications of knowledge that students are able to perform after completing the program. They are based on the goals of the program itself and on the objectives of the specific courses within the program. A list of the exit competencies forms the basis for the questions on the survey instrument.

Questionnaire Development - With the assistance of the research body on campus, the faculty, the program director, and the advisory committee jointly design three questionnaires--one for the program's current students and graduates, one for the non-persisters, and one for the graduates' university

professors and/or employers. The first section on the student questionnaire should gather data on their current status and should include a request for permission to send a similar questionnaire to their university professors and/or employers. The second section of the survey should have the students rate themselves against the exit competencies and then assess how well they believe the program is preparing or has prepared them for university-level work and/or employment. Those students who dropped out of the program should be asked the reason(s) for their non-persistence, and all groups receiving the survey should be asked to suggest ways that the program could be made more effective in meeting their needs. A third section of the questionnaire should ask students to assess the helpfulness of support services, such as counseling, career placement, and the library. A totally separate questionnaire should be designed for the university professors and/or employers, asking them to assess the students' mastery of the same exit competencies.

Questionnaire Distribution - After the names and addresses of the target groups have been compiled, the questionnaire is mailed. As the student questionnaires are returned with their university professors and/or employers identified, the follow-up set of questionnaires is mailed.

Tabluation of Results - As the questionnaires are returned, the research staff tabulate the data. After the deadline for the return has passed, a follow-up letter requesting a response is sent. After the second deadline passes, the data are tabulated and analyzed and then routed to all faculty and staff members who

participated in the evaluation.

Evaluation of Data - Each faculty member is asked to review the data and to respond to three questions regarding its interpretation:

1. In light of the responses, should any part of the surveys be revised?
2. Should any changes be considered in the exit competencies of the program?
3. Should any changes be considered in the curriculum or courses?

Both the tabulated data and the faculty's reviews and comments are summarized by the director who prepares a final report which outlines the results of the questionnaires, the recommendations of the faculty regarding the program, and the future steps to be taken.

Distribution of Conclusions/Recommendations - The director's report is presented to the curriculum committee, the program's advisory committee, the academic officers (deans and vice-presidents) and the executives (the president and the board).

Decisions about whether to maintain, modify, or discontinue the program and the actions taken to implement these decisions complete the process of program evaluation. The action step is absolutely essential if the evaluation procedure is to have any value or credibility. Too often in education, evaluations are carried out, but there is no action taken based on the findings. By following through on the recommended actions, honors programs could once again show leadership within an institution.

The outcome evaluation model, then, is one major step toward documenting the effectiveness of the honors program as perceived by the current students, the graduates, the non-persisters, university professors, and employers. This type of summative evaluation, along with formative evaluations, should be on-going activities if the institution wishes to maintain the quality, rigor, and intellectual vitality of the honors experience.

Conclusions

An honors program should be a part of every comprehensive community college's curriculum. Academically talented students are a special group whose needs must be addressed if the community college is to guarantee equity to all students. A successful honors program not only serves students, however; it also strengthens the image of the institution through its emphasis on quality education, academic standards, and scholarship.

As faculty modify current courses or design new ones, they develop a renewed interest in teaching and in curricular development; in fact, many current innovative approaches in education today--independent study, internships, senior projects, self-directed curricula, experimental education, experiential education, and seminar situations--were pioneered in honors programs (Clark and Cummings, 1983).

Whenever possible, honors students should be kept together in special classes so that the instructor can move rapidly through basic material and spend more time on in-depth analysis

of the key concepts within a discipline. Offering students a variety of curricular activities--seminars, workshops, independent study, travel abroad, internships--will give them the opportunity to choose the learning experiences that best match their learning styles.

If a program is to be successful, it must involve every facet of an institution, from the board and administration to the faculty, support staff, and students. Members from each group should be part of a supportive network that helps to recruit, retain, and reward the superior students on campus.

To insure the continuing challenge of the honors experience, there should be both formative and summative evaluations, including follow-up studies of program graduates. This type of outcome evaluation will help to determine if the program is actually meeting its goals and objectives and if the students are mastering the expected competencies. On-going review of the program should guarantee its continuing viability and its continuing success.

Additional Research

The honors program is a relatively new phenomenon in the community college, and most of the published research describes the general characteristics of the few programs now in existence. There is not much in the literature, however, about how to begin planning and implementing a successful honors program, nor are there articles that describe in depth the honors program at a single institution. Research in these areas could help institu-

tions that are considering such a program.

Some honors programs are more successful in recruiting and retaining students than others. Research could also be carried out that would analyze the qualities of the successful programs at the community college level so that other institutions could use the data to revitalize existing programs or to design new ones.

Honors programs also need to be more carefully evaluated. A study of honors programs in League for Innovation institutions (McKeague and White, 1984) shows that the oldest programs have been in existence for four to five years. At this point, however, there are no completed follow-up studies of the graduates, and only one study is in progress at this time. Research must be done to determine if honors programs are meeting their established goals and objectives.

Implications

Community colleges should analyze their present student body to determine if there is a need for an honors program. If there are high-achieving students on campus, the administration should appoint a broadly based planning committee to design a program that is tailored to the mission and character of the institution. Also important is the appointment of a competent and charismatic faculty member to direct the program. The director must be given an adequate amount of released time to perform all of the duties necessary to plan and implement a successful program.

The admission requirements and retention criteria must be

high enough to establish credibility for the program and yet broad enough to allow returning adults or "late bloomers" to participate. The curriculum, designed and implemented by competent and caring faculty members, must be demanding enough to challenge students and yet flexible enough to permit them to pursue individual interests. Continuing evaluations must be done to assess and maintain the rigor and the quality of the program.

A communications campaign should be designed to make the honors program highly visible so that every part of the campus--board members, administrators, faculty, support staff, and students--understand the program's reasons for being and its contributions to the college. Recognition and rewards should be given to all those who participate in any way in the program so that it will truly become an honorable part of the institution.

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