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## Honors Colleges in the 21st Century

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# HONORS COLLEGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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Richard Badenhausen,  
EDITOR

# HONORS COLLEGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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Edited by **Richard Badenhausen**

Series Editor | Jeffrey A. Portnoy  
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Honors education is also essentially a collaborative activity. Some of my richest professional experiences have involved interactions with honors colleagues around the country and world committed to this special form of education. I have learned much from them, and those experiences inform this volume. I have also become more educated about the rich possibilities of honors education during visits to almost two dozen universities for program review or consulting work. I always return from those interactions energized about the amazing creativity and innovation that is central to honors. Closer to home, I am continually inspired by the

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Richard Badenhausen

## INTRODUCTION

Richard Badenhausen  
Westminster University

Given that the first book-length treatment of “the honors college phenomenon”—so designated by its editor Peter C. Sederberg—was intimately intertwined with the generation of the National Collegiate Honors Council’s (NCHC) 2005 “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College,” it seems apropos that this newest volume arrives on the heels of the organization’s 2022 release of a new set of standards, the “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education.” That document supplants the original two sets of “Basic Characteristics” while its structure notably minimizes the differences between honors programs and honors colleges in favor of emphasizing the broad commonalities of honors education. The potential advantages that Ottavio M. Casale highlighted four decades ago in an essay entitled “Why an Honors College?” still hold in many cases, including the ability to scale programming, increased institutional autonomy, enhanced scope in serving students across the university’s entire portfolio, and the university’s endorsement of honors through collegiate status and appointment of a dean. Nevertheless, it is important to note Casale’s passing comment made late in the essay: “much of the advantage I ascribe to the Honors College concept could accrue to smaller Honors programs” (4). Therefore, in the spirit of the “Shared Principles and Practices,” this volume makes no value judgment about the worth of the two major honors models: there are plenty of outstanding, well-developed honors programs and many poorly conceived or underdeveloped honors colleges. And the differences that do exist are often tied to scale and execution rather than to sharp disparities in values, teaching and learning practices, and student composition. Instead, the authors of the nineteen essays in this book have targeted areas of focus that will help audiences better understand the

honors college model, guide those thinking about such possibilities on their own campuses, and assist experienced leaders wondering how to improve particular areas of an already-established honors college. The monograph also surfaces challenges and opportunities that are particular to honors colleges in the belief that highlighting them can lead to improvements in operations, culture, and learning outcomes, to name just three areas.

While honors colleges may have been a “phenomenon” during the decade (1995–2005) that Sederberg worked toward the document that became the “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College,” honors colleges are no longer a niche product; instead, they are a core feature of many university portfolios. When John Madden conducted a survey in 1993, he rustled up 23 honors colleges (Sederberg, “Characteristics” 41), while Sederberg’s subsequent 2003 survey was sent to 69 honors colleges, of which 35 replied (27). The 2021 survey conducted in conjunction with this project was transmitted to 248 honors colleges. Clearly, growth is the name of the game in honors education: as numerous authors in this volume note, honors is a source of enrollment strength in undergraduate higher education even as other sectors are pressured; and honors colleges, in particular, have grown significantly in number over the past three decades.

It is not difficult to fathom why honors education has been such an area of strength. Honors programs and especially honors colleges have long embraced many of the solutions that higher ed leaders have sought more recently in areas tied to student belonging, wellness support, innovative course design, student-centered pedagogies, and bridges between the curriculum and co-curriculum. Honors programs and honors colleges have enjoyed the flexibility and autonomy to innovate and, importantly, are not shackled with some of the institutional and disciplinary restrictions that can hamper other school-level units. Eric Hayot’s 2021 essay exploring the crisis in humanities disciplines—which he ties in part to “stale” majors and curriculums and the unhelpful way in which the field is framed for external audiences—seeks solutions tied to transcending disciplines. What if we organized the humanities classes, he

asks, around “the names of their best and most important ideas, and not by the names of their calcifying disciplinary formations?” (“The Humanities”). Such a change, he argues, may help students see the value of the educational enterprise and stem plummeting enrollments in the humanities. In his book that dives into these ideas in more detail, Hayot seeks to collapse disciplinary boundaries in faculty appointments and recast the curriculum around skills-based and thematized modules (*Humanist Reason* 170). Of course, Hayot’s aspirations are being fulfilled in many honors programs and honors colleges, which may partly explain the demand for honors across the country. Some examples in this monograph, such as discussions of problem-based curriculums, transdisciplinary collaboration, externally facing programs that serve local communities, culturally responsive advising, and ways in which honors colleges lead in diversity and equity work, demonstrate how honors colleges are often sites of experimentation and invention. These practices position honors as a “Laboratory for Innovation,” very much along the lines advocated by the “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education” (National Collegiate Honors Council 4).

*Honors Colleges in the 21st Century* contains the work of 56 authors representing 45 different institutions, which makes this the largest and most comprehensive group of honors leaders ever to appear in print together discussing honors colleges. Particularly notable is the fact that eleven of the chapters are co-authored by individuals from different institutions. I am grateful for the generosity and grace of so many who readily agreed to my suggestion they collaborate with others, in some cases with complete strangers! A wide range of institutional perspectives are represented: public and private, large and small, R1 flagships and regional, two- and four-year, religious and secular, and HBCU. The professional positionality of writers is similarly diverse, including faculty, staff, and administrators. Because the diversity of settings in which honors education takes place is one of its great strengths, this volume is not meant to provide a single prescriptive account of how honors colleges should be set up or run. The book very much endorses the framing comments in NCHC’s “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education,” which “acknowledge

that honors programs and colleges exist in vastly different institutional and environmental contexts, possess a wide variety of missions and approaches, and have varied access to resources to bring about these outcomes” (1). The authors hope similarly that its contents will, like the “Shared Principles and Practices,” “spark generative conversation around how honors education can help transform an institution and the students it serves” (1).

Less an all-inclusive handbook and more a collection of targeted essays that offer insights into key areas of honors colleges—fundraising, advising, administration, curriculum design—as well as conceptual testaments of the historical context of honors colleges, accounts of transitioning from an honors program to honors college, and reflections on supporting LGBTQ+ students in honors, the book breaks down different facets of the honors college model so they can be considered in their full context. This book is intended for numerous audiences:

- Those considering starting or transitioning to an honors college: administrators, honors leaders, task forces, and other stakeholders;
- Those who currently lead or work in honors colleges who are interested in building out a particular feature, such as the enrollment management operation, DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) programming, or innovative curriculum, of their organization;
- Those wanting to better understand honors education, which is sometimes the source of confusion for boards, presidents, provosts, deans of other colleges, and staff across campus.

For those first entering the honors space as a new leader, this book will be an invaluable resource: not only is honors sometimes mysterious, but the field has changed drastically during the past two decades. Even honors program faculty and staff who have no interest in honors colleges or those who stand completely outside honors could benefit from some of the insights in a number of these chapters, like those on stewarding donors, culturally responsive advising, curricular innovation, or DEI work.



The book is also quite different from Peter C. Sederberg's first essential volume on honors colleges. Most essays in *The Honors College Phenomenon* explore the material and structural qualities of honors colleges as they were understood in their earliest iterations by using case studies showing how they were aligned with individual "Basic Characteristics," while a few concluding chapters offer examples of creating or recreating honors colleges. This structure is tied to Sederberg's advocacy for a supplement to the "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program" that would identify the features of honors colleges, so it is a volume very much about the administrative nuts and bolts of the model. While still crucial for anyone hoping to learn more about honors colleges, Sederberg's volume is framed through the lens of national standards no longer in place and offers a portrait of honors education that is somewhat passé. For example, just as the earlier "Basic Characteristics" didn't include the words *diversity*, *equity*, *inclusion*, or *access*, *The Honors College Phenomenon* mentions these crucial ideas just incidentally, only several times in passing within its 150+ pages. This current book is informed by NCHC's new national standards and centers issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in many of its essays and devotes an entire section of the monograph to those topics in four chapters explicitly focused on how honors can lead in diversity work. Other chapters in *Honors Colleges in the 21st Century* also demonstrate the substantial amount of work that remains to be done in this area. None of the essays in Sederberg's volume contains a list of secondary references, which is partly due to its authors staking out new ground. The articles in this volume, however, are grounded in the robust research about honors education, teaching and learning, and administration from the past half century—numerous chapters contain full-blown literature reviews of their topics.

This volume is also framed through the data collected in a 2021 survey, the most wide-ranging survey of honors colleges ever conducted, though it is important to note that the data were drawn from 166 honors colleges during the 2020–2021 academic year, which was severely disrupted by the COVID global pandemic. I

am grateful to honors staff and administrators who took the time to respond to the extensive survey instrument when they were so busy attending to disruptions of their own operations. The pandemic also brought about major shifts in the way many institutions did business: expanding online classes, shifting to more inclusive enrollment management practices like test optional allowances, and experimenting with inclusive pedagogies such as flexible attendance policies, ungrading, and more varied modes of assessment. Remembering that such changes to operations may have an impact on future data tied to class demographics or retention and persistence rates is important. These current data were collected during a period of sharp pivoting away from some legacy practices. My hope is that this disruption—while horrible in so many ways—will also lead to more inclusive processes becoming the standard in honors education, for example like those laid out recently in NCHC’s position paper, *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion*.

The first two sections of this monograph examine the past, present, and future of honors colleges. Historian Christopher A. Snyder provides important context for the volume by tracing the roots of honors colleges to earlier educational models such as the medieval university, the liberal arts colleges of Colonial America, and the German-inspired research university of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Snyder reminds us that many key features of the Oxford tutorial system like critical thinking and student-centered learning are transformed and updated in twentieth-century American honors education. While this adaptation has the advantage of taking place in the relatively affordable space of a public research university, according to Snyder, a collateral effect may be the negative impact on private colleges. If liberal education continues to decline, Snyder wonders whether “honors colleges [can] carry the banner of liberal education into a more equitable and diverse future” (16).

Guided by a robust survey instrument completed in 2021 by 166 institutions with honors colleges, Andrew J. Cognard-Black and Patricia J. Smith draw up a comprehensive data-based portrait

of the twenty-first-century honors college. These long-time collaborators offer an excellent historical summary of the evolution of honors education while emphasizing some distinctions between honors programs and colleges and highlighting the key features of the contemporary honors college. Their survey instrument depicts common features of honors colleges while also acknowledging the many different models in operation, which certainly complicated their task. Without doubt, researchers will draw on the resultant data for many years going forward.

Two chapters offer blueprints for honors programs looking to transition from an honors program to an honors college. My own essay lays out the many good reasons for starting an honors college, as well as circumstances where the transition might not be warranted. It poses a series of questions stakeholders should ask during the process about who should be involved, the steps to be taken, and the likely challenges along the way; it culminates in a discussion of how to center DEI in the work of the honors college. Sara Hottinger and Clay Motley are two deans who helped oversee the transition to an honors college at their respective public universities, and, along with Megan McIlreavy and Louis Keiner, they walk readers through a step-by-step account of what that real-world process looks like. They explore the importance of a framing case statement for the honors college, collaborating with campus partners on the effort, organizational and staffing considerations, ramping up a more robust enrollment management operation, and managing financial issues such as budgeting and fundraising. They conclude with a seven-point list of key considerations for those thinking about transitioning to an honors college.

The volume next turns to leadership. Three honors college deans examine their own unique role by composing a portrait based on interviews with two dozen fellow honors college deans across the U.S. While Jeff Chamberlain, Thomas M. Spencer, and Jefford Vahlbusch note that this administrative position “def[ies] easy categorization” (138), they come down firmly on the positive side, suggesting honors deans have more flexibility, opportunity, and plain fun than the decanal leaders of other units. Two other

essays focus more on the obligations and challenges that come with the job. Honors college deans Peter Parolin, Timothy J. Nichols, Donal C. Skinner, and Rebecca C. Bott-Knutson identify the many responsibilities that confront them in their daily work, including the imperative to diversify their student bodies, reforming curriculum, centering students in the honors experience, shepherding funds for a unit that sometimes does not fit into neat institutional resource-allocation categories, articulating the value of honors, and stewarding one's administrative team. Malin Pereira, Jacqueline Smith-Mason, Karoline Summerville, and Scott Linneman raise additional important questions in asking why the dean's role has not been more open to women and academics of color. They dig into the problem surrounding how "honors college deans look on average unlike the communities they are leading" (182) and they make some clear recommendations for addressing this challenge. The authors note the need to diversify honors college leadership pathways not only because that outcome will better serve students but because there is a moral imperative for change.

The immense and varied experiences of the honors leaders represented in this volume offer excellent insight into the daily operations of honors colleges. One such chapter by Erin E. Edgington and Linda Frost provides an ample overview of how honors college classes are staffed across the country. They review the costs and benefits of those different models, and they conclude with some thoughts about tenure in honors and some advice for honors college deans. Another chapter takes up donor relations, especially the work of stewarding major gifts. Andrew Martino highlights some of the special responsibilities of honors college deans, especially their role as "storyteller-in-chief" (242) who incessantly reminds students (who are future alums) how the honors college adds value to their educations while informing university stakeholders (including donors) how honors moves the institution forward. While discussing his own experience at Salisbury University's Glenda Chatham and Robert G. Clarke Honors College, Martino surveys the various ways honors college deans can keep donors engaged with the work of honors.

Some of the most exciting (and overdue) work in honors education over the past decade or so has taken place in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This monograph reflects that increased interest across many of its chapters and in a dedicated cluster of essays, the first of which explores how two programs that transitioned to honors colleges in 2017 made DEI work central to the everyday practices of their newly enlarged units. Leaders at two very different institutions, the University of Kentucky and Westminster University, offer accounts of that journey. About the former, Tara M. Tuttle and Kayla Powell describe an expansive approach to building an inclusive and equitable program through staffing changes, modifications of enrollment management practices, cultivating a sense of belonging through advising, collaborating with partners across campus, and empowering students through listening and leadership opportunities. At Westminster University, Julie Stewart was central to a similar effort grounded in a climate survey of honors college students that informed the development of a diversity strategic plan, which has had a marked effect on diversifying the honors student body and prompting other programming changes such as a wellness co-curriculum, establishment of a student diversity coordinator, diversification of student leadership, and student-led events focused on belonging.

A second chapter in this thread argues that honors colleges at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) can not only play an active role in creating inclusive spaces on campus but do so while helping students develop their abilities to bring about social change. Maintaining that these efforts go hand in hand, Susan Dinan, Jason T. Hilton, and Jennifer Willford see this work as especially important in honors because it can help dispel “institutional legacies that situate diversity as counter to quality” (278), and they chart their respective journeys through case studies that provide models for how honors can become campus leaders in DEI efforts.

In a third essay, Teagan Decker, Joshua Kalin Busman, and Michele Fazio, who all work at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, argue for honors colleges—especially those located in regional universities like their own—to act as levers of equity

to counter the “conservative mechanisms through which higher education reproduces the status quo of inequality” (301). Their rendering demonstrates how honors colleges need to shape their practices to be responsive to the populations they serve, paying special attention to issues of identity—rurality or first-generation status, for example—that might cause students to experience higher ed in a multiplicity of ways. Because of the autonomy enjoyed by honors colleges, they are especially positioned to do this work.

A final essay in this section explores how honors colleges can support LGBTQ+ students at faith-based institutions through changes to curriculum, co-curricular programming, climate, and policy. While reviewing some of the tensions between religious and queer identities, Paul E. Prill encourages honors college leaders to take advantage of the many resources available to help ensure that honors spaces in these settings are safe and inclusive. His highly researched essay argues that the autonomy and flexibility present in most honors colleges makes them especially rich sites for innovation in supporting LGBTQ+ students.

Importantly, the four chapters in this DEI unit as well as many others in the volume understand deeply that the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion must move past what Brandon Wolfe and Paulette Patterson Dilworth have dismissively referenced as the “Three F’s of food, festival, and famous people” that so often make up such efforts at many universities. Instead, the authors of this volume propose deep systemic change to the core operations and cultures of honors colleges to transform them into more equitable, inclusive, and just places.

A key feature of honors education has always been the centering of students in the overall enterprise, so the next section examines two ways in which that orientation plays out in honors colleges. Elizabeth Raisanen draws up a model of culturally responsive advising that centers support and belonging in this work because “advising work is the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion . . .” (348). After engaging in an extensive literature review of the role of advising in honors, Raisanen unpacks how culturally responsive advising makes the student the focus of these exchanges with university staff,

which aligns the approach with honors pedagogy, since it turns on the asking of questions and positioning the so-called “expert” as a co-learner with the student. Ultimately, this advising “furtheres the work of equity in honors because culturally responsive advisors are well positioned to help students to continue seeing themselves in honors, even when they struggle academically” (361), especially minoritized students who already face a series of structural barriers to feeling a sense of belonging in honors. Jill Nelson Granger then discusses the varied opportunities for fostering student leadership in honors colleges, blending theory and practice to demonstrate what this work looks like at different honors colleges across the U.S. Such programming pays off in increases in engagement, belonging, community, and program distinctiveness.

Given that honors education has always experimented with student learning, two chapters explore ways in which honors curricula can be a site for innovation. The first, by John Carrell, Aliza S. Wong, Chad Cain, Carrie J. Preston, and Muhammad H. Zaman, proposes an “Honors Liberal Arts for the 21st Century,” in which leaders of honors colleges at Boston University and Texas Tech University recount their process of curriculum revision that pivoted away from a Great Books approach to one combining the liberal arts and STEM in an interdisciplinary curriculum. This new curriculum emphasizes DEI, student empowerment, and global citizenship while taking on some of the world’s most pressing problems and training the next generation of ethically motivated global leaders. Digging into issues such as climate change and migration through the lens of this dynamic curriculum has allowed these two institutions to make a case for students and families that the liberal arts are not only relevant but essential to navigating today’s world.

In the second essay, Virginia Tech’s Paul Knox and Paul Heilker explain the excitement of a problem-based/project-based approach to learning. They advocate for transdisciplinary approaches to course design because they see that format as most apropos for equipping honors college students with the skills to manage the most pressing challenges of the twenty-first century. They argue honors education is especially well suited to advocate for such methodologies because



it is designed to bring together students and faculty from different disciplines. Pressing issues like “income inequality, migration, and gender inequality involve complex interdependencies . . .” (425) that cannot be solved by any one individual, group, or community in isolation; thus, it is incumbent that we train students to think broadly across fields and communities, a task perfectly suited for problem-based and project-based learning.

One of the most noteworthy advances in higher education over the past few decades has been the way universities have turned toward engaging their local communities, a development that has blunted criticisms of “Ivory Tower” institutions cut off from the world. (Indeed, some of the more recent attacks on higher ed seem grounded in the fear that colleges and universities are *too much* of this world.) Heidi Appel and fourteen other leaders of honors colleges and programs at land-grant universities explore their collaboration to construct a “fourth space” in honors for students to address intractable challenges such as food insecurity and climate change. They recommend that members of honors communities engage in this civic and community-based work. In this model, “students are not mere volunteers but participants in community-participatory problem solving founded in complex systems thinking and multidisciplinary approaches” (447); and the authors argue that honors colleges are especially well suited to house this type of active learning. In a second essay in this thread, leaders of honors colleges at three very different two-year institutions—a relatively recent phenomenon in the honors college space—identify the ways in which two-year colleges have long served their communities and draw helpful distinctions between honors programs and honors colleges at two-year colleges. Eric Hoffman, Victoria M. Bryan, and Dan Flores remind us that two-year colleges, as local and accessible institutions, are deeply invested in improving their surrounding communities.

These nineteen essays offer a broad overview of both the theory and practice of honors college education and administration in the twenty-first century, coincidentally one hundred years after Frank Aydelotte established the first U.S. honors program at Swarthmore



College. The more than four dozen voices represented in the volume collectively bring centuries of perspective on student-centered education in honors and demonstrate the striking developments that have occurred in this space over the past two decades. The authors hope that readers will benefit from those perspectives as they take up the challenging yet thrilling work of honors education at their own institutions.

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# HONORS COLLEGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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Part I:  
Honors College Contexts:  
Past and Present



## CHAPTER ONE

# Oxbridge and Core Curricula: Continuing Conversations with the Past in Honors Colleges

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The honors college in America, a phenomenon appearing in the late twentieth century, nevertheless has deep roots stretching back to medieval universities—especially Oxford and Cambridge—and the establishment of liberal arts colleges in colonial America. But the most important catalyst for the sudden appearance and growth of the American honors college is the establishment of the German-style or Humboldtian research university in America in the late nineteenth century and the nearly exponential growth of both its student numbers and financial resources after WWII. This growth, at least for the large public “flagship” and land-grant schools, has often come at the expense of the small liberal arts colleges whose features (or some of them) they have attempted to mimic through honors education (Carnicom). The modern honors

college, marketing an affordable liberal arts education in a residential college while still providing students access to top research faculty and facilities and enjoying the social benefits of a big school, has been a strong lure for high-achieving students across a greater socioeconomic spectrum than that which Ivy League schools have traditionally drawn. Does this trend show signs of continuing well into the twenty-first century? Will democratization, diversity, and affordability continue in the honors college environment, which has traditionally relied on standardized test scores for its selective admissions practices? Is there a common educational philosophy behind this undeniable growth of honors colleges in America?

At the beginning of formal higher education (at least in Europe), there certainly was a common educational philosophy: scholasticism. While the University of Paris (c. 1150) established the seven liberal arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and music) as the basis for the undergraduate curricula at Oxford and Cambridge, it was the appearance of the residential colleges in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that built community and came to define the Oxbridge experience. Modeled in part on the mendicant (i.e., Dominican and Franciscan) houses in their towns, Oxford and Cambridge colleges were often walled and cloistered communities of male scholars who shared meals in a common hall, prayed together in the college chapel, built private libraries (and endowments), and enjoyed common “extracurricular” pursuits: drinking, hunting, sport, and social clubs and societies of every sort. The *universitas* may have collected the money and granted the degrees, but the *collegium* otherwise formed the Oxbridge student’s identity, loyalty, and character.

Scholasticism at Oxford and Cambridge was challenged by the “new learning” of humanism in the sixteenth century, but classics and theology survived as both universities continued to grow but now as Anglican institutions. While Cambridge seemed to be embracing the ascendancy of math and science in the eighteenth century, its rival was viewed by many as a tired training ground for Anglican ministers and a haven for aristocratic slackers. Despite the creation by statute in 1800 and 1807 of new rigorous *viva voce*



(oral) examinations, giving students a chance at the “honour” of a first-class pass, Oxford was not eager for major curricular change (Ellis; Evans 291–95). Parliament itself got involved in reform in the 1850s and 1870s, and as a result Oxford expanded beyond the mandatory classics to form five “schools”—*Literae Humaniores*, or Lit. Hum. (classical languages, literature, and philosophy—colloquially termed “Greats”); mathematics; natural science; modern history; and jurisprudence—while the Oxford tutorial system was reinvigorated. Tutorials—at Cambridge termed “supervisions”—are normally weekly meetings between the college tutor and one to five students in which the tutor supervises the students’ reading and comments on their written work. Tutorials not only formed the basis for undergraduate teaching at Oxford, but, to reformers like John Henry Newman and Benjamin Jowett, were meant to supervise the moral and intellectual growth of students (Evans 247; Ellis 203). In short, an Oxbridge education was intended to be intimate, holistic, and transformative—aspirations taken up by the American honors college.

The scathing rebukes of Oxford issued by *The Edinburgh Review* between 1808 and 1810, and many that followed by members of the Royal Academy, attacked the tutorial system, the dominance of Greek and Latin, and the selection of Fellows, recommending that Oxford and Cambridge follow the example of the research-focused universities of Scotland and Germany. Britain’s senior universities should focus on the Professor rather than the Tutor, proclaimed critics like Sydney Smith, and must be open to a wider array of subjects *and* students. Oxford in particular “was accused of being ignorant of advances in science, moral philosophy and European literature and . . . produced ‘a style of elegant imbecility’ in [its] graduates” (Arthur and Nicholls 136–37).

But this kind of reform would require money. Parliament’s interventions were followed by public funding and the creation of colleges for women and dissenters, while students were no longer required to live in college—an aid to poorer and older students. Both institutions grew their central administrations and research facilities, although the first doctoral degrees were not awarded until

1919 (Oxford) and 1921 (Cambridge), about the same time that women were finally awarded Oxford degrees. After 1886 Oxford students were no longer required to read in classics, though Latin proficiency was still required for the entrance exam, or “Responsions.” As a result, students from state-funded schools gained greater access to Oxbridge, and the number of international students started to grow at both institutions as well.

Similar changes were occurring in America in the nineteenth century. Many of the private institutions that were founded in the Colonial Era as liberal arts colleges and seminaries—Harvard (1636), Yale (1701), Princeton (1746), Columbia (1754)—had evolved into research universities by 1900, although some still mimicked Oxford’s “honours” distinction for undergraduates through passing exams or writing a senior thesis (Standley). Others remained small and undergraduate-focused, supported by healthy endowments. The landscape grew even more crowded with large public “flagships” and land-grants, “normal schools” (for teacher-training), and HBCUs, among others. But the growth of the large universities (public and private) and their drift toward the German research model threatened the American undergraduate experience—inside and outside the classroom—defined by the residential college model. Presidents and faculty leaders at the larger Ivy League institutions as well as the University of Chicago recognized the effect this might have on alumni giving and turned, once again, to Oxford and Cambridge for answers. How could these American universities continue to grow their research profile and graduate education without sacrificing community and identity among their (increasingly steep) tuition-paying undergraduate populations?

The answer to this modern dilemma was to embrace much that was, or gave the appearance of being, medieval in the Oxbridge model (Duke 65ff). Universities could divide their ever-growing campuses into smaller residential “houses” or colleges, often cloistered or at least clustered around quadrangles. They would also embrace Collegiate Gothic style in their new building projects, to remind (or, in some cases, to fool) new students about the antiquity of these universities. While Harvard, Yale, Chicago, and others went

down this path, none was as purposeful and expansive as Princeton under the presidency of Woodrow Wilson (1902–1910). A historian of political thought with a PhD from the very un-Oxbridge Johns Hopkins University, Wilson nevertheless made several trips to Oxford and Cambridge and was determined to remake Princeton along Oxonian lines. His plans included increasing the rigor of Princeton's entrance exams, creating new residential colleges with grand Gothic buildings and cloisters, and remaking the undergraduate curriculum centered on "preceptorials," a modified version of the Oxford tutorial, where the standard lectures given by professors were supplemented with one-hour meetings of small discussion sections led by junior faculty called preceptors (Axtel 112ff). Wilson's new "quads" were in part an attempt to break the exclusivity and excesses of Princeton's notorious eating clubs. A Gothic quadrangle was even planned for Princeton's new residential Graduate College, in which Wilson wanted to extend the liberal arts to prevent the growth of professional or technical schools (Snyder 191).

Yale's transformation along Oxbridge lines came a bit later, in 1933, with the establishing of a system of ten (now fourteen) residential colleges with which all its undergraduates and many of its faculty (as Fellows) are affiliated (Schiff). Construction for eight of the original ten colleges was funded by philanthropist Edward S. Harkness, an admirer of Oxford and Cambridge who had funded the system of residential "houses" at Harvard in 1928, and the plan was pitched to the faculty by Provost Charles Seymour, a Cambridge alumnus. Each Yale college is led by a residential faculty Head of College (the original, problematic title "Master" has recently been abandoned), usually a distinguished senior professor appointed by the president of Yale, working with a dean, often a junior faculty member or other professional. The Head with the help of the Fellows organizes lectures by visiting scholars, teas, and meals for the students while the Dean acts as academic adviser and residential director. Like Oxbridge colleges, Yale's residential colleges are gated and have their own endowments, dining halls, libraries, and other common spaces, while most have courtyards or quadrangles and buildings in the Collegiate Gothic or other revivalist architectural style.

Another significant bridge between these elite American institutions and Oxbridge came in 1904 with the arrival of the first American Rhodes Scholars in Oxford. While in number they have never been large (43 the first year, now 32 each year), the influence of the Rhodes Scholars on American higher education, particularly during the first generation, has been great (Snyder 55–65). From the 1904 group alone came future presidents of Kentucky Wesleyan, the University of Florida, and Reed College; deans at Bowdoin College, Harvard Divinity School, the University of Georgia, University of North Dakota, Lehigh University, and the American University of Beirut; and distinguished professors at Yale, Amherst, the University of Washington, and Montana State University.<sup>1</sup> The next year a football star named Frank Aydelotte (Indiana and Brasenose, 1905) arrived in Oxford to row, run track, and play rugby as well as read English. He would go on to become a faculty member at M.I.T., president of Swarthmore College, director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and American Secretary for the Rhodes Trust from 1918 to 1953. A reformer at Swarthmore, Aydelotte would create the college's Honors Program in 1922 by adapting Oxonian elements—tutorials, upper-level seminars with no grades, final written and oral examinations graded by extramural scholars—to an American liberal arts college, while deemphasizing football (Shoemaker; Guzy 16–19). Aydelotte is widely credited as the founder of honors education in America, even if the widespread growth of honors programs did not happen for several decades (Rinn, "Rhodes Scholarships"; Smith and Scott).

While many American institutions of higher learning had begun eliminating or reducing their classical language requirements by the turn of the century, all American Rhodes Scholars (until 1919) had to demonstrate proficiency in Greek, Latin, and mathematics through a qualifying examination, the equivalent of Oxford's Responsions, before being invited to interview for the Rhodes Scholarship (Aydelotte, "How Rhodes"). Oxford's continuing dedication to classics, however, inspired Rhodes Scholars Stringfellow Barr (Virginia and Balliol, 1917) and Scott Buchanon (Massachusetts and Balliol, 1917) in 1937 to introduce the New Program—a mandatory Great Books curriculum—at St. John's

College in Maryland after they became, respectively, president and dean of that venerable institution, the nation's third oldest (est. 1696). The curriculum centered on small seminars, led by faculty members called tutors rather than professors, with no grades given. Tutorials and preceptorials are also now offered and, like Oxford and Cambridge, students are not required to attend evening lectures given mostly by visiting scholars.

Columbia University had begun the Great Books trend among larger universities with the establishment of its Core Curriculum in 1919 (Montás, *Rescuing Socrates* 23–29). Growing out of its efforts to educate soldiers during WWI, “Contemporary Civilization” (CC) replaced history and philosophy freshman requirements, followed, a year later, by a more humanities focused “General Honors” seminar, later given the Oxonian title “Literae Humaniores,” or Lit. Hum. (Erskine). Both courses were discussion-based seminars, taught by notable faculty members (John Erskine, Mortimer Adler, Mark Van Doren, Jacques Barzun) drawn from many departments, relying on primary sources though read in translation. The University of Chicago followed in 1931 with adoption of its New Plan with Great Books seminars in the humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, and biological sciences. The plan's chief proponent, President Robert M. Hutchins (who had been converted to Great Books by Adler), stated plainly its goal in 1936:

The purpose of education is not to fill the minds of students with facts; it is not to reform them, or amuse them, or make them expert technicians in any field. It is to teach them to think, if that is possible, and to think always for themselves. Democratic government rests on the notion that the citizens will think for themselves. It is of the highest importance that there should be some places where they can learn how to do it. (119)

Teaching students not *what to think* but rather *how to think* has remained the mantra of the Oxford tutorial system (Palfreyman) and can be discerned even in the modern discourse on “critical thinking” and “student-centered learning,” two hallmarks of honors education.

Trends at America's elite institutions would not, by themselves, transform American higher education. Public universities, growing even larger after the post-WWII G.I. Bill, would need to embrace such changes, as, for example, most history departments across America created "Western Civ" courses in response to Columbia's and Chicago's Core experimentation and resulting books (Weber). Joseph W. Cohen, a philosophy professor and inaugural honors director at the University of Colorado, was a pioneer in this regard. At a 1957 conference in Boulder, he conceived the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student (ICSS), created with the support of major grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation (Andrews; Smith and Scott 18–20). With eleven charter members, almost all from large public universities, the committee published a newsletter from 1958 to 1965—forty-seven issues in all—after which it morphed into the National Collegiate Honors Council. In early issues of the newsletter, editor Cohen laments that "unprecedented numbers are about to engulf our institutions," with "landslide enrollments" and obsession with sports threatening the quality of undergraduate education at the very moment when America was losing the space race to the Soviet Union, which had launched Sputnik I in 1957 (qtd. in Andrews 21–22). Cohen and other authors called for a balance of breadth and depth, science as well as humanities in honors education. Larry Andrews' thematic analysis of the issues of the *Superior Student* identifies the concerted effort to combat the elitism charge against honors, arguing instead for "egalitarian' education" (23), though the title of the newsletter making explicit the connection between academic excellence and honors education would complicate that effort. Cohen had urged honors education to go beyond the Aydelotte model—honors for upper-level students only—to include all four years of the undergraduate experience and to expand beyond arts and sciences to include the professional schools. While honors should be flexible and pragmatic to fit the needs of diverse institutions, it should still be "the 'epitome' of liberal arts education," with "small classes (5–20)" where students engage with "primary source material" (Andrews 30–31). Honors programs at public universities should be

producing intellectuals, argued Cohen, able to compete with graduates of elite private institutions. The number of honors programs in the U.S. more than doubled in the first five years of ICSS, from 90 to 241, a period that coincided with increased attendance rates at universities and the beginning of the post-war “Baby Boom” generation’s participation in higher education.

Great Books courses had been in existence at many schools outside “the Ivy+” since Greek and Latin requirements started dropping at the turn of the century, although most now are small and elective programs. UT Austin, Boston College, Boston University, Temple, Emory, Clemson, Mercer, Kansas State, Pepperdine, and Villanova are just a few of the major research universities that still house Great Books programs, while Purdue University recently used Teagle Foundation and NEH grants to launch its “Cornerstone: Integrated Liberal Arts” program, which now has more than 2,000 undergraduates each semester signing up for its two-course sequence, “Transformative Texts,” including honors sections (Peede and Delbanco). A few honors colleges have mandated Greats Books curricula, and some even grant degrees and diplomas.<sup>2</sup> The University of Pittsburgh Honors College houses the Politics & Philosophy degree program, inspired by Oxford’s famed PPE (Philosophy, Politics, and Economics<sup>3</sup>), and offers the B.Phil., an Oxonian research degree. Baylor University has an optional Honors Residential College experience, a college chapel, and great hall (with “high table”), as well as a Great Texts program with both a major and a minor offered. Templeton Honors College at Eastern University, whose current dean is an Oxford-trained ethicist, has an undergraduate curriculum founded on Great Books seminars and offers an MAT in classical education.

By the late 1980s, however, there emerged a considerable backlash against the Great Books (especially by scholars in the humanities) and their two high-profile exponents, Allan Bloom and E. D. Hirsch. This was the beginning of the Culture Wars in America, with many inside academe challenging the hegemony of White, male, straight, and Eurocentric ideas and institutions. As a result of the Culture Wars, the Great Books have evolved into “core



texts,” that is, common readings from both the Eastern and Western traditions, inclusive of voices of writers from underrepresented groups as well as art, architecture, and music. The international Association for Core Texts and Courses (ACTC), with more than 70 institutional members, is dominated by private liberal arts colleges; has extensive ties to Columbia, Chicago, and Yale; and until recently sponsored both students and faculty from America in Oxford. It is currently housed at the University of Dallas, a small Catholic university noted for its rigorous Core Curriculum with Great Books spread across several disciplines. About 35 of the ACTC schools are Catholic institutions with a nearly equal number of Protestant schools (ACTC), although it remains to be seen if the group might connect more formally with honors colleges that employ a core text approach because of the shared curricular affinity.

The Oxford tutorial is more rarely seen in American colleges and universities. New College in Sarasota, the public honors college for the state of Florida, has offered tutorials and undergraduate research experiences since its founding in the 1960s. Ohio University’s Tutorial Honors College is perhaps the only honors college whose curriculum is totally defined by the tutorial (either one-on-one instruction or small seminars), serving some 300 students across 36 programs of study. Institutions as diverse as the University of Maine, Bowling Green, Butler, Gallaudet, Marymount University, Mississippi State, Missouri, Rutgers, William Jewell College, the University of Texas at San Antonio, the University of Tampa, Long Island University, SUNY Albany, and UNC Charlotte all have honors colleges or programs that advertise some form of the tutorial.

The residential college is more prevalent, especially at large public universities. In a 2008 survey of NCHC member institutions, 90% of the honors colleges reported offering some kind of residential honors component with 70% indicating the availability of honors housing for all four years of undergraduate study (Sederberg 34). A much larger NCHC housing survey was conducted in 2012 that included honors programs as well as non-member institutions (Frost and Kay). This time, 97% of the colleges that responded indicated



having some kind of honors housing, while only 76% of honors programs said the same; 42% of the colleges had at least one honors-only residence hall, while 36% had an honors wing in a shared residence hall. In the 2021 Census of Honors Colleges, 77% of the 166 institutions reporting (and 90% of R1 institutions) had dedicated honors residential housing (Cognard-Black and Smith 43).

Not all honors educators and administrators are supportive of honors-only housing. Critics have suggested that these environments exacerbate the elitism of honors, undermine institutional diversity efforts, and play into the “first-class perks” consumerism of our students, or have noted simply the lack of research studies indicating that students perform better because of these environments (Rinn, “Academic and Social Effects”; Badenhausen). At many institutions faculty and administrators resist supporting separate honors curricula, and even more resist honors having small classes (unprofitable), a Great Books program (too ethnocentric and lacking in representation of women and people of color), or large honors credit requirements (particularly from engineering and preprofessional programs). The late John Churchill, Secretary of Phi Beta Kappa, summarized and voiced this criticism most eloquently:

Honors programs and colleges can be a strong positive factor, . . . [but] also may have a negative effect, by concentrating the university’s attention to arts and sciences in one program and leaving everything else drained of their influence. . . . Because of socio-economic disparities, which have been increasing for decades, students bring starkly uneven levels of cultural capital to their undergraduate experience. Aggregating students for liberal arts emphasis in honors colleges can have the effect of intensifying, rather than mitigating, these differences. (8)

Two critics have even suggested that honors colleges are nothing more than “gestures at the true liberal arts experience” and “tacit acknowledgment of the superiority of the small liberal arts college way of doing things” (McWilliams and Serry 8). Yet, market

demands in the enrollment race—with a shrinking high school age population in most states—require an increasingly distinctive honors experience: if we do not offer it, the thinking goes, our competition certainly will. Honors began at many institutions with two objectives: to entice more high-achieving students to enroll and to elevate the intellectual climate across the campus. “Qualitatively,” asserts Hallie E. Savage, “honors students infuse academic excellence into university-wide classrooms by demonstrating a passion for challenge, curiosity, and diligence” (21).

In a 2015 NCHC monograph devoted to honors housing, several case studies were included from institutions large and small, public and private. The University of Massachusetts Amherst planned its Commonwealth Honors College Residential Community, a \$186 million complex that opened in 2013 to house its 3,000 students, as “an integrated living and learning environment that fosters a spirit of community among students and faculty” (Woglom and Lind 48). Of note were the college’s partnership with Residential Life during the planning stages and the 15 new honors faculty who were jointly hired (with 15 different departments). Barrett Honors College at Arizona State University, one of the nation’s largest—5,700 students and 26 dedicated faculty on its 544,000 square-foot campus in Tempe—and most prestigious, did not have to raise any initial money for its \$140 million complex in 2005 as it leased the land to a private development group (Jacobs 87). ASU president Michael Crow looked to Swarthmore for the new Barrett Dean, Mark Jacobs, seeking to build “an entity with the quality of a private residential college but interfacing seamlessly with the resources and excitement of one of the nation’s largest research universities” (84). When West Virginia University president David Hardesty, a Rhodes Scholar himself (WV and Queen’s, 1967), created the Resident Faculty Leader Program in 1996, he envisioned an Oxbridge student *and* faculty living-learning community at his alma mater that would aid in freshman retention. The WVU Honors Dean at the time, Keith Garbutt and Christine Garbutt, his wife, became Faculty Leaders in the newly opened Honors Hall in 2009 and witnessed over five years an increase in honors students in campus leadership positions and success in pursuing national fellowships (Garbutt and Garbutt).

The profile of an honors college, including its curriculum, naturally reflects the leadership and faculty and student culture of the institution. When I arrived as the founding dean of the Shackouls Honors College at Mississippi State University in 2011, I was a medievalist coming from a small Catholic university and a decade of researching and teaching at Oxford. A major gift of \$10 million from Judy and Bobby Shackouls in 2007 created the college just as the old University Honors Program and its 1,400 students were moving into a residence hall in a new residential village. The Shackouls Honors College now has about 2,600 students and 10 faculty residing in three residence halls clustered around a large courtyard where we stage Greek and Roman plays. Our curriculum—the *Cursus Honorum*—includes two core-text “Quest” courses for first-year students, interdisciplinary and problem-based seminars in all general education areas beginning the second year, and a required study abroad experience and senior honors thesis. Our thriving summer Oxford Program, with tutorials taught by Oxford faculty and Oxford college membership, provides an opportunity for MSU honors students to see firsthand the medieval roots of American honors education. Many of our Faculty Fellows over the last decade also have had experience, as former students and/or instructors, in classics or core-text programs at the University of Chicago, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and Oxford.

Like many other public honors colleges, we certainly stress to prospective students that they can get an *affordable* Oxbridge and residential liberal arts college experience at an R1 institution if they join our community. Where else can one enjoy tutorials, classical drama, and SEC football all in one place?! Endowed honors colleges, in particular, can offer students scholarships, support for research and conference travel, and funded international study opportunities, all of which compensates (partially) for declining state appropriations for the institution overall. Top scholarship packages—and already low tuition (especially for in-state students)—have helped many public honors colleges compete against expensive elite institutions that award few to no merit scholarships. And while highly selective privates like Harvard and Yale still dominate prestigious external scholarships like the Rhodes and the

Marshall, honors students from public universities can compete through mentorship and fellowship offices that are often housed in honors colleges. Becoming elite, in other words, without being elitist (Gee and Blemings). Or, to quote again Robert M. Hutchins, “The best education for the best is the best education for all.”

The enormous success of public university honors colleges over the last two decades, however, has come at a price. Many of the nation’s smaller, private liberal arts institutions are suffering from enrollment declines and financial distress not seen since the closure of 167 private four-year colleges between 1967 and 1990 (Hawkins 21). This decline in liberal education has been well documented in books and articles in recent years, even while the liberal arts (and especially the humanities) have been vigorously defended by educators and public intellectuals (e.g., Delbanco; Ferrall; Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity* and *Not for Profit*; Roth; and Zakaria). While students are still taking courses in disciplines traditionally defined as liberal arts, the fact remains that the number of liberal arts colleges in America has declined from about 500 to fewer than 200, educating fewer than 100,000 students in total, while NCHC can in 2021 claim more than 700 member institutions—including approximately 165 honors colleges—and over 330,000 honors students (Kimball 23; Cognard-Black and Smith 28).<sup>4</sup> That the overwhelming number of prestigious liberal arts colleges reside in the northeast—where population decline is greatest—also does not bode well for the future of this once-dominant American institution.<sup>5</sup>

If the numbers and influence of small liberal arts colleges continue to wane in America, can (or should) honors colleges carry the banner of liberal education into a more equitable and diverse future? Public and political assaults on the classics and the humanities, the perceived failures of “liberalism,” market- and data-driven decision-making by university boards and administrators, the continuing ascent of high tech and health science jobs—none of these trends suggest that the liberal arts are seen broadly as a common good (Keller). But, as Columbia’s Roosevelt Montás points out, despite the rising importance of technology and specialized knowledge at the university, these do not address the fundamental questions about *our humanity*:

the college is the place where the university must concern itself not with what we know, but with the meaning of knowledge . . . [and] to grapple with and give institutional form to a vision of the ultimate ends of education and of human development. . . . The college within the research university is there to keep alive—and to invent anew with each generation—a vocabulary through which we explore what it means to be human. . . . The essential dilemmas of existence and of human consciousness are not so different today than they were 100 or 200 years ago, or, in fact, than they were in the Middle Ages and Antiquity. (Montás, “By Order” 10–11)

Just as Oxford and Cambridge faced pressure from politicians and industrialists in the mid-nineteenth century, all American institutions that pay at least lip service to liberal education will continue to face legitimate questions of access and relevance in the twenty-first century. Those honors colleges that can balance the “unpractical” but essential liberal arts with the technical training of career preparation (even if that is somewhat of a moving target), that can offer communities of excellence beyond simply a “value-added” philosophy, are more likely to survive this long period of dwindling public support. Oxford’s and Cambridge’s nearly one-thousand-year track records of success in building intellectual communities that have produced leaders in every walk of life—all while becoming diverse, world-leading research universities—will continue to make Oxbridge an attractive model for honors programs and colleges to emulate.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>According to Frank Aydelotte (*The Oxford Stamp* 66), some 40 percent of American Rhodes Scholars between 1904 and 1917 ended up teaching at colleges and universities.

<sup>2</sup>In the 2021 NCHC Census of Honors Colleges, 11% of honors colleges reported having Great Books programs, 82% had seminar-style teaching, and 7% offered tutorials (Cognard-Black and Smith 42).

<sup>3</sup>The Philosophy, Politics, and Economics course at Oxford was created in 1920 and called “Greats Without Greek” or “Modern Greats” to distinguish it from the classics course, still called “Greats.”

<sup>4</sup>A 2012 study of IPEDS data (Baker et al.) concluded that only 130 institutions in the U.S. met the criteria of a small liberal arts college (SLAC). The NCHC 2016 Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges showed that, of 2,550 qualified institutions, 1,503 delivered campus-wide honors education, and of these 182 were honors colleges, up from only 23 in 1994 (Smith and Scott; Cognard-Black). The 2021 NCHC Census identified 248 honors colleges, or about 17% of U.S. universities with honors education (Cognard-Black and Smith 42), while the newly formed Council for Public Honors Education (CoHE, which is affiliated with the APLU) currently has 131 member honors colleges (28). There is some overlap in these two associations.

<sup>5</sup>In the prestigious Annapolis Group <<https://www.annapolisgroup.org/colleges>>, with its 120 member institutions, there are more liberal arts colleges represented in Pennsylvania alone (17) than in Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, and Tennessee combined (14). Nineteen states—Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming—are not represented at all. According to 2020 U.S. Census data <<https://www.census.gov/data.html>>, population in the South grew 10.2% and the West grew 9.2% since 2010, while the Northeast (4.1%) and Midwest (3.1%) grew much less.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# Characteristics of the 21st-Century Honors College

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As the Swarthmore College Honors Program, the first of its kind, has just celebrated the 100th anniversary of its 1922 founding, the national honors community has had occasion to pause and reflect on the growth and evolution of honors in this last century (Rinehart). One piece of this evolution is the growing distinction between the honors program and the honors college. Despite the label of “honors college” having been documented as far back as 1960 (Cohen), the trend of converting existing honors programs to honors colleges and drawing programmatic distinctions between the two began to truly take root approximately 30 years ago. We can find evidence of these discussions in *The National Honors Report* and at national conferences of the NCHC throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Madden; Sederberg, Introduction).

In 2005, Peter C. Sederberg documented the trend of the growing number of honors colleges throughout the United States. Sederberg theorized that the trend or “phenomenon” of an increase in honors colleges could be attributed to “an interest in raising the public profile of honors education at a particular institution” (“Characteristics” 121). Furthermore, he offered an analysis of the contemporary characteristics based on a survey of those he and his team identified. Sederberg’s work made a significant and lasting contribution to honors literature because it not only documented the early evolution of honors colleges but further defined the characteristics that would come to be seen as making an honors college distinct from an honors program.

Sederberg’s work documented the interest that NCHC’s executive committee began to take in the “honors college phenomenon” as well, and through his publication, we first see the expectation that the name “honors college” should carry with it something more substantive than that of an honors program. He states: “If an institution is simply gilding the name, then ‘honors college’ becomes a devalued misnomer designed as a marketing strategy and intended to mislead potential applicants into believing that something new exists where, in fact, substance remains unchanged” (“Characteristics” 121). Cheryl Achterberg—another key voice in early conversations around definitional specificity—stated that “honors colleges should make a distinctive qualitative difference in the life of a university as well as a difference in the entry statistics for each freshman class” (94). Along with Achterberg’s 2004 essay, Sederberg’s work was significant because it not only began to draw distinctions between the nature of honors programs and colleges as “a particular subset of the larger species,” but further set an expectation that these distinctions should be present. It is that subspecies of honors education, the “honors college,” that this volume seeks to explore (“Characteristics” 122).

## **THE ROLE OF THE NCHC BASIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Fueled by the formation of the National Collegiate Honors Council in 1966, the last half of the twentieth century ushered in waves of new honors programs serving students at institutions around the country (Rinehart; Austin; Byrne). By the early 1990s, the honors

community found itself with a great deal of variety among the programs in both mission and structure. With this level of diversity from one program to the next, it became apparent to NCHC and the honors community that more descriptors of what constituted a “fully developed” honors program were needed. In 1993, using characteristics endorsed originally by the Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student in 1961, the Executive Committee of the National Collegiate Honors Council successfully approved a document consisting of “Sixteen Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program,” revised in 2007 to include 17 characteristics (“Basic . . . Program”; Chaszar; Cohen; Cummings). Sederberg’s 2004 study focusing on existing characteristics of NCHC institutional members bearing the name “Honors College” subsequently prompted the NCHC’s creation of the “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College” (“Basic . . . College”).

Although labeled as “characteristics,” these documents played a role in shaping the nature of honors programs by creating language that guided the creation and further development of honors programs and colleges nationally. Despite their limitations, the Basic Characteristics were influential because no other formal guide to honors education existed. Although not necessarily the intention of the Executive Committee at the time, delineating the core differences between an honors program and an honors college gave honors administrators a roadmap to choose one of the two models. An even greater number of institutions looked at the characteristics as something that could challenge them to grow and/or evolve. While there is no evidence of whether honors colleges were significantly different when the label first began to appear, evidence from the 2016 Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges suggests there is now a demonstrable difference nationally between the shape and structure of honors programs and honors colleges (Scott et al.).

## **RESEARCH ON THE SHAPE AND STRUCTURE OF HONORS NATIONALLY**

Over the last ten years, Richard I. Scott, Patricia J. Smith, and Andrew J. Cognard-Black, among others, have produced a series

of articles examining the extent to which honors education is being delivered at institutions of higher education, the nature and characteristics of these honors programs and colleges, and the differences across programs based on institutional characteristics (Scott; Scott and Smith; Smith and Scott, “Demography”; Scott et al.; Cognard-Black et al.; Cognard-Black and Savage). Scott examined infrastructural and programmatic differences between honors colleges and programs, as well as among programs, and between those at two-year and four-year institutions. Scott and Smith delved deeply into functions of institutional mission and control for both honors programs and colleges. Smith and Scott then mapped the location and regional affiliation of all honors programs and colleges in the United States (“Demography”). Each of these articles identified inter-institutional relationships and therefore provided an understanding of systemic variation in honors education as well as a more refined look at the nature of honors colleges compared to that of honors programs.

Through this collection of articles, clear patterns were identified among honors types in NCHC. The 2012–2013 NCHC membership survey demonstrated that the characteristics of honors programs and colleges varied widely by institutional type and by program type, but that within institutional and program type, there were more commonalities than differences (Scott). Additionally, for the first time, the honors college could be seen as distinct from its four-year and two-year honors program counterparts. The honors college model was found to have markedly more complex infrastructure and greater resources (Scott). Another evolutionary characteristic that resulted from further study of the honors college model was that many more honors colleges are located at public universities than private ones (Cognard-Black and Savage; Scott and Smith). “There are,” according to Cognard-Black and Savage, “only four honors colleges at private institutions of 4,000+, and among the 92 schools over 10,000 in size there are no (zero) private schools with an honors college . . .” (101). This was a notable discovery about the nature of honors colleges because in the history of honors program evolution, institutional control (public vs. private) has not formerly separated

honors programs, with nearly equal percentages of public and private institutions having honors programs.

Beyond institutional control, Scott and Smith determined that the distribution of honors programs and colleges also varies by institutional type, with many more honors colleges in Doctoral Universities compared to Comprehensive/Master's Universities, Baccalaureate Colleges, or Associate's Colleges. The 2014 NCHC Admission, Retention, and Completion (ARC) Survey showed that honors colleges, on average, serve 2.5 times as many students as the typical honors program and report greater support structures such as honors tutors, honors ambassadors, honors study abroad offerings, honors housing, honors-specific advising, and priority course registration for honors students (Cognard-Black et al.). The 2016 Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges revealed that four-year institutions with honors colleges enroll twice as many total undergraduate students as those institutions with honors programs. Furthermore, the number of honors students being served by these honors colleges is nearly three times as many as their honors program counterparts (Scott et al.). It was again affirmed that honors colleges exist primarily in public institutions (89%), whereas the honors program model is the dominant model for private institutions (53%). The results of the 2016 Census also included data about the title for the head of honors; these data showed that the dean position is the most common title for the chief honors academic officer (Scott et al.). The continued growth in the number of honors colleges—some new to honors education and some having converted from an honors program to an honors college in recent years—raises questions about the degree to which these earlier findings continue to accurately describe honors colleges nationally, and what other characteristics might be emerging.

## **2021 CENSUS OF U.S. HONORS COLLEGES**

The 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges was administered to the primary contact person of all honors colleges. The foundation of the distribution list for the survey came from the National Collegiate Honors Council list of member institutions that had

previously indicated the presence of an honors college. That list was further built using a web-crawl of all institutions of higher education registered in the National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) database to correct contact information and identify additional honors colleges at institutions not in the NCHC membership database.

Questions included in the Census survey can be found in Appendix B. The survey was launched May 12, 2021. The Qualtrics survey platform was used to conduct the survey online, and email invitations were the primary medium for invitation. To minimize loss of respondents to spam filters and missed emails, a postcard informing respondents of the survey launch was sent to respondents to coincide with the launch date. (See Appendix C.) Three reminder email notices were sent on June 15th, July 15th, and August 9th. Between the penultimate and final reminders, approximately 126 respondents with incomplete surveys were contacted by phone to verify that the invitations had been received and to remind them to complete the survey. Most of those calls (84%) resulted in voicemail messages left according to a script that briefly described the survey, reminded respondents about the deadline, and invited respondents to contact one of the survey project leaders if they had questions or required a new survey link. Of the 126, 17 calls resulted in direct voice-to-voice contact. Five of those said they didn't remember receiving the email, prompting verification of email addresses, a few of which were updated and generated new email invitations. Thirteen of the 17 said they intended to complete the survey. The survey was officially closed on August 16th. Of the 248 eligible institutions at which honors colleges were identified, 166 completed the survey, for an overall response rate of almost 70%, a rate which is considered very good among survey researchers.

Detailed descriptive statistics for the survey are presented in Appendix A. The response rate varied across Carnegie classification of institutions with honors colleges at Associate's Degree and Baccalaureate Colleges (31% and 42%, respectively) pulling down the overall average response rate. Response at Research Universities was considerably higher, with what would be regarded as very high

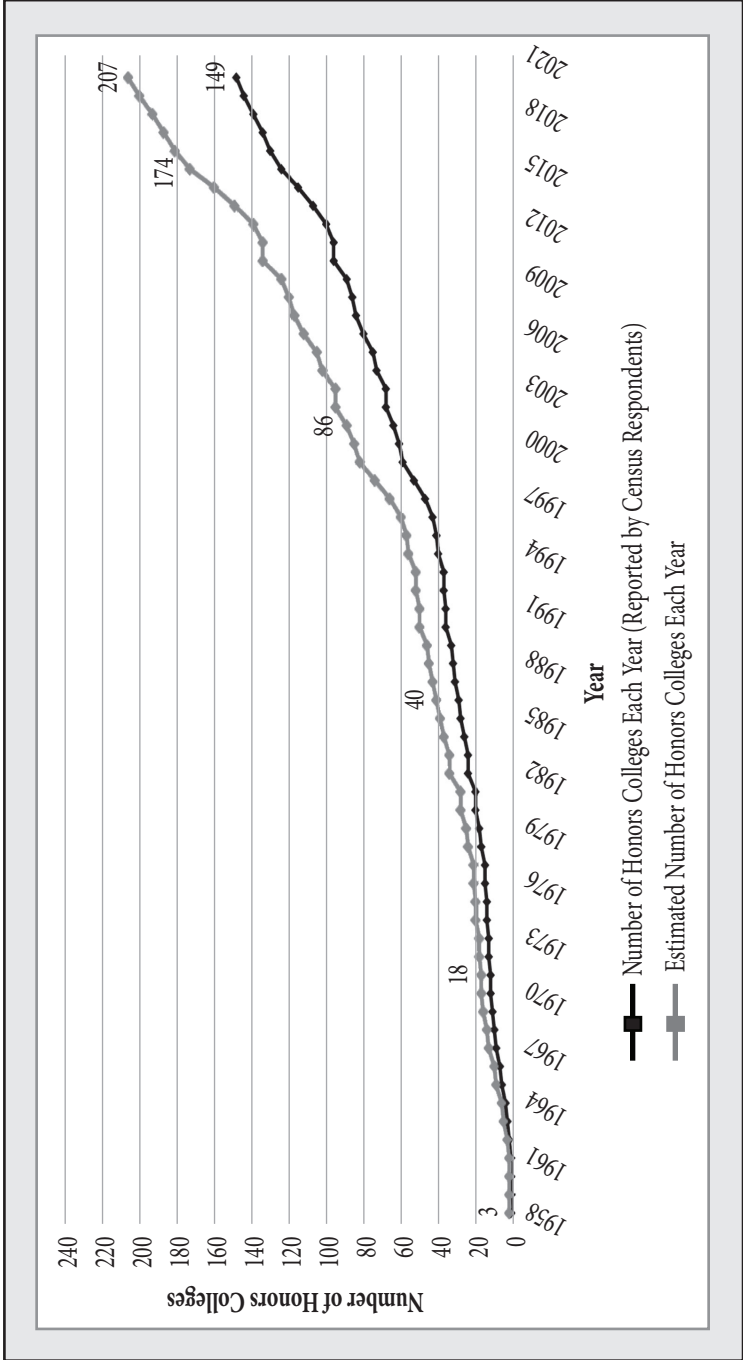


response rates of 80% for Research 1 and 75.3% for Research 2 and 3 universities (for simplicity, we use the more traditional R1, R2, and R3 designations as shorthand for the “very high research activity,” “high research activity,” and other “doctoral university” language adopted more recently). Response rates at Master’s Universities were slightly lower than the overall average, with 65%, but that level of response and respondent engagement for Master’s Universities is still considered quite high. As readers will note in the summary statistics that follow, honors college structure is comparatively rare at Baccalaureate and Associate’s Colleges. Lower response rates among Baccalaureate and Associate’s Colleges combined with the smaller number of those honors colleges mean that there are not many liberal arts colleges or two-year degree colleges in the Census survey data. What data are available suggest that honors colleges at Baccalaureate and Associate’s Colleges are very different from those at universities, but readers should interpret numbers for Baccalaureate and Associate’s Colleges with considerable caution. Sample sizes for Research 1 (R1), Research 2 and 3 (R2/3), and Master’s Universities are, however, sufficient for useful comparisons. While the summary statistics presented here are based on only those honors colleges responding to the survey, we believe the results to be a fair representation of honors colleges nationally when it comes to those at national and regional universities.

## **RECENT INCREASES IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HONORS COLLEGES**

Existing honors literature has offered only a snapshot of the number of honors colleges in existence at a given time, and as a result we have not always had an accurate picture of the exponential growth of honors colleges. The 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges allowed a closer look at the projected timeline by asking honors college respondents, “In what year was your honors college founded?” Figure 1 begins to paint a fuller picture of the pace of growth that honors colleges have experienced at Research and Master’s Universities.

**FIGURE 1. GROWTH IN THE FORMATION OF HONORS COLLEGES—ESTIMATED NUMBER OF HONORS COLLEGES AT RESEARCH AND MASTER'S UNIVERSITIES IN THE UNITED STATES BY YEAR**



*Source:* 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges (n = 149)

*Note:* Estimates were derived from a Census question asking respondents, “In what year was your honors college founded?” These numbers, however, are known to be an undercount because they are based on only those who responded to the survey. To arrive at a more accurate count of the actual number of honors colleges in existence in a given year, estimates were derived by multiplying the number for a given year by the ratio of known honors colleges in 2021 (207) to the number that responded in the Census in 2021 (n = 149), a factor of 1.389. This approach assumes the same degree of undercount across the time series from 1958 to 2021, but the actual number should not be less than reported in the survey, and the gray line is a reasonable estimate that should be closer to the real numbers than the counts derived from Census data alone.

The estimated growth documented in Figure 1 is consistent with the snapshots we have from existing honors literature. In 1994, Madden documented at least 24 identified honors colleges, whereas a decade later, Sederberg had identified 68 (“Characteristics” 121). By 2007, Scott and Frana found the NCHC list of institutional members calling themselves honors colleges had grown to 92, but it was unknown how many non-member honors colleges had formed by that date. NCHC’s survey of institutional members in 2012 identified 140 honors colleges (Scott), and by 2016, Scott and Smith documented 182 honors colleges, nearly double what had been identified eight years earlier. Furthermore, the 182 honors colleges identified in 2016 then accounted for more than 12% of all the honors programs or colleges nationally at that time. In each case, honors colleges have continued to grow in number but, based on the estimated growth, have likely been underrepresented in the surveys that have sought to describe their traits and characteristics. This is especially true for non-NCHC member honors colleges, which have been harder to identify because of the relative absence from national conversations about honors education.

Sederberg’s 2004 survey no doubt included many of the original honors colleges among its participants, but even from among that first core group, he pointed out that 60% had “been established since 1993 and 80 percent grew out of a preexisting honors program” (“Characteristics” 125). In 2021, we now see that 89.1% of honors colleges reported emerging from a previously existing honors program. In 2008, Cobane wrote: “By 2025, we can expect that most university honors experiences will be within honors colleges” (25). While more honors programs are adopting the honors college model with each passing year, honors colleges are not yet the predominant honors structure. Because honors colleges tend to serve a greater number of students than the traditional honors program, as the 2016 Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges showed, there may not need to be a majority honors college structure for the majority of student honors experiences to take place within the honors college structure (Scott et al.). We could also modify Cobane’s prediction by saying that most university honors experiences will be within honors colleges at public universities rather than private

ones. Of the honors colleges at Research and Master's Universities responding to the 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges, only about one in eight are at private institutions (honors colleges at private R1 Universities are even rarer). That's in a nation where, according to data from the U.S. Department of Education, over half of Research and Master's Universities are private, so it is quite clear that honors education is primarily a phenomenon within public higher education.

Among the 163 respondents to the 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges that reported total enrollment, they averaged 987.8 honors students each. The size, or mean enrollment, of the honors college varies by institutional type, with R1 Universities averaging 2,093.5 students, R2/3 Universities averaging 720.7, and Master's Universities averaging 450.9. In regards to the total population of students being served within each institutional type, R1 Universities, with their historically larger campus enrollments, still serve the greatest percentage of honors students within the institution—10% compared to 6% and 7% at all other institutional types. These larger enrollments within R1 Universities are supported by their large incoming first-year class sizes, which averaged 571.2 across this institutional type, compared to other institutional types all averaging below 200 students.

### **INSTITUTIONAL SIZE AND STRUCTURE OF HONORS COLLEGES**

Sederberg was among the first to categorize the organizational structures that honors colleges were beginning to take. Sederberg identified two major structural types, the “centralized overlay structure” and the “freestanding college” in his 2004 survey (“Characteristics” Rpt. 28). The same language was used in the 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges. While Sederberg did not define these categories, we understand the “centralized overlay structure” as referring to a central honors administration that coordinates honors curriculum and programming that is delivered through other entities of the institution. An example of this might include a dean with a central administrative staff overseeing a collection of honors programs or courses offered within other academic

colleges. In contrast, the free-standing structure allows for oversight of all aspects of its curriculum and program delivery under direct supervision. According to Sederberg, “freestanding” honors colleges were also more likely to “possess a significant faculty budget, and their own faculty will provide most of their courses” (“Characteristics” Rpt. 32).

Although that first survey included only 35 respondents (he reported a 54% response rate from among the 65 colleges he contacted), it is interesting to compare the findings of this survey done almost two decades ago to the organizational structure that honors colleges reported in 2021. In 2004, 68.6% of honors colleges reported a “centralized overlay structure” of university undergraduate programs compared to 58.2% of honors colleges today. The centralized overlay of university undergraduate programs remains the most common relationship for the honors college to take with the larger institution. The percent of honors colleges reporting a free-standing college structure, however, has grown dramatically, increasing threefold, from only 14.3% in 2004 to 45.6% in 2021 (Sederberg, “Characteristics” Rpt. 28). The growth in the number and percentage of free-standing colleges with independent curriculums represents the biggest change in this area, and will be discussed in more detail below. In 2004, 5.7% reported having a decentralized coordinating structure providing an honors core overseeing departmentalized honors (Sederberg, “Characteristics” Rpt. 28). The prevalence of this structure remains a rare form, with 8.9% reporting the same type of structure in 2021. While we do not have data on the 11.4% of honors colleges that indicated an organizational structure of “other” in 2004, a closer examination of the 2021 Census reveals numerous honors colleges now comprise a free-standing college with an independent curriculum as well as a centralized overlay structure. This overlap of institutional relationship may represent an intentional design, but it may also reflect temporary transitional arrangements as honors colleges emerge from the structures of their former honors program model.

The title and institutional location of honors college leaders is another area in which we can now compare the evolution of honors

over the last two decades, and the evidence shows that the most common arrangement is to have an honors head with the title of dean, who is working on a 12-month contract and who reports directly to the provost/vice-president for academic affairs. In 2004, Sederberg found that 77.1% of honors colleges had an administrative head with the title of dean. In 2021, this rate appears to be a little lower overall, with a rate of 67.1%, but the apparent difference is likely because of the presence in the 2021 Census of more Master's Universities, Associate's Colleges, and Baccalaureate Colleges, where it is less common for honors heads to have the title of dean. When looking at Research Universities, we found that the prevalence of honors deans is more in line with what Sederberg found; dean titles among honors heads are most common among R1 universities (86.1%) and R2/3 universities (67.2%). Placing deans in charge of honors colleges at Master's Universities is somewhat rarer (58.5%), but even so, the title of dean is still clearly the most common option for honors colleges at national and regional universities in the United States. The second most common titular option for honors heads is the title "director," and that option is fairly typical at Master's Universities, although placing directors as the chief academic leaders of honors colleges is less common, with only one in four having that title.

Consistent with the prevalence of honors deanships and the standard location of deans within university hierarchies, 73.5% of all honors college administrators report to the Provost/Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and this rate is again highest at the R1 (83.7%), R2/3 (72.7%), and Master's Universities (73.2%). By contrast, only 50% of honors heads at Baccalaureate colleges and 37.5% of those at Associate's Colleges report to the provost/VPAA. Most honors colleges report having both a faculty oversight committee (67.5%) and a student honors council (62.4%). Fewer than half report having an external advisory board (44.6%), but this type of board is much more common at R1 Universities, where 70% report such a governance structure.

The prevalence of 12-month contracts among honors heads appears to be high and essentially unchanged between Sederberg's

2004 survey—which showed 82.8% had 12-month contracts—and the 2021 Census. Among honors heads in 2021, 84.0% reported a 12-month contract, with very little variation among universities. A 12-month contractual arrangement would appear to be much rarer among honors college heads at Baccalaureate and Associate's Colleges, although, again, results for those schools should be interpreted with caution.

In terms of the likelihood of housing other kinds of campus programming, Associate's Colleges appear to be the most likely to report oversight of other high-impact practice programs on campus. While the number of Associate's Colleges reporting was less than a third of all eligible participants, which is a small group already, more than half of the respondents (57.1%) reported housing campus-wide undergraduate research and service learning opportunities within their honors college, and more than a quarter (28.6%) reported housing campus-wide teaching and learning initiatives. Other campus-wide programs housed within honors colleges include fellowship advising, which is most commonly cited, especially at R1 (64.3) and R2/3 (52.2%) universities.

Beyond institutional type, the honors college's relationship to the larger institution may also explain some of the variability in administrative title, reporting lines, contract structures, and an area yet to be discussed, tenure for faculty (Table 1). In every case except tenure within honors, the differences in these areas were found to be statistically significant. Title for the honors head varied significantly by free-standing structure, with 81% of free-standing honors colleges having an honors head with the title of dean versus only 62.5% of those schools without free-standing honors colleges. Similarly, 84.1% of free-standing colleges have heads that report to the provost, compared to 70.1% of those without free-standing colleges. Furthermore, 95.2% of free-standing honors college heads have a 12-month contract as compared to only 84.1% of without free-standing honors colleges. Further research is needed to examine the degree to which the relationship of the honors college to the larger institution may influence the arrangement of other structural features within honors.



The 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges also included questions tapping into which campus stakeholder initiated organization of honors as a college, and the most common responses were either a president or other upper administration (35.4%) or both upper administration and honors personnel equally (25.6%). With administrative support, the number of honors colleges within the United States continues to grow, but the motivations for introducing new honors colleges or transforming honors programs into colleges have changed very little. Sederberg noted that the top four reasons reported for establishing an honors college were to “recruit stronger students” (100%), “improve overall campus academic quality” (91.4%), “improve the quality of honors educational opportunities” (88.6%), and raise “the profile of honors within the institution” (85.7%). The 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges framed the question slightly differently, asking respondents to select their top three reasons for establishing an honors college. Recruiting top students (51.7%), raising visibility of honors on campus (53.7%), promoting innovative curriculum (43.6%), and creating more opportunities for students (42.3%) continued to be the most highly ranked choices from the available options. Recruiting top students appeared to be a somewhat more important motivation among R1 universities than other universities (67.5% vs. 50%), while raising the visibility of honors on campus appeared to be substantially more important among Master’s Universities (75% vs. 40–50%).

**TABLE 1. ORGANIZATIONAL FEATURES BY PRESENCE OF FREE-STANDING COLLEGE STRUCTURE WITH INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM**

	Free-Standing Structure (%) (n = 63)	Not Free- Standing (%) (n = 89)
Honors head has dean title	81.0%*	62.5%
Honors head reports to provost	84.1%*	70.1%
Honors head has 12-month contract	95.2%*	84.1%
Tenure is available for faculty in honors	15.3%	5.8%

\* p ≤ .05 (two-tailed test)

Source: 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges (n = 152)

Despite the small sample size and low participation rates among Associate's Colleges, their top four motivations vary slightly in that while the majority still reported an interest in raising visibility on campus (62.5%), promoting innovative curriculum (62.5%), and creating more opportunities for students (50%), interestingly only 12.5% of Associate's Colleges reported recruiting top students as a primary factor for choosing an honors college structure rather than an honors program structure. The next most common reason reported was to give honors more institutional autonomy (50%), which may lend further evidence for the notion that the motivations for Associate's Colleges to carry the honors college name are different from honors colleges at other types of institutions.

## **ADMISSIONS AND RECRUITMENT**

The 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges allowed us to investigate the contemporary admissions and recruitment practices of honors colleges. Across all institutional types, it is typical for honors colleges to have their own dedicated applications (84.8%) and to have control over the decision of which students to admit (93.3%), especially at Master's Universities, where these characteristics appear to be nearly universal. While standardized tests were still being used as a factor for admission by 69.2% of all honors colleges, an emerging trend revealed in the new 2021 Census data is that, compared to the 65% of honors programs and colleges reporting having a "minimum ACT or SAT score for admission to honors" in the 2014–2015 ARC survey, fewer honors colleges (31.9%) now report having a minimum standardized test score (National Collegiate Honors Council, "Percent"). This shift may have some connection to the timing of the survey in 2021, which occurred amidst the COVID crisis, a time when limited standardized testing availability and other issues of access were being called into question (Moody). For those reporting the use of standardized tests to establish a minimum for honors eligibility, the average minimum score was 26 for ACT and 1,202.8 for SAT. Grade point average is also a factor for admission at nearly all (93.7%) honors colleges,

with 54.9% having a minimum weighted GPA requirement averaging 3.56.

Data from the 2021 Census provide some evidence that honors colleges are moving more to holistic admissions practices. In addition to GPA and standardized test scores, 77.4% of honors colleges require an essay, 69.7% consider a record of co-curricular activities, and 51.6% consider the rigor of previous curriculum as some of the factors that inform the decision to admit a student to the honors college. Letters of recommendation (48.4%), other non-academic attributes (47.1%), and short answer responses (44.5%) are also common factors for admission into U.S. honors colleges. An interview for admission is the least common factor (20.6%). Interviews may be more common at Associate's (66.7%) and Baccalaureate Colleges (50%) where the number of students being admitted into a first-year cohort is considerably smaller, but whether interviews are truly more common in such schools is unclear in light of the small numbers of schools responding within those segments of the sample. Only a very small number of honors colleges charge an application fee. This rate is 2.4% for R1 and 2.6% at Master's Universities, but no schools reported a specific honors application fee at the other types of institutions.

Very few institutions have a 100% admission rate into the honors college, but 5.7% of honors colleges do have open admission. Nearly one-quarter of all honors colleges (23.6%) have an acceptance rate for the first-year cohort of 50% or less. Honors colleges boast an impressive yield, however, with 60% of honors colleges reporting 50% or more of admitted students deciding to enroll in the honors college. Yield appears to be considerably less, however, at R1 Universities, where only about half as many honors colleges report comparable yield at the 50% rate or higher. High yield may be particularly true for Associate's Colleges and Baccalaureate Colleges, where most of the institutions responding reported a yield rate of higher than 50%, but the small numbers of respondents in these categories mean that this conclusion should be regarded as provisional. Higher yield at Baccalaureate Colleges may have something to do with scholarship practices at such colleges, given that

66.7% of these honors colleges reported awarding scholarships to 76% or more of their first-year cohort.

Offering honors scholarships appears to be fairly common at honors colleges at larger universities as well, sometimes based on merit alone (39.2% of colleges reporting), but more often based on a combination of merit and need (45.1%). Just over half of honors colleges report offering such honors scholarships to 0–25% of first-year honors admits, but only about one-third of honors colleges at Research and Master's Universities offer scholarships to 76% or more of their incoming first-year cohort. On first glance, the practice of offering honors scholarships to almost all incoming honors students (76–100%) appears to be about half as likely at universities as it is at Baccalaureate Colleges, but, again, the numbers for those smaller colleges should be interpreted with caution.

About one-quarter of honors colleges (25.8%) charged students a participation fee in 2021. Having a fee for participation in the honors college is most common at R1 (36.6%) and R2/3 (25.8%) universities. The average fee varies significantly by institutional type among those reporting such a fee, with the mean annualized fee of \$722 for R1 universities, and a median of \$500. Research 2 & 3 universities, however, have much lower honors college fees, on average (mean = \$185; median = \$150). When present, the fee varies considerably, from as little as \$8 at two different schools to as much as \$3,000 at one (the next highest were \$2,000, \$1,500, and \$1,150, but otherwise fees were less than \$1,000). The percentage of institutions reporting a program fee appears to be up slightly compared with the NCHC 2016 Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges, which reported only 17% of honors colleges charging such a fee. The difference between the 2021 survey and the \$552 mean fee reported in 2016 may suggest a different sample composition weighted disproportionately to R2/3 and Master's Universities in 2016, but future research will be needed before any clear trend can be deduced. It is worth noting that an NCHC task force recently published a position paper focused on inclusive enrollment management practices, and that report specifically referred to exorbitant program and participation fees as “insidious,” suggesting that, even

if offering to waive such fees, an institution is sending “a message that honors is a community that is most welcoming to those with discretionary income, a place set off from the general university community” (National Collegiate Honors Council, *Honors Enrollment Management* 12).

## **CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMMING**

We have known that honors-specific courses and senior thesis/capstone projects have been common within honors colleges since Sederberg’s survey of honors colleges in 2003, but the 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges took a closer look at curricular offerings. Offering separate honors courses where enrollment is limited only to honors students is essentially a universal feature of honors colleges at four-year degree institutions (98.7%), and honors classes and any other honors credits make up an average of one-fifth (20.2%) of all undergraduate credit requirements for honors students. What’s more, that fraction of credits varies very little across institution type. Curricular opportunities available to most honors college students include general education equivalents (90.5%), honors first-year seminars (80.4%), and senior thesis/capstone courses (81.0%). Honors courses do appear to be more heavily present within the lower-division and general education offerings than upper-division honors seminars, which are present in only 69% of honors colleges. Not surprisingly, honors contract options tied to non-honors courses are also quite common, available at over two-thirds of honors colleges reporting in the Census. Comparison of the number of such contracts reported with the numbers of honors students suggests that only a small minority of honors students, however, uses the honors contract option in any given semester.

Honors-specific study abroad courses also appear to be widely available at honors colleges, with 70.9% of honors colleges offering such options. Honors-specific internships and service learning classes are also available at a number of honors colleges although those curricular offerings are not as widespread (43.7% and 51.3%, respectively). Data from the NCHC 2014 Admissions, Retention,

and Completion Survey reported by Cognard-Black and Savage show that honors-specific study abroad, service learning, and internships are curricular options that distinguish honors colleges from honors programs, where such offerings are much less common (39%, 44%, 22%, respectively). Comparison of the 2021 Census figures with those presented for honors colleges by Cognard-Black and Savage also suggests there has been no significant change in availability of honors-specific internships, service learning courses, or study abroad offerings between 2014 and 2021.

The 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges asked respondents about the pedagogical and curricular orientation of their honors colleges. Respondents could choose any that applied from a list of eight different orientations. The two most common pedagogical and curricular orientations across all institutional types were “interdisciplinary/cross-disciplinary” (87.9%) and “seminar-style learning” (82.2%). “Service learning” and “leadership” (both 43.3%) are also fairly widespread orientations, as are “team teaching” (31.2%) and “global studies” (24.8%). Both “Great Books” and “tutorial model” orientations have some presence among honors colleges, but they are fairly uncommon orientations (10.8% and 7.0%, respectively).

Almost all honors colleges (93.6%) have an expected minimum GPA to remain in good standing in the honors college. The strong majority of honors colleges (95.9%), however, offer a probationary period if the GPA dips below the standard expectation. The average GPA expectation to remain in the honors college is 3.24 across all institutional types that reported a standard that does not vary across the college career, although a sizeable minority of 28.1% of honors colleges have GPA expectations that vary depending on the stage of the student’s career. This standard is essentially unchanged from Sederberg’s 2004 Survey of Honors Colleges, which reported that 72.7% of honors colleges required a 3.25 GPA to remain in honors. For those students who successfully maintain those standards and complete the honors curriculum, institutions have a variety of ways to recognize those accomplishments. Across all institutional types, the most common recognition by far is denoting honors completion on the student’s transcript: 90.5% of institutions report this

practice. Other less common methods of recognition include honors certificates (30.4%), honors degrees (27.8%), an honors minor (12%), or an honors major (7.6%).

## **FACILITIES AND RESOURCES**

Another area of growth since Sederberg's 2004 survey involves facilities and resources. Sederberg found that 45.7% of honors colleges had an honors student lounge or reading room, 40.0% offered an honors IT center, and 37.1% had special honors classrooms or seminar rooms. Honors academic spaces are even more prevalent for honors colleges today, with 58.6% reporting dedicated classrooms. Nearly all (96.8%) report some type of dedicated office space, and 47.5% even report having their own dedicated honors college building, a resource that is even more prevalent among R1 Universities (75.0%). One area that has not seen substantial growth is in residential housing. In 2004, 91.4% of surveyed honors colleges reported having some residential component. With the changing composition of honors colleges likely resulting from increasing numbers of honors programs transitioning to honors colleges and new colleges being created, this high rate of honors residential housing has held true for only the R1 Universities (90%) and Baccalaureate Colleges (100%), although the small number of participants in the Baccalaureate Colleges segment may be unrepresentative. Even so, dedicated housing appears to be a regular feature of honors colleges, and the strong majority of R2/3 Universities (80.3%) and Master's Universities (74.4%) do offer residential housing specific to honors college students.

In addition to space, dedicated staff and faculty are an especially valuable resource. The results of the 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges show that only 26.6% of all institutional types have dedicated faculty lines, but among R1 Universities, half of honors colleges reported having dedicated personnel lines for faculty. Overall, 9.4% of honors colleges also now report having tenure available in honors, with similar percentages across all the institutional classifications. On first glance, then, it appears that availability of tenure within honors colleges is fairly rare.



As noted in an earlier section, however, significant differences in several honors college characteristics depend on whether the honors college is a free-standing honors college or not free-standing, and tenure is another one of those characteristics (see Table 1). Free-standing honors colleges are associated with greater likelihood of tenure availability for faculty in honors, with a rate of 15.3% as compared to only 5.8% of not free-standing honors colleges. Availability of tenure in honors also appears to be related to institution type. Where only about 15% of honors colleges with dedicated faculty lines at R1 Universities have the availability of tenure in honors for those faculty ( $(7.5 \div 50.0) \times 100 = 15$ ), about half of honors colleges with faculty lines at R2/3 Universities report pathways to tenure in honors ( $(10.6 \div 22.7) \times 100 = 46.7\%$ ), and four-fifths of honors colleges with faculty lines at Master's Universities have this available path to tenure for faculty in honors ( $(10.3 \div 12.8) \times 100 = 80.5\%$ ). In other words, it appears not so much that securing tenure availability for faculty in honors is rare at Master's Universities but that securing faculty lines in the first place is relatively rare at Master's Universities. For those few honors colleges at Master's Universities that have been able to secure faculty lines, most also seem to have been able to make those faculty lines tenure-track.

Dedicated support staff are also present at most honors colleges, with 89.2% reporting dedicated staff members who assist with a variety of tasks. Importantly, just over two-thirds of honors colleges report having a second-in-command such as an assistant or associate dean, and the presence of a second-in-command is especially prevalent at R1 Universities, where almost all honors colleges have one (92.3%). The most common tasks with which honors staff are involved include offering administrative support (95.5%), budget management (86.6%), recruitment of honors students (85.4%), dedicated honors advising (83.4%), review of admission applications (83.4%), and co-curricular programming (75.8%). Although not as prevalent, 47.8% of honors colleges also report having dedicated staff who spend at least some of their time on fundraising, and at R1 Universities having staff to help with fundraising is almost as common as any of the other tasks listed above (73.2%).



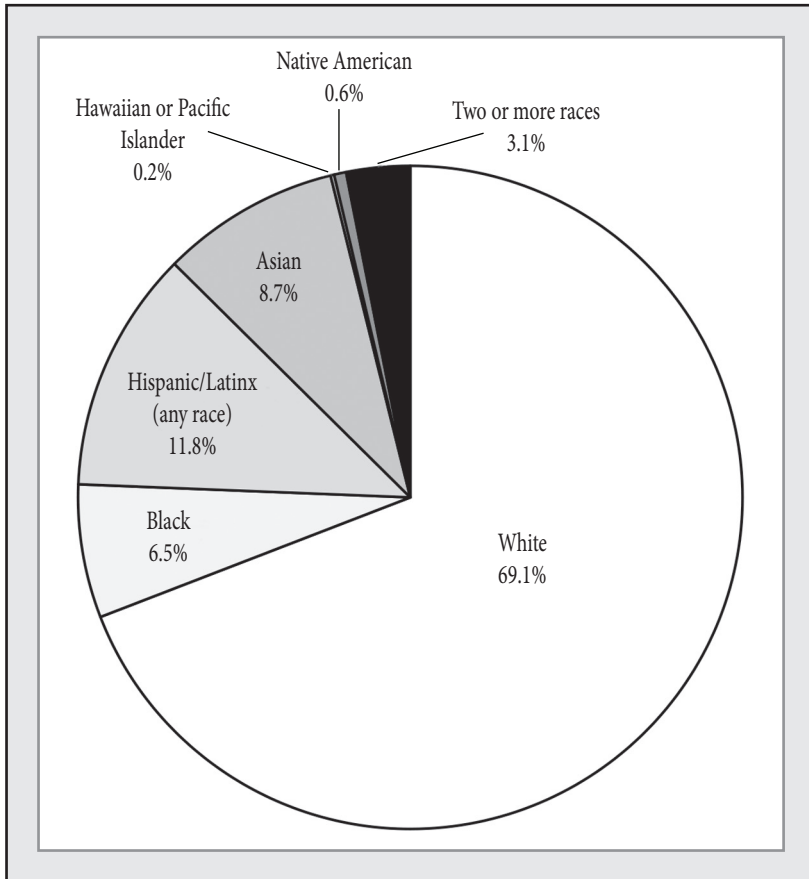
The fundraising efforts of these staff members plus other university officials have led to 60.8% of all honors colleges reporting a median endowment of \$1.9 million. These endowment funds typically supplement honors operating budgets. In 2021, Census respondents reported a median non-instructional budget of \$92,500; the average was substantially higher, at \$422,600, but financial measures are notoriously skewed by high values at select schools, and so the median is generally considered the preferable measure of what is typical. Not surprisingly, honors colleges at R1 Universities had substantially larger budgets and endowments than honors colleges in other categories of institution type (R1 median budget of \$700,000 and median endowment of \$5.3 million), and honors colleges at R2/3 Universities had significantly larger budgets and endowments than those at Master's Universities.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges provides one of the first opportunities to look at the race and ethnicity of honors leaders nationally, including the heads and those who serve as second-in-command (i.e., associate/assistant deans). In general, honors leadership is not racially diverse. The second-in-command position appears to be slightly more racially diverse with only 82.7% non-Hispanic White, but 89.9% of honors deans or others who are heads of honors are non-Hispanic Whites. For honors college heads, especially, the racial-ethnic composition is far more non-Hispanic White than the U.S. population as a whole. Gender identity is more closely aligned with the student body than race and ethnicity, with 56.1% of the heads of honors being men. In the case of those who serve as second-in-command, though, only 34.7% are men. As more women are earning the opportunity to serve in this second-in-command capacity, the national honors community should explore ways to support these women so that they are provided the opportunity to move into positions as honors deans, where they are still slightly underrepresented, especially at Master's Universities where only 29.7% of honors heads were women in 2021.

The racial composition of honors college administrators does not at all match the racial composition of the student body of the honors colleges. As can be seen in Figure 2, compared to the 89.9% of White honors heads, 69.1% of honors college students at R1, R2/3, and Master’s Universities are non-Hispanic White. This

**FIGURE 2. AVERAGE RACIAL COMPOSITION OF STUDENTS AT HONORS COLLEGES, 2020–2021**



Source: 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges (n = 99).

Note: Only a small number of Baccalaureate and Associate’s honors colleges reported race-ethnicity data, so this graph reflects data for only those honors colleges at Research or Master’s universities. Because of the unique nature of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in terms of student body racial composition, two HBCUs reporting race data were also excluded. Among honors students at those two HBCUs, the average percent Black was 97.3.

69.1% is very close to the 67.0% non-Hispanic White honors students reported at the 52 schools responding with race-ethnicity data to the 2014–2015 NCHC Admissions, Retention, and Completion Survey (ARC). Black students make up a smaller percentage of honors students at honors colleges participating in the 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges (6.5%) than among honors programs and colleges that participated in the ARC survey (11.2%). Hispanic students, however, made up a slightly larger proportion of the honors student body in the 2021 Census (11.8%) as compared to those represented in the ARC survey (9.0%). These differences are not statistically significant, so there is no clear indication of changes in honors student racial composition during the last seven years. More importantly, though, taken together these results add to growing evidence that honors students are not representative of the larger group of undergraduate students in higher education today when it comes to ethnic and racial diversity (Cognard-Black and Spisak).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), in 2019, non-Hispanic White students made up 53.1% of U.S. resident undergraduate students enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions. Since 2014, Hispanic students are the second largest population enrolled in postsecondary institutions, making up 21.7% in 2019. At the peak in 2010, Black students made up 15.1% of the undergraduate population, but in 2019 they made up just 13.2% of U.S. undergraduates (NCES). The honors college community does not appear to be representative of the national undergraduate student body, nor is it representative of the larger U.S. population. This area deserves more research as well as attention among those individuals responsible for providing honors education.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Scott and Frana speculated that further growth in the number of honors colleges would continue to occur because “competition in recruiting is intense, and this pressure to attract students from a small pool will encourage more universities to launch honors colleges or convert existing programs into colleges” (31). These factors

continue to be a reported motivation for the honors programs moving to the honors college model, but it is unknown whether honors colleges will continue to see the rapid growth of the last few decades. With increasingly tight budgets because of economic challenges and the “demographic cliff” caused by declining rates of fertility, even more institutions may explore the honors college model as a way to compete in the larger marketplace, but we may also see a slowing in this trend as institutions redirect resources and focus on other priorities. Another unknown factor in the expansion of the honors college model is the degree to which honors colleges will have an impact on the national landscape of honors education and how administrative and curricular structures might evolve. In light of how we have seen the greatest growth in the honors college model at Research and Master’s Universities, it is unlikely that the honors college model will replace the honors program model at Baccalaureate Colleges or Associate’s Colleges. It remains to be seen whether we will see honors colleges fully integrate into all Research and Master’s Universities, as Cobane once predicted.

If, as we have suggested here, defining the “Basic Characteristics” of an honors college in 2004 contributed to further expansion and greater distinction between honors colleges and honors programs, then we must consider how the recent adoption of NCHC’s “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education” (a massive reworking of the “Basic Characteristics”) might impact the ongoing evolution of the organizational landscape of honors education. Will the previously articulated distinctions between honors programs and colleges start to diminish with the previous two “Basic Characteristics” documents now replaced by one? Will a shared set of principles lead honors programs to look like honors colleges without the changing of the name or the accompanying restructuring? Or, conversely, will labels change without a subsequent push for structural alterations? As mentioned earlier, Sederberg spoke against the last development when he said: “If an institution is simply gilding the name, then ‘honors college’ becomes a devalued misnomer designed as a marketing strategy and intended to mislead potential applicants into believing that something new exists where, in fact, substance remains unchanged” (“Characteristics,” Rpt. 25).

One thing is certain: if we are to understand fully the continued evolution of honors colleges, NCHC, as the leading professional association in the field, must commit resources to regular, longitudinal data collection so that we can continue to monitor and report trends in these areas. We cannot count on the U.S. Department of Education to do so; they have never collected such data about honors education and there is no indication they will do so anytime soon. Associate's Colleges have been overlooked in past studies of honors colleges, primarily because so few honors colleges exist; however, the essay by Hoffman et al. in this volume explores this phenomenon. Unfortunately, this problem is exacerbated when fewer honors heads at two-year institutions respond to surveys and other requests for information. We identified 29 such honors colleges for sampling in the 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges, so this trend undoubtedly deserves further exploration. Honors colleges at two-year colleges may have lower response rates because they have fewer human and other resources available to respond to surveys. They are likely different in other meaningful ways, but more research is needed to better understand the administrative structures and motivations of honors colleges in these institutional settings.

Between 2004 and 2021, the honors college landscape has witnessed significant changes, not the least of which is an apparent shift away from having a minimum standardized test score for admissions decisions. Although testing companies are working to make standardized testing more accessible in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be important for researchers to monitor the decisions honors colleges make with regard to the use of test scores in admission and whether more holistic admissions practices are introduced in their place, as so many have advocated (Cognard-Black and Spisak; National Collegiate Honors Council, *Honors Enrollment Management*; Smith and Zagurski). From admission practices and diversity, to facilities and resources, to diversity among honors professionals, new structures are needed to facilitate data collection and research at the national level in order to continue to monitor trends in the ongoing evolution of the honors college phenomenon.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges**

Item	All Institutions		Research 1 Universities		Research 2 & 3 Universities		Master's Universities		Baccalaureate Colleges <sup>b</sup>		Associate's Colleges	
Institutions in Sample	248	55	89	63	12	29						
Total responding institutions	166	44	67	41	5	9						
Response Rate <sup>a</sup>	66.9	80.0	75.3	65.1	41.7	31.0						
<b>Institutional Size &amp; Structure of Honors College</b>												
Institutional control (% public)	84.0	95.5	76.9	90.0	20.0	88.9						
Is your honors college named? (% yes)	32.5	36.4	34.3	29.3	40.0	11.1						
Honors program prior to honors college designation? (% yes)	89.1	88.4	91.0	87.8	80.0	88.9						
Honors College Size (mean # of undergraduate students)	987.8	2,093.5	720.7	450.9	107.4	387.0						
Reported Honors Percentage (mean)	8.0	10.0	7.0	6.0	7.0	6.0						
Full-Time Students in Honors (mean)	897.8	1,966.6	690.5	413.4	107.4	277.6						
Honors College Incoming First-Year Class Size, Fall 2020 (mean)	273.0	571.2	199.3	128.5	32.3	110.4						
Honors College Incoming Transfer Students, Fall 2020 (mean)	17.1	32.3	16.5	5.9	1.0	4.6						
Honors College Internal Admissions, Fall 2020 (mean)	31.5	68.8	21.5	13.2	2.5	28.9						

Honors College's relationship to the larger institution (%) <sup>d</sup>									
<i>Free-standing college with independent curriculum</i>	45.6	54.8	43.9	45.0	33.3	14.3			
<i>Centralized overlay of university undergraduate programs</i>	58.2	42.9	62.1	62.5	66.7	85.7			
<i>Decentralized coordinating structure providing honors core overseeing departmental honors</i>	8.9	7.1	9.1	10.0	0.0	14.3			
Title of the person who heads your honors college (%) <sup>c</sup>									
<i>Dean</i>	67.1	86.1	67.2	58.5	25.0	44.4			
<i>Director</i>	23.8	11.6	20.9	39.0	50.0	22.2			
<i>Executive Director</i>	3.0	2.3	4.5	2.4	0.0	11.1			
<i>Coordinator</i>	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.0			
<i>Other</i>	5.5	0.0	7.5	0.0	0.0	22.2			
Title of person to whom the head of honors reports (%) <sup>c</sup>									
<i>Provost/Vice-President for Academic Affairs</i>	73.5	83.7	72.7	73.2	50.0	37.5			
<i>Assoc./Asst. Provost/VPAA</i>	16.0	7.0	21.2	14.6	25.0	25.0			
<i>Other</i>	10.5	9.3	6.1	12.2	25.0	37.5			
Annual contract appointment for the head of honors (%) <sup>c</sup>									
<i>12-month contract</i>	84.0	86.0	88.1	82.9	33.3	66.7			
<i>11-month contract</i>	2.5	2.3	1.5	2.4	33.3	0.0			
<i>10-month contract</i>	1.8	0.0	1.5	2.4	0.0	11.1			

Item	All Institutions		Research 1 Universities		Research 2 & 3 Universities		Master's Universities		Baccalaureate Colleges <sup>b</sup>		Associate's Colleges	
<i>9-month contract</i>	4.9	0.0	0.0	6.0	7.3	0.0	11.1					
<i>Other contract</i>	6.7	11.6		3.0	4.9	33.3	11.1					
Presence of governance structures (%) <sup>d</sup>												
<i>Faculty oversight committee</i>	67.5	63.6	65.2	67.5	100.0	44.4						
<i>External advisory board</i>	44.6	70.0	39.4	37.5	0.0	14.3						
<i>Student honors council</i>	62.4	75.0	63.6	55.0	25.0	42.9						
<i>Other</i>	17.2	15.0	21.2	12.5	0.0	28.6						
Campus-wide programs housed within the honors college (%) <sup>d</sup>												
<i>Fellowship advising</i>	45.0	64.3	52.2	22.5	0.0	14.3						
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	5.0	7.1	1.5	5.0	0.0	28.6						
<i>Undergraduate research</i>	23.8	19.0	31.3	10.0	25.0	57.1						
<i>Service learning</i>	9.4	7.1	7.5	5.0	25.0	57.1						
<i>Other</i>	15.6	19.0	13.4	17.5	0.0	14.3						
Among top three reasons for honors college instead of program (%) <sup>e</sup>												
<i>Recruit top students</i>	51.7	67.5	47.5	50.0	50.0	12.5						
<i>Increase honors population</i>	10.7	7.5	13.1	8.3	0.0	25.0						

<i>Raise visibility of honors on campus</i>	53.7	40.0	49.2	75.0	50.0	62.5
<i>Give honors more institutional autonomy</i>	36.9	35.0	29.5	52.8	0.0	50.0
<i>Increase honors budget</i>	8.7	5.0	11.5	11.1	0.0	0.0
<i>Open up fundraising opportunities</i>	20.8	30.0	21.3	13.9	0.0	12.5
<i>Promote innovative curriculum</i>	43.6	42.5	41.0	44.4	50.0	62.5
<i>Improve academic quality on campus</i>	28.2	27.5	31.1	22.2	50.0	25.0
<i>Create more opportunities for students</i>	42.3	42.5	49.2	22.2	100.0	50.0
<i>Other</i>	3.4	2.5	6.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Initial stakeholder who initiated organization as a college (%) <sup>c</sup>						
<i>A president or other upper administration</i>	35.4	27.9	40.3	34.1	25.0	44.5
<i>Staff/Other personnel already working in honors program</i>	13.4	18.6	11.9	12.2	0.0	11.1
<i>Both upper administration and honors personnel equally</i>	25.6	25.6	29.9	22.0	0.0	22.2
<i>Other</i>	5.5	9.3	3.0	4.9	25.0	0.0
<i>I wasn't here then/I'm not sure</i>	20.1	18.6	14.9	26.8	50.0	22.2
<b>Admissions &amp; Recruitment</b>						
Does honors have its own dedicated application? (% yes)	84.8	79.1	85.1	90.2	75.0	88.9
Does honors control the decision to admit students? (% yes)	93.3	83.7	95.5	100.0	75.0	100.0
Is there a minimum test score (e.g., SAT) for eligibility? (% yes)	31.9	30.2	25.8	31.7	75.0	66.7

Item	All Institutions	Research			
		Research 1 Universities	Research 2 & 3 Universities	Master's Universities	Baccalaureate Colleges <sup>b</sup> Associate's Colleges
SAT for those reporting minimum score for eligibility (mean)	1,202.8	1,325.0	1,237.9	1,080.6	1,057.5
ACT for those reporting minimum score for eligibility (mean)	26.0	28.0	26.0	25.0	24.0
Are test scores used in the decision to admit? (% yes)	69.2	78.6	64.1	65.0	66.7
Is there a minimum HS GPA for eligibility? (% yes)	54.9	40.5	54.5	63.4	75.0
GPA (weighted) for those reporting min. for eligibility (mean)	3.56	3.64	3.52	3.59	3.46
Is GPA used in the decision to admit students? (% yes)	93.7	95.2	90.8	94.9	100.0
Factors that inform decision to admit (%) <sup>d</sup>					
<i>Essay</i>	77.4	81.0	71.4	89.2	50.0
<i>Short answer written response to specific question</i>	44.5	47.6	50.8	35.1	50.0
<i>Rigor of previous curriculum</i>	51.6	64.3	50.8	45.9	50.0
<i>Letters of recommendation</i>	48.4	57.1	47.6	32.4	75.0
<i>Record of co-curricular activities (e.g., volunteer work)</i>	69.7	81.0	68.3	67.6	75.0
<i>Other non-academic attributes (e.g., grit, compassion)</i>	47.1	52.4	49.2	43.2	25.0
<i>Interview</i>	20.6	9.5	22.2	16.2	50.0
<i>Other</i>	16.1	2.4	19.0	21.6	50.0
Are all students who apply to the honors college admitted? (% yes)	5.7	2.4	6.2	7.7	0.0

Acceptance rate among applicants for the first-year cohort (%) <sup>c</sup>									
1-25	11.8	21.6	12.3	3.2	0.0	0.0			
26-50	11.8	18.9	7.0	9.7	33.3	12.5			
51-75	27.2	35.1	29.8	16.1	33.3	12.5			
76-100	49.3	24.3	50.9	71.0	33.3	75.0			
What was the yield for the first-year cohort entering in 2020? (%) <sup>c</sup>									
1-25	14.8	36.1	11.9	0.0	0.0	0.0			
26-50	25.2	30.6	22.0	30.0	0.0	14.3			
51-75	31.9	30.6	33.9	30.0	66.7	14.3			
76-100	28.1	2.8	32.2	40.0	33.3	71.4			
What is the number of dedicated honors scholarships annually?									
Percent not reporting	14.5	15.9	10.4	14.6	40.0	22.2			
Percent reporting 0 (zero)	14.8	13.5	13.3	17.1	—	14.3			
Minimum (among those reporting non-zero)	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	—	3.0			
Maximum (among those reporting non-zero)	1,450.0	670.0	1,450.0	500.0	—	600.0			
Mean (among those reporting non-zero)	145.8	146.4	182.7	86.9	—	148.0			
Percentage in first-year cohort receiving honors scholarship (%) <sup>c</sup>									
0-25	51.7	58.3	50.0	55.6	33.3	16.7			

Item	All Institutions	Research			Associate's Colleges
		Research 1 Universities	Research 2 & 3 Universities	Master's Universities	
26-50	9.1	11.1	9.7	8.3	0.0
51-75	2.8	0.0	3.2	0.0	33.3
76-100	36.4	30.6	37.1	36.1	50.0
On what factors are honors college scholarships based? (%) <sup>c</sup>					
<i>Demonstrated need</i>	2.0	2.4	3.1	0.0	0.0
<i>Merit</i>	39.2	19.5	43.1	45.9	57.1
<i>Both merit and need</i>	45.1	63.4	41.5	37.8	28.6
<i>We do not offer such scholarships</i>	13.7	14.6	12.3	16.2	14.3
Is there a fee to apply to the honors college? (% yes)	1.3	2.4	0.0	2.6	0.0
Honors college application fee (mean among those reporting yes)	\$28	—	—	—	—
Is there a fee to participate in honors? (% yes)	25.8	36.6	25.8	17.9	22.2
Honors college fee (annualized)					
Mean (among those reporting yes)	\$385	\$722	\$185	\$120	—
Median (among those reporting yes)	\$175	\$500	\$150	\$103	—
Low value (among those reporting yes)	\$8	\$8	\$10	\$15	\$300
High value (among those reporting yes)	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$700	\$300	\$300



<b>Honors College Curriculum &amp; Programming</b>									
Do you have separate honors courses? (% yes)	98.7	97.6	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	88.9
How many courses in Fall 2020 (mean among those reporting)	42.8	94.8	30.3	18.3	6.3	35.0	28.6	24.0	
How many courses in Spring 2021 (mean among those reporting)	37.4	84.6	26.8	15.6	5.5	28.6	24.0		
Percent of undergraduate credits in honors (mean)	20.2	21.3	18.1	22.5	14.3	24.0			
Curricular opportunities available to honors college students (%) <sup>d</sup>									
<i>First-year seminars in honors</i>	80.4	90.0	78.8	82.1	50.0	55.6			
<i>General education equivalents</i>	90.5	87.5	89.4	100.0	75.0	77.8			
<i>Senior thesis/capstone courses</i>	81.0	82.5	90.9	74.4	50.0	44.4			
<i>Independent study options in honors</i>	70.9	80.0	69.7	76.9	50.0	22.2			
<i>Honors contract option tied to non-honors courses</i>	68.4	70.0	68.2	64.1	75.0	77.8			
<i>Upper-division honors seminars</i>	69.0	85.0	65.2	76.9	50.0	0.0			
<i>Study abroad honors courses</i>	70.9	80.0	80.3	56.4	50.0	33.3			
<i>Departmental honors courses</i>	58.9	80.0	60.6	46.2	0.0	33.3			
<i>Honors internships</i>	43.7	60.0	48.5	30.8	25.0	0.0			
<i>Honors service learning courses</i>	51.3	60.0	51.5	38.5	50.0	66.7			
<i>Other</i>	10.1	20.0	6.1	7.7	0.0	11.1			
Pedagogical/curricular orientation that best describes HC (%) <sup>d</sup>									
<i>Interdisciplinary/cross-disciplinary</i>	87.9	100.0	89.4	84.6	50.0	55.6			

Item	All Institutions	Research				
		Research I Universities	Research 2 & 3 Universities	Master's Universities	Baccalaureate Colleges <sup>b</sup>	Associate's Colleges
<i>Team teaching</i>	31.2	35.9	27.3	35.9	25.0	22.2
<i>Seminar-style learning</i>	82.2	82.1	80.3	89.7	100.0	55.6
<i>Tutorial model</i>	7.0	10.3	9.1	2.6	0.0	0.0
<i>Global studies</i>	24.8	33.3	25.8	17.9	25.0	11.1
<i>"Great books"</i>	10.8	15.4	12.1	7.7	0.0	0.0
<i>Service learning</i>	43.3	46.2	40.9	41.0	50.0	55.6
<i>Leadership</i>	43.3	43.6	47.0	35.9	75.0	33.3
<i>Other</i>	13.4	7.7	15.2	12.8	25.0	22.2
Are honors contracts available for non-honors courses? (% yes)	70.3	72.5	68.2	69.2	75.0	77.8
Number of honors contracts in a typical semester (mean)	79.6	114.3	74.9	70.7	1.7	23.2
Ways honors recognized upon completion/graduation (%) <sup>d</sup>						
<i>Certificate</i>	30.4	27.5	29.9	35.9	25.0	22.2
<i>Degree</i>	27.8	32.5	28.4	23.1	25.0	22.2
<i>Transcript designation</i>	90.5	82.5	94.0	94.9	75.0	77.8
<i>Major</i>	7.6	15.0	6.0	2.6	0.0	11.1
<i>Minor</i>	12.0	10.0	17.9	7.7	0.0	0.0

<i>Other</i>	27.2	25.0	25.4	30.8	75.0	11.1
Do honors students have priority registration? (% yes)	84.8	90.0	83.4	84.6	50.0	66.7
Is there a minimum GPA to remain in honors? (% yes)	93.6	95.0	92.4	94.7	100.0	88.9
If so, does it vary at different stages? (%) <sup>c</sup>						
<i>It's the same for all four years</i>	69.9	63.2	67.2	75.0	75.0	100.0
<i>It varies depending on how far students have progressed</i>	28.1	34.2	29.5	25.0	25.0	0.0
<i>Other</i>	2.1	2.6	3.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
If there is a set GPA standard for all four years, what is it? (mean)	3.24	3.27	3.25	3.20	3.17	3.26
Is there a probationary period if GPA dips below standard? (% yes)	95.9	92.1	96.7	97.2	100.0	100.0
<b>Facilities &amp; Resources</b>						
Does honors have its own dedicated office space? (% yes)	96.8	100.0	98.5	97.4	75.0	77.8
Does honors have its own dedicated classrooms? (% yes)	58.6	77.5	63.1	43.6	0.0	33.3
Does honors have its own dedicated building? (% yes)	47.5	75.0	40.9	46.2	0.0	0.0
Does honors have its own dedicated residential housing? (% yes)	77.2	90.0	80.3	74.4	100.0	0.0
Percentage of students in honors housing, where available? (%) <sup>c</sup>						
1-25	31.0	35.3	32.7	24.1	25.0	—
26-50	44.8	47.1	44.9	48.3	0.0	—

Item	All Institutions	Research				
		Research 1 Universities	Research 2 & 3 Universities	Master's Universities	Baccalaureate Colleges <sup>b</sup> Associate's Colleges	
51-75	15.5	11.8	14.3	17.2	50.0	—
76-100	8.6	5.9	8.2	10.3	25.0	—
Does honors have its own dedicated faculty lines? (% yes)	26.6	50.0	22.7	12.8	0.0	22.2
Number of FTE faculty lines in honors, where available? (mean)	8.4	11.0	6.9	5.4	—	0.8
Can faculty receive tenure in honors? (%) <sup>c</sup>						
Yes, faculty can receive tenure in honors	9.4	7.5	10.6	10.3	20.0	0.0
No, not in honors	84.9	92.5	84.8	79.5	80.0	77.8
No, our institution does not have a tenure system	5.7	0.0	4.5	10.3	0.0	22.2
Does honors have its own dedicated staff lines? (% yes)	89.2	100.0	95.5	87.2	0.0	44.4
Number of FTE staff lines in honors, where available? (mean)	7.5	16.6	4.2	2.8	—	3.9
What activities are dedicated honors staff involved with? (%) <sup>d</sup>						
Dedicated honors advising	83.4	100.0	84.8	71.1	33.3	75.0
Administrative support	95.5	100.0	98.5	94.7	66.7	75.0
Fundraising	47.8	73.2	48.5	28.9	33.3	12.5
Co-curricular programming	75.8	85.4	77.3	68.4	66.7	62.5
Budget management	86.6	95.1	84.8	81.6	66.7	100.0

<i>Recruitment of honors students</i>	85.4	90.2	81.8	86.8	66.7	100.0
<i>Review of applications for admission into honors</i>	83.4	92.7	80.3	78.9	66.7	100.0
<i>Teaching honors classes</i>	53.5	68.3	50.0	42.1	66.7	62.5
<i>Other</i>	14.6	17.1	16.7	13.2	0.0	0.0
Annual honors operating budget (1,000s), excluding personnel						
Mean	\$422.6	\$1,169.8	\$188.7	\$78.4	\$146.0	\$1,012.1
Median	\$92.5	\$700.0	\$90.0	\$45.0	\$37.0	\$25.0
Approx. current value of honors college endowment (millions)						
Mean	\$4.826	\$10.199	\$3.971	\$1.462	—	\$0.068
Median	\$1.900	\$5.250	\$1.883	\$0.700	—	\$0.068
Percent reporting any honors college endowment	60.8	59.1	68.7	65.9	0.0	22.2
HC a member or participant in honors organizations ... (%) <sup>d</sup>						
National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC)	95.3	92.7	98.4	97.2	33.3	100.0
Honors Education at Research Universities (HERU)	22.7	63.4	12.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
C. on Hon. Ed., Assoc. of Pub. Land-grant Univ. (CoHE-APLU)	26.7	58.5	25.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Nat'l Assoc. of African American Honors Programs (NAAAHP)	6.0	4.9	7.9	2.8	33.3	0.0
A regional or state honors council	74.7	56.1	76.2	86.1	100.0	100.0

Item	All Institutions		Research 1 Universities		Research 2 & 3 Universities		Master's Universities		Baccalaureate Colleges <sup>b</sup>		Associate's Colleges	
<b>Honors Leadership Demographics</b>												
Race-ethnicity of the head of honors (%) <sup>c</sup>												
<i>White, non-Hispanic</i>	89.9	82.9	88.9	100.0	75.0	88.9	100.0	75.0	88.9	88.9	88.9	88.9
<i>Black, non-Hispanic</i>	3.4	0.0	6.3	0.0	25.0	6.3	0.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Asian, non-Hispanic</i>	2.0	5.7	1.6	0.0	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Hispanic/Latinx of any race</i>	2.7	8.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.1	0.0
<i>American Indian, non-Hispanic</i>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic</i>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Some other race, non-Hispanic</i>	0.7	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Two or more races</i>	1.4	2.9	1.6	0.0	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Gender identity of the head of honors (%) <sup>c</sup>												
<i>Men</i>	56.1	52.8	54.0	70.3	25.0	54.0	70.3	25.0	37.5	37.5	37.5	37.5
<i>Women</i>	43.9	47.2	46.0	29.7	75.0	46.0	29.7	75.0	62.5	62.5	62.5	62.5
<i>Transgender, non-binary, gender nonconforming, or fluid</i>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Does honors have an asst./assoc. dean or other 2nd? (% yes)	68.0	92.3	61.9	63.2	75.0	61.9	63.2	75.0	22.2	22.2	22.2	22.2

Race-ethnicity of the asst./assoc./2nd-in-command of honors (%) <sup>c</sup>						
<i>White, non-Hispanic</i>	82.7	81.3	81.6	82.6	100.0	100.0
<i>Black, non-Hispanic</i>	6.1	6.3	7.9	4.3	0.0	0.0
<i>Asian, non-Hispanic</i>	3.1	6.3	0.0	4.3	0.0	0.0
<i>Hispanic/Latinx of any race</i>	5.1	3.1	7.9	4.3	0.0	0.0
<i>American Indian, non-Hispanic</i>	1.0	3.1	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic</i>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Some other race, non-Hispanic</i>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Two or more races</i>	2.0	0.0	0.0	4.3	0.0	0.0
Gender identity of the asst./assoc./2nd-in-command of honors (%) <sup>c</sup>						
<i>Men</i>	34.7	27.3	44.7	26.1	100.0	0.0
<i>Women</i>	64.3	69.7	55.3	73.9	0.0	100.0
<i>Transgender, non-binary, gender nonconforming, or fluid</i>	1.0	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Sources: The 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges.

Notes: Em dashes (—) indicate instances where too few respondents or too few data existed to reasonably calculate summary statistics. Some numbers may not sum to 100 due to rounding error.

- a. The overall response rate when considering Research and Master's/Comprehensive Universities only is 73.4%.
- b. Four out of the five schools in this category are categorized as Baccalaureate: Diverse Fields, and only one is classified as Baccalaureate: Arts & Sciences. There are so few cases of honors colleges in this and the Associate's Colleges categories that percentages should be interpreted with caution.
- c. Response options were mutually exclusive and should sum to 100%, with some exception for rounding error.
- d. Respondents were instructed to select all options that apply, so percentages do not sum to 100.
- e. Respondents were instructed to select their top three choices, so percentages will sum to 300 percent, with some exception for rounding error.

**APPENDIX B**  
**Description of Survey Questions Included in the 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges**

Item/Question	Description/Response Options
<i>Institutional Size, Classification, &amp; Structure of Honors College</i>	
Institutional control	(1) Public; (2) Private, non-profit; (3) Private, for-profit
Institutional Carnegie Classification	(1) R1—Research/Doctoral University; (2) R2—Research/Doctoral University; (3) R3 Doctoral/Professional University; (4) Master’s University—Larger; (5) Master’s University—Medium; (6) Baccalaureate College—Arts & Sciences; (7) Baccalaureate College—Diverse Fields; (8) Associate’s College
Institution Size—Full-time equivalent undergraduate students	(1) 1–1,000; (2) 1,001–2,500; (3) 2,501–5,000; (4) 5,001–10,000; (5) 10,001–15,000 . . . (11) 40,001 or more
Is your honors college named?	Yes/No
Did your Honors College emerge or transition from an honors program that existed prior to honors college designation?	Yes/No
In what year was your honors college founded?	Year
Honors College Size—How many students were in your honors college in fall 2020? (Please indicate student headcount regardless of full/part-time status.)	Number of students



Honors Percentage—Of the undergraduate students at your school, approximately what percent are honors students?	Percent
Full-Time Students in Honors—Of the honors students in fall 2020, how many were enrolled as full-time students at your institution?	Number of students
Honors College Incoming First-Year Class Size, Fall 2020—Report the number of degree-seeking students entering your institution as honors students.	Number of students
Honors College Incoming Transfer Students, Fall 2020—Report the number of degree-seeking students transferring into your institution as honors students. (If students do not enter honors as incoming transfer students, please report 0 (zero) for this item.)	Number of students
Honors College Internal Admissions, Fall 2020—Report the number of degree-seeking students admitted into honors who started previously at your school as part of the general student body. (If students do not enter honors through this pathway, please report 0 (zero) for this item.)	Number of students
What situation best describes the honors college's organizational relationship to the larger institution? (Select all that apply.)	(1) Free-standing college with independent curriculum; (2) Centralized overlay structure of university undergraduate programs; (3) Decentralized coordinating structure providing an honors core overseeing departmental honors; (4) Other (please explain)
What is the title of the person who heads your honors college?	(1) Dean; (2) Director; (3) Executive director; (4) Coordinator; (5) Other (specify)

Item/Question	Description/Response Options
To whom does the head of honors report directly?	(1) Provost/vice-president for academic affairs; (2) Assoc./Asst. Provost/VPAA; (3) Other (please specify)
What is the annual contract appointment for the head of honors?	(1) 12-month contract; (2) 11-month contract; (3) 10-month contract; (4) 9-month contract; (5) Other contract (please specify)
Which of the following governance characteristics, if any, does the honors college have? (Select all that apply.)	(1) Faculty oversight committee; (2) External advisory board; (3) Student honors council; (4) Other (please specify)
Which, if any, of the following campus-wide programs are housed within the honors college? (Select all that apply.)	(1) Fellowship advising; (2) Teaching and learning; (3) Undergraduate research; (4) Service learning; (5) Other (please specify any others campus-wide programs housed in honors)
From the list below of possible reasons for having an honors college as opposed to an honors program, please select up to three that reflect your personal ranking of the most important reasons.	(1) Recruit top students; (2) Increase honors population; (3) Raise visibility of honors on campus; (4) Give honors more institutional autonomy; (5) Increase honors budget; (6) Open up fundraising opportunities; (7) Promote innovative curriculum; (8) Improve academic quality on campus; (9) Create more opportunities for students; (10) Other
From which campus stakeholder did the initial drive come for the organization of honors as a college?	(1) I wasn't here then/I'm not sure; (2) A president or other upper administration; (3) Staff or other personnel already working within an honors program; (4) Both upper administration and honors personnel equally; (5) Other (please specify)
<b>Admissions &amp; Recruitment</b>	
Does the honors college have its own dedicated application for entry?	Yes/No

Does the honors college control the decision to admit students to the honors college?	Yes/No
Is there a minimum test score (i.e., ACT/SAT) to determine eligibility to apply to the honors college?	Yes/No
If you answered yes, please indicate the minimum composite score for any test that is used to determine honors eligibility.	Separate responses for composite SAT and ACT scores
Are test scores (i.e., ACT/SAT) used in the decision to admit students to the honors college?	Yes/No
Is there a minimum high school GPA to determine eligibility to apply to the honors college?	Yes/No
If you answered yes, what is the high school GPA used to determine honors eligibility? (Please report for weighted GPA.)	Weighted high school grade point average
Is GPA used in the decision to admit students to the honors college?	Yes/No
What other, if any, factors specifically inform the decision to admit students to the honors college? (Select all that apply.)	(1) Essay; (2) Short answer written responses to specific questions; (3) Rigor of previous curriculum; (4) Letters of recommendation; (5) Record of co-curricular activities (e.g. volunteer work, service, leadership, athletics, etc.); (6) Other non-academic attributes (e.g., grit, resilience, compassion, etc.); (7) Interview; (8) Other (please specify)
Are all students who apply to the honors college admitted?	Yes/No

Item/Question	Description/Response Options
What was the acceptance rate of completed applications for the first-year student cohort entering honors in fall 2020?	(1) 1–25%; (2) 26–50%; (3) 51–75%; (4) 76–100%
What was the yield rate for students admitted for the first-year student cohort entering honors in fall 2020?	(1) 1–25%; (2) 26–50%; (3) 51–75%; (4) 76–100%
What is the total number of dedicated honors scholarships awarded on an annual basis?	Number of annual honors scholarships
What percentage of students in the first-year entering honors cohort receive some form of dedicated honors scholarship support for the most recent year when data are available?	(1) 0–25%; (2) 26–50%; (3) 51–75%; (4) 76–100%
If the honors college awards dedicated scholarships, what are those awards based on?	(1) We do not offer such scholarships; (2) They are based on demonstrated need; (3) They are based on merit; (4) They are based on both merit and need
Is there a fee to apply to the honors college?	Yes/No
If so, please specify in whole U.S. dollars.	Honors application fee, in dollars
Is there a separate fee that honors students pay to participate in honors in addition to regular tuition and fees charged to enroll at your institution? (Please do not include fees for optional events or experiences in which only some honors students participate.)	Yes/No
If so, please specify how much that fee is on an annual basis.	Honors fee, in dollars

<i>Curriculum &amp; Programming</i>	
Do you have separate honors courses or honors sections where enrollment is limited only to students in your honors college?	Yes/No
If yes, how many such courses did you offer for the fall and spring terms during the 2020–2021 academic year?	Separate responses for the numbers of honors courses or honors sections in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021
Approximately what percentage of undergraduate credits are made up of honors courses or other credit bearing honors requirements? (If you have more than one honors program or other pathway to honors within the honors college, report the percentage for the most commonly chosen pathway.)	Percentage of credits
What type of honors curricular opportunities are available to honors college students? (Select all that apply.)	(1) First-year seminars in honors; (2) General education equivalents; (3) Senior thesis/capstone courses; (4) Independent study options in honors; (5) Honors contract option tied to non-honors courses; (6) Upper-division honors seminars; (7) Study abroad honors courses; (8) Departmental honors courses; (9) Honors internships; (10) Honors service learning courses; (11) Other (please specify)
Please indicate the pedagogical/curricular orientation that best describes the overall honors college learning experience. (Select all that apply.)	(1) Interdisciplinary/Cross-disciplinary; (2) Team teaching; (3) Seminar-style learning; (4) Tutorial model; (5) Global studies; (6) “Great books”; (7) Service learning; (8) Leadership; (9) Other (please specify)
Are honors contracts available for honors college students to meet honors requirements in non-honors courses?	Yes/No

Item/Question	Description/Response Options
If so, about how many honors contracts do students in your honors college undertake in a typical semester? (Please indicate your best estimate of a single number rather than a range.)	Number of honors contracts in a typical semester
How does your honors college recognize completion of honors upon graduation? (Select all that apply.)	(1) Certificate; (2) Degree; (3) Transcript designation; (4) Major; (5) Minor; (6) Other (please specify)
Do honors students have early or priority registration for classes at your institution?	Yes/No
Is there a minimum GPA that students must maintain to remain in honors (i.e., to avoid dismissal from the honors college)?	Yes/No
If so, is it a set standard across all four years, or does it vary at different stages of progress?	(1) It's the same for all four years; (2) It varies depending on how far students have progressed; (3) Other (please specify)
If there is a set standard for all four years, what is the minimum GPA students must maintain to remain in honors?	Grade point average
If the GPA standard for remaining in honors varies depending on progress, please provide a brief explanation of how the criteria for remaining varies.	Responses varied
Do you have a probationary period to allow students to recover if their GPA drops below the honors college standard to remain?	Yes/No
<b>Facilities &amp; Resources</b>	
Does the honors college have its own dedicated office space on campus?	Yes/No

Does the honors college have its own dedicated classrooms?	Yes/No
Does the honors college have its own dedicated building?	Yes/No
Does the honors college have its own dedicated residential housing specifically for honors students?	Yes/No
If yes, approximately what percentage of honors students typically reside in dedicated honors housing?	(1) 1–25%; (2) 26–50%; (3) 51–75%; (4) 76–100%
Does the honors college have its own dedicated faculty lines?	Yes/No
If yes, what is the number of full-time equivalent faculty lines dedicated to the honors college?	Number of FTE faculty lines
Can faculty currently receive tenure in honors at your institution?	(1) Yes, faculty can receive tenure in honors; (2) No, not in honors; (3) No, our institution does not have a tenure system
Does the honors college have its own dedicated staff lines?	Yes/No
If yes, what is the number of full-time equivalent staff lines dedicated to the honors college?	Number of FTE staff lines
What activities are dedicated honors college staff involved with? (Select all that apply.)	(1) Dedicated honors advising; (2) Administrative support; (3) Fundraising; (4) Co-curricular programming; (5) Budget management; (6) Recruitment of honors students; (7) Review of applications for admission into honors; (8) Teaching honors classes; (9) Other (please specify)
Not including personnel costs, what is the annual operating budget of the honors college?	Operating budget, in dollars

Item/Question	Description/Response Options
Approximately what is the current total value of all honors college endowment funds?	Current value (summer 2021) of honors college endowment, in dollars
Is your institution a member of or regular participant in any of the following honors or other organizations? (Select all that apply.)	<p>(1) National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC); (2) Honors Education at Research Universities (HERU); (3) Council on Honors Education, Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (CoHE-APLU); (4) National Association of African American Honors Programs (NAAAHP); (5) A regional or state honors council</p>
<b>Honors Demographics</b>	
Honors Student Enrollment by Race-Ethnic Category—Of the undergraduate honors students in fall 2020, please indicate the number of students in each of the following categories. Report Hispanic/Latino students of any race as Hispanic/Latino. Include international students only in the category “nonresident aliens.” (These demographic categories correspond with standard definitions typically used to report student data to the U.S. Department of Education and the Common Data Set.)	Percentages for each institution were calculated based on student numbers provided in nine categories of race-ethnicity: (1) Nonresident aliens (i.e., international students); (2) Hispanic/Latino; (3) Black or African American, non-Hispanic; (4) White, non-Hispanic; (5) American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic; (6) Asian, non-Hispanic; (7) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic; (8) Two or more races, non-Hispanic; (9) Race and/or ethnicity unknown
For the initial first-year class of degree-seeking honors students entering in fall 2020 (reported earlier), please indicate the number who received a Federal Pell Grant. If you don't know the number but know the percentage, please include that instead.	Separate responses for percentages or numbers of first-year honors students receiving Pell Grants were collected, and percentages were calculated for those institutions reporting headcounts instead of percentages






For the initial first-year class of degree-seeking honors students entering in fall 2020, please indicate the number who were first-generation students. If you don't know the number but know the percentage, please include that instead. (Please use the definition of first-generation prevailing at your institution.)	Separate responses for percentages or numbers of first-generation first-year honors students were collected, and percentages were calculated for those institutions reporting headcounts instead of percentages
What is the race of the current head of honors? (Select all that apply.)	(1) Black or African American; (2) White; (3) Asian; (4) American Indian or Alaska Native; (5) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; (6) Some other race
Does the current head of honors identify as Hispanic?	Yes/No
What is the gender identity of the current head of honors?	(1) Woman; (2) Transgender; (3) Man; (4) Non-binary, gender non-conforming, or gender fluid identity; (5) Some other gender identity (specify); (6) Prefer not to respond
Does your honors college have an assistant/associate dean or other person who serves as second-in-command?	Yes/No
What is the race of the current assistant/associate dean, director, or other second-in-command for the honors college? (Select all that apply.)	(1) Black or African American; (2) White; (3) Asian; (4) American Indian or Alaska Native; (5) Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; (6) Some other race
Does the asst./assoc. dean or other second-in-command for the honors college identify as Hispanic?	Yes/No

Item/Question	Description/Response Options
<p>What is the gender identity of the current assistant/associate dean, director, or other second-in-command for the honors college?</p>	<p>(1) Woman; (2) Transgender; (3) Man; (4) Non-binary, gender non-conforming, or gender fluid identity; (5) Some other gender identity (specify); (6) Prefer not to respond</p>

*Note:* Items come from the 2021 *Census of U.S. Honors Colleges* unless otherwise indicated. Data about Institutional Carnegie Classification come from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

APPENDIX C  
**Postcard Announcement of Census of U.S. Honors Colleges**

<p>Dear Dr. Smith,</p> <p>Greetings! My name is Richard Badenhausen and I'm dean of Honors at Westminister College in Utah. I'm also a proud member of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), where I've served the past four years on the Executive Committee.</p> <p>I wanted to drop a note made of old-fashioned ink and paper to let you know that I'm working on a survey project with the NCHC Research Committee, and we're writing to ask your help. You should have received an email invitation and unique link to the 2021 Census of US Honors Colleges on <b>Wednesday, May 12</b>.</p> <p>If you didn't receive that email, please check your junk folder and/or feel free to reach out to me at <a href="mailto:rjb@westministercollege.edu">rjb@westministercollege.edu</a> and we'll try another way to get that link into your hands. And if you've already completed the survey, thank you for your help!</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>          Richard Badenhausen          Dean of the Honors College, Westminister College  <a href="mailto:rjb@westministercollege.edu">rjb@westministercollege.edu</a></p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content;">                 PRESORTED                  FIRST CLASS                  U.S. POSTAGE                  PAID                  SLC, UT                  PERMIT # 953             </div> <div style="text-align: center;">   <b>WESTMINSTER                  COLLEGE</b> </div> <p>1840 South 1300 East                  Salt Lake City, UT 84105  <a href="http://westministercollege.edu">westministercollege.edu</a></p> <div style="text-align: right;">                   WC-.....SINGLP                  PATRICIA SMITH                  201 DONAGHEY AVE P 5024                  CONWAY, AR 72035-5001                  177                  T1 P1             </div>
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# HONORS COLLEGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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Part II:  
Transitioning to an Honors College



## CHAPTER THREE

# Should We Start an Honors College? An Administrative Playbook for Working Through the Decision

RICHARD BADENHAUSEN  
WESTMINSTER UNIVERSITY

### INTRODUCTION

Acknowledging that the number of honors colleges across the U.S. has increased 50% between 2016 and 2021 suggests the answer to the question posed in my title is a resounding “yes!” This recent expansion has also occurred on the heels of robust growth during the previous two decades. Yet there are good and bad reasons to start an honors college or evolve an honors college from an existing honors program; and there are also fine reasons *not* to start an honors college. While those reasons will vary across institutions—as every local context is different—some common questions and considerations can guide stakeholders as they dig into strategic thinking about the opportunities and costs surrounding an honors

college. This essay lays out some of those questions in seeking to provide guidance around what can be both an exhilarating and harrowing journey.

Let's start with a scenario typical in higher education. A new president or provost rolls into town looking to make a mark. They want visible change, a material object they can point to suggesting the institution is "on the move." These days, transitioning an honors program to an honors college or starting one from scratch is increasingly part of the standard playbook. And why not? Honors colleges present opportunities for enrollment lift, provide a tangible fundraising opportunity, and can move the needle on an institution's academic profile, among other benefits. In short, senior administrators can appear to be *doing* something. But is it a good idea?

Many institutions skip over the question of "*should* we start an honors college?" and proceed directly to "*how can we* build an honors college?" Ignoring the former in favor of the latter is a grave mistake because there are many reasons *not* to transition to an honors college or at least not do so in a given moment.

- **If the honors curriculum is not built out fully**, it is going to be difficult to scale the operation—a greater number of students showing up at your door without being able to move through the curriculum in a timely fashion will result in frustrated undergraduates and low persistence and completion rates.
- **If an honors program already has some unaddressed problems that require attention**—perhaps with resources, in staffing or advising, or low student satisfaction—moving to an honors college model will simply exacerbate those problems and make them more entrenched and thus more difficult to address. Your house should be in order before a major transition.
- **If you are simply changing the sign over the door without identifying strategic aims being served by the move from an honors program to an honors college**, you are



doing your institution and its students a disservice. “Fake it until you make it” is not a recipe for long-term success: students have many choices in the marketplace and are looking for programmatic distinctiveness and material differences between institutions. “You get extra perks if you join the honors college” is not a compelling positioning statement.

- **If you don’t have the full support of senior administration**, creating the necessary momentum around personnel investments, fundraising, and elevation of the position of honors on the university org chart, which are required for success, is going to be difficult.
- **If your honors program is in wonderful shape and there’s the risk of losing something special**, the move to an honors college may not be worth it. Strong community, a culture of innovation, positive collaboration with campus partners, a history of distinctive traditions, and a powerful curriculum should not be taken for granted and won’t automatically transfer to the new model. The Hippocratic oath of “first do no harm” applies here.

Just as there are good reasons for *not* starting an honors college, there are many compelling rationales for why an institution might wish to move toward that new model, including some of the following advantages.

- **Scale:** honors colleges tend to be bigger than honors programs and, as a result, can present opportunities for operational efficiencies.<sup>1</sup>
- **Autonomy:** honors colleges tend to have more control over their operations, especially in the areas of curriculum, staffing, and enrollment management.
- **Visibility:** honors colleges tend to have a bigger footprint and thus are more visible both internally and externally, which can lead to more opportunities for collaboration with other units across campus and with community partners.

- **Enrollment lift:** enhanced visibility creates an opportunity to increase the size of the honors student population and sometimes improve the quality of cohorts you are attracting to the institution.<sup>2</sup>
- **Advancement opportunities:** honors colleges, often supported by an advisory board, can provide compelling cases for donor support and tend to be more on the radar of development offices.
- **A seat at the table:** because honors colleges are typically led by deans, they offer the unit a chance to contribute to key conversations about academics at the university through participation on the deans' council.
- **Staffing:** honors colleges provide a greater opportunity to secure faculty lines in the unit and build out the administrative support structure: a quarter of respondents to the "2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges" indicated they have dedicated faculty lines, a figure that climbed to roughly 50% for R1 institutions (Cognard-Black and Smith 64).
- **Build out programming:** a larger budget, more support personnel, and a greater number of students allow an honors college to increase its co-curricular programming and thus provide more opportunities for students. An honors college may also prompt the addition of a residential component, as over three quarters of honors colleges in the 2021 census conducted in association with this monograph indicate the presence of residential housing (Cognard-Black and Smith 63).

While the above list is enticing, a few caveats are worth mentioning. These advantages are not present in every case and will only evolve over time with careful planning and through the collaboration and support of other units and senior administration. We also should not overplay the differences between honors colleges and honors program, for as NCHC's "Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education" remind us, the common characteristics of honors programs and honors colleges far outnumber the

differences, hence the framing adjective “shared.” Likewise, there are numerous highly successful honors programs that are far more mature than some underdeveloped honors colleges, so we should not make value judgments about the two different organizational forms. Honors colleges are not a good in and of themselves, and simply moving to this model does not mean that the advantages above will necessarily accrue.

In fact, programs that transition to an honors college and grow their honors student population significantly can anticipate facing some new problems. One of the most common challenges will be trying to cultivate and maintain community. Small honors programs have a built-in advantage in that students and faculty can develop relationships more easily. Often, such programs have high concentrations of students from the arts and sciences, further creating a sense of shared experience. Word of mouth around the traditions of honors can be passed along easily and often without intention—there is a kind of inertia to the community-building effort. But as you scale the operation and bring more diverse populations into the honors space—more students from professional programs; transfer students who have not experienced your first-year programming; more students with different life experiences, identities, and varied academic preparation—community will not take care of itself. Program distinctiveness and clear marketing materials around what honors means will help mitigate some of these effects. Additionally, affinity groups, strong peer mentoring programs, community engagement coordinators, and residential programming can point you in the right direction, but you will need to be intentional about new ways of thinking and new ways of addressing advantages you may have taken for granted in an honors program. Failure to address such challenges will also likely lead to collateral damage in reduced retention and persistence rates, confusion around program identity, and even negatively affect the academic performance of students.

The process of starting an honors college from scratch or evolving one from an existing honors program will differ in significant ways. The latter approach is much more common according to the 2021 census, with 89.1% of respondents indicating their honors

colleges grew out of existing honors programs. So while starting with a blank slate offers some freedom, this essay imagines its primary audience consists of readers adapting a current program into an honors college. Although I am suggesting one particular chronology in this essay, different institutional circumstances will dictate these steps be staged in a variety of ways.

By the way, a chapter in Peter C. Sederberg's volume on honors colleges by Bob Pepperman Taylor, "How to Create an Honors College," raises some excellent questions worth considering, even though much has changed in the two decades since he was appointed dean of the honors college at the University of Vermont. And following the orientation of Sederberg's volume, that essay focuses on the particular *characteristics* of an honors college: admissions, curriculum, personnel and governance, student makeup, and budget, among others. This chapter—which is informed by recent survey data and the variety of options that have sprung up during a period of significant growth in honors colleges—can be paired profitably with Taylor's essay by those looking to map out a game plan for institutional change.

## PURPOSE

In an interview about motivation and learning, author Daniel Pink once explained the following:

When kids ask, "Why are we doing this?" we often dismiss it as an annoying question when, in fact, it's a pretty darn good one. And we need to be able to answer it—not to placate the kids, but because there's a rich body of evidence showing that when people know why they're doing something, they do it better.

That fundamental question "Why are we doing this?" is often on the tips of the tongues of students in classrooms, but it less frequently makes its way into the planning meetings of administrators, which may explain why so many organizations lurch from fad to fad each time a new leader surfaces or why so many strategic planning processes seem so lifeless and doomed from the start. "Why are we

doing this?” should be a question that kicks off any discussion of moving to an honors college. Institutions should have clear answers to that important question not only because good answers will help buttress leaders of the effort during what is usually a long process but because various constituencies will need to hear compelling reasons to support you: boards, donors, administrators, as well as faculty, students, and staff. In an environment of limited resources, institutions owe members of their communities a clear rationale for why investments are being made in one unit over others. Ultimately, leaders need to be able to articulate what the honors college is *for*.

Not only should it be clear *why* an institution is starting an honors college, but the creation of such a unit should meet some clear institutional *need*. Perhaps a university wants to create a space for pedagogical experimentation in the classroom; perhaps it is looking to increase the number of motivated students to work with faculty on undergraduate research; or perhaps giving the honors unit more institutional autonomy will unleash curricular innovation across academic programs. In all these cases, questions about purpose should take place amidst conversations about institutional mission, vision, and values. NCHC’s “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education” leads off by highlighting how the honors college both “aligns itself with the mission of the institution” (1) and advances strategic priorities because that synergy should inform everything that follows. And subsequent conversations around key practices—such as admissions, teaching/learning, and co-curriculum—should be framed and informed by the institution’s mission, vision, and values. If a university has gone all-in on global learning, then the honors college should reflect or complement that orientation.

The other reason conversations around purpose are so essential is that they will ultimately inform the metrics by which the effort will be judged. If no clarity around the reasons for starting an honors college exists, then the institution will not know whether the project has been successful down the road. If the primary purpose is growing enrollment, then increases in student numbers should be tracked to determine success; an effort driven by fundraising

should identify target amounts of donor dollars. The answers to questions around purpose and need should be buttressed by data and ultimately result in a written case statement that lays out the case for an honors college: here's where we are going; this is why we are going there; and here's what we need to get there. The corollary to Pink's observation above that learners will be more successful when they know why they are being asked to do something is that research has shown that employees will be more engaged when they have a clear sense of the goals the unit is aiming for (Bezuijen et al.). By clearly delineating objectives and key results (OKRs), you are more likely to attract allies to your cause.

Speaking of metrics, there are certainly instrumentalist reasons that may inform an institution's decision to move to an honors college. For example, some states are increasingly allocating funds through their university systems based on performance metrics that take into account factors that may be improved by the presence of an honors college, including enrolling high-achieving students, increasing persistence and graduation rates, and demonstrating post-graduate success, to name three. As stated on the "Performance Based Funding" website of the State University System of Florida, one guiding principle is to "reward Excellence or improvement." This example is one of many where an investment in an honors college can move the entire institution forward. Do note, however, that this increased focus on metrics can cut both ways. State-mandated performance-based funding approaches may limit student credit hours at an institution or restrict classes outside a major program—both of which will have a negative impact on honors offerings. Elevating honors to a place alongside other colleges at the university may also subject the honors college to evaluation along the lines of revenue generation or expenses tied to FTEs and Student Credit Hours.

### **WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?**

The "2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges" suggests that in about a third of cases, the president or other members of senior administration initiated the effort to move to an honors college.

Nevertheless, conversations around whether a transition to an honors college is a good idea and, if so, what the final product might look like should involve a wide range of stakeholders, including current faculty, staff, and students in honors, honors program alums, and leaders in advancement, student affairs, enrollment management, and academic affairs. Campus representatives from outside honors will also provide useful insights. Having such conversations will be easier if an institution has an established history of honors, an existing culture on which to build, faculty and staff with experience in honors education, and a track record of how honors has interacted with other units on campus. On the other hand, those past experiences can also sometimes limit the perspective of those involved in planning conversations. For example, if an honors program has never employed its own faculty—instead depending on “borrowing” the faculty of other programs and leaning heavily on departmental honors and honors contracts—it may be harder to envision how a standing honors college faculty might fit into the institutional culture of the university or college. Likewise, if a program has employed a Great Books curriculum, conceiving of and implementing different models like problem-based learning, for example, may be hard. In these cases, having NCHC-trained site visitors investigate the current situation, prompt stakeholders to describe their aspirations, and generate a report outlining some strategic opportunities that may inform the local conversation can be helpful. Calling for such assistance is especially important (perhaps even obligatory) if a campus has no expert on honors education or no experienced voice helping shape the transition process. For a fraction of the cost of for-profit outfits that offer consulting services across the entire portfolio of higher education activities, NCHC consultants who focus on honors education can play a crucial role in helping a program move forward with its plans for an honors college.

Anyone who might be impacted by the decision to move to an honors college should have the opportunity to weigh in at some point and in the most transparent fashion. Transparency will create good will just as furtiveness will create suspicion and resentment

across campus. In the case of my own institution, during the process of transitioning to an honors college, I engaged in year-long dual conversations about the what, why, and how with 1) individual schools and the faculty governance system and 2) the senior administration and advancement staff who needed to hear the fundraising case and understand how the plan for expansion aligned with the strategic goals of the institution. A campaign feasibility study can lay the groundwork for a significant and extended fundraising effort as well as help stakeholders understand what is and is not possible. At my own institution, it was important that the entire faculty vote on the creation of a new unit—even after the faculty senate unanimously endorsed the proposal. I made sure to seek out known opponents of the plan to hear them out during individual conversations, even if I was fairly certain my comments would do little to change their minds. In the end, 93.3% of faculty who voted approved of the motion to create Westminster’s fifth school, a move subsequently passed by the board of trustees and then accepted by our accrediting body. At larger universities where the full faculty rarely vote in such a manner, the faculty senate and the board will be the focus of attention.

## **DISTINCTIVENESS**

For decades, the standard value proposition for universities housing honors colleges was to explain that “we offer the benefits of a small liberal arts experience in the context of a large research university and all its attendant resources.” Combine that claim with the presence of additional opportunities (or perks) such as honors-specific scholarships, priority enrollment, and upscale housing, and you have the standard set-up of the turn-of-the-century honors college. Indeed, of all the institutions with an honors college surveyed in the 2021 census, 84.8% report offering priority registration to honors students, 77.2% provide dedicated residential housing, and over 70% offer some form of honors scholarships. Yet with such uniformity in approach and the explosion in the number of honors colleges across the U.S., institutions are increasingly having to work harder to differentiate their honors offerings in a progressively



more crowded market. Given recent and long-overdue conversations about equity in higher education, which make such “perks” reserved for a select group of students unattractive if not unjust, the time is right for honors colleges to position themselves in the marketplace in more creative and substantive ways. The ski industry in my own state of Utah offers an instructive case in point. Nine world-class resorts operate within one hour’s drive of my office, so by necessity each has carved out a niche in the market to remain relevant and attract a particular type of consumer. Deer Valley caters to high-end consumers who don’t think twice at grabbing a \$22 burger for lunch at Stein Erickson; Alta is restricted to skiers only and relishes its old school, locals vibe; Brighton welcomes the teenage boarder community, and sprawling Park City has gone all-in on the “Vail experience,” for better or worse. The ski industry knows that trying to be everything to everyone is a quick path to irrelevancy, a lesson most colleges and universities are still struggling to learn. If you are one of a dozen honors colleges in Virginia, you better be able to explain clearly how the experience of your students differs from that of those in the other eleven honors colleges.

Aaron Basko begins his 2022 discussion of the perils of the “generic college” by wondering why higher education has “so much trouble with differentiation,” the quality he identifies as the “secret sauce of success.” This dilemma certainly applies to honors colleges, which sometimes coast along on vague promises about enhancing a student’s undergraduate education rather than embracing sharp differences in curriculum, programming, and the student experience. Yet distinctiveness is the name of the game these days, as we see in most industries—media, film, music, restaurants, skiing—where targeted programming wins the day. After all, consumers have never been more sophisticated, never had more choice, never had more resources at their fingertips that allow them to scrutinize the quality of a product. We shouldn’t fool ourselves into imagining that our students don’t approach the selection of an honors college in the same manner. Yet benefits abound in having the courage to stake out a distinctive program: clarity about mission will guide curricular and co-curricular programming choices, will make it

easier for enrollment management and marketing staffs to pitch the program, and will have a positive impact on retention. Brand loyalty occurs when an organization makes a clear and distinctive promise and then actually delivers on that pledge.

As mentioned above, being distinctive takes courage, especially in an industry that is deeply conservative and resistant to change. Boards may be reluctant to embrace difference if they are too far removed from the program portfolio while senior administrators having to sell change may not want to take too many risks for fear of being held accountable if things don't work out. Yet the history of innovation in honors education—which has shown leadership in areas such as interdisciplinary curriculums, place-based learning, student-centered pedagogy, and team teaching—makes it a perfect space in which to experiment. Indeed, NCHC's "Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education" speak to this historical culture of innovation by detailing the many ways an honors college (or program) can serve as a "laboratory of innovation" (4). It is also important that the question of distinctiveness be considered not only in terms of the marketplace an honors college is operating in (i.e., the most common external competitors) but in terms of other units on campus, particularly the general education program, if the honors college offers an alternative pathway through the general education requirements.<sup>3</sup> Tougher grading or additional work are not compelling position statements: honors should not be harder but different. Thus, when stakeholders consider the move to an honors college, they should take advantage of this transition opportunity to avoid making themselves in the image of one hundred other honors colleges. They should strive for a distinctive experience that is well-aligned with the culture, mission, and strategic goals of the larger institution: distinctive aspects of a program should serve some larger purpose. Just as small classes are not a good in and of themselves—although you'd be hard-pressed to know that by all the college marketing materials touting that feature—interdisciplinary approaches to education need to be tied to some ancillary outcome. In the case of my program, that curricular feature helps students practice having conversations across difference and develop their

own voices in community, two key learning outcomes for our honors college. For Aaron Stoller at Colorado College, what he calls “critical interdisciplinarity” serves a different function, which is to “advance democratic aims” (“Case” 34). In both cases, the function of the distinctive feature is clear.

## RESOURCES

NCHC’s “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education” is quite clear on the matter of resources. At the start of the section on “Infrastructure and Resources,” the first principle explains, “The permanence and stability of an honors program or college is ensured through adequate infrastructure and resources, including an appropriate budget as well as appropriate faculty, professional staff, and administrative support when necessary” (6). While it is up to institutional leaders to decide how they understand the modifier “appropriate,” the subsequent language around how to put this principle into practice is unambiguous: “Honors does not depend on the good will and energy of particular faculty members or administrators for survival; instead, the program is fully institutionalized so that it can build a lasting tradition of inclusive excellence” (6). In short, universities should not run an honors college on the cheap nor outside the typical channels of institutional practices. It is not unusual for honors programs that have evolved over time to have staffed classes through long-standing oral agreements with individual program chairs or deans, covered operational expenses through the generosity of a provost who locates funds to support honors on an ad hoc basis, or managed administrative tasks through the efforts of a staff member in another unit who takes on honors as an additional responsibility. Such tenuous arrangements will break under the weight of scale; thus, planning conversations around moving to an honors college model provide perfect opportunities to lay out clearly how the new unit will be fully institutionalized. The honors leader should not have to approach other units looking for a hand-out if the chair, provost, or staff member who had previously given cover to honors moves to another position or leaves the institution. The structure must be stable. An honors college requires its own

independent budget with clear lines of funding for programming and staff. Calculations around budgeting may acknowledge that honors often functions as a service unit that may not fit easily into university budget models based on credit generation or number of majors. Honors colleges, of course, serve other invaluable roles tied directly to finances, such as attracting high-achieving students to an institution before they go on to major in individual programs; establishing significant records of achievements in undergraduate research, fellowships, and graduate placement that are often trumpeted by the university for purposes of fundraising and recruitment; and producing alums with strong affinity for both honors and the institution, which translates into high giving rates. In short, honors college students provide an excellent ROI for an institution.

One tactical question involves when to fundraise for an honors college. One approach is to raise money before converting an honors program to an honors college, securing funds to underwrite the operations of the new unit in advance of its launch. Another option is to methodically scale the operation and then tout a record of success for donors. No single right approach exists. Honors leadership, however, should work with advancement and senior administration to be clear on the matter of naming rights: what would it cost to name the new honors college? Barrett, one of the best-known honors colleges in the U.S., was named in January 2000 upon a \$10 million commitment to Arizona State University by former Intel CEO Craig Barrett and his wife, Barbara, who graduated from ASU (“History”). The Kilachand Honors College at Boston University emerged in 2011 from a \$25 million pledge from Rajen Kilachand, president of the Dodsall Group (Jahnke). Other honors colleges have been named for significantly more modest sums: the Clarke Honors College at Salisbury University, for example, was named on the basis of a \$1.5 million gift (*Clarke*). The key point is that naming an honors college only happens once: institutions should resist underselling this opportunity, though some universities may have strict formulas tied to operational expenses, leaving deans little latitude in budget discussions or efforts to identify naming targets.<sup>4</sup> In some cases, an honors college has been established in honor of

a significant member of the community without a corresponding gift, as is the case with the Irvin D. Reid Honors College, whose name recognizes the first African American president of Wayne State University.

For public universities, funding questions can sometimes get wrapped up in state politics because the institution's budgeting process must travel through the state legislature and ultimately the governor's office. This circuit can lead to some unfortunate outcomes. In the case of the Florida Gulf Coast University Honors College, for example, the Florida legislature approved \$1 million in one-time funding in 2017 to launch the honors college, only to have Governor Rick Scott veto that allocation (among other higher ed requests) because "FGCU should be able to self-fund those projects based on other funding it has received," according to press reports of the decision (Bland). The story has a happy ending because the university provided its own funds and the FGCU Honors College is thriving, but the case demonstrates that the process can be bruising.

## **INSTITUTIONAL POSITIONALITY**

Honors programs have historically been situated all over the organizational map of institutions. Sometimes they are housed within individual schools, sometimes they float in a liminal space in or adjacent to academic affairs, and sometimes they stand alone without a home. Some universities may have multiple honors programs spread across schools. In many cases, honors sits in organizational tension with disciplinary programs in ways that often go unspoken, though in a recent *JNCHC* essay, Aaron Stoller surfaces that tension explicitly when he calls out

the binary framing of labor in the academy, which is split between the so-called "academic" and "non-academic" domains. . . . The former is devoted to the production and dissemination of "legitimate" (i.e., disciplinary) knowledge and is, therefore, the only domain in which one can gain expert status. On the other hand, the labor within the "non-academic" domain, which includes virtually all

other institutional functions, is rendered non-theoretical and non-intellectual. This binary explains why many universities classify honors colleges and programs as “non-academic” versus the degree-granting “academic” units of, for instance, business, arts and sciences, and engineering, even though the professionals in those colleges and programs carry the same credentials, teach similar course loads within internal honors curricula, and publish equivalent research. (“Honors” 44)

Indeed, I served as a program reviewer at one state university where the honors college was required to complete the assessment process designed for administrative and educational support units rather than academic programs, resulting in some odd metrics of evaluation that periodically did not apply, given their heavy emphasis on “users” and “services.” While Stoller highlights this organizational friction to set up his invitation to the honors community to create a “third space” for its activities, an alternative approach is to work within the existing system by firmly situating honors colleges on the academic side of the house, complete with all the appropriate trappings: robust budgets, dedicated faculty lines, degrees, and a seat at the deans’ council table. Whatever route a university decides to take, it should be clear up front where the honors college is positioned on the institutional org chart and what that positionality means for the honors college and other units on campus. It seems foolish to devote significant time, energy, and resources toward an honors college and then not assign it the necessary autonomy to thrive.

## **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS**

One of many improvements in NCHC’s new iteration of the “Basic Characteristics,” the “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education,” is that they infuse the work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access across the spectrum of honors activities.<sup>5</sup> The approach suggests that the DEIA lens should inform the full scope of work in honors instead of being considered an isolated add-on or

a mere afterthought. As suggested above, one of the earliest questions an institution needs to answer as it considers transitioning to an honors college is “what is honors for?” The answer to that question will inform what the honors college looks like and the way its practices reinforce the unit’s mission, vision, and values and support the strategic goals of the larger institution. But just as important as that initial question is “*who* is honors for?” And in considering answers, an institution must wrestle with the exclusionary history of honors education, both its origins in a mid-twentieth-century culture shaped by anxieties about “falling behind” in STEM and other fields and subsequent practices limiting eligible populations for honors because of very narrow definitions about how talent and potential are measured in the admissions process. Some of these tendencies have been exacerbated by the insidious focus on prestige that originated after *U.S. News and World Report’s* first annual rankings of colleges and universities in 1983. As former Reed College president Colin Diver notes in his new book exploring the disastrous impact of this phenomenon, there are many “games” that institutions use to “chase” high test scores, which has resulted in a perverse system he refers to as “rankocracy” (x). Honors programs and colleges have often been complicit in this project because they have been employed by institutions to attract students with strong ACT and SAT scores and thus have helped move the needle on ranking metrics tied to high scores; however, to be fair, other excellent honors programs and colleges at regional universities counter that imperative with explicit access missions that honors supports.

Honors education has matured significantly in its engagement with diversity issues in the past decade and numerous successful honors colleges across the U.S. employ inclusive enrollment management practices. Institutions looking for models not tied to traditional practices of exclusion can readily find plenty of examples. My own honors college does not restrict application to students who hit certain GPA or test score benchmarks nor does it factor test scores into the decision to admit. This practice has achieved considerable momentum across higher ed during the COVID crisis because many institutions embraced test-optional approaches. All

potential Westminster students are given the option of expressing interest in the honors college on Westminster's Common Application, and honors application materials are evaluated holistically. Honors is not positioned as "better" but as one of two distinct pathways through the general education requirements, one that is appropriate for any sufficiently prepared Westminster student excited by an interdisciplinary curriculum and a discussion-based classroom environment. NCHC's recent position paper, *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion*, details a series of specific steps honors programs and colleges can take to make their enrollment management practices more inclusive as well as examples of institutions that have been successful in instituting such steps.<sup>6</sup> Some of those practices include using marketing material to frame the honors experience in inclusive ways, opening up the application process and minimizing test scores in ways I have mentioned above, creating multiple routes into the honors college for populations beyond the traditional first-year student, removing barriers to entrance and continued enrollment in honors (such as expensive participation fees and overly restrictive probation standards), and collaborating with campus and community partners committed to DEI work.

Other important questions related to diversity, equity, and inclusion should also be asked as an institution considers transitioning to an honors college. For example, how will honors cultivate a sense of belonging among students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education in general and in honors education in particular? For Terrell L. Strayhorn, because a "sense of belonging is a basic human need, a fundamental motivation, sufficient to drive behaviors and perceptions" and its "satisfaction leads to positive gains such as happiness, elation, well-being, achievement, and optimal functioning" (9), that feature of a student's experience is really a matter of equity: those students who do not have as strong a sense of belonging in honors are not being given as sufficient an opportunity to be successful as other students. And once you decide such support is important, what does that support look like? How will you position the honors college relative to other campus units in



terms of questions of privilege: for example, the 2021 census shows that four out of five honors colleges employ priority registration for their honors students. How will you explain that benefit and what kind of message does it send to the rest of campus? While there can be good justification for this special treatment, that rationale should be made explicit to the community and framed less as a perk and more as a necessity tied to the circumstances of the honors college curriculum and student population.

Additionally, how will you collect data so that you are making data-informed decisions around DEI work? For example, will you develop a robust climate survey in order to understand how students are experiencing the curriculum and co-curriculum and whether they see themselves in the program the institution is offering? And how will you share data among faculty and staff so they have a sense of the population they are serving? It would be tragic, for example, for staff who worked in an honors college with a significant proportion of students who are Pell eligible to not be steering those students toward the U.S. State Department's Gilman International Scholarship Program to support study abroad for low-income students due to erroneous assumptions about the demographics of the college's student population. In support of the efforts above, what kind of professional development will you be offering your honors college faculty and staff so they are equipped with the tools necessary to enhance student belonging? For example, will they be trained in the sort of robust culturally responsive advising laid out by Elizabeth Raisanen in another chapter in this volume? She notes: "Holistic academic advising and related programming must play a central role in any honors program or college with a true commitment to inclusivity because advising work is the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion . . ." (348). Will faculty have the tools to employ inclusive pedagogies of the sort called out in NCHC's "Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education"? They involve "inclusive teaching practices reflected in course design, syllabus construction, classroom climate, learning activities, and modes of assessment, practices that acknowledge the varied experiences, identities, backgrounds, and learning differences of students" (4). Finally, are

you willing to go beyond merely addressing these kind of baseline questions and be even more aspirational by positioning the honors college as a visible leader in DEI work on campus? Potential activities include partnering with other campus stakeholders (McNair, first-gen programs, veterans centers) on innovative yet challenging programming; ensuring a comprehensive curriculum that not only attends to diversity but centers it; regularly assessing your climate and designing strategic plans that have measurable goals in response to what you learn in that instrument; and aggressively recruiting students of color, first-gen students, LGBTQ+ students, and veterans.

## CONCLUSION

Myriad pitfalls and frustrations will surface during the journey to create an honors college—that's simply part of the deal in trying to effect change in higher education, one of the most conservative institutions in existence. I mention a few of the most common ones here although you're likely to encounter other surprises on this journey.

- **Not everyone will be supportive of your effort to create an honors college:** jealousy from other units and kneejerk resistance to change are facts of life on university campuses. Do not be put off by this opposition nor take it personally; instead, attempt to bring critics into the fold. Even if they don't change their minds, they will respect that you were willing to hear them. Frame the honors college case in terms of how it can potentially help other units: by providing enrollment lift for individual majors; by offering professional development opportunities for faculty through innovative teaching arrangements; by creating new programming—like an Office of Fellowship Advising, for example<sup>7</sup>—that serves the entire campus; by presenting occasions to collaborate with other programs on requests for shared faculty lines. An honors college can and should provide lift across the institution.

- **You will have to repeat yourself, again and again and again:** under the best of circumstances honors is confusing and often the majority of campus will be unclear about how honors works or what purpose it serves. This situation is one reason that my earlier point about distinctiveness is so important: your case should be clear, and distinctiveness will help with clarity. And then you will need to remind members of your community in many different settings of the design of the new honors college and why the move to an honors college makes sense for the institution. In some cases, this advocacy will necessitate engaging colleagues who have preexisting ideas about what honors education is or is not or misapprehensions based on outmoded models or bad experiences with previous iterations of honors.
- **You will never have more leverage over financial decisions**—what a budget looks like, how the office and classes will be staffed, the place of honors in a capital campaign—than when senior administration decides the honors college is a good idea for the institution. Don't waste that leverage! Definitely push back against any attempt to cut corners. Have your wish list ready and be very clear about what it will take to create a fully developed honors college the institution can be proud of, one that lives up to the national standards outlined in NCHC's "Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education." If you demonstrate you can staff your honors college on the cheap from the outset, you may be establishing a precedent and tone such that administrators will have no incentive to improve the staffing situation down the road.
- **Moving from an honors program to an honors college takes time:** it *should* take time if done properly. Having a new president simply wave a wand (Poof!) to create a new honors college might seem like an attractive prospect, but doing so will eliminate the important work of building a foundation, creating buy-in across campus, and engaging in generative thinking about what is best for students. That work is best done deliberately and in community. A model example of

this kind of thoughtful examination over time occurred at Purdue University in 2011–2012; more than eighty students, faculty, and staff broke into individual subcommittees to consider different features of the new honors college.<sup>8</sup> Those considering approaches to a campus-wide process would do well to read the Purdue document, which ultimately led to the establishment of a thriving honors college. Remember that it can sometimes take a year of working through the faculty governance process to get a single course approved, so bringing an entire college onboard won't happen overnight. Having said that, the process can also be perverse: I know of one state university where an honors program director tried for more than a decade to develop the program into an honors college but was blocked by a single dean on the deans' council. After that director whose efforts were frustrated for so long departed, the honors college was created by administrative fiat.

Many of the other essays in this volume will examine in granular detail important considerations involving budgeting, staffing, curriculum, advising, space, and additional features that make up a robust honors college. Likewise, the 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges conducted in conjunction with this monograph provides a thorough portrait of the qualities of honors colleges across the United States. The purpose of this chapter is less to lay out the nuts and bolts of an honors college—the basic characteristics, if you will—and more to introduce the various considerations and thought exercises that can help an institution examine a possible evolution to the model. There is no right way to engage in this process of transition, especially since the proper approach often depends on organizational culture, institutional history, and current political winds. But I have tried to raise some common questions that can inform the process and lead to a successful outcome no matter what your circumstances are. When done right, honors colleges can provide enormous autonomy to serve students, create an environment for powerful faculty and staff innovation, and generate positive outcomes for the entire institution.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>NCHC's 2016 Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges shows the mean size of honors programs at 385 students and the mean size of honors colleges at 1,023.

<sup>2</sup>In the 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges, enrollment lift and increased visibility were the only two motivations for moving to an honors college model cited by more than half of the responding institutions (Cognard-Black and Smith 56–57).

<sup>3</sup>It is important to note that the quest for distinctiveness within one's own university can be an ongoing journey for honors colleges. It is not unusual for honors to offer successful programming, such as common reads, living-learning communities, peer mentoring programs, and place-based learning that then get adopted by the larger institution.

<sup>4</sup>The 2021 Census of U.S. Honors Colleges indicates that one third of honors colleges surveyed are named (Cognard-Black and Smith 54).

<sup>5</sup>In the interest of full disclosure, I co-chaired the ad hoc committee that generated the “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education.”

<sup>6</sup>I also co-chaired the group that authored *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion*.

<sup>7</sup>According to the 2021 census, 45% of honors colleges surveyed house the institution's Office of Fellowship Advising (Cognard-Black and Smith 56).

<sup>8</sup>See Savaiano for a detailed 38-page task force report on the process that led to the creation of an honors college at Purdue University.

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CHAPTER FOUR

**Beyond the Letterhead:  
A Tactical Toolbox for Transitioning from  
Program to College**

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**T**he “Honors College Phenomenon,” as coined by Peter C. Sed-  
erberg’s 2008 eponymous NCHC monograph, is probably the  
single-most widespread and significant trend in honors education  
over the last two decades. Of the 95 honors colleges surveyed in  
the 2016 “NCHC Census of U.S. Honors Colleges and Programs,”

one-third had transitioned from an honors program within the previous seven years, and one-quarter had done so during the previous decade, meaning that most surveyed honors colleges were younger than sixteen years old (Cognard-Black). In 2018, the authors of this chapter oversaw similar transitions at their two respective universities, and trends across the country indicate that the “honors college phenomenon” is not losing momentum.

Although the honors programs at Coastal Carolina University and Florida Gulf Coast University both transitioned to honors colleges at the same time, they did so in radically different ways. The former experienced a slower, more intentional transition via shared governance while the latter underwent a quick change resulting from a top-down mandate. Despite these initial differences, the two processes shared some commonalities. The authors have developed a set of recommended strategies, which appear at the end of this chapter, for honors programs contemplating a transition, preparing for one, or already experiencing such a change. These strategic commonalities underscore that honors programs transitioning to an honors college can be guided by some basic principles regardless of their unique campus circumstances.

Coastal Carolina University (CCU) and Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) are both public regional comprehensive universities. Located near Myrtle Beach, SC, CCU was founded in 1954 and has an enrollment of approximately 10,000 undergraduates. About 50% of CCU students come from South Carolina, with most out-of-state students hailing from states along the eastern seaboard. FGCU was founded near Naples on the southwest Florida coast in 1997. It has quickly grown to approximately 16,000 students, 88% of whom are undergraduates. Currently, 97% of FGCU students come from Florida, and the university emphasizes degree programs in STEM and health professions. Both institutions are young, growing, and finding ways to build innovative institutional identities that distinguish them from other public universities in their home states. The choice to transition their honors programs to honors colleges has been a key feature of each institution’s growth and commitment to improving student success.

Essential differences between honors programs and honors colleges must be defined and acted upon if the transition from program to college is to be substantive. Jeffrey A. Portnoy makes a powerful argument in “A Requiem for Certification, A Song for Honors,” that the honors college phenomenon is not necessarily an evolutionary transition of an inferior program blossoming into a superior college. Disagreeing with Ottavio M. Casale’s assertion that honors programs are more “narrowly conceived” than honors colleges, Portnoy argues against the assumption that the distinction between honors program and honors college is inherently a difference in quality or conception (Casale 4; Portnoy 38). Honors education must fit the local needs and characteristics of a particular university. A university choosing to transform its honors program into an honors college must articulate differences as well as effective strategies for achieving them.

Before they were supplanted by the “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education,” NCHC’s “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program” and “Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College” focused on issues of scale. In that rendering, “fully developed” honors colleges are typically larger, more complex, and more autonomous units than honors programs in terms of enrollment, curriculum, administration and staffing, budget, fundraising, and co-curriculum. “Demography of Honors: The Census of U.S. Honors Programs and Colleges” (Scott et al.) empirically supports such distinctions by demonstrating that honors colleges are indeed quantifiably larger in these significant categories. This difference in scale is not predicated on wasteful administrative bloat or the notion that an honors college is simply an honors program on steroids. Rather, the differences in scale between honors programs and honors colleges increase an honors college’s ability to directly serve its students in a variety of ways and positively impact the larger university. An honors college, implemented correctly, amplifies the essential nature of an honors education that honors enthusiasts value, regardless of the size of our programs or colleges. While we periodically draw examples from our respective experiences at CCU and FGCU, the remainder

of this essay describes practical strategies for transitioning an honors program to an honors college by focusing on the importance of establishing collaborative relationships during the transition process and on how the areas of administrative structure, recruiting and enrollment, curriculum, faculty involvement, budgeting, and fundraising may need to evolve within a new honors college structure.

### **CULTIVATING COLLABORATION DURING THE TRANSITION PROCESS: THE HONORS COLLEGE WHITE PAPER**

Whether the decision to transition from honors program to honors college originates with a top-down mandate from the administration or develops out of a grassroots faculty-driven initiative, it is hard to overemphasize the value of a white paper or case statement in guiding this transition if the timeline allows. The white paper can serve many practical purposes, but primarily it offers a universal way to share a proposed vision, disseminate information about honors education, and gather feedback from key stakeholders. Providing a framework of the current state of the honors program as well as communicating current trends or best practices in honors education, the paper also establishes a comprehensive and common understanding that helps stakeholders evaluate current and future needs and contribute to the vision informing the transition. The white paper can initiate those key conversations, spur feedback, and generate campus-wide buy-in and support for the establishment of a new college.

A key component of the white paper should be a vision statement for the new honors college. Institutional context and culture will dictate the creative possibilities for the vision that is generated during the transition process, and both identifying and clearly articulating the ways in which the new honors college builds upon and expands institutional strengths, mission, and points of pride are important. In fact, the very first principle in NCHC's new "Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education" speaks to mission alignment: "The honors program or college aligns itself

with the mission of the institution, responds to its strategic plan and core values, and embraces student-centered practices while actively welcoming diverse faculty, professional staff, and students into its community” (1). The goal of any transition from program to college should be to elevate the undergraduate experience for all students on campus, and this should be reflected in the vision statement. The white paper should also include details regarding the current organizational and operational structure in honors, ensuring that readers gain a clear understanding of how the honors program functions, for many readers will only have a very general understanding of honors at a given institution. It will contextualize the institutional approach to honors education by providing a comparison to honors education at peer and aspirant institutions. Such comparisons will highlight potential areas of growth and provide a regional and national context that justifies the transition from program to college. In addition to answering questions regarding how the new college will operate and serve the greater campus community, the white paper should highlight areas of collaboration, innovation, and growth not only for honors, but for the institution as a whole.

The honors college white paper at CCU was disseminated widely and helped to build relationships with partners and stakeholders across the university. Administrators, trustees, faculty, staff, and students were invited to share their thoughts and feedback. The white paper functioned as a conversation starter and was used as a platform to inform others about the innovative ideas driving the transition from program to college. By soliciting feedback and incorporating it into the final draft, the white paper generated campus-wide buy-in, support, and collaboration for the establishment of the new college. It demonstrated how honors education connected to academic and non-academic units across campus, enabling individuals and departments to feel more ownership of and to invest in the honors educational experience. Relationship-building and collaborative partnerships were essential in the successful transition at CCU, and the white paper highlighted and capitalized on the unique strengths that marked the institution.

Creating buy-in and support across campus early on can lay a foundation for change that is indeed transformative; establishing and growing collaborations between honors and other academic departments on campus are a key part of the transition process and will ensure a growing interest and investment in the new honors college. Change will be easier and longer lasting if key stakeholders come to see their own success and achievements enhanced by the success of honors education. A first step is to identify strong programs with which honors may already have well-established relationships and work with those programs on some key collaborative initiatives. Signature programs attract large numbers of highly motivated students who often form a significant portion of the honors student population, so these initiatives will benefit both the program and the new honors college. Examples of possible collaborations include shared funding mechanisms to support student research and conference travel, collaborative special-interest housing, and joint programming such as the creation of a nationally competitive scholarships office. Partnering with well-established and successful departments on campus can demonstrate how honors is integral to the wider academic success of the institution. Thus, highlighting and publicizing stories of success and achievement that arise from these collaborative initiatives are important. As it becomes apparent that honors might serve and benefit students and faculty in their own department, more programs on campus will cultivate a stronger relationship with the new honors college. These collaborative initiatives should be at the heart of the transition process and should become central to the work of the new honors college.

### **ADMINISTRATION, STAFF, AND ADVISORY BOARDS IN AN HONORS COLLEGE**

A key initial consideration during the transition from program to college is the new leadership model and organizational structure. The 2016 “NCHC Census of Honors Colleges and Programs” found that 68.3% of honors colleges are headed by a dean, whereas only

1.8% of honors programs had a dean (Scott et al. 200). These percentiles represent perhaps the largest discrepancy between honors programs and colleges revealed by the survey. While this divergence makes clear that having a dean is a defining feature for most honors colleges, the survey reveals that more than 30% of honors colleges do *not* adhere to this leadership model, a figure confirmed in the 2021 “Census of U.S. Honors Colleges,” which shows 67.1% of honors colleges headed by a dean (Cognard-Black and Smith 55). Many honors colleges do not have dedicated faculty or tenure lines, and even if they do, these tenured or tenure-eligible faculty are smaller numerically than even a small academic department. Some administrations do not want a dean leading a “college” that functions so differently from other academic colleges. Campus politics may also play a role. A new dean can be perceived by existing deans as diluting their influence, or at least adding a new competitor for resources and the provost’s attention.

If a university chooses to transition an honors program into an honors college, then it should also be prepared politically and financially to create a dean position as the leader of the college. A dean ensures that the honors college has a seat at the deans’ council and can participate in university-level decisions as a peer. An honors college dean also reports directly to the provost, ensuring that the honors college has access to information and advocacy on par with other colleges. Other constituencies at the institution should perceive a new honors college as being equal to the other colleges in terms of shared decision making and standing on campus. It should be clear that a major reason for creating an honors college is so it can positively impact the university and its students in a much broader and deeper way than an honors program can. Thus, having a dean as the lead administrator ensures that the new college can appropriately function at a university-wide level.

Another important administrative structure—one that is shared with many honors programs—is a faculty advisory committee. While both honors colleges and programs typically have faculty advisory committees (87.3% and 83.2%, respectively), they may serve very different purposes (Scott et al. 221). Since honors

programs, on average, have fewer administrative staff than honors colleges, they rely on faculty advisory committees to perform duties more typically handled by an honors college's staff, such as reading admission applications, interviewing prospective students, and creating and attending extracurricular events. Honors programs need these faculty committees to do the basic administrative lifting required to adequately run the program more so than honors colleges do.

Faculty advisory committees are important to honors colleges as well, but this group can exist more for political purposes than administrative ones. While functional autonomy is desirable to a certain extent, and expected for an honors college, a central hazard for an honors college is the risk of becoming too walled off from the rest of campus. A robust and active faculty advisory committee can ensure that the honors college has knowledgeable advocates "seeded" throughout the university, especially if the committee is part of the overall faculty governance system. Having faculty representatives serve in limited terms, such as three years, will increase diversity of perspectives as well as provide opportunities for other faculty to learn and understand the role of honors education and the functioning of the honors college from the inside. Faculty advisory boards can help with many of the administrative functions previously mentioned; however, the board is best suited for working on curriculum revisions, program assessment, the honors thesis process, and academic policies. Since an adequately staffed honors college should have enough personnel to handle its primary administrative functions, the faculty advisory board can focus on core academic functions of the college. Their perspective is valuable, and the board members will appreciate being tasked with duties appropriate to their expertise.

While a faculty advisory board can assist with some administrative duties, particularly early in the transition from an honors program to an honors college, a strategic, multi-year hiring plan for dedicated administrative staff positions is essential and should be part of the budget planning process. While all potential staff positions are important, some are more time-sensitive than others. The



next section (Recruiting and Enrollment) details the importance of eventually having a dedicated recruiting/admissions person for a new honors college. This, however, is probably not the first staff position needed. Many professional needs, such as advising, recruiting, fundraising, and communications, can be shared with other offices. For example, certain advisors or recruiters housed in other units could be designated as the “lead” staff members in their offices for activities related to honors. Such arrangements require significant coordination between units, but the model is not sustainable in the long run although it can work until additional resources allow for the hiring of dedicated honors staff to assume these duties.

Beyond the honors college’s senior administration, the most important initial staff position is someone who focuses on events and programming for honors students. Honors programs and colleges often pride themselves on building community and offering opportunities for fun and personal growth outside of the traditional classroom. A staff member concentrating primarily on events and programming can provide a strong slate of activities that could attract new students to the honors college and retain them once they enroll. An honors dean will have many administrative duties that (sadly) do not directly involve students, and faculty only can teach so many students in an honors course. Frequent, creative, and enriching programming can engage many students and establish a sense of community and identity that both enhance and transcend the honors curriculum. A dean or a faculty advisory board cannot realistically dedicate the time to create such programming, nor are they necessarily best positioned to understand what is most appealing to students. Thus, a staff position focusing on community building is an ideal starting place. After this initial hire, an individualized assessment of institutional and college needs can inform future staffing decisions. These might cover areas such as recruiting, academic advising, marketing and outreach, or nationally competitive scholarships. The most important factor is that a plan to create a new honors college must include resources for several hires during the first five years.

## RECRUITING AND ENROLLMENT

That honors colleges typically have larger enrollments than honors programs is not surprising. The 2016 survey of NCHC member institutions revealed that honors colleges at four-year institutions enroll on average more than twice the number of students than honors programs (1,023.4 students compared to 385 students), comprising a larger percentage of the student body (7.4% compared to 5.7%) (Scott et al. 197). There are strategic reasons behind these numbers. Honors colleges are often more expressly considered university-wide units serving all majors rather than a niche program for a smaller, and perhaps more academically homogenous, set of students. Honors colleges often have more formal structures to involve faculty from a broader array of disciplines. As Scott and Frana forecasted in “Honors 2025: The Future of the Honors College” and Sederberg indicated in *The Honors College Phenomenon*, public universities often use their honors colleges as strategic tools to attract larger numbers of students with strong academic credentials. Brown et al. have used sophisticated surveying and statistical analysis to quantify the positive impact a robust honors college can make at a public university in terms of recruiting highly motivated students and retaining them through graduation.

Honors and university leadership should prioritize strategic changes to enrollment management early in the process of transitioning to an honors college. As demonstrated above, honors colleges typically have significantly larger enrollments than honors programs. Growing—even doubling—honors enrollment while maintaining rigorous admissions practices requires different enrollment practices and support. Further, significant enrollment growth can quickly demonstrate the value of an honors college to senior leaders on campus. A university transitioning its honors program to an honors college is likely doing so, in part, as a strategy to recruit more highly motivated students to the university, retain them, and graduate them in a timely manner. Strong enrollment growth signals an early return on investment to campus leaders. Finally, enrollment is the lifeblood of any academic organization. *How* an honors college recruits and admits new students results in

who they eventually enroll, which in turn informs the culture of the honors college.

Recruiting high school students is clearly important, but that takes time and staffing. One effective and relatively low-cost strategy for quickly increasing the honors enrollment is to recruit students already demonstrating success at the university. By reaching out to these students and convincing them that honors offers significant academic and co-curricular opportunities, honors colleges can increase enrollment quickly with little financial cost. The enrollment for the honors program (and then college) at FGCU grew from 530 students in fall 2015 to 1,200 students by the start of fall 2021. Much of this growth, particularly in the first few years, was fueled by enrolling significantly more current FGCU students rather than directly admitting a larger number of high school students. As of fall 2021, 40% of honors college students at FGCU were admitted after at least one semester at the university. A similar pattern occurred at CCU, which grew from approximately 300 students in 2012 to 820 in the spring of 2020, with an average of 35% of honors students being admitted after at least one semester at the university.

Initially focusing enrollment efforts on current university students has the advantage of diversifying honors college enrollment. Jason T. Hilton and Jessica Jordan's recent essay in the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, surveying twenty years of scholarship on diversity in honors programs and colleges, notes that honors admissions practices fixating on GPA and standardized test scores "replicate structural inequalities and generally are poor predictors of honors program completion" (125). Implementing holistic honors admission practices for students already on campus is easier than employing them for prospective high school students. For example, it may be logistically unfeasible to interview all high schoolers applying for admission to an honors college, but those barriers are reduced for prospective honors students already on campus. Such an admissions process can also rely more heavily on faculty and staff recommendations, current student word of mouth, and partnering with student affairs and the diversity, equity, and inclusion office on recruiting events.

Despite the advantages of recruiting prospective honors students already enrolled at the institution, high school recruiting will likely remain the lifeblood of an honors college. Two strategies can quickly ramp up a high school recruitment plan for a new honors college. First, an honors staff member dedicated to honors recruiting and admissions can work within the recruitment funnel of students who have already decided to attend the university, communicating to them that the honors college will add value to their university education. Additionally, they can also recruit “students who otherwise would not have enrolled at the university” (Scott and Frana 32). For example, when the fall 2021 cohort of first-year honors students at FGCU was surveyed at the honors orientation, 56.1% agreed that the honors college was a significant factor in their decision to attend FGCU.

While dedicated recruiters meet the practical and time-consuming needs of admission and enrollment work, they also signify that prospective honors college students need to be recruited differently. University recruiters are trained to recruit students to the institution as a whole and likely will know few details about the honors college and targeted opportunities such as undergraduate research, study abroad, and service learning activities. Prospective honors college students and their families often have a narrower focus and specific interests, and they often want many more details about their potential collegiate experiences. A dedicated honors college recruiter can tailor conversations, highlight specific faculty expertise aligned with individual interests, and provide more specifics of how honors can enrich the student experience.

A second effective way to quickly grow high school recruitment is through dedicated scholarships for incoming honors students. While finding additional funds through philanthropy is certainly a long-term goal of any honors college scholarship program, that process takes time. A more immediate strategy might be to look at the larger institutional merit scholarship program, if one exists, that the university already uses to recruit highly motivated students. At such institutions, incoming honors students are often already identified as recipients of a merit scholarship, thus allowing the honors

college to work with the office of admissions and finance office to rebrand some of the merit scholarship funds already going to honors students as honors college scholarships. At CCU, the honors college was allowed to claim a portion of the funds dedicated to merit scholarships and offer incoming honors students a \$1,000 per year honors college scholarship that stacked on top of the university merit scholarship.

## **BUILDING CURRICULA**

If enrollment management is the lifeblood of an honors college, then the curriculum is its body, giving shape and form to the college's central academic mission. As an honors program transitions to an honors college, the curriculum (or curricula) should also change to support its evolving academic mission. Because the university curriculum review and approval process is typically quite lengthy, alterations to the curriculum should be considered early in the honors college planning process. Honors curricula serve the needs and culture of their particular campus environment more than most academic units; however, some common features distinguish an honors college curriculum, especially those centering on enhanced curricular scope and flexibility.

The classic honors programs created in the 1960s through the 1980s were often general education replacement programs, which allowed honors students to earn all or significant portions of their general education requirements in small, often humanities-focused interdisciplinary honors seminars. In this model, once students started upper-division courses in their major and minor, then they typically were finished with the honors program requirements, except perhaps for a culminating honors thesis. This system was driven more by the difficulty of scheduling and staffing upper-division honors courses rather than pedagogical considerations. Conversely, an honors college curriculum is usually threaded throughout a student's entire undergraduate career, comprising honors general education courses, interdisciplinary honors electives, and opportunities to earn honors credit in upper-division courses required for the major and minor. When Larry Andrews

described the transition of the honors program at Kent State University in 1965 into what would be only the third honors college in the U.S., he prioritized “an expansion to a four-year curriculum” that would “engage the students in honors work every year” (“Multi-Collegiate” 66, 67). Of course, an expanded curriculum requires expanded instructional staffing and resources, and the next section addresses some of these important considerations.

Since honors colleges are university-wide units, they need the curricular flexibility to support students regardless of major. Importantly, students can take courses for honors credit that fulfill both general education requirements and requirements within their major. Also, as discussed above, honors colleges often have various admissions “on ramps” for students at different points in their college career. The need for curricular flexibility is amplified by the popularity of high school advanced placement and dual enrollment programs that enable students to earn college credit before they even matriculate. Many honors administrators feel the need to have a tightly controlled, homogenous academic experience for all honors students—and there certainly are benefits to that approach—however, that is rarely feasible today, particularly for a university-wide honors college.

## **MODELS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL STAFFING**

Any curriculum expansion, particularly when it includes upper-division courses in majors, is predicated on having the teaching capacity to consistently deliver such a curriculum. Thus, as the curriculum is being built, an accompanying honors college teaching model must be designed that accounts for an institution’s culture, structure, and needs. Often, this presents the most difficult aspect of transitioning to an honors college since it relies on significant buy-in and coordination from colleges, departments, upper administration, and individual faculty members. Several well-established models for faculty associated with an honors college exist, and we will discuss the positives and drawbacks of each. Many honors colleges use a hybrid of two or more of the following models, so they are not intended to be mutually exclusive options.

Determining the model that will work best and then making a strong argument for the resources necessary to support the academic mission of the new honors college are key to a successful transition. If the transition is a top-down mandate, then capitalizing on the initial interest of the administration by spending some cultural capital can ensure you have the necessary teaching resources. Likewise, those who are more intentional may want to leverage the buy-in and excitement during the planning phase of the transition; it can be the opportune moment for proposing a model for teaching honors that builds upon and nurtures the strongest connections across campus.

If the investment in honors education is already present in the honors program, and departments across campus are used to contributing faculty resources to the teaching of honors, a faculty buy-out model might be worth considering. The faculty buy-out model necessitates an increase in budget, allowing the honors college to transfer funds to departments that lend a faculty member to the honors college for a semester (or longer) in order to support the hire of a replacement adjunct instructor. A major benefit of this model is its cost-effectiveness: an honors college can staff its courses with tenured and tenure-track faculty members for the cost of a few adjunct faculty hires. It also can create broad support for the honors college amongst faculty members by providing them rotating opportunities to teach and engage with honors students. With an adequate buy-out budget, more departments will be able to lend out their faculty members to teach an honors course, ensuring broader faculty participation and not limiting honors teaching to a few faculty insiders from those privileged departments with adequate staffing. One major drawback, however, is that these faculty generally have no significant connection to the honors college beyond the teaching of that course. Because these faculty retain service obligations in their home department, for example, contributing to the administrative work of the new college can be difficult. Administratively, recreating a new schedule of honors courses each semester with an ever-changing faculty is challenging.

The model of an honors college with a permanent faculty also has both advantages and disadvantages. Two of the more obvious

advantages of a core honors faculty are their dedication and experience teaching and mentoring honors students and their investment in contributing to the development of the college. Honors faculty can help coordinate and contribute to the curriculum planning, serve on various committees, advise students, and participate in honors activities. A permanent faculty means a stable, predictable selection of upper-level seminars will be available and that faculty can help with recruiting, mentoring, and advising students. Admissions can also advertise the expertise and specialties of individual faculty dedicated to the enrichment of a student's experience.

A challenge worth recognizing is that honors faculty can develop feelings of disconnectedness from their disciplinary home department and feel somewhat siloed at the university if communication or coordination with the other units is diminished or vanishes. Since honors includes students from all disciplines, connections to other parts of the university are key to its success, and the faculty and administration of the honors college must be diligent in encouraging and supporting collaboration among the honors faculty, faculty in their home disciplines, and faculty in other colleges. For example, at CCU the honors college has championed the growth of an affiliate faculty model and encouraged honors faculty to apply for affiliate status with the departments with which they are most closely aligned. This not only helps the honors faculty at CCU stay connected to their home disciplines, but it allows the honors college to continue to develop and nurture collaborative relationships with different departments across the university.

Several questions need to be addressed when hiring honors college faculty. What disciplines are needed? What expertise should faculty members have? What should the requirements for tenure and promotion look like in an honors college? One of the principal benefits of creating faculty lines within the honors college at CCU has been the ability to create promotion and tenure guidelines that specifically recognize and reward honors pedagogy, as well as interdisciplinary research and teaching. In "Tenure and Promotion in Honors," Rosalie Otero argues for ensuring that full-time faculty housed within the honors college have equal privileges as faculty



housed in traditional disciplines in terms of their career trajectory. The best way to accomplish this goal is to establish college-specific hiring, tenure, and promotion processes for honors college faculty. The challenge faced by honors colleges that have their own faculty lines, however, is that, as Otero notes, “Honors’ is not a discipline” (63). To address this concern, the honors college at CCU has developed a unique organizational structure by building and housing two independent, interdisciplinary majors within the honors college (Sustainability and Coastal Resilience and Women’s and Gender Studies). These majors are open to all students across the university. This model has multiple benefits. Because it houses two degree programs open to all students and grants independent degrees, the CCU Honors College functions within the larger university in ways similar to the other academic colleges and has gained, in a short period of time, a status not unlike the other colleges. In order to staff these degree programs, the honors college has hired faculty whose areas of expertise are in either Sustainability or in Women’s and Gender Studies and who are able to deliver the interdisciplinary honors curriculum. Thus, CCU honors faculty both teach within honors and remain connected to their primary area of specialization. The honors college controls its own promotion and tenure process, and it oversees the awarding of tenure and promotion to honors college faculty in Women’s and Gender Studies and Sustainability and Coastal Resilience. Having academic majors housed within an honors college is not always feasible and can create some administrative tangles, but it does support faculty and student development in interesting and innovative ways.

A middle ground between the buy-out model and dedicated honors faculty is the faculty fellow model. Faculty fellows have a portion of their teaching assigned by the honors college for a fixed number of years and can be competitively selected based on an application endorsed by their home department and college. For example, at FGCU faculty fellows have one course of their standard teaching load assigned by the honors college each semester for three academic years. In 2015, the honors program at FGCU had three faculty fellows; now the honors college currently has 13

faculty fellows. In addition to its permanent honors college faculty, CCU has one faculty fellow. This model creates more pedagogical stability than the buy-out model while still allowing faculty to circulate between their home colleges and the honors college. It can also help to refresh the courses offered periodically. Faculty fellows can contribute in other ways by reviewing admission applications, attending recruiting events, and generally participating in the life of the honors college. A drawback is that there is no guarantee that a department or college will allow a faculty member to apply to be a fellow, which might result in some disciplinary gaps in the honors curriculum.

Another option for offering honors courses is through embedded courses, upper-division departmental classes where students earn honors credit in the course by completing a set of enriching activities/opportunities listed on the syllabus. Similar to honors contracts, embedded honors activities are designed in advance by the instructor and articulated on the syllabus. While not separate courses or sections, they can increase students' ability to earn honors credit, expand their engagement opportunities with content specific to their majors, and, of course, provide faculty opportunities to teach honors students. Honors embedded courses share many of the same well-established strengths and weaknesses as honors contracts; however, since they are designed well in advance and listed on the syllabus, the capacity for strong oversight from the honors college exists (Miller).

## **ESTABLISHING THE BUDGET**

One key aspect of moving beyond “just changing the letterhead” is ensuring a significant transition from honors program budget to honors college budget. This reallocation can be difficult for honors program administrators, who more often than not are faculty members themselves. In “Costs and Benefits in the Economy of Honors,” Richard Badenhausem argues that while many of us involved in honors may prefer dealing only with “the life of the mind” and the creation of “distinctive learning experiences,” we must acknowledge that “to be in honors is to be engaged in many

different economic arrangements and exchanges” (16). The importance of careful attention to budgets and resources becomes clear when examining the differences between program and college budgets. Often, programs located within larger organizational units do not have the resources necessary to support the infrastructural needs of an academic college. This infrastructure comes in many forms, from an adequate operating budget to the staffing necessary to run a college.

As planning the transition to an honors college proceeds, two pieces of research are key to fully understanding how a program budget differs from a college budget. The first involves assessing the location of the honors program within an institution’s organizational structure. Is the honors program located within another college or attached to the provost’s office or housed in academic affairs? Oftentimes, honors programs rely heavily on resources that belong to the umbrella unit. An honors program within a college of arts and sciences, for example, might depend upon academic advisors from the college advising office. For honors programs located within the provost’s office, travel budgets may be a part of the provost’s general operating budget, thus forcing faculty, staff, and students associated with honors to request conference travel funds from the provost. At smaller institutions, faculty directors of the honors program may rely upon their home department’s administrative assistant. Doing a thorough assessment of resources currently being used by the honors program and tracing where those resources originate are important first steps to determining the needs that will surface when transitioning to an honors college.

A second consideration may be to identify honors colleges at peer or aspirant institutions that have a similar operational model to the honors college being envisioned. Because honors colleges are often funded very differently from the other academic colleges within the university, examining budget models for honors colleges at similar institutions may be fruitful. Reaching out to the deans of those honors colleges to ask them to explain their budget, how they are funded, and what kinds of staffing resources are housed within the honors college can save precious time and energy. Borrowing

and adapting features from other honors operations have been a welcome and standard practice for many decades. Ideally, gathering a handful of different models may help build a budget proposal that works within the budgetary culture of the larger institution.

A proposal for an honors college budget should bring together multiple threads of information, including a thorough understanding of the current resources allotted to the honors program, the budgetary culture of the larger institution, the proposed staffing model that will work best for the new college, the relationship between the honors college and the other academic units on campus, and information about how successful honors colleges at peer and aspirant institutions are funded. All these threads will need to be researched to understand how to effectively propose a budget for the new college.

### **LEVERAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OFFICE AND BUILDING AN EXTERNAL ADVISORY BOARD**

A key reason for transitioning to an honors college is to increase the visibility of honors education on a college campus. Sometimes, an honors program is not seen as an autonomous, university-wide unit, especially if it is housed in another academic college or under the provost's office. For this reason, the university development office may not have an honors program on its radar as a possible location of donor interest and potential fundraising. Transitioning to an honors college increases the visibility of honors both within the institution and within the broader community. With this increased visibility, the leader of the new honors college should reach out to the university development office and establish the importance of honors to the university's overall philanthropic plan. In *Fundrai\$ing for Honor\$*, Larry R. Andrews urges leaders of honors programs and colleges "to ascertain the development model currently in operation at the institution" and where honors fits into it (37). Honors deans and directors need to meet with the leader of their institutional development office, ensure that honors has a place at the fundraising table, and create widespread

awareness amongst development officers that honors education can be an attractive area to potential donors. Development officers may also have an outdated understanding of honors education that is informed by their own collegiate experience and therefore would benefit from conversations about current national trends in honors focused on innovation; community engagement; and diversity, equity, inclusion, and access.

A key turning point in the transition of the honors program to the HTC Honors College at CCU centered on initial conversations with CCU's Office of Philanthropy. After we determined that honors was not a part of the overall development plan for CCU, we launched a series of discussions to raise awareness of the attractiveness of honors education for donors. According to Andrews:

Honors has a good story to tell in attracting donors. It represents academic quality. . . . It offers, in its students' success, many heartwarming arguments for support, especially for scholarships and for special programs, such as study abroad or research support. There really are people who would delight in being associated with such quality. (*Fundraising* 5–6)

With examples of honors students' stories and successes as well as opportunities for developing high-impact practices and program enhancement, these discussions led to significant results at CCU, including a donor interested in formally naming the new college. The subsequent endowment now funds educational experiences for honors students outside the classroom, including support for undergraduate research, study abroad, conference travel, and internships. Ultimately, advocacy on behalf of honors education and honors students convinced the philanthropy team to shift their strategy and focus, making honors a key philanthropic sales pitch for prospective donors.

Notably, Andrews lays out a long-term and developmental approach to fundraising that is perhaps more typical of most university fundraising efforts, rather than the more immediate, larger gift that marked the transition from program to college at CCU. This strategy involves developing a base of small donors by doing

alumni outreach, developing relationships that may result in both smaller and larger gifts, and identifying potential major donors. Relationship building, donor cultivation, and donor stewardship are all very much a part of any good long-term fundraising plan.

An external advisory board can be a key organizational unit within an honors college that will help support the dean of the college to devise a long-term fundraising plan, to initiate and cultivate fundraising opportunities, and to develop community engagement activities. As Scott Carnicom and Philip M. Mathis note in “Building an Honors Development Board,” this kind of external board can serve multiple purposes. Not only are board members charged with assisting the dean of the college to find and cultivate potential donors, but they can serve the honors college in other ways, including

1. offering insight into current hiring practices and expectations that directly benefit student internship and job prospects,
2. providing a ready-made professional network for honors students, and
3. establishing recognition for the honors college by promoting the work of honors students and faculty within the wider community (Carnicom and Mathis; Andrews, “Multi-Collegiate”).

The HTC Honors College Board of Visitors at CCU consists of honors alumni; influential community members with specific professional backgrounds such as law, medicine, and education; and enthusiastic university boosters invested in the work of the honors college. To participate on the Board of Visitors, members are asked to make a small annual donation and attend two meetings as well as two student-centered events per year. Board members particularly enjoy interacting with CCU honors students, and students find these events quite beneficial. Recent student-centered events have included meetings with the Honors Student Council and professional networking/speed dating events where honors students had the opportunity to discuss career paths with successful professionals in a variety of fields.

As an honors program transitions to an honors college, a key difference will likely be how honors engages with the development office. The creation of a new honors college can be an incredible opportunity to attract new donors and new community partners who are interested and invested in furthering honors education at the institution. As an honors program director transitions to honors college dean, another beneficial move is to seek out professional opportunities in the areas of development and alumni engagement. Ensuring that the advancement office assigns a dedicated gift officer to the honors college is critical. Honors colleges can present wonderful new opportunities for fundraising and partnership development that should be fully taken advantage of by the new dean.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter, we have described the processes by which two growing institutions have recently transitioned their honors programs to an honors college. While these processes were entirely different, we found a wealth of similarities and shared values that informed the transition at our respective institutions and that demonstrate key differences between programs and colleges. Importantly, we have offered practical ideas that could generate widespread support and facilitate the development of impactful educational experiences that are generally applicable to a broad range of institutions. Overall, some important considerations should include the following:

- Clearly defining the university's goals, values, and beliefs about the role of an honors education on the campus.
- Assessing the institutional culture to determine the staffing, teaching, and administrative structure that best benefits students and strengthens the university's mission.
- Identifying the resources already available for honors education and creating a budget plan that will support the organizational needs of a new academic college and provide distinctive learning experiences for students.

- Finding ways to widely promote the interests, great work, aspirations, and accomplishments of honors students. This activity does wonders for recruitment but is also important for attracting potential donors who might provide support in specific areas.
- Prioritizing strategic changes to enrollment management early in the transition process, including having a dedicated recruiter for admissions and enrollment who will pursue talented students from a wide range of diverse backgrounds.
- Developing curricular changes that provide an enhanced scope and flexibility for all students throughout their undergraduate career.
- Diving into fundraising work guided by a fuller relationship with the advancement office and eventually supported by an advisory board.

Overall, an honors college amplifies the essential nature of an honors education, enhances the mission of a given institution, and leverages those unique strengths that identify a university's culture and make it distinctive. We encourage faculty, staff, and administrators who are engaging in this transition process to reach out to other institutions and ask questions. Our decisions were greatly influenced by the advice and wisdom kindly shared with us by our colleagues at other institutions. Establishing a new honors college is an exciting opportunity and allows for the evaluation and prioritization of many things that can directly impact the lives of our students and make working in higher education even more worthwhile.

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# HONORS COLLEGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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Part III:  
Administrative Leadership



## CHAPTER FIVE

# “It Is What You Make It”: Opportunities Arising from the Unique Roles of Honors College Deans

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### INTRODUCTION

Honors college deans have unique roles at their institutions. They carry the title of “dean,” but they often have significantly different duties and responsibilities than their disciplinary decanal colleagues. Honors deans sit on higher administrative bodies such as the deans’ council and answer to the provost but typically have smaller budgets and fewer, if any, faculty who answer

directly to them. According to the 2021 “Census of U.S. Honors Colleges,” fewer than 27% of honors colleges have dedicated faculty lines although that figure climbs to 50% for R1 institutions (Cognard-Black and Smith 64). Of necessity, honors deans are heavily involved with the day-to-day, on-the-ground operations of their colleges, including recruiting students and finding faculty to teach them. Honors deans often depend on the resources of other colleges and units for their success. Since the colleges they run are not rooted in a particular discipline or set of disciplines, and since they operate in unique ways, honors deans often fit uneasily into traditional university governance and can be overlooked or given short shrift. Honors deans are also expected to be fundraisers but face more logistical challenges than their non-honors decanal colleagues. The chapter in this volume by Andrew Martino speaks to the special fundraising opportunities tied to leading an honors college. Nevertheless, honors deans often have fewer staff members to help with development work and fewer alumni in their databases. In addition, all honors college alumni are also graduates of other colleges on campus and therefore must be shared. Of course, honors colleges that have established a culture of community and engagement may graduate students who feel more affinity with honors than with other units and may later become willing donors.

Honors deans would seem, therefore, to defy easy categorization. The challenges that come with this hybrid role are obvious, but the opportunities may not be. This chapter shows that honors deans, despite—and sometimes because of—their unique situation, can play pivotal roles in their institutions, prompt transformative change across the university, and model best practices in higher education. But much depends, of course, on the person who takes up the role. To effect real change, honors deans must have initiative, creativity, and strong skills in persuasion and negotiation. Honors deaning is not for the faint of heart, but for those willing to accept the challenges, it can be one of the most significant and fulfilling positions in higher education.

The conclusions developed in this chapter are based on interviews the authors conducted with two dozen honors deans from

a variety of institutions, both public and private, and the honors colleges over which the interviewees presided served from two hundred students to several thousand. Despite these wide divergences, the themes that emerged were remarkably consistent. Interviewees were assured of confidentiality in particular matters, but they readily agreed to have their names listed at the end of this essay. (See Appendix A.)

### **UNIQUENESS OF THE HONORS DEAN ROLE**

There is (or should be) no question: honors college deans are deans. They head distinct colleges and have the same (or nearly the same) responsibilities as deans from other colleges: they bring vision and strategic direction to their colleges; advocate and lead; manage and administer; problem-solve and troubleshoot; mentor and develop; promote and implement university initiatives; and bear ultimate responsibility for the success of their college, faculty and staff members, and students. Honors college deans typically report to and serve at the pleasure of the provost; sit on deans' and provost councils or their equivalents; attend meetings and interact with members of the institution's board of trustees; work with the development office and raise funds; and capitalize, or try to, on whatever *gravitas* and influence may come with the title of "dean."

Without exception, the honors college deans we interviewed also agreed that their honors dean role is substantially and importantly different from the roles of other academic deans at their institution. Certainly, some spoke of being treated at one time or another, and often especially at the beginning of their decanal tenure, as "second-class" or "lower-class" deans, or of having been overlooked, excluded from key discussions, or not invited to certain events with the other academic deans. Since honors colleges tend to be relatively small, and since only about a quarter of honors colleges possess their own faculty lines, most honors college deans do far less promotion and tenure work than their non-honors dean colleagues, and most also deal with fewer personnel matters. Nearly all the honors college deans we spoke with devote serious time and energy year-round to marketing their colleges and to recruiting

students; to recruiting faculty from across the university to teach in and engage with the honors college; and to engaging students in shared governance and in social and co-curricular activities. But the honors college deans also all agreed, each in their own institution-specific contexts and with their own specific programmatic examples, that the uniqueness of the honors dean role, at least at institutions willing to invest in their honors colleges, also brings with it extraordinary opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and positive transformation, both within their honors colleges and across their universities.

Honors is easy to conceptualize or caricature, especially from the outside, as a field whose purposes and practices seldom change, as an elitist place consisting of exclusive practices that serve and add value only to the educational experiences of small groups of privileged, high-achieving, and driven students. Honors colleges and programs are often therefore assumed to be exclusive campus islands that focus mostly on themselves and their students' academic success. Honors practitioners at many institutions, of course, know differently, and nearly every honors dean we spoke with aligned themselves with the strong push toward diversity, equity, inclusion, and community and civic engagement that has featured ever more prominently in national conversations and practices in honors education over the past 15 or so years. (See, for example, the National Collegiate Honors Council's (NCHC) 2020 position paper, *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion*.) As a consequence, many deans emphasized that they conceive of their roles and perform their work on their campuses as *service*, not only to their own honors colleges and honors students, but to the other colleges and departments at their universities and to their universities as a whole and the communities that surround them. Honors colleges recruit, advise and mentor, connect to opportunities, develop, support financially, retain, graduate, and stay in productive touch with diverse students from every college and in every major across the university.

Of equal significance: many honors colleges become campus centers for programmatic, curricular, and pedagogical innovation and entrepreneurship; for student-faculty research and creative



collaboration from any and every major; for the use and dissemination of various high-impact educational practices; for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary opportunities; and, increasingly, for partnerships between the university and its various surrounding communities. In fact, NCHC's new "Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education" highlight this potential for innovation in honors as one of its key principles:

In fostering student-centered practices, the honors program or college serves as a campus laboratory for diverse students and faculty to experiment with pedagogical and curricular innovation. Honors is well-positioned to serve as an innovation hub because interdisciplinary spaces tend to be generative, students have self-selected into a program focused on challenge, team-teaching can lead to cross-disciplinary experimentation, and honors education is a locus of scholarship on novel educational practices. (4)

Honors deans thus happily and necessarily have the welfare of the whole university and of its individual components as a focus of their work and part of their responsibility. Resources dedicated to honors colleges and honors programs, especially those designated to spark innovation and student-faculty collaboration, also help students, faculty, and programs across the whole university.

Nearly every honors dean we talked to underlined what they characterized as their relative independence. They felt far less bound by rules and conventions and therefore much freer to shape their colleges and curricula and to pursue student and faculty opportunities than their fellow academic deans. Many deans we talked to offered variations on the notion that "we can do what we want." Others said: "We can innovate; that's the wonderful part," "We can give great faculty free reign and opportunities to develop courses and programs important to them," and "We can expect faculty to innovate for us." Described by one dean as "centers for innovation," honors colleges bring together students, faculty, and sometimes staff in courses and initiatives that may not have found support elsewhere. More than a few honors deans put it this way: "Honors deans can say 'yes.'" Or simply: "Honors says 'yes!'"

In the same way, honors deans running colleges and programs that serve students and engage faculty from every academic department on campus cannot permit themselves to be siloed and must always be among the most active units on campus and perhaps the academic unit most dedicated to outreach and relationship building and nurturing. All aspects of the honors dean job require that deans work actively and supportively with and across colleges, departments, and programs; successfully with both academic and student affairs; and actively to forge and to strengthen productive connections in communities beyond the university. With their strong ties to and knowledge of the always innovative pedagogies and cutting-edge practices of NCHC members across the U.S. and the world, honors deans can also offer unique perspectives and fresh approaches that can enrich their institutions.

We must add that the independence of honors deans and honors colleges also comes with increased risks: honors deans and colleges are often far more exposed or vulnerable to changes in upper administrations than non-honors deans and their colleges. They are more vulnerable because honors students are not tied to particular majors and because 75% of honors colleges lack faculty lines. As Richard Badenhausen notes, honors leaders might “advocate for faculty lines since they lend stability to scheduling, provide allies in making the case for honors, and put a human face on potential budget cut-backs” (21). Our fortunes in honors can change overnight, positively or negatively, with a change in staffing above us or a change in administrative “heart.” Negative examples were not rare in the interviews we conducted, but positive examples abound as well.

## **HONORS DEANS AND THE NIMBLENESS OF HONORS EDUCATION**

Although honors colleges are often constrained in resources, they are much less constrained by institutional tradition, rules, and procedures. The NCHC has always maintained that honors colleges and programs should be “laboratories of innovation,” and according to the vast majority of deans interviewed, they are that indeed. Deans spoke about having much more freedom to innovate in

curriculum and pedagogy than most non-honors deans. In many cases, honors courses counted toward the university's general education program, but they did not have to fit precisely the template or standard disciplinary categories of courses outside of honors. Honors deans can often hire the most creative faculty at the institution to teach in unique ways. Some of the examples of this flexibility included using place as text, doing "virtual study abroad" during the COVID pandemic (and, when it worked well, afterwards), employing team teaching with faculty from different disciplines, incorporating design thinking, and developing student leadership by having upper-class honors students teach and tutor first-year students. Honors deans can often, therefore, create and run, as one dean put it, an "incubator for innovative education."

Programs from one college typically do not influence or affect programs in another, but here honors colleges are also different. Since honors usually has students in virtually every major at the university, honors can have a positive influence on curriculum development, enrollment growth, university-wide programming, pedagogy in other units, and even unique programs that have no other home. Some deans spoke of having helped to promote and shepherd through university governance programs such as departmental honors or honors in the major. Honors deans can encourage deans of other colleges to promote departmental honors or other approaches to upper-division honors and can work with chairs of departments to develop such programs. One dean spoke of developing a task force of faculty from every college to create general guiding principles for departmental honors. He then elicited support from other deans, every one of whom welcomed the ideas and invited him into meetings with chairs to pitch the idea. He then started to see program after program develop unique, enriched offerings in their majors. One task force suggestion was to give students in majors the option to take a graduate course or two (at the undergraduate tuition rate, if possible), which then also helped fulfill the university's goal of growing graduate programs since many of the students who took such graduate courses as an undergraduate continued on at the institution. Some honors colleges keep

honors-in-the-major programs centralized, but even where they are distributed among the colleges and departments, honors can still be a catalyst for significant curricular development and for fostering remarkable student achievement. An honors college may also have a tangential influence on the classroom environments in other units merely through the presence of honors students bringing their experience with innovative honors pedagogies into these adjacent spaces. Moreover, faculty having taught in honors team-teaching arrangements can influence or bring that experience into the courses in their home department.

Honors can also sponsor other university-wide programs. A faculty member approached one honors dean about the possibility of joining the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) program. UNAI is a network of universities working to fulfill the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), so the first step was finding out what was being done across campus to address the SDGs. The honors dean took the matter to the deans' council and received a positive response. Each of the deans agreed to survey the departments in their colleges, which produced a long and impressive list of ways in which units were already fulfilling the expectations of UNAI. The honors dean worked with a faculty member to summarize the findings and develop an application for the university to become a member of UNAI. The university was accepted, and this initiative not only benefitted the whole university, but it centered honors in the nexus developing at that university to address global issues. The honors dean's seat on the deans' council and his good connections with faculty members made it possible for honors to be the galvanizing force for such a significant and transformative initiative for the whole university.

Deans spoke often about how they frequently took on or fostered programs that were not championed or did not fit in other units or colleges on campus. In some cases, faculty came to the honors college with a proposal because no other unit was interested or prepared to support an idea. One honors college, for example, began an esports program in which a club and varsity team worked in partnership with student affairs, and more than a few

have developed entrepreneurship or innovation programs. Honors deans have created annual themes for the institution and invited and coordinated activities for the whole university around them. Some deans have started undergraduate research journals. During COVID-19 honors deans were some of the first to adopt virtual study abroad.

Although innovation is a watchword at many universities, there is still precious little of it. One dean spoke of a recent discussion between members of the deans' council and the president of the institution in which the other deans bemoaned the paucity of creative collaborations and interdisciplinary approaches. The deans then looked to the honors dean and said that they needed honors to help bridge the gap, to forge connections made difficult by hidebound procedures, inflexible departments, or disciplinary boundaries. Honors colleges often answer such calls. Deans spoke of bringing in faculty who are not regular instructors to teach in honors, such as engineers who led City as Text™ excursions; creating partnerships with and between other colleges; connecting programs that previously had had little formal connection (for example, engineering and business); developing initiatives with athletics departments or partnering with other units to increase diversity in recruiting; and reaching out to graduate programs to offer early assurance programs. One honors dean cultivated a relationship with a faculty member in the college of medicine because so many honors students wanted to go into medicine. That contact blossomed into a year-long course, then many courses, then an honors pre-med club, and finally an early assurance program for pre-med honors students. Another strategy employed by some deans is to invite administrators from other colleges to teach in honors: that initiative can quickly create strong relationships that burgeon into partnerships.

More than a few enterprising deans have been successful in raising funds because of the unique education that their colleges offer. Some honors deans talked about the importance of asking for a development officer to be assigned to the honors college: having one person who can dedicate time specifically to honors and adopt

the specialized vocabulary of honors education makes all the difference. Honors colleges can promote features that are often attractive to donors—unique programs, student and alumni success stories, and connections with every major and college. Scholarships are, of course, the obvious area for attracting donors since many want to support extraordinary students with merit as well as need-based scholarships for those who may have limited financial resources. One dean successfully raised \$25 million in 19 months for an endowment that will yield \$1 million in scholarships per year. The connections between honors and other colleges can be helpful, too, because it is not unusual for donors to support honors students in particular majors. To be sure, finding a niche so that the honors dean is not approaching the same donors sought by another college is a challenge, but here, too, partnerships can be formed: a pitch made jointly by deans for funding honors students in certain majors can be effective, and sometimes more effective than having only one dean asking a donor. To have an honors college endowed is, of course, highly desirable, for that access to steady resources provides more flexibility and also brings the college recognition and stability. Here again, the honors dean must have the support of the development office as well as the upper administration. If the dean is regularly communicating successes and opportunities, prospects will be much easier to cultivate.

## **HONORS DEANS AND THE STUDENT CONNECTION**

Not surprisingly, honors deans often have more personal relationships with their students than non-honors deans. In large honors colleges, of course, it is impossible for deans to get to know hundreds of students well, but active recruiting work, involvement in co-curricular programming, and even teaching the occasional class allow many honors deans the chance to know a fair number of their students. Some honors deans find they become popular with higher university administrators because they can always find a good student to speak at a university event for alumni or donors. One dean said that the other academic deans come to him for names of good students in their own college to speak at such events.

Honors deans also have more personal relationships with faculty than are typically possible for a non-honors dean who needs to focus on faculty promotion and tenure. Being involved in promotion and tenure requires deans to maintain a certain social and/or emotional distance, something not typically necessary for an honors dean. Of course, many honors deans are still involved in these matters but at the department level, where they may vote on their colleagues' promotion and tenure. Honors deans also have closer relationships with faculty since they themselves are often still faculty members in particular departments and colleges. Such multi-faceted roles can often bring dividends for both the honors college and the departments, faculty, and students involved.

Honors deans often stay in closer touch with alumni than non-honors deans because they develop closer and more social relationships with their students. They also do a great deal more outreach that involves alumni in ongoing honors college events. Promoting the relationship between the student and the honors college, or often the honors dean, paves the way for maintaining connections after students graduate. Some deans invite graduates to connect with them on LinkedIn. LinkedIn then sends updates when people change their profiles because of completing graduate degrees, changing jobs, or getting promoted. Even if a dean does not know a student well, former students appreciate it when they receive a message from a dean congratulating them on their progress. This sort of activity on LinkedIn also gives the honors dean important connections with alumni not only as donors but as well-placed professionals who can connect the dean with potential donors in other circles. If an honors dean has created an alumni advisory board that includes older alumni, even some perhaps who may not have been honors alumni, LinkedIn can provide ways to connect with those alumni as well. Although it is rapidly falling out of favor, Facebook allows for similar connections with alumni. One dean still follows the progress of honors alumni from two prior institutions and congratulates them on achievements more than a decade after they graduated.

Honors deans are also significantly involved in recruiting, and this work is often best done in concert with current honors students

acting as ambassadors for the honors college. Deans have to be familiar with their students—know their majors and their personalities—so they can effectively position them to recruit a particular student or group of students. Having these personal connections with students is important because honors deans are contacted all the time to provide student speakers at events and can almost always offer a list along with their stories—although staff members who know honors students well can also perform this task.

This recruiting emphasis also allows honors deans to get to know admissions personnel and the university's recruiting staff in depth. This type of networking can pay dividends as well. If a recruiting event is effective, prospective students will meet faculty from their chosen department and begin that mentor/mentee relationship even before students arrive on campus. To make recruiting events work, the honors dean and the college staff must know faculty and honors students in many different departments and know how to connect them to prospective students. Faculty or staff may also reach out to honors deans for help with making an honors research project happen. Similarly, faculty or staff may recommend students for the honors college, and these interactions are made possible because the dean has established personal relationships with students, faculty, and staff. Honors deans also often get to know staff members whom other deans generally do not get to know as well because their job requires them to work with and coordinate with different offices, including the registrar, academic advisors, and enrollment management personnel, on a regular basis. One dean was able to put together a National Student Exchange program in about a month's time because he already knew the key people and offices and knew how to use such connections to move quickly and decisively.

Honors deans, especially if the honors college has a living/learning program, also work closely with housing staff. These connections with student affairs divisions are critical to developing a vibrant living/learning community. Such familiarity is helpful both in good times and bad. Several honors deans said that part of their job is encouraging students to take on public-facing leadership roles



such as student government officers. Many honors deans observed that honors students are often active across the campus and that it is valuable for the dean to know the students “running the place” or taking on significant roles at the university. Honors students are also prominent in student affairs positions such as resident assistants or, as already mentioned, student government officers. Some honors deans pointed out that honors students drive change at their institutions and often pursue activism within these organizations for causes such as social justice or other social or political issues.

It is a truism that donors and administrators do not invest in programs; they invest in people or, more precisely, students. This reality provides opportunities for honors college deans to pursue assistance for honors students. For example, honors colleges often sponsor undergraduate research: one dean even pursued a grant from a large private foundation focused on retaining students by involving them in undergraduate research. Faculty work hard to provide these research opportunities to good students, and most or many of those students are often honors students. Many honors deans author weekly or semiweekly email newsletters for their students that include program updates as well as a list of student opportunities. These newsletters help honors students find good opportunities. One dean has authored one of these for 13 years in three different honors programs/colleges and institutions. In fact, other departments and deans contact him to make sure their current opportunity appears in the *Honors This Week* newsletter. This campus-wide communications tool offers another important example of how honors deans serve their students as well as their faculty colleagues.

## CONCLUSION

To be as effective as possible, honors deans need to be masters or at least practitioners “of all trades” and have a wide range of people skills and administrative abilities: they have to be student-focused; work equally well with faculty, staff, administrators, and members of non-academic units; be creative; use initiative; have strong negotiation skills (often from a position of real or apparent weakness);

be good ambassadors for honors and for education; and discern opportunities where many see only obstacles. Honors deans are also not likely to do well if they are glory seekers or try to compete with the other deans and colleges or seem to want to build their own kingdom. Honors deans do have one key advantage, though: they serve and collaborate with high-achieving, highly motivated, and influential students in almost every department and college in the university. When honors deans show that they can enhance the academic enterprise across the entire institution by offering new and exciting ways to engage these students both in honors and in department after department, magic can happen. We should add here that honors program directors (i.e., those in charge of honors programs who do not report to a chief academic officer) often have many of the same advantages of honors deans, but deans usually have more ability to make real differences at universities because they have closer working relationships with other deans and with the provost and typically have access to greater resources. Honors deans lose little of the working relationship with faculty and staff, but they can gain much more access and leverage and can, therefore, more easily effect change.

Jim Ruebel, the late dean of the Ball State University Honors College, once said that an honors dean “can never have a bad day.” To be sure, he explained, honors deans have many frustrations, but “sooner or later” the dean would meet with a student who would make the dean’s day through their enthusiasm for engaging in cutting-edge research, for a unique study abroad experience, or for working on campus or in the community for important change. The deans we interviewed readily agreed with Dean Ruebel’s comments. And Ruebel’s successor at Ball State, John Emert, even went further: Ruebel said that “a bad day in honors is better than the best day anywhere else on campus.” There are many challenges and frustrations in running an honors college, but working with honors students is a tremendous privilege, and the opportunities for making transformational change at the institution are extraordinary if one looks for them and takes the right initiative.

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## APPENDIX A

### Deans and Directors Interviewed

- Adams, Charles (University of South Florida).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 16 July 2021.
- Ali, Omar (University of North Carolina at Greensboro).  
Zoom Interview by Jefford Vahlbusch, 16 July 2021.
- Andersen, Mark (University of Texas Rio Grande Valley).  
Zoom Interview by Thomas M. Spencer, 8 July 2021.
- Appel, Heidi (University of Toledo).  
Zoom Interview by Jefford Vahlbusch, 9 July 2021.
- Bailey, Rita (Kennesaw State University).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 28 July 2021.
- Breuninger, Scott (Virginia Commonwealth University).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 28 July 2021.
- Buss, James (University of Northern Kentucky).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 26 July 2021.
- Camarena, Phame (New Mexico State University).  
Zoom Interview by Jefford Vahlbusch, 26 July 2021.
- Carson, Jennifer (University of Central Missouri).  
Zoom Interview by Thomas M. Spencer, 16 July 2021.
- Eisenberg, Ann (Eastern Michigan University).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 15 July 2021.
- Emert, John (Ball State University).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 16 July 2021.
- England, Richard (Eastern Illinois University).  
Zoom Interview by Thomas M. Spencer, 12 August 2021.
- Espinosa, Juan Carlos (Florida International University).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 28 July 2021.
- Frost, Linda (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 28 July 2021.

- Galloway, Heather (Texas State University).  
Zoom Interview by Thomas M. Spencer, 9 July 2021.
- Glascott, Brenda (Portland State University).  
Zoom Interview by Jefford Vahlbusch, 21 July 2021.
- Harpham, Edward (University of Texas at Dallas).  
Zoom Interview by Thomas M. Spencer, 8 July 2021.
- Hottinger, Sara (Coastal Carolina University).  
Zoom Interview by Jefford Vahlbusch, 21 July 2021.
- Kelly, Sean (University of Texas at San Antonio).  
Zoom Interview by Thomas M. Spencer, 8 July 2021.
- Lopez, Irma (Western Michigan University).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 15 July 2021.
- Perdigao, Lisa (Florida Institute of Technology).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 23 July 2021.
- Rosenblum, Don (Nova Southeastern University).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 26 July 2021.
- Smith, Patricia (University of Central Arkansas).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 15 July 2021.
- Zierler, Matthew (Michigan State University).  
Zoom Interview by Jeff Chamberlain, 26 July 2021.



CHAPTER SIX

The Role of the Honors College Dean in the  
Future of Honors Education

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**INTRODUCTION**

Leading an honors college is one of the most rewarding and complex endeavors available anywhere on today's higher education landscape. Working with colleagues and students in institutional settings that encourage creativity and innovation, honors leaders have enormous potential to make an impact. Collaboration is

essential, and this chapter emerges from the collaboration among four honors deans as well as over twenty honors leaders from across the country who joined our session, “Re-Imagining Honors Leadership: A Dialogue with Deans about the Future of Honors Education,” at the NCHC’s 2021 conference in Orlando, Florida (Nichols et al.). Rich discussions with colleagues inform both our ideas about the opportunities and challenges facing honors leaders and our strategies for addressing them.

While we celebrate the opportunities that leading an honors college affords, we recognize that this position is one of the most variable and perhaps least understood on college campuses. Other academic deans are attached to colleges that at least have a general subject matter in their names (i.e., education, business, medicine, law), so people intuitively understand what they are and what they do. By contrast, many colleagues, even on campuses with robust honors programs and colleges, are unsure precisely what honors is or how and why to engage with it. This chapter tells the story of honors by focusing on leadership. We chart the many aspects of the honors dean’s job, identifying the foundational values of honors, its aspirations, and its ways of turning vision into reality. We also identify many impediments honors leaders face, and we suggest ideas, backed by examples, for overcoming them.

First and foremost, the honors dean has a multifaceted job that demands connecting to stakeholders in every corner of campus. The sheer variety of responsibilities makes honors leadership a perfect fit for those who seek a wide impact, enjoy assembling complex structures, and value collaboration across the entire institution. Not only is the spirit of honors collaborative, but the scope of honors makes collaboration essential. The rewards are enormous, including the satisfaction of supporting the professional development of colleagues and providing transformative educational experiences for students. To reap the rewards, however, honors deans must respond to diverse, evolving challenges, many of which we lay out below. Doing so successfully enables honors to embody its highest values of meaningful relationships, innovative pedagogy, rich interdisciplinarity, and transformative co-curricular engagement. Our



method here is to identify sequentially key issues facing honors leadership and to link each to a series of challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities. The significant term here may ultimately be *responsibilities*: we argue that by accepting the responsibility to serve others well, honors deans show the way for students, faculty, and staff to live and learn with honor.

## **THE ISSUE:**

### **MYTHS AND PROBLEMS AROUND HONORS EDUCATION**

#### **The Challenge**

Unhelpful myths about honors abound: honors is elitist and exclusivist, narrowly focused on conventional markers of academic success like scores on the ACT and SAT. The myths limit honors education to classroom academics; further, by portraying honors students as already academically and personally successful, they underemphasize the ways in which honors students may stumble and need special support. Some see honors as homogenous, inhospitable to diversity and to students from underrepresented groups. Campus colleagues can see honors as a silo, having little connection with, or impact on, other programs and therefore as a competitor in resource-stressed environments. These myths can understandably diminish the appeal of honors to students as well as its ability to collaborate with important partners. Even more problematic is when the myths about honors carry degrees of truth: for example, honors programs have historically been exclusionary in admissions practices and insufficiently attentive to the role of diversity in how we understand excellence. Where our own practices counter the values of honors, we must commit to change.

#### **The Opportunity**

We must assess the myths honestly and commit to building a better reality so that they do not impede our potential if left unaddressed. High school experiences lead many students to think that honors at the post-secondary level means harder classroom

experiences, more difficult content, and more numerous assignments, that honors is about students clearing higher hurdles in order to define themselves as superior. In this model of honors, John Zubizarreta and James Ford note: “What the instructor teaches in terms of countable amounts of information and what the student produces in terms of quantitatively measurable outcomes rule the day” (xi).

The myth of honors as the uber-difficult academic experience profoundly obscures the radical potential inherent in honors education to help students enrich the questions they ask, answers they formulate, and goals they set for themselves. This is the transformative dimension of honors education that “depends equally on *what* we teach, complemented by *how* and *why* we teach in a way that challenges students to learn in deep, meaningful, connected, and lasting ways” (Zubizarreta and Ford xi). Honors encourages students not just to master content but to think *differently*, to consider new points of view, and to bring diverse approaches to bear on important questions. This is the story honors needs to tell.

Confronting myths that bear traces of past realities enables the honors dean to assert all the more powerfully the potential of contemporary honors as a holistic form of education. Far from putting students through an academic gauntlet, honors encourages them to learn on multiple levels and in multiple spaces. Further, through service, leadership, and engagement activities, honors enables students to enact classroom knowledge and aptitudes in the real world in pursuit of the greater good.

## The Responsibility

If we believe that honors offers students value, then we must make it as available as possible. The myth defines honors as an *exclusivist* bastion, the part of the college or university that doubles down on the principle, excoriated by Michael M. Crow and William B. Dabars, that American institutions of higher learning earn their status not by how many students they *include* but by how many they *exclude* (241–42, 305). Students accustomed to seeing themselves on the outside, as part of the non-elite, can easily assume they do

not fit a certain profile and dismiss the possibility of joining honors. One first-generation student at a 2021 honors lunch at the University of Wyoming said, “I thought honors was for rich white kids,” her comment confirming the persistence of this stereotype. Yet the nationwide statistics on admissions to honors tell a different story. According to a 2021 census of U.S. honors colleges, 75% of honors colleges nationwide accept over 50% of first-year cohort applicants (Cognard-Black and Smith 39). Although significant progress has been made on the issue of access to honors, much work remains to be done in the area of diversifying student populations.

Numbers, of course, do not tell the whole story. Even as we rebut the myths about honors, we must acknowledge that the myths respond to aspects of our practice that fall short of our ideals. They pinpoint structural features of honors that we need to keep working to improve. Our central priority has to be aligning honors practices with our fundamental values of excellence informed by diversity, equity, and inclusion and by the engagement that strives to improve the world. Thus, honors must continue to work to increase accessibility and recognize more diverse forms of excellence. The dean’s responsibility is to cultivate an honors community that puts these values into practice.

## **THE ISSUE:**

### **JUSTICE IN THE HONORS ADMISSIONS PROCESS**

#### **The Challenge**

Rew A. Godow, Jr., lists “Admissions Officer” (21) as one of the crucial roles of honors administrators. Honors deans across the U.S. are currently rethinking appropriate admissions criteria and processes. Standardized test scores, a common metric used for honors admissions, have long been known to be biased against students of color and students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged (Dixon-Román et al.). High school grade point averages are also commonly inflated for those with access to advanced placement and international baccalaureate coursework. Further complicating the admissions process, value-added high school experiences have

the potential to discriminate along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. For example, in all our states, students at many rural and reservation schools lack access to accelerated or diversified curricular opportunities or programs that may give them a leg up in the admissions process and help them succeed in college. They may also have to work after school or care for younger siblings, thus precluding participation in the extracurricular and service experiences that strengthen college applications. Many honors colleges now de-emphasize test scores in favor of more holistic admissions processes, but these processes are labor intensive and require resources.

### **The Opportunity**

Honors is built upon the premise that students are more than test scores. Honors students are leaders and intellectual risk takers who serve their campuses and communities. Honors deans should rely on diverse data points to identify student potential to thrive and establish admissions practices that focus on potential. In recent years high school GPA has been validated as five times more effective at predicting potential collegiate success than standardized tests (Allensworth and Clark). Recent advances in admissions practices have increased the accessibility of honors by privileging holistic approaches, which may include reflective essays, interviews, letters of recommendation, video submissions, and a portfolio of work, over standardized scores.

### **The Responsibility**

In increasing accessibility, we must be mindful of setting up students to succeed in honors. Honors deans must ensure that admissions criteria and processes align with the unique values and vision of honors. Admissions criteria shape the student body and determine who has access to the benefits of honors. Studies of current successful students can help determine where leadership can cultivate more inclusive student populations and nurture environments in which more students can succeed. As admissions directors, honors leaders must partner with institutional admissions offices to ensure that these offices understand what honors values. Delivering

on the promise that honors students are more than a numeric score starts by emphasizing honors' holistic approach throughout the recruitment and admissions process, an approach discussed at length in NCHC's position paper, *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion*.

## **THE ISSUE:**

### **RECRUITING AND SERVING DIVERSE POPULATIONS IN HONORS**

#### **The Challenge**

One of the most salient concerns for honors deans is diversity. While data remain elusive, honors programs and colleges are typically less diverse than non-honors units, an especially acute situation at Research 1 universities. In a related finding, Andrew J. Cognard-Black and Art L. Spisak show that the number of students in honors who received Pell Grants or other forms of need-based aid is significantly lower than for non-honors students. In many institutions, honors has not sufficiently broadened access to transformative educational experiences for the most marginalized and underrepresented student populations. Interestingly, Cognard-Black and Spisak found more individuals identifying as LGBTQ+ in honors than in broader university contexts.

Full disciplinary participation in honors is also a challenge. Some disciplines, particularly those focusing on agriculture, engineering, or education, are less represented (Kutzke et al.). When honors is embedded within siloed programs, then only a select few students and faculty benefit from the experience. Arguably, these benefits are limited in comparison to programs offering the more synergistic educational experience of exposure to processes and knowledge from across all disciplines.

#### **The Opportunity**

Honors institutions have a distinct opportunity to broaden the appeal of honors to a wider, more representative swath of students and colleagues than ever. Early exposure to honors through

a first-year honors orientation, a pre-first-year summer experience, or an honors section of an introductory course within the student's field of study increases retention and provides a clear opportunity to recruit students from across disciplines, particularly underrepresented ones (Hansen et al.; Spisak et al.).

Honors can also combat underrepresentation across campus in various ways. Although women dominate in honors, in other colleges, such as business and engineering, women are a significant minority. By creating a welcoming environment for women in these fields, honors can mitigate against the consequences of underrepresentation. For example, in 2021–2022, women made up only 19% of engineering students overall at the University of Wyoming, but 40% of the engineering students enrolled in honors. In a resource-restricted environment, honors can also support requests for faculty lines in other departments, with honors perhaps providing a second home for the faculty, thus increasing disciplinary reach.

The world's foremost challenges require collaboration between diverse individuals with myriad life experiences and disciplinary knowledge. Ensuring diversity in honors enables our entire student population to practice the kind of collaboration that will contribute to their future success.

## **The Responsibility**

As honors expands access beyond those who have already achieved the conventional measures of academic success, we must provide our evolving student population with an evolving set of robust services. Beyond merely avoiding the practice of tokenism, we must actively provide support structures for all forms of diversity. All students must see themselves as valued.

Because diversity issues extend beyond the student mix, honors deans must also attend to issues of diversity in faculty and staff, in curricular and programmatic offerings, and even in facilities. Once again, a holistic approach will guide leaders, informed by the lens of inclusive excellence and the context, demographics, and academic and programmatic landscape of their institutions, to

build relationships with appropriate partners on campus and in the community.

## **THE ISSUE:**

### **TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION**

#### **The Challenge**

For the honors leader, whom Godow calls “Curriculum Reformer” (19), curriculum development and management are key challenges. With curriculum at the heart of higher education, deans need to set intentional learning outcomes for their programs and support them with the appropriate curricular and co-curricular experiences. Some leaders struggle with inherited curriculum and onerous institutional processes for change. Even so, it is important to find ways to integrate the high-impact practices associated with honors, practices such as independent research, service learning, field experiences, study abroad, creative scholarship, and internships.

Honors curricula need to respond nimbly to changing student needs as well as institutional contexts. For example, honors must respond creatively to the fact that while general education coursework once commonly comprised a significant portion of honors curricular requirements, many honors students enter university today having completed many of their gen-ed requirements through a myriad of “early college” programs and standardized exams. Honors must offer these students something more than simple gen-ed credits.

#### **The Opportunity**

Honors can become more attractive to such students by offering upper-division courses that satisfy honors and major-specific outcomes simultaneously. Faculty may be drawn to honors by the opportunity to develop innovative interdisciplinary and experiential offerings tied to themes such as global grand challenges (Nichols et al., “Collaborative”; Bott-Knutson et al., “Community

Partnerships”). Honors students’ openness to challenge allows faculty to adopt exciting new pedagogical approaches. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many honors faculty made their curricula more accessible to students by embracing new instructional technologies. And honors students reported greater ability to adapt to the rapidly changing curricular approaches than their non-honors counterparts (Wiltse et al.).

## **The Responsibility**

While novel pedagogical approaches remain a vital part of honors, we must also ensure that these approaches maintain the intellectual rigor that challenges and inspires students. Innovative pedagogies must help students progress on programmatic learning outcomes. New activities must be accompanied by carefully crafted and clearly articulated assessments. Honors education is purposeful. Students and faculty should be encouraged to take intellectual risks within the space of honors, but these risks should be measured and not haphazard.

### **THE ISSUE:**

#### **PROMOTING INTERDISCIPLINARITY**

### **The Challenge**

While honors education has long transcended the confines of single disciplinary perspectives, finding space for interdisciplinary honors courses in students’ schedules can be a challenge. Some narrower or vocationally focused majors actively advise students against, or prohibit them from, enrolling in honors. Additionally, colleges or majors with stringent GPA requirements for program continuation or scholarship eligibility disincentivize students from taking some of the risks that honors encourages.

Further, as the cost of higher education escalates, many degree programs attempt to provide the most time-effective path toward graduation, a goal that state legislatures typically support. The goal may be well-intentioned, but the result is that considerable numbers



of students no longer explore the world through the wider lens of the liberal arts or pursue the kinds of interdisciplinary connections that will equip them to thrive in a complex world.

## **The Opportunity**

With its ability to innovate, honors can collapse academic silos and promote interdisciplinarity. For example, honors can offer team-taught courses that break the artificial barriers among disciplines, allowing faculty and students to connect content areas in new and invigorating ways. One Wyoming honors course, *The History of Diseases*, pairs a social historian and a professor of veterinary medicine; another, *Medicine's Moving Images*, pairs a biologist and an English professor. In Montana, interdisciplinary themes challenge students to connect the dots across subject matters such as democracy, water, sound, and love. In each of our institutions, honors leads the way in pedagogical approaches to contemporary grand challenges. Through these approaches, honors introduces students to subjects they might not otherwise have considered; thus, honors can also become a powerful ally in recruitment for other programs.

Similarly, linking honors courses with community resources can enhance student learning. At Wyoming, honors collaborates with a local theater company by covering production costs in return for the company's connecting one of its plays to a relevant honors course. In Ohio, honors works with a local historical society to ground students in community history. In Montana, honors partners with the Mayor of Missoula's office, the Montana Museum of Art and Culture, the YWCA, and the Clarkfork Watershed Coalition. To extend such expansive opportunities to students whose majors discourage adding honors, honors programs and colleges could provide one-credit hour options to lower some of the barriers. Additionally, honors might remove GPA pressures by providing honors courses that are grade neutral, appearing on the transcript only if completed satisfactorily.

## **The Responsibility**

The problems facing society today and into the future are so complex and multi-faceted that they require both a focused and an interdisciplinary approach. Honors programs and colleges ask students to embrace interdisciplinarity not as a luxury but as a necessity. Indeed, the institutional autonomy enjoyed by honors colleges allows them to refine curricular approaches nimbly to achieve these objectives. While many degree programs requiring accreditation are beholden to heavily prescriptive curricula, honors permits greater freedom in curating the educational experience.

### **THE ISSUE:**

#### **SERVING THE WHOLE STUDENT**

### **The Challenge**

According to NCHC's "Definition of Honors Education":

Honors education is characterized by in-class and extra-curricular activities that are measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning experiences typically found at institutions of higher education. Honors experiences include a distinctive learner-directed environment and philosophy, provide opportunities that are appropriately tailored to fit the institution's culture and mission, and frequently occur within a close community of students and faculty. ("Definition")

Honors education aims to see each student as an individual with intellectual, emotional, relational, physical, and experiential needs.

### **The Opportunity**

The call for a multidimensional, people-centered honors education surely makes the honors dean responsible for offering transformative educational experiences. Because honors cuts across both academic and student affairs, it can cultivate students holistically within and beyond the classroom walls. Through the collective

wisdom of faculty, students, staff, alumni, and community partners, honors encourages students to explore the intangibles of life in settings such as living and learning communities, student organizations, and service learning experiences (Grassel et al.; Bott-Knutson et al., “First-Year Fellowship”). To serve the whole student, honors also needs mechanisms for checking in regularly to see how students are doing. Ongoing opportunities for conversation and connection may include traditions such as hikes, tea times, recognition programs, and book clubs. With support from honors, students can more manageably embrace new adventures as varied as study abroad (Arens et al.), peer mentorship (Grassel et al.), and explorations of identity (Bott-Knutson et al., “First-year Fellowship”). In addition to serving students well, these kinds of experiences have the benefit of building enduring relationships between honors colleges and their students (Kadlecek et al.).

## The Responsibility

Failing to equip students with skills beyond technical disciplinary knowledge is akin to training accomplished athletes on technical performance while omitting teamwork, nutrition, conditioning, rest, and mental fitness. In both cases, the narrower scope of tutelage prevents subjects from achieving their full potential. Honors asks us to engage those we serve holistically. Angela Salas therefore asks honors to understand students in terms of “full brains, open minds, the ability to read, write, think, and speak clearly,” and to nurture in them “the optimism and service ethic to believe that they can change the world for the better, and the initiative and *savoir faire* to figure out how to do that” (153). To support students in their full dimensionality, honors leaders must institute systems that make students feel comfortable asking for help or exploring areas where they think they need improvement, especially through the practice of culturally responsive advising discussed by Elizabeth Raisanen in this volume. Honors students often perceive that because they are “honors” they should not need external support, but they share many of the same needs as non-honors students. For example, they experience anxiety and depression as or more

frequently than their non-honors peers. Honors practitioners must understand the nature of this student population and develop optimal approaches to serving them.

## **THE ISSUE:**

### **BUILDING THE PLANE IN FLIGHT**

#### **The Challenge**

Honors, by definition, is multifaceted, innovative, and nimble; that identity encourages in deans and their teams a spirit of intellectual adventurism and a willingness to take off in a plane that has not been fully designed and then figure out the rest of the design and construction while in flight. Adopting a different metaphor, Bonnie Irwin argues that honors deans practice “a form of civil engineering because, in order to make our programs integral to our colleges and universities, we are road and bridge builders. We not only build connections, but often have to design them” (30). Because of its innovative habits, honors can address high stakes and urgent needs as they emerge on our campuses perhaps more effectively than other units.

#### **The Opportunity**

Engaging regularly with both academic and student affairs while also being relatively free from the disciplinary constraints of other campus leaders, honors deans recognize institutional needs or conflicts before they become widely apparent. The dean is therefore indispensable to the success of the university above and beyond honors, which is one of many good reasons the honors college dean should sit on the deans’ council and report to the provost.

#### **The Responsibility**

The compelling creative opportunities of honors are enticing, and the dean should seize them. But the dean must also avoid the temptation to pursue myriad possibilities at the cost of quality in any one. A seed may set roots in sparse conditions, but to flourish,

it needs sunlight, rich soil, and water. Such is also true for the honors college: excellence stems from a strong foundation, industrious fortification, and the fruits of forward thinking more than a scattered approach seeking to be comprehensive but lacking clear vision (Kelleher; Hecker et al.).

## THE ISSUE:

### RESOURCING THE WORK OF HONORS

#### The Challenge

Godow calls the honors dean a “General Administrator” and “Entrepreneur” (19, 20). One of the dean’s key roles is securing and strategically managing resources, which requires navigating different fiscal realities and a range of budget models, including historical budgeting, RCM (responsibility centered management), or some combination of both. The unique institutional positionality of honors sometimes means that honors colleges do not fit into the typical budgetary models of the university, and limited institutional resources commonly make entrepreneurial efforts necessary. Many honors leaders spend significant time working with university foundation staff to raise dollars from external sources while others secure grants from state, federal, and private agencies to supplement resources from their home institutions.

#### The Opportunity

Resourcing honors gives deans the opportunity to promote the people and mission of honors across a wide network. While many deans step into their role lacking substantial experience with fundraising (Carnicom and Mathis), deans excel at telling the story of honors. When deans shift the frame of reference from raising *funds* to raising *honors* (Bott-Knutson et al., “(Fund)raising”), fundraising becomes both achievable and enjoyable. In this model, deans first identify what is necessary to *raise the bar*—that is, how can a donor help honors do something for students that is currently not possible. They next *raise awareness*—sharing honors’ compelling

need, vision, and successful track record. When the dean raises awareness, prospective donors emerge. At this point, the dean needs to *raise relationships*, collaborating with prospective donors to promote and fund the work of honors. Alumni and community partners further raise awareness through their personal stories of the impact of honors (Andrews). Foundations and community leaders can connect honors to donors eager to make a positive difference. At Wyoming, the connection to a major libraries donor resulted in the endowment of a library position specifically affiliated with the honors college.

Another way to resource the work of honors is to implement an NCHC program review. Through the NCHC, deans may request an external review of their college, which typically consists of two NCHC-trained reviewers evaluating the college according to NCHC criteria. As leaders within their own honors colleges, these reviewers understand common challenges and opportunities. The NCHC review offers the opportunity to raise the bar, raise awareness, raise relationships, and raise honors. For example, during an NCHC review at South Dakota State University (SDSU), the dean involved two key donors in the process and engaged them in frank conversations about the findings. The review identified significant potential to enhance the college's existing strengths through further staffing, instructional dollars, and operational resources. As a direct result, the donors committed a new gift, the largest challenge match in the history of SDSU, to fortify college operations. When deans invest in relationships to support their honors college, significant opportunities to *raise honors* will arise.

## **The Responsibility**

Honors deans may have to cobble together numerous sources of funding to support their colleges. Because different entities, such as foundations or university accounting systems, apply specific rules to each type of fund, leaders must be diligent in learning how funds function. When funds are insufficient, leaders must raise new funds for targeted needs through development work or grants. Leaders with strategic priorities but no specific funds to realize them can

reallocate resources to show proof of concept to donors and university administrators. In any case, in fundraising for honors, deans should rely on the value of relationships and the desire to make a difference that inform honors education as a whole.

## **THE ISSUE:**

### **ARTICULATING THE VALUE OF HONORS**

#### **The Challenge**

Honors leaders must articulate the value of honors to a wide range of constituents—students, parents, employers, faculty, staff, senior administrators, donors—not all of whom intuitively understand the value of honors. These values are clear to those who work and study in honors, and they persist after graduation in the personal and professional lives of alumni (Kotschevar et al.). Honors has demonstrably strengthened educational institutions and individual lives alike. The challenge is to prevent honors from being the best-kept secret on campus and in the community.

#### **The Opportunity**

When deans actively articulate the value of honors, opportunities arise. Articulating how honors enriches the university, deans may open doors for new collaborations with colleagues and programs. To tell the story of honors as powerfully as possible, deans could simply survey honors students about their honors experience. Surveys yield powerful data about why honors attracts and retains top students. In turn, the data may make conversations about the sometimes additional expense of honors more persuasive.

Honors leadership should also be prepared to shift the larger administrative dialogue from the economic *cost* of honors to the economic *value* of honors. Deans should discuss the financial impact of students choosing to enroll in the university at least partly because of the honors college. Honors deans know that the value of honors extends far beyond dollars and cents, but we must also assert the economic value of honors to the institution, state,

and region. Retaining, persisting, and graduating at significantly higher rates than the general student population, honors students are a good investment and less expensive than they might seem, especially since it costs more to recruit a new student than to retain an existing one. When deans show that honors has fiscal value, in addition to intrinsic personal value, they will impress prospective students and parents, inspire future donors, and establish honors as crucial to the success of the university.

## **The Responsibility**

Having the relevant data and personal stories about the impact of honors and being able to articulate the impact, energetically and authentically, to a wide range of constituents are essential skills for honors deans. Leaders unfamiliar with data-driven analysis should seek help in gathering and interpreting data and should collaborate with experts in web-design, publication design, and social media marketing to tell the honors story. (See *The Demonstrable Value of Honors Education: New Research Evidence*.) They must communicate effectively about honors and they should empower others—students, faculty, development officers—to do the same.

### **THE ISSUE:**

#### **LEADING HONORABLY**

### **The Challenge**

A final challenge for the honors dean is recruiting, retaining, and empowering a team of honors professionals equipped with the wide-ranging skill set needed to realize the college's mission. The dean may be “captain” of the team, but the challenges, roles, and lofty aspirations of honors require a team of colleagues committed to the vision and mission of honors. The dean needs to nurture the members of this team with the emotional and material support that will enable their long-term success.



## The Opportunity

Leading honorably means empowering people to achieve their greatest potential. The quality, accessibility, and impact of honors all increase when the right people are working effectively toward a common vision. In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins describes this concept as “First Who, Then What.” Good institutions find specific good people to constitute the team, a process Collins calls getting the right people onto the bus. He then postulates that great institutions match good people with the right roles, what he calls getting the right people into the right seats. In other words, deans should not only hire people committed to honors, they must also assign tasks that match the interests and skills of each team member. Honors professionals commonly display what Carol Dweck famously calls the growth mindset; therefore, deans should empower team members to grow. The ability to grow within honors produces long-term professional satisfaction. Even when exceptional team members are recruited away, honors can find solace in having played a role in their success and know that former colleagues will continue to promote the vision of honors in other settings.

## The Responsibility

Responsible for the well-being of colleagues, honors deans should coach colleagues on developing goals and mitigating shortcomings, so that no one is surprised or alarmed by the details of an annual performance review. Deans can show leadership by welcoming feedback on their own performance as well. One of our co-authors regularly gives her team copies of Michael Useem’s *Leading Up: How to Lead Your Boss So You Both Win*, which stresses the importance of employees leading their supervisors and lines of communication that allow advice to flow in both directions. Returning to the story of honors, deans can serve teams well by continually communicating the collective “why,” or the significance of our shared work. Patrick M. Lencioni argues that healthy teams rely on more communication than might seem necessary and suggests that strategically employing ideal types of communication improves team performance.

Because honors deans rely on extraordinary efforts from team members, they should celebrate achievements regularly. They must also recognize the benefits of grace and incentives. Grace may take the form of encouraging someone to come late to work the day after participating in an all-hands-on-deck evening program. Incentives may include the opportunity to lead an honors study abroad or funding for faculty and staff to attend honors conferences. Recognizing colleagues' contributions involves nominating them for awards and occasionally simply treating the team to lunch. Honoring people helps honors thrive.

Deans send a clear message about honors being more than a line item on a résumé when they align their own actions with the core values of honors. Honors deans are fortunate in many ways. They breathe life into education through innovative curricula. They invest in the future through the development of new leaders. They inspire communities through service initiatives. They nurture authentic relationships among the students, faculty, and staff who meet each other through honors. In every interaction, they can help others fulfill their greatest goals.

## **CONCLUSION:**

### **REWARDS OF THE HONORS DEANSHIP**

The honors deanship is one of the best administrative positions on campus. Not only is it rewarding to direct a program whose students are consistently talented, motivated, and engaged, but it is a privilege to work with colleagues inspired and energized by this exceptional student population. One satisfying reward is hearing from honors students about the transformative impact honors has had on their undergraduate years, whether this came from faculty-student collaboration on research, which the professor and student may have presented at conferences or published; capstone experiences; or apprenticeship and internship opportunities. Another reward is the satisfaction of seeing honors contribute to the university's strategic goals. For example, at the University of Wyoming, honors offered international courses that enabled the institution

to meet its target of doubling the number of students studying abroad. Further, these honors courses targeted academic disciplines in which few students typically travel internationally, such as engineering and science, thus engaging students who would not otherwise have studied abroad.

In these ways, honors elevates the campus experience for everyone. Honors students bring insights, perspectives, and energy to every academic and co-curricular unit they are part of, with widespread, tangible benefits. University presidents maintain that a vibrant honors college brings enormous value to the entire campus community. For example, Paul W. Ferguson and James S. Ruebel note that a major “value of honors comprises the institutional benefits gained by having such a program on campus,” and point to “the catalytic impact such a learning experience has on honors students and in turn on their peers, their faculty, and even their administrators” (13–14). E. Gordon Gee and Kenneth P. Blemings similarly write that “the increased value placed on an honors education is enriching entire universities and how they operate. . . . Honors students on campus make our entire university better, and having them in our community and in our state is an investment not just in these students but in ourselves” (177, 180).

A final, immeasurable reward of honors leadership is that it provides an opportunity to transcend local boundaries and embrace the national and international exchange of ideas. Participation in national honors events, especially through the NCHC, is a highlight of the calendar year and becomes a place where friendships flourish and where ideas, such as this paper, originate.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

From the Top Down:  
Implications of Honors College Deans'  
Race and Gender

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The recent National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) position paper, *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion*, offers powerful insights into how honors enrollment practices must change to meet the needs of today's students and the moral imperative to foster diversity, access, and

inclusion. Because of its focus on students, the document does not consider diversity in honors leadership. In their conclusion, however, the authors note, “We hope that this paper will lay the groundwork for similar pieces that address hiring, staffing, and administrative structures at our programs and colleges that can contribute to greater diversity and inclusion work” (*Honors Enrollment* 14). Our paper pursues that very point by interrogating the implications of race and gender for honors college administrative leadership. According to the survey conducted in conjunction with this monograph, 90% of all honors college heads from responding institutions were White while 56% were male (Cognard-Black and Smith 45). The 56% male and 44% female gap in gender representation constitutes a 12-percentage point difference; furthermore, the presence of racial/ethnic minorities among honors deans is miniscule. Although the numbers look somewhat better at Research I institutions (83% White and 53% male, representing 27% of the responding institutions), the situation at Master’s universities is far worse: deans are 100% White and 70% male (representing 30% of responding institutions). Interestingly, only 35% of honors college assistant or associate deans were male, a point to which we shall return. These numbers are also fairly in line with the 2016 NCHC Census results (Scott et al.), which showed, for example, out of 101 respondents, only two Black deans, both male, suggesting this situation has continued over time.

There are multiple reasons to find these data troubling and, furthermore, unacceptable. First, a college-attending population that is 45.7% minority (“Student Diversity” 37) and an average honors college student female population of 63.1% (Cognard-Black and Spisak 142) mean that honors college deans look on average unlike the communities they are leading. Second, given the lack of a promotional pathway within honors leadership for underrepresented minorities and, to a lesser extent, women, the situation will not be improving anytime soon. Third, honors colleges represent an embarrassing departure from dean profiles nationally in colleges with disproportionately female student bodies: for example, according to a CUPA Research Report for 2019–2020, education

deans were 57% female and 18% minority, and nursing deans were 92% female and 11% minority (Pritchard et al.).

If “Honors College Dean” is most typically a White male, to what extent have we simply perpetuated the legacy of “Oxford College Don,” following a model that constitutes our honors colleges as bastions of elite White male privilege and power? While others may wish to investigate (and we encourage them to do so) the impact of this problem on honors students in areas such as recruitment and retention, the development of female and/or minority student leaders, and curriculum and programming, this chapter investigates the disproportionate representation of White males among honors deans as a consequence of leadership and authority schemas, university and honors structures, promotional practices, faculty/staff classifications, lack of mentoring, and few rewards for work typically done by women and minorities. Taken together, these realities create a system of inequality regimes that effectively makes it exceedingly difficult for ethnic minorities and a proportionate number of women to advance to an honors deanship (Acker; Ray). In highlighting such inequities and offering recommendations for current honors deans and NCHC leadership, we hope to contribute to the amelioration of this disparity.

In making this case, we are mindful of Claudia Rankine, a Black poet and essayist whose project to reveal America’s persistent racism drives her recent work in *Just Us*. Rankine cites a warning from Sara Ahmed, who has interrogated the presence of racism in the academy as well as the difficulty of challenging normative structures: “When you name the problem you become the problem” (Rankine 155). We fervently wish to avoid such an outcome, to be shunned at honors conferences for the remainder of our careers for calling out these systemic barriers, though such risks are real: Ahmed, for example, has left the academy. We are not the first to point out the hold that an elitist “Oxford Don” model has had on honors education:

To deny that this classical infrastructure is central to American higher education in general and to honors pedagogy in particular is to fall victim to our own . . . ‘honors fragility’

[paraphrasing Robin DiAngelo], in which our visceral response to questions about the way we do things (e.g., ‘Are we elitist?’) is to defend our practices rather than to listen carefully, take a deep breath, and re-examine them. (Yarrison 26)

We hope that you, our readers, are made of tougher stuff, and are willing to consider what we as administrators of a privileged space in higher education have done to uphold and perpetuate inequity, unwittingly or not, and to take on the task of doing something about it. Moreover, as Victor Ray writes, “The tacit refusal to name the Whiteness of mainstream organizations is a hierarchy-reinforcing project” (45). Honors has made great strides recently in forwarding the practice of “Inclusive Excellence” within our student bodies, and naming the problem was the first step. We now need to turn the mirror around and look at the lack of diversity among honors deans. As Aaron Stoller writes, “The powerladenness of knowledge . . . requires that, both in terms of its administrative and research activities, honors educators resist . . . practices that serve the institutional structures that construct and reinforce systems of oppression” (22). To look away, to do nothing, will only reinforce the lack of diversity among honors leaders and, more generally, leaders in our society. Ryan A. Smith points out that the underrepresentation of women and racial minorities in positions of authority “is not simply an *instance* of gender (and racial) inequality; it probably is a significant *cause* of inequality” (535). We must act because the racial and gender disparity within honors college leadership may, in fact, produce further inequalities.

Unconscious bias seems one possible explanation for this situation. In “Untold Stories and Difficult Truths about Bias in Academia,” Marie Chisholm-Burns explains that “each of us has unconscious biases, but because they are unconscious, we fail to recognize, evaluate, criticize, or discuss them” (29). They are automatic products of our upbringing and experiences that influence our decision making. But unconscious bias as a concept has recently come under attack as providing an excuse for ignorance and continuing racism or simply as lacking empirical evidence (Tate and

Page; Skov). Furthermore, despite a growing interest in the concept of unconscious bias, few studies provide empirical data that show an explicit link between instances of unconscious bias and gender gaps in academia (Skov). This absence is not surprising, given that the processes of unconscious biases are implicit; however, the outcomes of unconscious bias are hard to ignore.

More importantly, as Jennifer Rindfleish argues, “Focusing on one aspect of women’s disadvantage, such as unconscious biases, will never change the robustness of the structure completely. All three ‘structures’ [labor, power, and cathexis] must be dismantled at the same time for lasting change to occur” (183). The problem of inequity thus is built into societal structures and normalized behaviors, not just instances of individuals’ unconscious bias. So, in this essay we intend to consider, instead, specific interlocking systems of processes and practices that create barriers for the advancement of women and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) into the honors deanship.

## **GENDER BARRIERS**

Some scholars have posited two reasons beyond unconscious bias or outright discrimination for the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles: they self-select out and/or they have child and family responsibilities that demand their time. Smith’s extensive review of the sociological literature on race, gender, and job authority, however, finds very little evidence that women self-select out of authority positions due to family responsibilities (532). In the academic setting, Mason et al. found that the career structure of the university is not well adapted to needs of women and presents barriers to leadership roles—deans, chairs, presidents—commensurate with their numbers in the academy. Rindfleish concurs, noting that in Australia gender “inequalities persist even after many years of proactive legislative, childcare . . . and gender equality initiatives,” thus suggesting that even when the family issues are addressed and the playing field leveled, men still dominate leadership positions (179). The hypothesis of self-selection out of a senior leadership track for non-family reasons is more difficult

to evaluate. We know of anecdotal examples of senior women faculty wanting not to lose direct access to students, but little research could be found to support this idea broadly. Even if self-selection and family (un)friendliness were explanations for the absence of women in the leadership pathway, such evidence only underscores the root cause—that universities and colleges have institutional practices that narrowly define the “ideal” leader.

The barriers women face on the path toward a university presidency are also applicable to our discussion. A report by the American Association of University Women found that Black men are making positive strides at the presidency level, but the same cannot be said for Black women. The report goes on to highlight the common argument that women fail to ascend to leadership positions because of a limited pool no longer has merit, given that over 50% of doctoral degrees are earned by women (Silbert et al. 4). “It’s systemic bias, according to the report,” writes Chelsea Long of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. The study’s authors argue:

Higher education is viewed as a great equalizer, and institutions of higher education are considered moral exemplars for society. They present role models for our future civic and business leaders, making diversity at the highest levels of leadership paramount. These institutions have the clout to drive change within their own bodies and to inspire action and motivate change throughout our country. We chose to focus on higher education because we believe the sector could and should be the first to achieve gender parity and fair representation of people of color at the top. (Silbert et al. 6)

Honors colleges should be at the forefront of responding to this call to action. Studies show that each of us contributes to the systemic bias against women with leadership potential by “doing gender” every day in ways that constrain women’s access to leadership roles through formal (e.g., selection, promotion, compensation) and informal (e.g., mentoring) pathways.

For example, intersecting schemas of gender and leadership affect who is selected or promoted into leadership. Leadership

stereotypes are typically associated with male or masculine stereotypes (Koenig et al.; V. E. Schein, "Relationship" and "Relationship . . . among Female Managers"). Research consistently has shown that people view leaders as men rather than women because men typically occupy high-status positions. For example, in an experimental study where participants were asked to guess who a leader was among a group of men and women seated around a table, half of the participants were more likely to choose a man as the leader, even when situational cues suggested that the woman was the leader (i.e., a woman was shown sitting at the head of the table). To explain his decision to choose a male as the leader, one participant stated, "[U]sually men are always the leader like the president" (Jackson et al. 720). A recent meta-analysis shows strong evidence that people tend to ascribe masculine characteristics to leadership positions such that leaders are considered to be more agentic than communal, for example (Koenig et al.; Adapa and Sheridan). Across both of the previously mentioned studies, men were more likely than women to choose male leaders and ascribe leadership characteristics to masculinity. Such tendencies reinforce the position of White men as authority elites in academia and many other organizations.

Smith argues that authority elites reproduce themselves: women and minorities are "disproportionately located in the most marginalized structures of the economy" and "majority-group gatekeepers positioned at the entry ports and promotional ladders of jobs/organizations . . . are typically charged with the responsibility of making the kinds of decisions that often lead to the exclusion of some minorities and women" (519, 520). The result in these circumstances is that those leaders promote those in closer proximity to themselves, and most often those are people like them, White and male. This phenomenon is akin to a concept known as "homosocial reproduction," although this concept, first articulated by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, focuses more on the tendency for people to cultivate mentoring relationships between people who are socially similar (Smith 521; Volpone). Homosocial reproduction in academia is also embedded in the criteria that define academic excellence and merit, thereby constituting a male model that favors

the experiences and achievements of males, as opposed to being a gender-neutral model, a reality that also has significant implications for female-identifying students. For instance, publishing in top A-level journals is often cited as a necessity for tenure and promotion, a criterion that disadvantages women, who are often asked to engage in service work at disproportionate rates compared to men and who also tackle research agendas that are more socially oriented and less likely to be published (Babcock et al.; Santos et al.). In short, not only do we not see women as deans, but the people who decide who becomes the dean (more often than not White and male) are hierarchically and socially distant from those not like them (gender and racial minorities); as a result, they continue to define leadership criteria without considering the implications of overlooking diverse perspectives when doing so (Orupabo and Mangset).

### **DEFINITIONS OF THE IDEAL ACADEMIC LEADER: IMPLICATIONS FOR RACIAL UNDERREPRESENTATION IN HONORS DEANSHIP**

Some might say that a lack of minority faculty makes it difficult to diversify honors administration. According to recent PEW data, however, 24% of the faculty at U.S. colleges and universities are now people of color (Davis and Fry). While faculty of color are 27% at both the assistant professor and “other” ranks—suggesting it will take some time for those faculty to make it into the traditional dean pathway—it is worth pointing out that, if the faculty are 76% White now and full professors 81% White, why are honors college deans 90% White? Clearly, honors colleges have a leadership pathway problem.

Just as we have schemas for gender, we also have schemas for race that pose a barrier for non-Whites on the path to an honors deanship. Much of the structural problem Smith explores, which we explained earlier, applies to race as well as to gender, in that minorities are often in more marginalized areas of the organization and are thus less likely to be mentored by those who call the shots,



two factors that make it more likely they will be excluded from promotional consideration. In addition, authority measures differ considerably based on race, with “white men’s authority scores rang[ing] from 10% to 30% higher than those of blacks depending on the authority measure” (Smith 525). In one Wisconsin study Smith cites, the authority rank of Black men was “about half that of white men” (525). One result of this authority schema is that White men are nearly twice as likely as Black and Latino men to hold high authority positions (525).

Ray’s article fruitfully connects organizational theory to race and ethnicity scholarship, yielding multiple insights into how race is constitutive of organizational foundations, hierarchies, and processes (26). Whereas “scholars of organizations typically see organizations as race-neutral bureaucratic structures” (26), Ray brings race to the conversation, positing that

1) racialized organizations enhance or diminish the agency of racial groups; 2) racialized organizations legitimate the unequal distribution of resources; 3) Whiteness is a credential; and 4) decoupling is racialized. Each of these tenets highlights the connection of racial schemas to a particular set of material and social resources. (27)

Ray’s work thus helps us understand the importance of “seeing organizations as racial[ized] structures—that is, cultural schemas connected to social resources” and how these structures perpetuate racism and inequality (30).

The question of resources plays a critical role in this analysis because many students as well as their parents associate honors colleges with additional resources for academically motivated students. The issue of special resources is what makes the principle of equitable access for our students so important. But should we not say the same of our leadership? Honors dean positions offer access to resources and benefits unlike many other academic leadership roles, a point taken up elsewhere in this volume by Chamberlain, Spencer, and Vahlbusch, themselves honors college deans. Some honors deans outperform other deans on fundraising in part because donors love honors, and alumni often demonstrate intense

affinity with their honors college due to the sense of community and engagement they enjoyed as undergraduates. At the honors college level, we often have budgets to keep class sizes small, occupy beautiful buildings or at least dedicated living-learning spaces, and have opportunities for innovative, creative curricula and pedagogy unimaginable to most colleges at large public universities. Many honors colleges are named (32.5%, according to the 2021 Census), typically due to a sizable endowment (Cognard-Black and Smith 45). In other words, an honors deanship can often be a well-resourced role, at least in comparison to that of other deans. Should we not also consider how those resources and privileges are implicitly racially marked? And, in fact, how “White Male Honors College Dean” provides a racially marked credential? As Ray explains:

Whiteness is a credential providing access to organizational resources, legitimizing work hierarchies, and expanding White agency. This credential helps organizations appear racially neutral in principle, while in practice institutionalizing the property interest in Whiteness. Credentials are allegedly objective, organizationally-generated statuses showing suitability for employment and legitimating modern stratification systems (Collins 1979). According to this narrative, credentials replaced ascribed status as a legitimate bureaucratic means of allocating resources by merit (Pager 2007). (41)

We can easily see the parallels to honors colleges here: “White Male Honors College Dean” authenticates the honors enterprise by making it appear race-neutral, even in the face of largely White student bodies, thereby justifying allocation of additional resources by the university, as well as providing a job credential for students and even the faculty who teach for the college. If we tacitly understand honors college leadership roles as White prerogatives, like an antebellum plantation (33), Ray argues that we risk our entire organization remaining “White-dominated in the face of even good-faith efforts at integration” (41). Ray’s work to draw out the implications of joining Critical Race Theory to organizational hierarchies and leadership should make us all deeply uncomfortable

about the 90% White data point for honors college deans. We hope it does because “much racial inequality is produced through relatively passive participation in racialized organizations” (Ray 40). It is time for change.

### **WHY CHANGE?**

Clearly, change is necessary, but what might be some compelling reasons to do this hard work? Research on diversity initiatives within organizations suggests two dominant perspectives on why diversifying leadership is desirable. First, diversity in leadership can offer competitive advantages tied to student success. Most obviously, increased representation of traditionally marginalized groups in honors deanship positions can help students. Students of all races, ethnicities, and gender identities thrive when they see people like themselves in positions of authority (McBride; Harper). Furthermore, a more diverse faculty contributes to reducing stereotypes and preparing students to live and work in a multiracial society. Jonathan R. Alger argues that majority students who have previously lacked significant direct exposure to minorities frequently have the most to gain from interaction with individuals of other races. Diversifying our student bodies is not enough; we must diversify our leadership positions. That may actually help us diversify as well as enlighten our student bodies.

Second, creating more racial and gender diversity among honors college deans is also an ethical project. It simply is the right thing to do. #BlackLivesMatter has made more non-Black people aware of racial injustice and structural inequities, and #MeToo and the COVID-19 pandemic have focused attention on gender inequities in the workplace, specifically related to a negative climate and childcare issues. Because more of us realize that racial and gender inequities are not acceptable and must be changed, the competitive advantage and ethical arguments for diversity are becoming more entangled. Lack of diversity has become a public relations problem for honors, which may eventually hurt the market share in academia of honors colleges. The more that honors colleges look like bastions of White elite privilege, the less successful and sustainable

they will be, given our current climate. We must evolve or suffer the consequences.

A third consideration is that honors academic identity has been tied more recently to pedagogic, curricular, and programmatic innovation, and even radical difference and opposition to the norm. Publications demonstrating honors as an innovational and/or oppositional practice include *Continuity and Innovation in Honors College Curricula* (Grover and O’Flaherty) and *Occupy Honors Education* (Coleman et al.). Many of our students seek to change the world, and much of our work with them aims to help them practice the skills they will need to do it. Furthermore, a commitment to community engagement is a staple of honors; we need to recognize that commitment extends to having not only honors students who look like the community and are from it but also honors college leadership who represent it. We must ask ourselves, “Do we really want articles on educational leadership written 30 or 50 years from now to be using honors colleges as examples of non-diverse leadership?”

### **A CALL TO WHITE MALE DEANS TO EFFECT CHANGE**

Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is not easy; however, making honors education more diverse and inclusive among its leadership is worth the investment. Organizational culture shifts are slow and incremental, and the benefits of DEI may not be immediately visible. Thus, detractors will argue that DEI strategies do not work. Because systemic racism, however, is built on hundreds of years of oppression of people of color, the damage cannot be quickly dismantled. Therefore, the question for the honors college community is what role it will choose to play in addressing the lack of diversity among its leadership. When it comes to promoting diversity and inclusion, Orin Davis, a human capital strategist, argues:

Those in comfortable strata are in a position to dismantle this system that shouldn’t exist, and their obligation to do so hinges upon the fact that those in lower strata receive

unearned punishments and deficits that none of us would want if our rolls [sic] had come out like theirs. None of us wants to live in a world where such spins of the wheel determine our fates, and it is for that reason that we need to stop reinventing that wheel and actually break it.

## **THE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION TOOLBOX:**

### **HOW TO PRACTICE ACTS OF ALLYSHIP**

#### **Become an Inclusive Leader Through Allyship**

Inclusive leaders must be intentional about how they show their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. One of the pioneers in diversity and inclusion, Vernā Myers, describes diversity as being invited to the party and inclusion as being asked to dance. Myers' metaphor pushes us to consider moving beyond counting the number of underrepresented racial minority (URM) faculty and administrators and to examine whether diverse voices are amplified or silenced. One significant step is reflecting on how to become an inclusive leader through allyship. To be an ally or an accomplice requires intentionality in promoting DEI through correcting schemas that reproduce inequality, dismantling structures that uphold privilege toward dominant race and gender groups, building supportive mentoring relationships with URM faculty and administrators, and utilizing public acts of sponsorship to place URM colleagues in spaces where their talents can be seen or where they may serve as mentors. Honors colleges may sometimes have advantages in this area, given the relative flexibility of their staffing models. Allyship does not look like allowing race differences (or underrepresentation) to be an excuse for not mentoring URM faculty and administrators. When colleagues insist there is no talent in the pool, they need to be questioned about their position. When people say that diversity, equity, and inclusion mean lowering the bar and are not synonymous with excellence, that position, especially since honors often traffics in questions about excellence, must be challenged.

## **Establish an Inclusive Social Lens**

### *Become Better Informed*

Many of us know about diversity, equity, and inclusion generally, but few of us take the time to read the scholarship. We invite you to read the scholarship in our Works Cited. Jessica Nordell's *The End of Bias: A Beginning* offers a one-stop-shop for understanding and eliminating bias. In fact, a reading group dedicated to reading books and articles about racial and gender barriers to academic leadership would create a collective awareness in an honors college or even across multiple honors colleges, either in person or virtually.

### *Surround Yourself with People Who Are Not Your Race or Gender Identity*

Since 24% of faculty members are now non-White, use your connections across the university to recruit those faculty to teach honors courses and sit on honors thesis/project committees, which will move them into the pipeline for honors leadership. Get to know them. Ask their opinions, and not about racial or gender issues alone. Remember that women and minorities are disproportionately represented in lecturer, assistant professor, and "other" roles, so interrogate your criteria associated with hiring to make sure that you are not reinforcing long-held biases; make sure that imperatives around inclusiveness extend to how you evaluate what qualifies individuals to help honors students have powerful learning experiences.

### *Intentionally Disrupt Patriarchal and Heteronormative Gender and Racial Schemas*

Authority schemas diminish female and Black power and create a negative climate that causes women and minorities to elect to leave particular institutions or academia altogether (Bystydzienski et al. 2301). One way to create a positive climate and thus aid in retention is to position women and minorities as leaders of committees, keynote speakers, and seminar faculty in your college.

Consciously avoid repeating outdated patriarchal family norms, such as women typically doing the work of helping, cooking, serving, listening, or taking minutes. If you are a White male dean who is married to a woman, think carefully about her role, if any, in the honors college and any uncompensated labor she provides. As Edgar H. Schein points out, organizational culture seems natural but in fact is created by “basic assumptions and beliefs” that are shared and “operate unconsciously” (qtd. in Bystydzienski et al. 2302). What may seem natural in your household (if this sounds familiar to you) will not contribute to change in your honors college. Bystydzienski et al. conclude: “A key component of meaningful culture change is to recognize, question, and shift cultural assumptions” (2306).

### **Rethink and Redesign Organizational Structures of Honors Colleges**

We need to identify and rectify structures that inhibit diverse leadership. Studies of corporate efforts to increase the proportion of underrepresented people in the senior ranks conclude that

1. diversity is personal,
2. organizational culture and values are at the core of successful diversity outcomes,
3. improvements are systematic, and
4. oversight boards spark movement (Barsh et al., as cited in Rindfleish).

Since systemic structure matters for overcoming historical inequalities, then college deans clearly play a key role in promoting cultural change. Deans directly impact each of the key factors identified above. They can identify a pool of talent, see that development opportunities are accessible, and build empowered and supportive workplaces that not only recognize bias but also call it out. This behavior is what Rindfleish calls the “transformational style of leadership” that women are more likely to exhibit than men. Per Bystydzienski et al.’s vision of a transformational leadership model

cited above, cultural change requires recognizing, questioning, and shifting “cultural assumptions” (2306). Without the leadership of existing chairs and deans, cultural change in the academic setting is unlikely. Focused, sustained efforts like Project CEOS (Comprehensive Equity at Ohio State) have been shown to increase female faculty satisfaction across a broad array of cultural factors.

Historically, honors colleges have been led by a tenured faculty member with a body of staff and either embedded or borrowed faculty who are often a mix of tenured/tenure track and contingent positions. Fully expanded honors colleges typically have one or more assistant or associate deans whose roles vary but whose responsibilities can include oversight of curriculum, admissions, scholarship, or community activities. The 2021 Census shows that 65% of them are female (Cognard-Black and Smith 45). An important question for this analysis, one not answered by NCHC census data, is how often do these assistant or associate dean roles, which also include a higher proportion of URM colleagues, lead to a top leadership post. If an inclusive mentoring leadership model were in place, the answer would be “frequently,” although to be fair many assistant dean positions in schools/colleges (as distinguished from associate dean roles) are filled by staff who have not come up through the faculty ranks and may therefore be ineligible by university policy for the top post.

### **Let Someone Else Have a Turn**

If you are a White, male, mid-career honors faculty/staff member, think twice about running after that brass ring; furthermore, when honors leadership positions open up, put forward names of female and URM colleagues. This recommendation may be our most controversial and one that some may find unreasonable. You may have been working toward an honors college deanship and feel you deserve it and have earned it. You very well may have. But now that you are aware of all the factors that have tipped the scales in your favor along the way (e.g., tenure and promotion criteria, authority schemas), can you also acknowledge the playing field has not been level? Can you place the larger principle of equity and the



greater good of honors colleges before your own ambition? This worldview also means clearing a space for other voices to be heard at different stages in the recruitment processes. A vivid example of the importance of deliberate efforts to create diverse pathways comes from Maryam A. Kazmi et al., who studied the effect of search committee diversity on applicant pools. They found that faculty search committees chaired by women resulted in 23% more women in the applicant pool and searches chaired by URM faculty and administrators resulted in 100% more URM applicants (Kazmi et al. 1417).

### **Mentor Women and Minorities into Administrative Roles**

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's concept of the homosocial reproduction of leadership alerts us to how mentoring relationships are often between two people of the same race and/or gender; as such, a majority of leaders being White and male will simply reproduce a next generation of White male leaders. We call upon White male deans to break that cycle by mentoring a diverse next generation into honors college administration. Since the Census reveals that 65% of honors college "#2s" are female, mentor them into a deanship. This will require promoting a climate in which "#2s" are not treated like second-class citizens and that allows for a flexible career path. It also requires considerable self-reflection and development of the leader to whom the female "#2" reports, especially since recent scholarship reveals significant gender bias in the developmental feedback given to female leaders (Dolder et al.). Unfortunately, the percentage of "#2s" reported as non-White is only 17%; much work remains to create a larger presence of BIPOC faculty and staff in honors colleges. But even mentoring that 17% into honors college deanships would be an improvement upon the current 10% of honors college deans who are not White. Creating an intentional leadership pathway for honors deans thus requires active outreach and mentoring at both the local campus level and through national organizations like NCHC.

## **Rethink Assumptions About Credentials During Hiring and Promotion**

When examining hiring practices, Frank W. Hale argues that women and faculty of color often have circuitous rather than linear career paths, and bias toward certain candidate profiles can creep into search committee deliberations to the exclusion of qualified under-represented minority candidates. Hale writes, “We must confront head-on the narrow notions of who is the ‘best qualified,’ as these definitions favor white males, and now, Asian males” (192). Many institutions could expand their applicant pool for an honors college dean search if tenure was a preferred qualification rather than a requirement, although this practice would likely require changing university policy at institutions that assume the leader of tenured faculty must have tenure. After all, institutions have increasingly expanded criteria around who is qualified to serve as university president, and honors has often been at the forefront of innovative practices. For honors colleges that lack tenure lines, this seeming deficit may present an opportunity for diversifying leadership. A typical job announcement, for example, might state candidates should be qualified to hold a position as a tenured faculty member in one of the university’s fourteen schools. Since the number of women in tenure-track or tenured positions is low, a change in such language could increase the number of female applicants. According to the American Association of University Professors, only 32.5% of full professors are women (“Data Snapshot”). Higher education is not immune to systemic racism, so such a change could also increase the number of minority candidates. Creating job announcements that make tenure a mandatory requirement instead of a preferred requirement excludes potential female and minority applicants who have the credentials, skills, and experiences needed to be a dean. Institutions serious about DEI would be served well by examining their recruitment and hiring practices.

For example, compare the two job requirement announcements in Table 1 for an Honors College Dean. We note that, when this essay was first composed, all five announcements for honors college deans then listed in the NCHC Career Center were of the exclusive type.

Importantly, we must also consider cultural taxation during the evaluation processes involved in hiring or promoting faculty for deanship positions. Cultural taxation occurs when faculty and administrators of color are asked to do more service work, often referred to as invisible work, than their White colleagues (Hirshfield and Joseph). Such taxation might include serving on committees and as faculty advisors to student organizations, mentoring and advising students, working on community engagement projects that involve students and the university, and creating experiential learning opportunities. While this important work can contribute to increasing retention and graduation rates, it is often marginalized during tenure and promotion reviews (Cleveland et al.). Potential solutions are to codify such work in the evaluation processes for promotion, establish awards that recognize individuals who engage in socially innovative work, and create intentional systems that distribute service work equitably across the academic unit, thus bringing to light previously hidden labor.

One of the stickiest parts of diversifying honors leadership may be the prospect of donor influence. According to results from Noah D. Drezner’s 2014 National Alumni Giving Experiment, donors to an alma mater were 76% White and 54% male (269). His theory of “philanthropic mirroring” suggests that these donors act in identity-congruent ways by perceiving reduced social distance between themselves and a recipient when making a donation. White male donors may feel more comfortable working with an honors dean who is also a White male and may give more based on shared social identities (267). This is where the leadership of provosts and

**TABLE 1. COMPARING EXCLUSIVE AND INCLUSIVE CONTENT IN JOB ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Exclusive Job Announcement	Inclusive Job Announcement
<p><i>Required Qualifications:</i> An established track record of excellence in teaching and scholarly activity and the ability to meet the requirements for tenure at the rank of professor.</p>	<p><i>Required Qualifications:</i> An earned PhD and at least 10 years of experience in teaching and academic leadership.</p>

chancellors is key because they can make clear to donors the institution's high value on having a diverse leadership. The co-authors are aware of a recent dean search at a flagship university that was working with a donor to endow a new honors college. The public presentations of all three finalists were videotaped expressly for the donor to view. While one cannot know whether the donor (a White male) had final say over the selection of the dean, the candidate who was the "diverse" finalist (a White female) and who made diversifying the honors college a top priority in her presentation, was not selected. That college's new dean is a White male. Gaining a diverse leadership for an honors college must be a commitment coming from the very top, not only from within the honors college itself.

### **A CALL TO WHITE FEMALE HONORS COLLEGE DEANS**

If you are a White female honors college dean, all the above applies in terms of race. It may not feel like you had the easiest time making it to a deanship, and you probably face additional hurdles even now. Nevertheless, it never hurts to remember that you are the more palatable "diversity" candidate by bearing the Whiteness credential Ray identifies; you should feel the obligation to bring others along with you. Make racial and ethnic diversity and inclusion hallmarks of your deanship; others may listen better because you are White. And take care to avoid gender schemas, whether in your own actions or those of your team because women "do gender," too.

### **A CALL TO NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL LEADERSHIP**

We have three charges for NCHC leadership. First, consider creating a Charter for Equity that honors colleges could adopt. Rindfleish's essay concludes: "The intractable and multifaceted nature of inequality regimes demand[s] that they are addressed through a public 'Charter for Equity' that includes the three identified change mechanisms of enabling workplace meritocracies, changing workplace culture and engaging leaders by making them accountable" (198). The details of implementation for each of these

three change mechanisms can be found on pages 193 and 194 of her essay and come from Australia's Committee for Economic Development 2013 report. We include them as Appendix A.

Second, we recommend NCHC work intentionally to create diverse leadership pathways to the NCHC Board of Directors and to honors college deanships by identifying and mentoring women and minorities working at all levels of honors administrative structures. This work can start at the NCHC committee level, where approximately two dozen committees might articulate diversity statements into their leadership succession documents. Council-wide awards that recognize leadership in DEI initiatives can highlight and promote best practices.

Finally, we call for a Publications Board task force to create guidelines for NCHC authors and editors related to DEI matters such as identifying and avoiding gender- and race-based schemas and bias in all written materials published under the sponsorship of the association. Many organizations and publishers have done excellent work ensuring that the language employed in service of their goals does not reinforce longstanding biases experienced by members of various marginalized communities. For example, in 1986 the American Philosophical Association released (and has since updated) "Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language," which warns against both the unconscious eliding of "the distinctive elements of female experience" and the use of "examples [that] may manifest sexist bias . . . through embodying explicit or implicit sexual stereotypes" (Warren). The giant, for-profit science publisher Elsevier posted a guide in 2020 helping their authors "use language that is culturally sensitive and inclusive" (Holloway), while the American Psychological Association developed in 2021 an extensive toolkit helping members be cognizant of the power of language to harm marginalized groups. In falling in line with this trend, NCHC would be living up to the spirit of its own diversity statement, which notes that the organization is "committed to modeling best practices in inclusion" ("Diversity").

In sum, honors college deans at present are most likely to be White and male—and at higher rates than deans of other colleges

with a significant number of female students (education and nursing) or with a percentage of BIPOC faculty (27%). Women and underrepresented minorities face stiff barriers to advancement to an honors college deanship, including leadership and authority schemas, university and honors structures, promotional practices, faculty/staff classifications, lack of mentoring, and few rewards for work typically done by women and minorities. We have made numerous recommendations that may improve this situation. The work of diversifying “Honors College Dean” will be difficult because systems of bias are prevalent and the people who exist within and perpetuate those systems find them familiar and correct, even when presented with evidence to the contrary. Urged to see things another way, one may feel un-homed in the Freudian sense or, to put it more frankly, dispossessed from the roles and privileges one has enjoyed for a lifetime, or just overwhelmed by the magnitude of the work. We hope this chapter has both informed and inspired our readers, because this work—complex and daily, institutional and individual—must happen for the future of honors students and, it may not be too much to claim, for the future of our country. If honors students want to change the world, we, their leaders, need to expand the race, gender, and ethnic profiles of the honors college deans whose vision guides them. We have to make space for all the female and BIPOC leadership talent standing on the periphery of the honors party but not being asked to dance. Who knows what new, paradigm-shifting ideas for honors will come from a diversified honors college leadership?

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## APPENDIX A

## Charter for Equity

*(from Rindfleish 193–94)*

1. *Enabling workplace meritocracies*—The assumption that workplaces are meritocracies does not always hold, leaving women on an uneven playing field. Organizations may help ensure that workplaces become meritocracies by
  - Raising awareness regarding all areas of unconscious bias and addressing them through unconscious bias programs, including educating employees about gender diversity and the detrimental effects of gender stereotypes;
  - Performing structured pay audits to identify potential gender pay gaps;
  - Examining recruitment processes and selection criteria, as well as indicators used to assess performance and promotion to ensure that they are not unconsciously and unwittingly biased against women; and
  - Offering mentoring programs and networking opportunities to support women’s careers and equip them for leadership roles with a view to level the playing field.
2. *Changing workplace culture*—Societal norms, such as traditional roles, can affect gender equality in the workplace. Business and government leaders can help improve women’s equality of opportunity through culture change by
  - Breaking down stereotypical gender role barriers embedded in workplace culture. For example, by encouraging fathers to take more parental leave to which they are entitled;
  - Reassessing the historical way that companies have organized work by exploring alternatives to the nine-to-five work system, and reconsidering how childcare and other non-work commitments fit within the system;
  - Exploring the feasibility of designing workplaces that promote flexible work practices for all employees regardless of gender and family status; and
  - Mainstreaming flexibility can help to counter the association of flexible work with ‘women’s work’.
3. *Engaging leaders and introducing accountability*—To enable equality of opportunity in the workplace through gender diversity strategies and policies, the following is needed:
  - Clear governance, accountability and leaders committed to dealing with this complex issue; and

- Embedding changes to existing systems and processes through personal responsibility for behaviors and actions, such as adding gender diversity policies to performance indicators (CEDA Report, p. 8).

Leaders must implement all of these proactive measures simultaneously in order to deliver an effective systematic, continuous program of equity within their organizations. Leaders will benefit greatly by recruiting and working with followers who also have knowledge and commitment to these measures. Governments and public and private institutions also need to foster and prompt the progress of more women into leadership roles. The three methods of 'ensuring workplace meritocracies', 'changing workplace cultures' and 'engaging leaders and introducing accountability' form the basis of a 'Charter for Equity' that can be implemented by leaders within every workplace and organization worldwide.

# HONORS COLLEGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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Part IV:  
Honors College Operations





## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Something Borrowed, Something New: Honors College Faculty and the Staffing of Honors Courses

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Among university instructors, faculty who teach in honors colleges—including those adjuncts whom honors directors and deans as well as universities increasingly rely upon to deliver much of their instruction—are typically the most fluid group on campus. There are good reasons for this fluidity and instability given the prevailing model for providing honors instruction in the U.S., which is borrowing faculty from other academic departments to teach honors classes. As the number of honors colleges in the U.S. increases, though, this fluidity is starting to disappear. With this rise in the number of honors colleges, the question of who teaches

honors college students may well have a significant impact on what honors is and what it could and will be.

Historically, securing faculty to teach in honors colleges has been a patchwork process, one that has utilized a wide range of currencies to seal these formal and informal teaching contracts. These arrangements include but are not limited to good faith relationships with different department heads and chairs, stipends to compensate individual departments for borrowing their faculty for a semester or longer, the appointment of honors fellows for extended periods of time, the prestige and departmental benefit of faculty teaching honors students, adjunct funding to bring qualified community members into the classroom, the teaching expertise and qualifications of honors staff, and the existing culture and traditions of an individual institution. Simply put, the range of these practices suggests that the instruction of what many believe are among the most motivated, brightest students on our campuses is often left to the whims of tradition, a university's overall culture, the persuasive power of an honors director or dean, or the annual size of an honors budget. Jesse Peters calls this the "beg, borrow, or steal" (33) method of procuring faculty for honors:

When the call for next semester's schedule came from the registrar, I would email and call department chairs and request that certain general education courses be offered as honors sections and ask for faculty to cover those. We also needed faculty to teach the interdisciplinary seminars that serve as our core curriculum. Even though I knew most of the chairs fairly well . . . , the process was not always smooth. Some said they could not spare anyone; some wanted to assign faculty they did not want to deal with themselves; some wanted adjuncts to teach the courses; some wanted to teach themselves; and some wanted to talk about opening the classes up to non-honors students. . . . Though I was technically in charge of the program, I had little or no authority to request specific faculty for honors courses. Every faculty assignment was a complex negotiation, one that did not always work to the program's advantage. (33-34)

Whether or not this scenario resonates with every honors administrator, all would agree that the ways in which honors courses are staffed varies significantly among institutions.

Honors administrators and staff very often contribute to honors instruction, and in many programs and colleges, they function out of necessity as a baseline honors faculty. In cases where the honors staff is small or values this arrangement, some or all of its members, including the director or dean, may teach honors courses on top of their other duties. Programs and colleges with larger staffs may task a subset of members, such as academic advisors, to deliver the same courses. For example, programs and colleges with curricula incorporating a senior thesis may rely on their directors or deans to oversee this requirement and to deliver any associated instruction if that administrator is the only qualified faculty or staff member, whereas a dedicated faculty or staff coordinator may be responsible for this work on larger staffs. Depending upon the composition of their student bodies and their own workload, honors administrators and staff may also teach courses in their fields of specialization. For example, the director or dean who is a statistician by training might teach the occasional thematic seminar on big data. Most commonly, though, honors staff members with academic credentials across a variety of disciplines are called upon to deliver any of a series of in-house honors courses. Beyond those courses that fall under the exclusive purview of the honors program or college, faculty arrangements become ever more variable.

Certainly, the cultures and traditions of specific institutions play a role in determining how honors courses are likely to be selected and staffed. At some large institutions, honors education may be relatively decentralized with academic departments offering honors sections of their courses more or less at will, with or without input from the honors office (of which there may also be more than one), even though the National Collegiate Honors Council's "Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education" urges institutions that possess departmental honors to assign "coordinating responsibility over those offerings" to the honors program or college because "those pathways may be difficult for

students to navigate without such central oversight” (4). In addition to the robust slate of honors seminars offered by the Hutton Honors College at Indiana University, Bloomington, for instance, “schools and departments on campus offer honors course opportunities as well as honors notations at the school, department, or major level on the transcript” (“School and Departmental Honors programs”). The extent to which faculty teaching honors sections of courses intersect with the central honors college in such situations is, of course, also variable. At other large institutions, one honors program or, more often, college might employ its own faculty members who exclusively (or almost exclusively) teach honors sections of general education courses in which honors students are required to enroll. This arrangement is the case at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where honors college students choose from “an exclusive array of advanced, thought-provoking courses—in place of UNLV’s standard general education requirements” (“Program Overview”). Alternatively, such dedicated honors faculty may teach specialized honors core courses. At Arizona State University’s Barrett, the Honors College, “the Barrett faculty are forty-six scholars across five campuses, all of whom are exclusively dedicated to honors education” (“Honors Faculty at Barrett”). A similar model is in place at the University of Utah, where a corps of a dozen or so faculty deliver the four honors college core courses (Torti).

Midsized and smaller institutions with relatively small and/or disciplinarily diverse honors populations may prefer to contract with academic departments to offer a more restrained slate of honors courses consistent with their enrollments and enrollment management priorities. In a decentralized honors model, the degree to which the honors program or college can influence the selection of faculty for such agreed-upon courses could be limited; alternatively, in a centralized honors model—and with sufficient institutional buy-in—each term’s honors courses could be selected via a proposal process that would afford the program or college a comparatively high level of influence over faculty selection. More generally, where honors courses are to some extent predictable, relationships are likely to develop among the honors program or college, the chairs of the various academic departments, and the faculty.

At the University of Nevada, Reno, both models have been in use through the years. For many years a stable rotation of general education honors courses was aligned with the institution's core curriculum requirements, but the honors college has recently transitioned away from a fixed slate of courses to a course proposal process that allows for courses at any level to be proposed as honors sections. The former model had the advantage of predictability for the college and for the faculty involved in delivering the courses. For students, however, that predictability translated into boredom because of the lack of variety in honors course offerings. The much greater curricular variety of the new proposal-based model engages students, but the college must also devote more time to soliciting proposals from faculty to ensure that a sufficient number of proposals are submitted and that the courses proposed support its curricular priorities.

Honors programs and colleges that borrow faculty from academic departments to deliver honors courses are beholden to the chairs of the respective departments. Many honors directors and deans expend a significant amount of energy building and maintaining good faith arrangements with chairs in order to facilitate offering honors courses, despite the caution in NCHC's "Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education" that honors should "not depend on the good will and energy of particular faculty members or administrators for survival" (6). Such arrangements may or may not involve monetary compensation to the departments either as an incentive to chairs or to offset lost instructional capacity, or to the individual faculty members in the form of in-load or overload pay. In cases where stipends of one kind or another are offered to departments, the level of compensation is equally variable; it may be calibrated based upon the instructional units or credit hours represented by the course (e.g., \$1,000 per unit) or based upon the cost of the faculty member's time according to institutional instructional buyout scales (e.g., 12% of the base salary per course) or other related metrics. At the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, the honors college compensates departments lending their faculty to teach honors seminars with both replacement funds to hire adjuncts to teach the courses the faculty would have taught for

the department as well as funds to be used at the department head's discretion.

Within academic departments, too, the ways in which faculty are commissioned to teach honors courses are legion. In some departments, the honors section(s) may be prime teaching assignments reserved for the most accomplished or the most senior professors. In others, they may be leveraged as carrots offered to junior faculty members or even advanced graduate students—instructors who can develop as teachers in the honors setting where, at a minimum, they will have fewer students to contend with and where they may also have more freedom to develop original courses. If honors sections are offered on a recurring basis, there may even be an established rotation among faculty or, perhaps less ideally, a lottery system for distributing the honors courses. These sorts of arrangements are often the only ones that are financially viable for honors programs and colleges with fewer resources, but they carry certain disadvantages for honors administrators insofar as they afford minimal influence over honors instruction and hinder assessment efforts. This situation can lead to a scenario in which a faculty member who is not particularly strong in the honors classroom is consistently assigned to an honors course. In such a situation, the only recourse available to the honors program or college may be to risk giving offense and losing the course altogether by requesting that a different instructor be assigned to the course.

At the other end of the spectrum, the development of such standing arrangements with departments, to the extent that they involve specific, effective faculty members, can result in the development of a strong *de facto* honors faculty over time. In such cases, faculty members may function as honorary honors “fellows” with the understanding on campus being that Professors X and Y teach in the honors program or college on an ongoing basis either instead of or in addition to their other teaching duties. Again, at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, such a situation exists with the English department; one creative writing professor has taught the freshman foundational honors course, Honors Humanities, for over thirty years. This work accounts for two-thirds of that faculty

member's course load, but no additional compensation has ever been provided to either the instructor or the department. At institutions where honors education is valued highly or where such customary arrangements have been in place, academic departments may collaborate with the honors program or college without the exchange of funds because the benefit to those departments of the prestige associated with participating in honors education is sufficient to ensure their continued participation. The ability for faculty members to identify themselves as, for example, honors-affiliated faculty on their CVs and departmental websites may be a powerful motivator. The inverse situation, in which well-resourced departments opt to offer honors sections of their courses at no cost to the honors program or college, is comparable, but slightly less advantageous insofar as it puts the honors program or college in the politically trickier position of either graciously accepting or refusing cost-neutral instructional support, whether or not the curriculum and pedagogy of those departmental sections are aligned with approaches in the honors program or college.

More formalized affiliate honors faculty or faculty fellow arrangements are also increasingly prevalent. In such instances, honors faculty may be appointed for a set period—say, two years—to deliver a specific number of honors courses, potentially in addition to honors service commitments such as sitting on an admissions or scholarship committee. At Florida Gulf Coast University, for example, honors faculty fellows “teach the equivalent of six credits for the Honors College per academic year as part of their assigned annual teaching duties [and . . .] are appointed for three-year terms” (“Honors Fellows”); these appointees also have a service expectation and may serve as research mentors, recruiters, or in other participatory honors roles. At Ball State University, the Ball Brothers Foundation Honors College Faculty Fellows are supported by an endowment. The two-year fellowships “provide a means by which successful and creative faculty can partner with the Honors College for a fixed term to benefit the Fellow’s professional agenda, to benefit the students directly impacted by the Fellow, and to further the greater work of the Honors College” (“2021–2023

Ball Brothers Foundation”). This program incorporates a strong focus on student and faculty research as “the Fellow benefits by having the opportunity to pursue interdisciplinary scholarship and research opportunities possible only in partnership with [the] Honors College” and “the students benefit by access to a novel partnership” (“2021–2023 Ball Brothers Foundation”). In general, faculty affiliate initiatives help the honors program or college build relationships with other academic units while providing additional instructional stability. Fellows returning to their home units are uniquely positioned to be liaisons to honors and to bring additional faculty into the fold.

An advantage of the affiliate faculty model is that it can help programs and colleges skirt some of the definitional issues associated with the creation of an honors faculty. Temporary, or at least not permanent, honors faculty arrangements can offer a high level of consistency to the honors program or college without stirring up territorial or logistical disputes over faculty within other academic units. Depending upon the specific compensation mechanism in place, such arrangements may also be advantageous to the departments loaning their faculty. If an honors program or college has the means to offset the lost instructional capacity and funding for a department or to compensate faculty members either by paying a portion of their salary or providing overload pay, then the situation is a win-win. If the honors budget is leaner, however, the faculty member may still enjoy the perks of delivering honors courses, but the department chair may view the arrangement as unsustainable or, worse, unfair.

One way for honors colleges to sidestep the minor departmental squabbles that come with the territory in borrowing faculty is to hire qualified community members as adjunct instructors. Although such hires are not without their own administrative hurdles, on many campuses they are significantly less complicated and/or less closely monitored, providing maximum flexibility. Additionally, because honors curricula typically embrace both interdisciplinarity and inclusivity of diverse populations, engaging local artists or community and business leaders to deliver courses



tailored to honors students' unique interests enables the program or college to provide a boutique experience and expose its students to a more diverse faculty group at a minimal cost. Of course, while some community members may appreciate the opportunity to work with the best and brightest young students and be relatively unconcerned with the compensation involved, it remains important for honors directors and deans to carefully consider their reliance—or overreliance, as the case may be—on contingent faculty. Although honors education is nimble by comparison with many other disciplines, its positive capacity for flexibility can sometimes be used as a justification for preserving disadvantageous temporary faculty arrangements. That is, to the extent that an honors college wishes to advocate for dedicated honors faculty, the ease with which it can recruit temporary instructors may be taken as an indication that depending on contingent labor is a sustainable practice over the long term.

Making the jump from an honors faculty characterized by many arrangements of varying stability to a permanent one—a process that is often a corollary to the move from honors program to college—presents its own unique challenges. Perhaps most notable among these is the lack of understanding among some faculty and administrators of how an honors college might support its own faculty or, indeed, why it would need or wish to do so. Questions raised along these lines often focus on how a dedicated honors faculty would fit into the institution as a whole (i.e., if we hire a composition professor for honors, how will the English department react?) and navigate the vagaries of tenure and promotion in honors. One of the great strengths of honors education is its capacity for interdisciplinarity, and yet, in the realm of institutionalizing a set cadre of honors faculty, this asset can become the square peg that does not quite fit in the round hole of university histories, policies, and practices.

Nevertheless, the rise and maturation of the honors college movement in the U.S. does seem to be having a clear effect on the stability of honors faculty. According to a census completed in 2016, over two thirds of all honors programs and colleges at that time

utilized a “borrowing” model; four in five honors colleges borrowed faculty from other units to which the faculty reported (Scott et al. 202). Only 14% of all honors faculty reported to the head of honors, and only two in five honors colleges participating in that survey had faculty who reported to the head of their honors college (Scott et al. 202). In a more recent survey of honors colleges conducted in 2021, 42 out of 158 or 26.6% of the colleges surveyed indicated that they had their own dedicated faculty lines, although despite this increase, dedicated staff lines are still much more prevalent—141 out of 158 universities with honors colleges—or 89.2% of the total honors colleges participating (Cognard-Black and Smith 64). The number of honors colleges offering tenure to faculty within honors has also increased: only 8.3% of the participating colleges offered tenure in 2016 versus 9.4% or 15 out of 159 honors colleges in 2021 (Scott et al. 205; Cognard-Black and Smith 64). Given that tenure for faculty is a sign of additional job security, honors colleges do seem to be gradually increasing the stability of the ranks of honors faculty.

It is possible that simply by increasing the number of dedicated honors faculty within a university’s honors unit, honors administrators are redefining our work on the most basic level, solidifying what has often been fluid in our classrooms. In the fourth edition of *Beginning in Honors*, Samuel Schuman argues for increased stability among honors course staffing:

Sometimes the first faculty hired wholly within an honors program or college are part-time, non-tenure-track appointments, sometimes spousal hires. The quality of instruction provided by such individuals can be very high. Over time, however, if the honors college is to have an equivalent status to other collegiate units within the university, it needs to be hiring faculty on the same contractual basis as those units, if it is to hire them at all. That means evolving towards full-time, tenurable positions. (27)

But Schuman concedes on this point moments later when he notes: “It is always important, too, not to give the appearance of developing some sort of elite and closed cadre of honors instruction. *New*

*instructors should regularly be urged to consider joining the program; rotation, rather than permanence, should be the staffing rule*" (29; our emphasis). Whether honors courses should be staffed by set faculty who reliably and ably teach them semester after semester, or whether those courses should offer existing faculty across campus the opportunity to experiment in the honors classrooms while exposing more of them to honors students is a quandary worthy of discussion. As Richard Badenhausen has noted, hiring dedicated honors faculty is "one way to protect" an honors entity's economy given that these employees offer stability to the college's ability to offer its curriculum as well as putting "a human face on potential budget cut-backs" (21). While the argument about whether instructor stability is better or worse for any given honors college will undoubtedly continue, if the move to hire more faculty specifically in honors and to provide more of them with a path to tenure in those honors colleges continues to gain momentum, then certainly that development will play a large part in the kinds of colleges honors administrators create.

In addition to the inevitable administrative hurdles to hiring faculty, the challenge of promoting an esprit de corps among the members of an honors faculty remains. Just as any faculty member might identify primarily with an academic discipline ("I'm a professor of theater") or with the institution ("I teach at a small liberal arts college"), it is possible to imagine several potential identifications among honors faculty. While one honors faculty member might feel the greatest allegiance to honors ("I'm an honors chemistry professor"), another might feel a greater affinity to a discipline ("I'm a chemistry professor who primarily teaches honors courses"). Honors faculty identity, owing to the influence of some of the customary currencies and institutional practices discussed above, is likely to be idiosyncratic.

Faculty members whose appointments are split, for example, will necessarily identify with the units that claim a share of their time, but the ways in which they do so may be more or less predictable. At the University of New Mexico, professors hired jointly with academic units beyond the honors college have sometimes

elected to join those other units full-time following promotion and tenure (Donovan).<sup>1</sup> Intriguingly, these faculty departures have not always conformed to disciplinary stereotypes. Whereas a hire from a humanities or social science field might seem like the safe bet given the preponderance of honors administrators hailing from those disciplines, at New Mexico, hires from natural science fields have sometimes shown great dedication to honors, even in the face of such temptations as lab space that another unit might have been better positioned to provide (Donovan). Hiring committees may be able to sniff out and pass on candidates who are attracted to honors primarily as a stepping stone to tenure. In fact, this concern will likely be an important aspect of their deliberations, but they will not be able to do so categorically. Moreover, individual faculty members' professional priorities may shift over time and be absent of any nefarious intentions. No matter where the allegiances of a faculty in a shared line may fall, those professors inevitably get caught up in the service demands of two units; honors deans need to be prepared to address any questions of equity that arise.

In cases where honors faculty are appointed solely within the honors college, the question of their standing (if any) with regard to their "home" discipline remains a potentially thorny one. Many prospective faculty members may wish to maintain those ties, especially if candidates have training, for example, in a field in which an institution is well respected. Others may be itching to cut them: the well-pedigreed physicist who, at the end of a postdoctoral fellowship, realizes that they have no further desire to conduct research but are passionate about teaching may be attracted by a teaching-focused, tenure-track position in an honors college. Honors colleges should be prepared to provide candidates with specific information on how closely (or how distantly) related they should expect to be with units outside of honors. In the interest of being good stewards of honors faculty, deans might need to consider whether a siloed honors college puts honors faculty who later leave the college at a disadvantage in finding employment elsewhere. Apart from those faculty members who might depart to take up an honors director or dean position that carries tenure, would tenure in honors translate to tenure in another discipline at another institution?

Faculty identity in honors is the focus of two published discussions of the development of an honors faculty culture within an honors college. In “Implementing Honors Faculty Status: An Adventure in Academic Politics,” Jesse Peters details how both visibility and viability for teaching in honors increased shortly after he assumed the deanship of the University of North Carolina Pembroke Honors College in 2005. Utilizing the prevailing culture at his institution, Peters worked to establish an honors faculty status for those interested in teaching honors that paralleled the institution’s practice for graduate faculty status. At that time, the results were promising:

The new process of achieving honors faculty status established public and formal recognition for the faculty who were already interested in working with honors students and teaching honors courses. It has also aided in the recruiting of highly motivated and skilled faculty to teach honors courses. I have noticed a marked increase in faculty participation in honors social and co-curricular activities, helping us to forge an even stronger honors community on campus. Since the faculty are formally and officially linked with the program, I also see more energy dedicated to curriculum development and teaching innovation. I have a much easier time recruiting faculty mentors for honors projects, and the honors faculty seem to have a much keener interest in the academic progress of honors students in general. (Peters 37)

“Establishing an honors faculty,” Peters contends, “is one step towards addressing the academic marginalization which can be common for honors programs” (38). This is exactly the kind of impact that an honors college may well have on any given campus.

Utilizing the model of the preceptor—a faculty member who guides discussion and interacts with students in a generally smaller setting than an entire class—Charlie Slavin collaborated with the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the provost at the University of Maine to hire four such positions and begin to create a defined teaching community for its honors college. The published account, written jointly by the two existing preceptors,

the four new preceptors hired that year, and the dean, provides a 360° view of this transformation of the college via the creation of an honors faculty body and identity (Glover et al.). Focused on the value of interdisciplinarity in honors and in these positions, the authors hold that “various perspectives illustrate the difficulties and possibilities endemic to this faculty formation and collectively belie the assumption that faculty members necessarily best cohere around a single discipline and familiar professional constructs” (Glover et al. 193). Developing a discrete group of honors faculty members, however it is achieved, has the potential to more visibly seat honors within the center of a university and to further the growth of interdisciplinary work and teaching on a campus, growth that is often very difficult given the siloed nature of many, if not most, academic units in U.S. universities and colleges today.

Of course, the question of who is best suited to teach honors students is one that has appeared numerous times in the literature. In “Defining Honors Culture,” Slavin distills the essence of instructors in honors to two key components: faculty who are willing to take intellectual risks and faculty who are self-selective in joining the honors community—who are there, in other words, because they *want* to be (16–18). For Slavin, these traits are not relegated to either students or faculty but pertain to both groups:

Students choose to accept our invitations or apply for admission to honors; they aren’t forced to do so. . . . Likewise, faculty choose to teach honors courses or to be part of an honors faculty. An honors culture that was not based on this idea of self-selection—among qualified candidates, of course—would not foster the intellectual risk-taking that I perceive to be at the heart of honors. (17)

Similarly, in the Netherlands, Marca V. C. Wolfensberger focuses on the qualities that honors students look for in faculty and honors courses and distills these to three: “autonomy, competence, and relatedness” (“Qualities” 57). A follow-up study highlights again that “honours students’ evaluation of their academic environment indicates a high level of intrinsic motivation” and that, compared with non-honors students, “honours students place higher value

on having teachers who are demanding, challenging, and inspiring than non-honors students” (Wolfensberger and Offringa 180, 177). Wolfensberger’s “Six Habits of Highly Inspiring Honors Teachers” further emphasizes what she and her team have found are the key elements in successful honors instruction: being authentic as a teacher, having the courage to go against the grain in the honors classroom, being challenging, investing in relationships with students, showing intellectual passion to their students, and “living the dream” or realizing all these traits in the honors classroom. As Wolfensberger notes, “Honors education is an excellent way to help faculty sharpen their interests in pedagogical innovation, reorient themselves to a refreshing student-centered philosophy of outstanding teaching and learning, and achieve the best education for everybody” (“Six Habits” 111). Other researchers have also found that a high level of engagement with their students among honors faculty members is desirable (Miller et al. 13).

Honors faculty still must be found, though, and according to Rocky Dailey, this means finding those instructors whose identity most closely matches what is valued in honors: “Academic identity can combine teaching and non-teaching activities into one identity, and honors teaching is a special subset where this combined identity is perhaps especially important in attracting the right students” (152). Dailey found that faculty teaching in honors most prized their ability to work with these students and create interesting experiences in the classroom for them; they also indicated that they had a great deal of autonomy in the classroom and that they largely saw themselves as mentors in the classroom (170, 182). Faculty with less experience in the classroom often had the most teaching experience in honors, “indicating that teaching quality is valued over quantity and that an experienced educator might not be a good fit for an honors program” (Dailey 184). Dailey encourages directors of honors programs to be wary of faculty who look to honors for an “easier” teaching gig and to focus on faculty development when recruiting honors faculty. Indeed, one of the things Cheryl Achterberg notes was added to their overall programmatic activities when the honors program at Pennsylvania State University converted to an honors college in 2004 was a slate of faculty

development seminars (89). In keeping with this idea, Hanne ten Berge and Rob van der Vaart recount the details of an honors teaching course developed by the Center of Excellence in University Teaching at Utrecht University in 2011, a course based on the three key principals of honors pedagogy articulated elsewhere by Wolfensberger and Offringa: “creation of a learning community, substantial freedom for the learners within a structured context, and academic challenge” (Berge and Vaart 62). Noting that faculty who have finished the course realize that honors “is largely about moving ‘out of your comfort zone,’” Ten Berge and Van der Vaart emphasize again that what seems to be true for the honors student is also true for the honors faculty member. Milton Cox also focuses on the theme of community among faculty in honors in his description of a faculty learning community focused on honors. It is interesting, if not revealing, that the traits of an honors student are mirrored in a good honors faculty member and that the existence and health of a community of honors faculty may well be as significant a factor in the success of that college as the health of the community of its students.

Perhaps the single largest cultural and institutional shift prompted by the growth of the honors college movement and its faculty is the institution of tenure within honors itself rather than within a conventional disciplinary area or department. Although tenure is currently under threat in some quarters, since 1995 when Rosalie Otero was the first faculty member in the United States to be tenured in honors, tenure in honors has become more prevalent. And as honors colleges craft their own bylaws and populate their own promotion and tenure committees, the question of *how* to promote and tenure faculty in honors colleges—a path that looks quite different from campus to campus, if not different at different times on the *same* campus—becomes a relevant one for what it means to *be* a college in the first place.

An essay based on Otero’s own experience, “Tenure and Promotion in Honors” is the first and perhaps still the most comprehensive public document detailing the process of and necessary assumptions underlying the granting of tenure in an honors college.



Relying most emphatically on the interdisciplinary nature of the University of New Mexico's then-honors program (now an honors college), Otero stakes out the territory of and tenets beneath this process as it was instituted and as it has been carried forward at that institution. Central to her argument is the idea that joint appointments for faculty, particularly honors faculty, are deeply problematic for the faculty members themselves and do not ensure professional success for those professors.<sup>2</sup> The greatest significance of Otero's case, though, is in the answers it provides to two key and persistent questions regarding offering tenure to faculty in honors: Should tenure exist within an honors college, and, if so, what should the criteria be for achieving it?

In almost every case, the first priority for gaining tenure within honors is teaching. At New Mexico, "faculty are expected to focus primarily on undergraduate teaching" although "quality scholarship and/or creative work is also considered essential for tenure in the Honors College," according to the *Promotion and Tenure Handbook* (University of New Mexico Honors College). At the University of Central Arkansas, "teaching and high-quality interaction between faculty and students continue to be hallmarks of the Schedler Honors College"; it then follows that "the evaluation of teaching is the most important measure of candidates' appropriate progress toward tenure, promotion, and advancement" (Norbert O. Schedler Honors College 2-3). Excellent teaching in honors, though, does not simply equate to high course evaluations but extends into the area of pedagogical experimentation and growth. Honors teaching, for example, often involves interdisciplinary courses as well as team-taught ones. The willingness to explore beyond the boundaries of a particular academic discipline is one of the hallmarks of honors education and, indeed, is featured in many, if not most, honors colleges' curricula.

Research in honors—which covers a broader swath of intellectual engagement than is permitted in most academic units—is a vital requirement for honors faculty and one of the primary reasons to award tenure within an honors college rather than in a faculty member's disciplinary home. At the University of Maine, the

category of “research” includes work undertaken with undergraduates and the publication of that research in, say, a co-authored essay, as well as research focusing on honors education itself. According to the *Honors College Promotion and Tenure Criteria* of the University of Maine Honors College, the following activities are counted toward the area of research in the tenure process: “research and scholarship that engages undergraduate students, work aimed at enhancing Honors pedagogy, scholarship focusing on Honors education, and work within one’s own discipline” (2).

The research of faculty members in their discipline is, of course, key to the research expectations for honors tenure-track faculty, but the tenure requirements in an honors college also credit research that is often overlooked because it falls beyond the narrowly defined boundaries of a particular discipline. The Schedler Honors College offers helpful language regarding the nature of scholarship within honors. There, the interdisciplinarity of honors translates to encouraging honors faculty to explore different modes of research:

While some faculty may choose to work solely in research and others may choose to work solely on creative endeavors, some faculty may choose to work in both areas. In this instance, faculty should not be penalized for a lack of focus. Instead, the unique nature of the scholar/artist should be recognized, and appropriate credit should be given in both areas. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the Honors College, it is expected that interdisciplinary scholarship will be given the same weight in tenure considerations as discipline-specific scholarship. (Norbert O. Schedler 4)

Granting tenure to faculty members in honors allows the research efforts of professors to benefit their discipline while also directly benefiting their undergraduate students and the work of honors education on the campus at large.

Honors faculty typically engage extensively in service activities. The University of New Mexico Honors College “demands an extraordinary amount of service from assistant professors” who “normally take part in many activities related to building a strong community of scholars and active members of a broader community

of citizens” (2.3). Noting that the service of faculty there must be “respected and weighed accordingly,” the University of New Mexico Honors College *Promotion and Tenure Handbook* explains its significance in honors education:

Teaching and scholarship are augmented by a range of service responsibilities and activities orchestrated to enhance education: from lectures and events in the community to recruiting that takes place throughout the academic year to the full round of College and University committee work necessary to the functioning of the institution. The Honors College considers this range of service to be vital to the unique form and high quality of education in our community. (2.3)

The language in the University of New Mexico Honors College handbook has been adopted by other honors colleges, including the Schedler Honors College (University of Central Arkansas) and the Frederik Meijer Honors College (Grand Valley State University). Such borrowings underscore the broad relevance of its description of the role of service and leadership in honors education nationwide.

How honors colleges have been able to establish tenure within their own units, though, tells a different kind of story about definition: while a unit may be able to clearly delineate what an honors faculty member would need to do in order to earn tenure in an honors college, the explanation of why tenure should be offered in honors at that institution in the first place hits at the core of how honors is identified by that institution versus how it may be self-identified there. Indeed, if these identifications do not align, convincing a university’s or college’s executive administrators of the necessity of offering tenure in the honors college rather than in the faculty member’s disciplinary home department may be difficult. And the questions this situation can raise are significant. Does offering tenure in an honors college at a university suggest that honors is indeed its own discipline, separate and apart from that of a faculty member’s doctorate-granting disciplinary home? Does an honors college’s offering of an honors major constitute reason enough for tenure to exist there? Can offering tenure in an

honors college address the practical concerns of offering authority and permanence to a faculty member whose daily workload is strikingly different from that of a faculty member in a more traditional academic department? And if tenure is instituted within an honors college, does the tenure necessarily imply a redirection of the purpose of honors on that campus: away from a unit offering exploration and experimentation to an ever-changing faculty who choose to teach there to something more rigid, more narrowly defined? How honors college administrators answer these questions will certainly in part determine if and how the definition and institutionalization of honors will change over time.

While dictating how set an honors faculty should be in any given honors college is not our place, several best practices are apparent. Because the size and function of honors on a given campus varies so much, suggesting that all honors colleges need the same kind of faculty structure would be inappropriate. Some honors colleges may serve a campus mightily by offering honors as a place for faculty in other departments to explore new pedagogies and to create new courses they may not be able to in their home departments, with the hope they will bring those discoveries back to their home departments. Some honors operations may require a volume of coursework that can only be effectively delivered by a strong corps of dedicated honors faculty. Other campuses may be primarily and inadvertently driving undergraduate research via honors contracts in departmental courses that require no specific honors faculty whatsoever. Whatever the case, we do see three key practices regarding faculty in honors as instrumental to success.

First, honors colleges need to have steady and reliable access to faculty best suited to teaching in honors. Although specific needs will vary, these are necessarily faculty who privilege working on research with undergraduates; are willing to step out of their comfort zone and try new strategies in the classroom; and will challenge but also support their students, allowing them the opportunity to take intellectual risks with relative impunity. Faculty in honors need to be willing and interested participants in the community that honors inevitably builds and prioritizes; securing faculty from

underrepresented populations is obviously also key to this initiative given what they can uniquely offer all our honors students. For many institutions, offering tenure to full-time honors faculty within the honors college may be the best way to ensure such dedication and, in turn, guarantee honors students that they will have a committed and stable core of honors-specific mentors on whom they can depend.

Second, and related to the first practice, honors deans or directors need to have the primary say in who teaches for their colleges. This autonomy can be managed in a range of ways, including offering faculty on campus the opportunity to submit proposals for honors seminars that honors deans and directors, in consultation with their advisory committees, select; creating and selecting an identifiable and highly visible body of faculty on the campus who are approved to teach in honors; generating agreements with individual departments regarding how faculty will be selected to teach honors sections or ongoing honors foundational courses; garnering the necessary budget to compensate departments when reimbursement is advisable and possible; initiating an honors fellow or affiliate program on the campus that commits faculty members for extended periods of time to teach in honors; initiating an honors faculty status application process that essentially approves faculty to teach in honors at whatever time they are able and whenever the college needs them; running internal, regional, or national searches for honors-specific faculty to be housed in, funded by, committed to, and, ideally, tenured by the honors college in question. Again, as honors administrators strive to bolster the diversity and inclusion efforts in their own colleges, being able to attract faculty of color and other underrepresented groups is another crucial element of this endeavor.

Finally, heads of honors colleges should prioritize faculty development in their own area and by working with all relevant units on campus. Examples include offering workshops to the entire campus or mentoring new assistant professors in the honors college that hired them—and everything in between. Honors administrators must find ways to introduce faculty to one another to encourage

interdisciplinary teaching, generating opportunities for faculty to share ideas, concerns, and thoughts about educating honors students. Offering professional development sessions can help faculty better do what we want them to in honors when they do teach there: integrate undergraduate research at every course level, utilize ongoing revision practices to encourage students to learn by failing, increase the overall inclusivity of the honors community and more effectively extend that inclusion to its diverse members, travel with students, mentor students in long-term research projects such as an honors thesis, stretch beyond their own disciplinary perimeters, and experiment with innovative pedagogical practices such as various kinds of experiential education, design thinking, creative research processes, and service learning. Honors students are not born; they are made via our instruction, advisement, and overall encouragement. Surely it is no different for our faculty: instructors need the opportunity, resources, knowledge, and support to be able to carry on the ever-transforming, ever-transformative mission of honors education.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Broader considerations related to the state of the academic job market and growing inequities among academic disciplines must be considered by honors deans wishing to avoid increasing the precarity of such up-and-coming faculty.

<sup>2</sup>The significance of Otero's discussion, as well as her own experience and example of leadership, is evident in other discussions of advocacy for and from honors faculty themselves. An experienced veteran of honors composition instruction, Annmarie Guzy has written eloquently and frequently about the need to offer greater support to faculty teaching in honors ("Can Faculty Afford Honors?" and "Faculty Compensation and Course Assessment in Honors Composition"). Jayda Coons offers her own call to action in "A Different Kind of Agitation," noting that we should not spend our time advocating a certifying or credentialing process in honors; rather, she believes we need to "agitate on behalf of university faculty" (55) and to resist "the movement toward greater bureaucracy"

(54) rather than find new ways to join it. Coons continues: “While the burden is not on honors educators to fix the colossal issue of exploited and contingent labor, our ethical responsibility as participants within the educational system is to advocate, resist, imagine, and inform” (55).

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## CHAPTER NINE

# Telling Your Story: Stewardship and the Honors College

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“mais il faut cultiver notre jardin.”  
 (“but let us cultivate our garden.”)

Voltaire, *Candide* (221)

Telling the story of the honors college, letting the campus and the outside world know the value an honors experience can add to the undergraduate educational journey, is a fundamental role of honors leaders, especially in the wake of COVID, the competition of other options such as dual enrollment and AP credit, and financial pressures from changing demographics. Yet that project is complicated by the day-to-day middle management tasks that bombard such leaders: honors deans are budget managers, class schedulers, student advisors, hiring managers, teachers, and liaisons between upper administration and faculty, to name a few roles. Honors deans, however, also function very much like provosts

in that they are not beholden to any discipline or group of similar disciplines. This liminal positionality can sometimes place the dean of an honors college outside the inner circle of more traditional deans and administrators. But it often gives the honors college dean valuable access and insight into other disciplines that might otherwise be held at bay by disciplinary boundaries. As many of the chapters in this volume note, work in honors colleges presents both opportunities and challenges. This particular essay will explore that dynamic in terms of one of the primary roles of an honors college dean: stewarding the relationships with donors.

We must note at the outset that the role of a college dean is a public role in the way that, say, the chair of a department is not. Although a department chair mediates between the faculty and administration, the chair still maintains primary allegiance to fellow faculty members. Furthermore, the dean of any college and/or school, or any administrator for that matter, does not have the luxury of free speech like that of a faculty member when it comes to how one is perceived outside of the walls of academia. In our current milieu where anything one says can and will be held against them, one must be quite careful about one's public persona. The attention to perception is especially true when it comes to donors and their needs and desires.

Other than tangentially, my intention is not to go into detail about how a dean finds a donor and secures a major gift. Instead, I focus my attention on the continued cultivation of already established relationships and how those relationships can lead to possible new relationships. Most specifically, I am interested in the role that stewardship plays in maintaining healthy and fruitful relationships with donors, which in turn can impact the overall health of an honors college, and this includes the public persona of the dean. Moreover, the role fundraising plays in the life of the dean is now more important than ever and has become an increasingly essential part of the dean's portfolio of duties. Through careful and sustained stewardship, the honors college dean can also enroll donors to help with fundraising. Donors are often connected in ways that reach far beyond alumni networks.

There are several ways in which the dean can practice effective stewardship. At the outset, stewardship demands a long-term commitment from the dean, the university (and its president), the office of institutional giving, and the donors themselves. All players must be on the same page when it comes to the needs and desires of the honors college. A strong mission statement can be indispensable when it comes to helping the dean articulate the needs of an honors college, especially one that maps onto the overall mission statement of the university. In this sense, the honors college can be promoted as the player moving the entire institution forward in ways that may be less apparent for disciplinary-specific schools and colleges. In other words, if the honors college draws from every major, and it is a wise tactical move if all honors colleges embrace this expansive reach instead of defaulting to departmental honors, then an investment in honors is an investment in the university as a whole and should be promoted as such.

Although deans can be considered middle management, and most of their duties reflect this assumption, it helps if deans also possess an outgoing and animated personality, especially if they are to be successful when it comes to the cultivation and stewardship of the donation. The dean must exhibit a highly contagious level of passion for the honors college, the students, faculty, and staff, as well as the community in which the university is situated. Passion is something that cannot be taught, and even some of the savviest deans can display a rigid or distant persona. Passion for one's program and the ability to articulate that passion are what inform and guide the dean toward major gifts. In this sense, the honors college dean must act more like a politician representing constituents than a professor with administrative duties.

The second aspect to which a dean must attend is that in a short time, incoming students will become alumni. This is not to say we should think of students as customers and treat them as such. Instead, we must ensure that the honors experience is one that adds value to the undergraduate experience in meaningful and transformative ways that subsequently create strong affinity with the honors college. Moreover, the dean must be the one to take

the lead in cultivating the relationships among students, faculty, staff, and the university writ large. Deans are also storytellers-in-chief in that they must take the lead in informing students, their parents, and the public on how honors experiences enhance and enrich the undergraduate experience. In addition, the honors college dean must also be persuasive about how the honors college adds value to the entire university. In *How to Be a Dean*, George Justice makes the following claim: “You [the honors college dean] need to demonstrate added value to students. And you also need to demonstrate added revenue to the university, through the number and quality of students who attend specifically to take advantage of what the college has to offer” (8). Justice’s point is worth pausing over. Not only do honors colleges add value to the university through the recruitment of especially bright and self-motivated students, but the honors college can also attract donors through the college’s recruitment of high-level students and the honors curricular philosophy. Although gifts may be directly deposited in honors college accounts, the overall funds also add to the picture of the health of the university when it comes to fundraising and donorship. Here I am not just speaking about major six or seven figure gifts, but the acquisition of smaller funds that support opportunities like scholarships. The acquisition of smaller gifts can contribute to the overall story of the college or university in meaningful ways, but these smaller gifts must be promoted within and beyond the college or university.

Fundraising campaigns are also effective in helping an honors college link itself to the overall mission of the university. Fundraising campaigns can be either university-wide or honors-based. In either case, including already established donors in this endeavor and asking for their help in raising additional funding may be wise. The relationship between the honors dean and the development office and its officers is key here, especially with the staff member who is assigned as a liaison to the honors college. Another wise move is to bring in members of the data analysis team to help articulate the honors story. Hard data are useful only when one knows what to do with the information. Data can highlight and support

the major and minor milestones and accomplishments of an honors college, or data can show strategically where key deficiencies in the honors college exist, thus demonstrating need that is not fulfilled through budgets and standard operations. In fact, showing the deficiency or deficiencies is a way of ushering in the donor, new or one already secured, to the continuing needs of the honors college.

Stewardship is the cultivation of a relationship among many different aspects of the honors college and its donors. That cultivation is an ongoing process that must be attended to even after the departure of the dean who was a part of the initial gift. According to Angelique S. C. Grant and Mimi Wolverton, “Stewardship can be thought of as a philosophy and a means by which an institution exercises ethical accountability in the use of its resources” (47). Grant and Wolverton’s assertion underscores the ethical responsibility of the institution, the dean, and the honors college to care for the funds that have been bestowed upon the honors college. Part of the honors dean’s responsibility is to show how that major gift is being ethically utilized. As I suggested earlier, perhaps the best way to approach this obligation is to show how the gift is indissolubly related to the mission of the honors college and how that mission is executed through in-class and out-of-class activities. The donor is, for all intents and purposes, investing money in the mission of the honors college and in the character of the dean. But more than that, donors are also investing their reputation and name in the honors college. One need not secure a naming gift for this logic to apply. In fact, every major gift, from naming gifts to smaller scholarships, should be portrayed by the honors dean as an *investment* by that donor. Therefore, the honors dean must be clear about the mission statement, about the trajectory of the honors college—past, present, and future—and about how the honors college fits into the mechanism of the university as a whole. Beyond that, the honors college dean must also be aware of the expectations of the donors. This is where regular communication becomes key.

In addition, the definitions of stewardship may differ between the institution and the donor, for not all donors require the same attention and reporting. One must approach all donors differently,

adhering to their particular idiosyncrasies. Some donors are content with merely bestowing the gift, while others like to be more involved in the honors college. Some prefer to give anonymously while others appreciate being recognized for their gift. The situation becomes difficult because juggling more than one donor becomes a feat (a very good problem to have). Moreover, not all donors have a full or even limited understanding of higher education and its many foibles. For example, the recent case of a high-profile donor who funded and designed a residence hall on the University of California at Santa Barbara's campus has caused significant controversy. According to Katherine Mangan's article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "The 11-story building is based on a design created by Charlie Munger, the longtime business partner of Warren Buffett and a vice-chairman at Berkshire Hathaway. Munger donated \$200 million toward the project on the condition that it be built according to his plans" (Mangan). Those plans called for the bedrooms to be windowless and for only two entrances serving 4,500 residents, ultimately causing the consulting architect to resign. The controversy surrounding this very public story may be an example of extreme behavior, but the story still resonates as a cautionary tale on how we develop our relationships with donors.

Although many donors have an appreciation for the value of higher education, many come from other industries that often function by a very different logic. In *The Essential Academic Dean or Provost*, Jeffrey L. Buller writes: "Donors, like everyone else, want to feel they're in charge of situations where they're making a substantial contribution" (327). Buller's take is important because it persuasively suggests that it is not enough for honors deans to explain and sell their vision: they must also link that vision to the personality and goals of the donor and continue to evolve with the donor over time. I am not suggesting that honors deans cave to the whims and wishes of donors, but if deans are to cultivate a strong, long-lasting relationship with a donor, then they must be willing to listen and, at times, incorporate the donor's ideas into their own thinking about projects. In this sense, strong stewardship with donors operates as a partnership. From my own experience at



Salisbury University, our donors Robert and Glenda Clarke were clear from the outset that they were interested in investing in people and not buildings. When my honors college was endowed by the Clarkes and became the Glenda Chatham and Robert G. Clarke Honors College, we agreed that the Clarkes would take an active role in the educational lives of our students, not through curriculum, but through events hosted at their home, as well as other networking opportunities. Moreover, the story of the Clarkes is one that began at Salisbury University (Salisbury State then), where they met as undergraduate students. We take every opportunity to tell that anecdote whenever we recruit new students, look for other potential donors, or engage with alumni and the community. The story of the Clarkes has become a central part of the narrative of the Clarke Honors College far beyond the naming gift, one that adds emotional depth to the honors college and the rearticulation of our history.

The development office also plays a fundamental role in stewarding the gift even after it is secured. Just as securing a major gift is a team effort, so is its ongoing stewardship. It is not advisable that the dean alone take on these additional responsibilities. In fact, keeping the development office or the major gift officer assigned to the honors college apprised of the communication and outreach practiced with the donor is wise. This is not to say that all communication should be relayed to the major gift officer; however, good practice dictates keeping the lines of communication open among the players involved, including the provost. This practice not only will ensure the provost is up to date but will demonstrate the goodwill that goes with stewardship, reinforcing a team-based culture. Equally important is consistently demonstrating how the donor is part of the mission and vision of the honors college.

Larry R. Andrews's insightful 2009 NCHC monograph, *Fundraising for Honor*, provides a useful starting point if one wants a comprehensive overview. Although much about fundraising and stewardship has changed since 2009, the monograph still serves as a standard for honors administrators looking to expand their knowledge on this subject. "Good stewardship," writes Andrews,

“is usually expressed through effective communications, through formal and informal events, and through donor recognition” (27). Working with donors and showing appreciation on a regular basis is one of the most important aspects of good stewardship. As Andrews states, this good practice can be executed on many levels. For example, during the naming ceremony of my own honors college, we were forced to curtail the number of participants because of COVID. As a result, we did not generate the attention a naming ceremony warrants. A year later we planned a “Meet the Clarkes” event for our honors students and university faculty and staff. In many ways, however, we garnered more mileage out of the naming ceremony by holding smaller, more intimate events. The points of contact between the honors college and the donors increased, which also opened up the possibilities of using the donor as a networking line to other donors. As Andrews observes, “Active and ongoing contact with major donors is a basic principle of Stewardship 101” (34).

I would like to highlight the concept of stewardship as a relationship. One is a steward for the long haul, and just as one must work on relationships, one has to work on the care and cultivation regarding stewardship. “Good stewardship is common courtesy,” according to Andrews, “but it also pays off in the long run in directors’ increased comfort level with fundraising and in donor confidence expressed through additional contributions” (35).

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned the ethical responsibilities of the dean when it comes to stewardship and the relationships one forms with donors, along with the ethical responsibilities of the honors college and the university. In addition to embodying high-impact practices, honors colleges also promote a greater sense of community, both within the walls of the university and the surrounding community. Whether a college or university is public or private, it has a responsibility to the greater good. This responsibility often gets lost in the neoliberal capitalist frame of utility and the job market. In other words, we must look beyond the job market and take back the narrative of education from an entirely utilitarian storyline. Donors can be especially helpful pushing back against instrumentalism. I want to be clear: I am not suggesting

that training our students for the job market is not important; it is. And yet, there is something inherently distasteful about the role of higher education functioning only as a training program for specific skills. If anything, honors education is or should be about thinking itself, and so honors is positioned to fill that gap left by higher education as it continues to buckle and give way under the whims of legislators and the market. One way to demonstrate this opportunity is to map the mission of the honors college, its curricular and co-curricular activities, and its ties to the community and the greater good.

## **STRATEGIES**

Many strategies for good stewardship exist when it comes to donor relations. The following list is not meant to be exhaustive but rather provide a sketch of some of the strategies deans can utilize to ensure good practices. First and foremost, the lines of communication among all the players must be kept open and exercised regularly. This obligation does not mean that the dean should send donors updates every time a student receives a national fellowship, for example. Instead, consistent, periodic updates may be most effective. The dean need not be the only conduit for communicating the happenings of the honors college to donors; student outreach, for example, can provide an effective engagement tool.

A year-end report can powerfully showcase what the honors college did during the academic year. Year-end reports need not be so comprehensive that they include all data points, but they should be comprehensive enough that readers get a good picture of the year the honors college had. Year-end reports can highlight national fellowships and other student accomplishments, research projects and presentations, community engagement activities, special classes that were offered, as well as guest speakers who might have appeared. The report should also feature honors and honors-affiliated faculty. In addition, the report may want to include a section on alumni and their recent activities.

If the honors college publishes a newsletter, that should also be sent to donors. Newsletters typically offer up-to-date information,

usually from the perspective of the students, who will talk about honors in a voice different from that of faculty and staff. Including a short note or one written by a student with the newsletter mailing is a thoughtful gesture. Taking the time to handwrite notes demonstrates an intimacy that year-end reports lack, and many donors appreciate the gesture. Mailing holiday or seasonal cards is an easy and non-intrusive way to maintain contact. If the relationship is more intimate or personal, sending a birthday card is a lovely tradition.

For the most part, donors want to be problem solvers. One best practice is to ask donors for advice. If the honors college is always asking for money, then the donor is apt to suffer from donor fatigue and may lose interest in the college. By incorporating donors into the planning phases of an initiative or asking their assistance with addressing a problem, deans may find that donors are more willing to give beyond already bestowed gifts and help in other meaningful ways. Discussing possible strategies with donors ensures they are being heard and are part of the evolution of the college. Involving faculty members in these collaborative enterprises is also a good idea. Moreover, the more players donors meet, the better understanding they may have about the college, its mission, and its needs. Broadening the relationship also ensures the donor is connected with the institution and not just the dean, an important sustainability strategy given that administrators move on to other positions while the institution remains. By sharing the expertise of faculty members and their talent as mentors with donors, the dean can promote faculty engagement with the honors college on a different level, which has the added benefit of enriching the connections to honors for both constituencies.

Advisory boards offer another way for donors to deepen their connection with the honors college, and they can take many different forms. While advisory boards can be made up of internal members, where the charge may be more curricular in nature, outside advisory boards can be charged with looking at the honors college in a different or broader context. The dynamics and activities of advisory boards can be complex; moreover, advisory boards

may not be appropriate for every honors college. If an honors college does have an advisory board made up of outside members that includes donors, the intricacies of stewarding the honors operations, its funding, and its many contributions to the institution is likely to be an important component of that group's agenda. Deans need to recognize that orchestrating an advisory board properly requires an enormous amount of work and thought.

Finally, accessing resources outside of the university through organizations such as ACAD <<http://www.ACAD.org>> and CASE <<http://www.CASE.org>> can be invaluable for honors deans, both new and more seasoned. CASE frequently hosts seminars on fundraising and stewardship, and attending those sessions is worthwhile. CASE also publishes pamphlets that are useful in helping honors deans familiarize themselves with the culture of donor relations. ACAD has an active listserv populated by deans and provosts while also offering an annual meeting that provides hands-on workshops and networking opportunities with other academic leaders who face similar challenges and opportunities.

The secret to good stewardship is building relationships and partnerships. The benefits to building those relationships can bring more than just monetary gifts. I believe that once a major gift is secured, part of the task of stewardship is to utilize and build upon that gift. Success follows success. Ultimately, donors should be utilized to help the honors college tell its story. They should be thought of as partners in the overall tending of the garden, as Voltaire's *Candide* suggests. By involving donors in the story of our honors colleges, we are expanding our networks and reputations in potentially immeasurable ways.

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# HONORS COLLEGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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Part V:  
Honors Colleges as Leaders in the  
Work of Diversity, Equity,  
Inclusion, and Access





CHAPTER TEN

Cultivating Institutional Change:  
Infusing Principles of Diversity, Equity, and  
Inclusion into Everyday Honors  
College Practices

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For social justice to exist, diversity, equity, and inclusion for all must become what we in honors are about, centrally, obsessively, perennially.

—Lisa L. Coleman, *Occupy Honors Education* (xiv)

(Editor's Note: Westminster College officially became Westminster University on 1 July 2023. Because the programming described in this chapter took place before the change occurred, the original name is preserved.)

## INTRODUCTION

College campuses across the United States currently face an opportunity and a challenge. In the coming decades, demographers predict the decline of a White majority and the growth of diverse racial and ethnic populations. With higher education being more diverse today than at any previous time, college campuses serve as a microcosm of this future. Adding to this growth in racial and ethnic diversity is the recognition that college students embody a range of identities in terms of sex, gender, and sexuality. Students come to college with a wide array of physical, mental, and psychological abilities. They vary according to age, religion, socioeconomic background, marital status, national origin, and citizenship status. These changes—in tandem with the growing momentum of social justice movements—have catalyzed more robust commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) among institutions of higher education. “We in honors must be prepared to explain why our programs do not reinforce a system of privilege and elitism within our institutions,” asserts David M. Jones in “From Good Intentions to Educational Equity in an Honors Program” (67). Are honors colleges grappling with this legacy of exclusion and building inclusive and equitable practices as their campuses diversify? Can they utilize these practices to create truly diverse and authentic communities? If the answer to these questions is yes, how can honors colleges participate in this critical project?

This chapter seeks to answer these questions by comparing honors colleges at the University of Kentucky and Westminster College (Utah). Both began as honors programs but in 2017 transitioned to honors colleges. The mission of the Lewis Honors College is to improve the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the world by helping students explore their purpose, develop intellectually, and lead with integrity. As a part of this mission and the vision to create a world-class honors experience at Kentucky’s largest land-grant public university, the Lewis Honors College strives to implement best practices in its implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies and initiatives. The vision of the Westminster Honors College is to cultivate a community of diverse voices through

genuine curiosity, intentional reflection, authentic conversation, and interdisciplinary inquiry to engage the challenges of a complex world with courage, creativity, and compassion. To bring this vision into sharper focus, the Westminster Honors College designed and implemented its campus's first unit-specific diversity climate survey in 2018. Its findings have informed strategic curricular, programming, and staffing practices. In the following sections, we describe how each college is striving to act on their commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## **LEWIS HONORS COLLEGE**

### **Assigning Responsibility**

To ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion are everyday practices in an honors college, leaders must establish clear expectations of responsibility for advancing DEI initiatives. Although the ideal for any institution would be a true commitment to DEI by all employees, Garrett D. Hoffman and Tania D. Mitchell's analysis reveals the dangers of asserting that diversity work is "everyone's business," however much one feels that should be true. "By placing the onus on all parties within an institution to further equity, the very real power differentials present in this institutional hierarchy are erased," explain Hoffman and Mitchell (285). In the Lewis Honors College, the founding dean created the position of assistant dean for diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as a diversity and inclusion advisory council to solidify and make visible the commitment to DEI by acknowledging the labor performed and expertise needed to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion. The dedicated position and council also signal to the university community, to the student body, and to prospective families that the honors college takes seriously the work of addressing historic practices of exclusion associated with honors education. This step also acknowledges the work that is all too often invisible or the unquantified labor often performed by employees of color or those holding other marginalized identities. The establishment of a diversity council also distributes the labor of DEI efforts among a larger group of

employees who may also offer greater representation of identities and backgrounds when making decisions about practices and policies to advance diversity and inclusion in honors.

The duties of the assistant dean for diversity, equity, and inclusion and the DEI council include coordinating programming that deepens cultural competencies, increases cultural humility, affirms identities, fosters community, and responds to local and national events affecting our community members; responding to concerns about inequities, discrimination, and questions about issues related to ability, religious affiliation, gender and sexual identities, regionalism, socioeconomic status, first-generation status, veteran status, and other aspects of identity that may shape honors students' and employees' experiences; and collaborating with units across campus and in the community to create opportunities for recruiting a more diverse applicant pool to the honors college, to offer a rich variety of programming including speakers, workshops, films, and other events reflecting a variety of identities, communities, or concerns. The assistant dean for DEI sits on the dean's leadership team, which grants the occupant crucial access to leadership, a literal seat at the table that allows them to ensure the commitment to DEI is integrated across all units of the college and to advance goals for actual structural change. That positioning has allowed them to have success over the past three years, particularly in the areas of recruiting, with increased visits from students involved in organizations supporting historically marginalized youth and expanded collaborative events with the university's diversity recruiters. Other successful steps have involved professional development of faculty, staff, and peer mentors on DEI issues; the inclusion of diverse authors and issues of epistemic injustice in the honors foundation seminar; and the incorporation of honors board members' expertise and experiences in shaping the college's DEI Action Plan and strategic plan.

The existence of such a role does not, though, absolve other leaders at the college from centering DEI commitments in their work. This commitment is crucial to making DEI an everyday honors practice. The current dean of Lewis ensured broad responsibility

for DEI initiatives by developing a DEI Action Plan in collaboration with the college leadership team, which includes the directors of college life, the Center for Personal Development, recruitment and admissions, academic affairs, philanthropy, and communications. Furthermore, dedicated honors faculty must demonstrate their own efforts contributing to diversity and inclusion in their performance evaluations. The associate dean for academic affairs and the director of undergraduate studies are charged to work with academic affairs units and individual instructors to increase the number of course offerings and study abroad experiences addressing DEI concepts and to recruit a more diverse pool of honors faculty. Nearly every employee of the college is expected to contribute to the advancement of DEI in some way.

### **Recruiting a Diverse Student Body**

Because many honors programs have been historic sites of racial homogeneity, DEI efforts in many honors colleges must prioritize diversifying the student body. Betsy Greenleaf Yarrison notes that many honors colleges “use test scores, high school grades, and class ranking to determine who will be granted asylum” in ways that perpetuate racial homogeneity at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), foster isolation, and further burden students of underrepresented identities (14). McCoy points out that when PWIs admit “students who are racially and ideologically homogeneous with the institutional culture,” they “perpetuate a racialized hierarchy that requires acquiescing to majority perspectives to achieve academic success” (338). Such environments are not inclusive and affirming. To counter this issue, building strong relationships with university recruiters is crucial to diversifying the honors applicant pool, and this step has proved productive at Lewis. A fruitful exchange between newly hired university diversity recruiters at Kentucky and honors college DEI professionals provided the recruiters with key talking points to share with prospective students in their recruitment events and established a collaborative relationship that continues to yield more opportunities for the honors college to participate in university-sponsored initiatives. Honors college

representatives were welcomed to the Diversity Access Team, a network of recruitment professionals from across the university who share the goal of recruiting members of historically underrepresented, excluded, and marginalized populations to each college. We were also invited to promote the many benefits of honors education and to encourage applications to a large audience of high school students from diverse backgrounds and identities at the Diversity Leadership Summit, allowing for interactions with over 250 prospective students in a single day. Students from a wide range of identities and backgrounds are successful in honors, and our recruiting and admissions processes must recognize that fact. Yarrison urges, “Honors must reimagine itself [. . .] to create a path to student academic success that does not automatically privilege those students who come to it from a privileged pre-college experience” (14).

Ensuring a diverse pool of applicants, however, is not enough to diversify the student body; honors colleges must also scrutinize their admissions processes for ways to improve equity and reduce bias. Careful review of application forms for assumptions is crucial. In our review of applications, scorers at Lewis noticed few students included work experiences among their extracurricular activities. This omission could potentially undermine the chance of admission for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds for whom work after school is necessary and prohibitive of their participation in school-sponsored activities. Although our training sessions for application scorers discussed crediting work experience as an extracurricular activity and a demonstration of leadership potential, we had not initially signaled to applicants to include employment among their activities. Noticing this absence, we modified the application to include instructions to include work in this field so prospective students would know such pursuits count in our holistic review process that examines a variety of factors including essay responses, leadership potential, grades, and course rigor.

Another way to diversify the honors student population is to establish other paths into honors beyond first-year admissions.

Creating other doors to honors counters the deficit-mindedness that past admissions models featured, particularly the “deficit-minded belief that implementing holistic admissions means lowering standards” and that “students of color benefit disproportionately from preferential treatment in admissions” (D. Jones 58). The upper-level admissions application to Lewis offers an opportunity to recruit students who may not have applied to the college initially or who were not admitted as first-year students. This admissions process resulted from the recognition that traditional processes for evaluating students have historically excluded many students who attended schools with fewer resources, like AP courses, standardized test prep programs, and robust extracurricular opportunities, as well as those students who spent after-school hours working or caregiving. The upper-level admissions process provides a way to allow students to be evaluated exclusively on their academic performance at the university and their potential for success in honors.

Another barrier we recognized is self-concept. Some students have a hard time envisioning themselves as honors students. To counter this tendency, we intentionally built relationships across campus with groups serving underrepresented minoritized students. Honors advisors, personal development counselors, and student representatives provide information about the upper-level admissions opportunity to students served by the Center for Academic Resources and Enrichment Services, Veterans Services, First-Generation Student Services, the International Center, the MLK Center, the African Student Organization, and the Transfer Center. Because this approach proved to be successful, we plan to further our reach to additional student populations in upcoming terms.

## **Fostering Belonging in Advising**

Commitments to DEI extend beyond recruiting a diverse student body to ensuring dedicated service to the current student population. To help advisors stay current on best practices regarding support of students and to further develop cultural competencies and agility, honors advisors devote part of their

professional development to building DEI skill sets. Lewis advisors avoid a prescriptive approach by encouraging students to take the lead. This allows students to share what guidance they would like to receive and keeps advisors from utilizing script-based advising patterns that are delivered similarly regardless of the student. Academic advising offers a practical place to center the needs of each student and to coach students through the process of identifying research interests and building relationships with faculty. Taking the time to be well-informed about course content and offerings, instructors, and research opportunities means advisors can best direct their students. In Lewis, advisors are urged to be mindful of office space aesthetics. An inviting environment that provides symbols of a commitment to providing a safe space for all students can help students feel comfortable and identify allyship. Advisors are particularly positioned to build the culture of belonging that fosters inclusion as they build long-term relationships with their students throughout their growth in college.

## **Collaborating Across Campus**

Strong relationships with other campus professionals are also crucial to the success of any honors college because they can contribute to robust programming for students, faculty, and staff. The persons charged with DEI responsibilities can enhance college offerings by collaborating with units across campus to co-sponsor speakers, trainings, films, workshops, and other events that might be too burdensome in terms of budget or labor if undertaken alone. Our college has collaborated with the university's MLK Center, Office for LGBTQ\* Resources, Appalachian Center, Center for Equality and Social Justice, the John Jacob Niles Center for American Music, the Office for Institutional Diversity, the Department of Gender and Women's Studies, the Gatton College of Business and Economics, the Institute for the Study of Free Enterprise, UK Libraries, the UK Women's Forum, and the UK Gaines Center for the Humanities. These collaborations not only made those events possible but also cultivated relationships with other faculty and staff that have led to additional instructor interest and future programs.



Collaborative programming can also expose students to faculty of a wider range of identities, especially if the honors faculty of a college or program is insufficiently diverse, as is often the case. Yarrison remarks, “Honors students from underserved and marginalized populations rarely see themselves reflected in the designated intelligentsia of most universities” (16). Whether an honors program staff includes racial and ethnic diversity along with diversity in ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, socioeconomic status, and other identities and backgrounds, working with other units on campus can facilitate student connections to a wider range of individuals as well as better promote the honors program and increase opportunities for honors students, faculty, and staff.

## **Developing Student Leaders**

Honors colleges want to develop not only high academic achievers but leaders in their communities. Students in the Lewis Honors College may contribute to DEI through participation in or creation of additional student-formed organizations. The most robust of these is the DEI Coalition. The DEI Coalition works with the assistant dean to generate ideas for programming, workshops, trainings, field trips, book clubs, film viewings, and other activities. They meet monthly in addition to their other activities, and in these meetings student leaders divide up their time intentionally, opening with space for updates and concerns followed by community-building activities. Such groups are crucial for URM students at PWIs. Samuel D. Museus et al. note, “Incongruence between students’ precollege cultures (and therefore cultural identities) and the cultures of their campus is negatively related to their ability to find membership in their campus communities” (470). One way this incongruity may be addressed is through the formation of affiliate and resource groups based on identities. By connecting honors students to organizations that already exist on campus or by supporting those who wish to create organizations of honors students of specific cultural heritages or identities, a greater sense of belonging may result. “Traditional White organizations often hold inadequate

representation of Black students” and other students of color and may involve “White students interrogat[ing] the legitimacy of a service created for students of color if it is not in line with the interests of the dominant student body,” explains Veronica Jones (27). Organizations like the DEI Coalition and *Hay que Hablar*, a Spanish language club developed by the co-president of the DEI Coalition, DISC for disabled and chronically ill students, and other affiliate groups can foster belonging by creating sites for shared experience, identity, background, and heritage, as well as counter “race-neutral diversity approaches on college campuses” that deliberately engage in “downplaying and disavowing related social problems [in ways that] perpetuate the status quo by failing to challenge normalized racism” (V. Jones 23). Creating opportunities for students to form groups of their own within the honors college fosters a sense of belonging and affirmation, and experiences within them have led some of our students to report that Lewis is the place on campus where they feel most free to be themselves.

Groups like this within the honors college serve as instrumental resources, for their existence signals to the students that designated groups exist to advance DEI, groups to which they can bring ideas, questions, and concerns. These groups foster environments in which they are assured their identities are affirmed. They can help students feel empowered in places they may feel outnumbered or disenfranchised.

## **Listening to Our Students**

The DEI Coalition is only one of many ways we strive to gather feedback from our students about their perceptions of belonging. Another involved a graduate researcher and honors alumna with her faculty mentor who met with Lewis Honors College students to assess feelings of belonging, especially among students whose identities are concordant with categories designated as underrepresented minorities by the university. Their research illuminated patterns on areas of concern, feelings of isolation, and positive reports on the honors college in comparison with other parts of the university; however, these insights must be interpreted with caution because

the resulting sample was limited by the university's response to the pandemic to disperse students from campus. We have also begun utilizing focus groups facilitated by two of our honors advisors currently enrolled in doctoral programs in education policy. Sensitive to power dynamics that can shape or suppress feedback, we felt it important that the students meet with personnel who do not assess their academic work and who lack potentially intimidating administrative titles. Another strategy for gathering feedback will be a new annual survey distributed to all honors students. The survey includes questions about belonging and engagement in the college.

These many strategies aim to build a culture of belonging at Lewis. Compelling scholarship highlights the elitist history of honors in higher education (National Collegiate Honors Council). Despite efforts to counter this legacy, Betsy Greenleaf Yarrison, past president of the Maryland Collegiate Honors Council, notes, "Honors programs seek diversity, but in truth we tend to practice assimilation" (15). At Lewis, we are practicing intentional, attentive listening and response to student perspectives; empowerment of students to DEI leadership and community building; culturally responsive holistic advising expansion of inclusive admissions policies; and clear articulation of professional responsibilities regarding DEI to supplant this tendency. Similarly, the Honors College at Westminster College is spearheading specific practices to counter assimilation and forge an authentic and diverse student community.

## **WESTMINSTER COLLEGE**

### **Growing Honors at Westminster**

Honors education at Westminster began in 1986 with 18 undergraduates. Since the inception of that program, students have been at the center of honors curricula and programming. In the early days, honors at Westminster promised an enhanced educational experience for academically talented and highly motivated students. In practice, this meant honors students met in interdisciplinary, seminar-style classes, read primary texts, and learned with professors who represented most disciplines, from anthropology

to theatre. Over the years, honors at Westminster grew. In 2017, the program became an honors college, serving approximately 225 students.

The college has continued to evolve. Extensive conversation produced a new mission, vision, and values statement in 2019. The Westminster Honors College aims “to cultivate a community of diverse voices through genuine curiosity, intentional reflection, authentic conversation, and interdisciplinary inquiry to engage the challenges of a complex world with courage, creativity, and compassion” (Westminster, “About”). Eight core values help that vision materialize: academic and personal growth, community-centered conversation, compassion and empathy, connections across difference, curiosity and dedication, student empowerment, and support and mentorship. Community is central to our vision and forms the heart of our values. But how do we ensure that our communities are diverse, equitable, and inclusive? What practices cultivate the community that we strive to be?

## **Developing and Administering a Climate Survey**

As honors transformed to a college in 2017, we began a study to answer these questions. This effort dovetailed with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion’s (DEI) call to achieve exceptional learning and inclusive excellence across campus. As the campus’s newest academic unit, we were poised to embrace this challenge. Our first move was data collection. Some data suggested that our students were more diverse than ever before, but we needed more granular information. Secondly, we studied student perceptions, attitudes, and experiences around equity. To understand inclusion, we surveyed students about their experience of affiliation, membership, and identification within the honors college and across campus.

Accordingly, we designed a 51-question climate survey that solicited data on identity, perception, and experiences. We hoped to create a baseline to inform future programming. That effort was part of a national trend. In response to a growing focus on these critical issues, hundreds of colleges and universities conducted climate surveys

between 2015 and 2020 (Higher Education Research Institute; Rankin). We administered our survey in March 2018 and received responses from 149 students (a 70% response rate). Although the survey has 51 questions, there were 185 possible responses because of the nature of the questions, as shown in Table 1.

Response rates for surveys of college students are notoriously low, averaging around 25% (Fosnacht et al.). Our response rate was nearly three times that size. We attribute our high response rate to three factors. First, our transition from a program to a college generated excitement among students and faculty. Becoming a college brought greater autonomy, recognition, and opportunities. Our climate survey rode the surf of that excitement as we promoted it as a way to better understand ourselves and to foment a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

Faculty buy-in also boosted the response rate. We asked honors faculty to devote twenty minutes of class time to the survey, offering a two-week submission window. Almost universally, faculty agreed. Finally, we worked closely with the Student Honors Council (SHC). Student leaders grasped the importance of this tool. The president of the SHC was the first student to complete the survey, and the SHC regularly sent out encouraging reminders. When the survey closed, we had a trove of data to explore.

Here we discuss findings in three areas—student identity, classroom experiences, and co-curricular programming—that we found most compelling and actionable.

**TABLE 1. STUDENT RESPONSES TO Q5: PLEASE INDICATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS.**

The Honors College at Westminster:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Encourages students to have a public voice and share their ideas openly	2.03% (3)	8.78% (13)	56.76% (84)	32.43% (48)
Has faculty and administrators who regularly speak about the value of diversity	1.35% (2)	12.16% (18)	56.11% (86)	28.38% (42)
Promotes the appreciation of cultural differences	0.68% (1)	9.46% (14)	60.14% (89)	29.73% (44)

N = 148 (1 skipped)

## Survey Findings around Student Identity

Our discussion of student identity highlights strengths and areas of dissatisfaction. We asked students to rate their ability to work with people different from themselves. Eighty-nine percent indicated their ability to work with others with “different beliefs” was a “major strength,” while 97% identified their ability to work cooperatively with “diverse people” as a “major strength.” Qualitative feedback reveals honors has cultivated this capability: “I love the Honors College. It is seriously what makes Westminster worth it to me. I would not be satisfied in my other classes without the in-depth and complex discussions I have in my honors classes and outside of classes with other honors students” (Stewart).

Nearly 40% of the respondents, however, indicated they were dissatisfied with the racial and ethnic diversity of the student body. Student comments emphasized the necessity to connect across differences and foster respect between groups: “I hope that the Honors College will include more diverse students and faculty from different backgrounds to better understand and respect other identities, perspectives, and beliefs. This would make the Honors College a better place for students to connect” (Stewart). Another student emphasized that low numbers of underrepresented students impacted their ability to become an integral member of the community: “I recall coming into the Honors College and not seeing many people of color. In my classes, I was always one of the only persons of color. The lack of racial/ethnic diversity in the Honors College has contributed to my struggle of adjusting to college” (Stewart).

Using these data, we created a strategic plan for diversity and excellence. Its vision—“to institutionalize the link between diversity and student achievement and demonstrate how excellence can be inclusive”—contributed to a primary objective: “Entering first-year honors cohorts and lateral entry cohorts will exceed national figures on racial diversity in honors; and will meet or exceed diversity figures for the overall entering first-year Westminster class in the areas of students of color, low-income, and first-generation students” (Westminster, “Diversity”).

The strategic plan recommended strategies such as building relationships with high school groups like Latinos in Action to modifying our admissions processes to engage in holistic review processes and de-emphasize standardized tests scores. Since 2018, those efforts have intensified. Currently, Westminster is a test optional institution, and there is no minimum ACT/SAT score to apply to the honors college. This practice acknowledges that standardized test scores closely correlate with family socioeconomic status while containing little predictive power around academic success (National Collegiate Honors Council; Khé). Our application invites students to write about their experiences in an inclusive way. Rather than asking students to write about their “favorite volunteer experience,” we have asked about memorable experiences or powerful conversations. The latter prompt does not assume free time to volunteer and reduces some bias in the admissions process (Badenhausen 11).

These efforts produced results. In 2020–2021, 26.6% of honors students identified as students of color versus 22.4% for Westminster’s overall undergraduate population. At other honors colleges across the country, race/ethnicity figures tend to be much lower than the overall student population. Students of color have led the Student Honors Council four of the last five years, while honors students across campus are leaders in fighting for equity through organizations such as Queer Compass, the Feminist Club, Walkways to Westminster, and the Society for the Advancement of Chicanx/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science. For the fourth time in the last five years, an honors student received the MLK Unsung Hero Award for promoting a diverse and inclusive campus and community.

As this list of accolades attests, honors students at Westminster are ambitious. They aim this ambition beyond campus as well. When asked to identify the highest academic degree they hoped to obtain, 80% indicated plans for further study. Students identified the essential role that honors played in their preparation. As one student shared, “I think the Honors College pushes students to have thoughts of their own and to think critically” (Stewart).

Despite their confidence and ambition, our students struggled with mental health issues: 35% of respondents indicated they had been diagnosed with some psychological disorder such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD in the past year. To put this number in context, the American College Health Association conducts an annual assessment of college students. It reported that 21.6% of respondents reported being treated for anxiety in the past 12 months, while 17.9% had been treated for depression (2017). In Utah, 25% of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 reported seeking treatment or receiving a diagnosis connected to a “mental health disorder,” according to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2015–2016). These data—local, state, and national—suggested a growing crisis among college students, nearly two years before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response, we included more wellness conversations in our co-curricular programming, starting with “Tuesday Conversations,” when first-year students congregate to discuss topics ranging from college success to Hindu goddesses to Egyptian mummies. In 2019 and 2020, we added sessions on stress, thriving in college, the importance of play, stress and the brain, and faith and spirituality. In 2020, we raised \$48,512 from donors for professionally led mindfulness and meditation sessions for honors students, which are regular features of our co-curricular first-year programming that was recently recognized as the winner of the 2022 NWCCU Beacon Award for Excellence in Student Achievement and Success.

Student wellness guided our 2020 common read, the text that all incoming honors students read before enrollment: Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Natural Causes: An Epidemic of Wellness, the Certainty of Dying, and Killing Ourselves to Live Longer*. Our first-year seminars also integrated student well-being into our textual selections. One seminar read Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* to bring up the critically important but often undiscussed topic of suicide. Another read selections from Jon Kabat-Zinn’s *Waking Up* to help students develop mindfulness habits. The goal was to destigmatize mental health challenges by bringing them into everyday conversation and by positioning faculty as allies in students’ self-care work.



Student wellness fits within this DEI discussion for three reasons. One, if students are unwell, any academic or programmatic initiative is a non-starter. Two, underrepresented and minoritized students suffer from mental health challenges at higher levels than students with a majority racial/ethnic identity, a family college legacy, or above-average socioeconomic status even as they are also less likely to receive care (Zamudio-Suarez). Finally, a global pandemic, long overdue reckonings with racial injustice, the climate crisis, and widespread economic insecurity mean that it is a rare student indeed who is not facing some type of existential threat (Eisenberg et al.).

### **Survey Findings Around Classroom Experiences and Co-Curricular Conversations**

Much of our DEI work happens in the classroom. Student perceptions of our curriculum were illuminating. As shown in Table 2, students reported curricular diversity, but also indicated there was room for improvement in disability, sexual orientation, and class: 82%, 70%, and 43% of students indicated they had either no classes—or only one class—with content in those respective areas. The qualitative sections of the survey allowed students to elaborate:

As an institution, I think its representatives like to “talk” about diversity. But I don’t think we always follow through with that talk. Many of my honors readings focused on ancient and early-modern texts. Most of them were by men who were writing from a rationalist perspective. I think there were missed opportunities. However, there are classes that take a diverse approach. (Stewart)

Undoubtedly, students have different definitions of diversity. One student wrote that they wanted more “classes based in classical Western mythos/belief systems” (Stewart). This student might have agreed with another student’s critique of the curriculum in the honors college: “There is respect for differing beliefs in the Honors College if those beliefs fall on the spectrum between left and far-left. Very little in terms of course content or discussion is

accommodative of views that do not align with the current sentiments of humanities academics” (Stewart).

Clearly, we needed to have hard conversations about what diversity means. We found that students did not always feel confident in such conversations, with 15% indicating difficulty in challenging others on issues of discrimination and 16% indicating difficulty in educating others about social issues. These numbers were not alarmingly high, but they suggested room for growth. They also sparked faculty conversations around modeling the art of civil disagreement and dialoguing across difference. Two student comments bring this issue into focus:

I am concerned that not all students feel like they have a voice in honors due to fears of being shut down during conversation. Students still believe that they must have the “right” answer to speak, and that isn’t the spirit of honors. (Stewart)

I have spoken to many students who feel like they have been attacked or forced to make it appear like they believe just like everyone else because they fear the repercussions. I do not believe this atmosphere is a positive one for learning or making change in our society. (Stewart)

These comments suggested dissatisfaction with our ability to dialogue and learn across difference. Accordingly, we added an objective to our strategic plan for diversity: “Improve opportunities for students to engage questions around diversity in learning settings” (Westminster, “Diversity”). Faculty participated in several workshops to help us better dialogue across difference, led by our Faculty Fellow for DEI. The first focused on engaging healthy conflict in the classroom. One participant commented she was reconsidering what it means to be collegial, explaining, “In this institution, I think we focus on being nice more than we focus on justice. The conversation we had today went a long way in convincing me that conflict might be necessary to advance equity across our campus.”

Another workshop helped faculty develop intersectional teaching opportunities, including drafting specific language to use during challenging classroom conversations. One participant underscored the value of creating and practicing a script. She explained, “In tense moments, I sometimes lose my words. But if I have practiced saying something, I’m more confident that I’ll speak up and use a tense moment as a teaching moment.” Continuing this trend, two honors college faculty received funding to attend a 2022 Council on Independent Colleges workshop entitled “Deliberation and Debate: Advancing Civil Discourse through First-Year Courses” and then shared resources from that experience at the 2022 honors college faculty retreat.

**TABLE 2. STUDENT RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION: *HOW MANY COURSES HAVE YOU TAKEN AT THE HONORS COLLEGE AT WESTMINSTER THAT INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING?***

Content of Honors College Courses	None	One	Two–Four	Five or more
Opportunities to Study and Serve Communities in Need (e.g., Service Learning)	70.4% (100)	19.7% (28)	9.9% (14)	0.0% (0)
Opportunities for Intensive Dialogue between Students with Different Backgrounds and Beliefs	10.0% (14)	20.0% (28)	61.4% (86)	8.6% (12)
Materials/Readings about Gender	8.5% (12)	26.8% (38)	57.8% (82)	7.0% (10)
Materials/Readings about Race/Ethnicity	8.5% (12)	22.5% (32)	61.3% (87)	7.8% (11)
Materials/Readings about Socioeconomic Class Differences	10.6% (15)	31.7% (45)	50.7% (72)	7.0% (10)
Materials/Readings about Privilege	16.4% (23)	24.3% (34)	52.9% (74)	6.4% (9)
Materials/Readings about Sexual Identity	33.3% (47)	36.9% (52)	27.7% (39)	2.1% (3)
Materials/Readings about Disability	50.7% (71)	30.7% (43)	17.1% (24)	1.4% (2)

N = 140–142 (7–9 skipped)

In an earlier retreat held in 2020, we moved to transforming our syllabi to reflect DEI principles. Our workshop encouraged faculty to consider the colonial context of knowledge creation in higher education and to identify readings and assignments to challenge the tenets of classical thinkers. One faculty member explained, “For years, we’ve talked about syllabus diversification, adding more voices and perspectives to our syllabi. But decolonization suggests that we are moving against the unethical occupation of knowledge. That’s a very different starting point for me.”

Students have also become directly involved in creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community in honors. One objective of our strategic plan is to “increase honors student exposure to campus conversations around diversity issues” (Westminster, “Diversity”). This desire led to the creation of the Honors College Diversity Coordinator, a student-held position. Sophie Caligiuri undertook this role in 2018. Under her leadership, honors deepened connections with the McNair Program, Queer Compass, the Feminist Club, Black Student Union, Legacy Scholars Program, Walkways to Westminster, and the Society for the Advancement of Chicanx/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science. Honors students co-sponsored panel discussions and keynote speakers but also backed informal strategies, such as shared study spaces and student networking. Caligiuri explained that she and her SHC colleagues wanted to fight the stereotype that honors was exclusive: “Connecting honors with other student groups meant that someone could always find a friend, or someone who shared their identity, and maybe feel more comfortable. That was our goal, that people would feel at home in honors” (Caligiuri).

That desire to create a community “that felt like home” was the brainchild behind Chai and Chat, an initiative led by the SHC president and informed by a tradition in her Somalian culture. In 2019, the SHC aimed to weave diversity into all honors programming in a way that was more inviting and less intimidating. They marketed the monthly events as opportunities to drop by, grab something hot to drink, eat some snacks—and chat! Student leaders invited people whose identities were being highlighted during monthly

heritage events to join the conversation, discussing Black history, Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage, and the intersection of Latinx and queer identities. Student leaders invited guests to join these conversations, but to not burden people's busy lives, the guests could choose the format. Some chose panels, others formal presentations, while some preferred to chat informally.

One key benefit of these partnerships was that programming became more collective, fostering deeper connections between honors and other campus members. As Caligiuri explained, "Some people might steer away from honors events because they felt that their place on campus was elsewhere. But blending our events made honors more accessible" (Caligiuri).

A focus on decentralized and inclusive practices continues to characterize student-led programming in honors. The current student diversity coordinator, Kiva Call-Feit, has been working toward creating a student diversity council. It will help institutionalize DEI in student leadership. Like most honors processes, this involves considerable conversation. As Call-Feit explained, "I'm most excited to foster discussion and open conversation because I believe that is the way to make change" (Call-Feit).

## CONCLUSION

In NCHC's recent position paper, *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory of Inclusion*, longtime leaders in honors education assert, "Honors has long been a space for pushing boundaries and being creative about the educational journey" (National Collegiate Honors Council 8). The educational journeys that our honors institutions have taken—both being PWIs—means that we started on an elitist path, one that privileged a certain type of student, excluded large portions of the potential student population, and overlooked extensive talent. We are changing course by infusing DEI into our everyday practices. Westminster Honors College and Lewis Honors College at the University of Kentucky are advancing DEI by recruiting more diverse students, faculty, and staff; researching student, faculty, and staff experiences of belonging; increasing cultural competency-building programming and

curricular options; implementing increasingly holistic admissions and tailored advising; and creating true accountability around DEI efforts. We are creating mechanisms for ongoing reflection and assessment about what we must improve to create affirming, inclusive environments. This enterprise requires frank conversations about what needs to change and sincere commitments to act on the fruits of those contemplations, real action aligned with clearly articulated values affirming diversity and inclusion. Talk is not enough. Hoffman and Mitchell, whose work highlights how diversity talk is often substituted for actual structural change, explain, “Language has come to stand in for effects” (288). Making DEI an everyday practice ensures that we take actions to address problems that undermine the culture of belonging in the diverse communities we aim to create in honors education.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Positioning Honors Colleges to  
Lead Diversity and Inclusion Efforts at  
Predominantly White Institutions

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Our nation is in the midst of a racial reckoning, and higher education has an opportunity to play an important and powerful role in bringing about sustainable, positive change to long-standing systems of oppression. In the past, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts within predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have often existed on the periphery (e.g., diversity committees and offices) rather than at the core of the PWI mission. Now, this is finally starting to change. Honors is well-positioned to lead

transformative efforts at PWIs by reimagining honors as a broadly diverse and inclusive space while reorientating honors programming toward equipping students to become effective agents for social change. These changes allow honors colleges, in particular, to contribute to broadening the diversity of the student body at PWIs while dispelling institutional legacies that situate diversity as counter to quality.

To transform honors colleges into an attractive and meaningful space and program for students from minoritized backgrounds within a PWI, significant changes are needed. Honors must turn away from serving the privileged elite and toward programs and practices that engage those most motivated to bring about change and social justice. Eligibility for honors must reach beyond common criteria that replicate normative and systemic prejudice against those from minoritized backgrounds. The mission of honors must stretch beyond academic excellence, which has typically been defined in honors along narrow lines, to include inspiring meaningful social change. The walls of historically siloed honors programs and colleges must be torn down and replaced by connections to student affairs offices and student organizations that appeal to and support students across a range of backgrounds and aspirations. Finally, avenues for students to work together to effect change must be cultivated, and efforts by students to make those changes must be adequately supported.

These changes require awareness, time, and determination but are possible for any honors college at a PWI. This chapter brings together a rich history of scholarship directed toward these types of changes and includes two case studies of honors colleges at PWIs that made research-informed changes, thus becoming DEI leaders on their campuses. Because of these changes, the honors community in each setting has been significantly broadened without negative impacts on student quality or student outcomes. Diversity and quality clearly can go hand in hand.

The key to demonstrating the commitment of honors colleges to DEI is to engage in a broad and robust process of evaluation related to achieving diverse and inclusive programming oriented toward social change. Important markers for success, as well as

quantitative and qualitative assessment techniques, are provided to ensure that once honors colleges embark upon a mission to lead diversity and inclusion efforts, they can accurately determine and communicate to others results and future directions. By combining program changes in honors to support DEI along with a meaningful assessment of student experiences and outcomes, honors colleges can position themselves to lead DEI efforts at predominantly White institutions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Honors as Historically for Privileged Students

Many honors programs and colleges struggle to be accessible and inclusive of students from historically minoritized racial and ethnic backgrounds. In a survey of 408 NCHC members in its 2016 Census of U.S. Honors Programs, 90.3% of honors students were classified as White, non-Hispanic (Scott et al.). The more recent 2021 Survey of U.S. Honors Colleges shows that about 69% of students in honors colleges at research or master's universities are White (Cognard-Black and Smith 46). While honors education was originally conceived as a way to separate intellectually curious students from others in order to provide a more enriching academic experience, a consequence is that honors programs and colleges often also separate students by class, race, and ethnicity, thus perpetuating the structural inequities that begin in public K–12 education (Bastedo and Gumpert; Pittman). When included only in small minorities, honors students from diverse backgrounds may feel tokenized, leading to less confidence and a sense of illegitimacy (Ashton). In these cases, while diverse students are successfully recruited into honors, an environment that is fully inclusive of them is not created, which also means that retaining diverse students becomes problematic. When asked about the lack of diversity in honors, students from majority backgrounds tend to cite poorer academic performance by minority students; minority students, on the other hand, describe a lack of diversity, sense of elitism, and unnecessary additions to their academic programs as barriers to joining honors (Pittman).

## **Holistic Admissions**

Often honors colleges are defined by the students they recruit. When such institutions focus solely on standardized test scores and high school GPA, they replicate the systemic biases against historically minoritized students that are widespread in U.S. K–12 education (Hilton and Jordan). Standardized test scores, which are often the most systemically biased, are also one of the worst predictors of future success within honors (McKay; Smith and Zagurski). Admission criteria should be broadened to draw from a wider range of potential honors students, and recruitment practices should be designed with an eye toward equity: both changes will result in a more diverse honors student body (Longo and Falconer).

When honors programs and colleges engage in holistic admissions, they will move beyond attracting just students with a history of academic success (narrowly defined along the lines of traditional metrics) to students who may also possess other skill sets and rich life experience while frequently demonstrating high levels of growth, grit, and motivation. Holistic criteria for admissions may include letters of recommendation, peer-to-peer recommendations, school and/or community involvement, student portfolios, interviews, and pathways for transfer students into honors (Badenhausen; Bahls; Mead; Yarrison). In honors admissions, when test scores are either optional or ignored altogether, the result is a more ethnically diverse honors student body (Jones; Radasanu and Barker). Engaging in holistic admissions and broadening entry criteria will increase the number of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those who are first-generation students (Mead; Yarrison).

## **Academic Excellence to Empowerment**

Students often decide if honors is right for them by determining if honors will add value to their higher education experience. Traditional approaches that position honors as the program for the “smartest” students have a limited appeal outside of those who are already advantaged in a systemically biased education system (Ash-ton) and who understand “smarts” in an extremely narrow way. For

majority students, the desirable outcomes of engaging in honors relate to the gathering of credentials that may grant them an advantage in a future graduate school or job application (Kimball). While many students hope to attend graduate school or secure an excellent job, students from minoritized backgrounds often have loftier goals for their education.

Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and from minority racial/ethnic backgrounds often desire to be prepared to lead future social change (Coleman; Riek and Sheridan). They tend to want to be successful and give back to their communities (Coleman; Hilton and Jordan). When honors is positioned as a traditional space for the academically elite, the value-add of honors participation for students whose goals are more socially oriented is less obvious (Ashton). Conversely, when honors is oriented toward positive social change, a broader community of potential students can see the benefits of joining the honors community (Dziesinski et al.). This approach allows students who view themselves as “academically elite” to be credentialed while also exposing them to diverse thinking and experiences.

## **Social Justice**

One approach to social change that appeals to students across all ranges of diversity is honors college programming directed toward social justice (Dziesinski et al.; Stoller). For students who come from backgrounds and communities that are historically marginalized, the desire to positively impact others through social justice is often strongly motivating when they connect these issues to injustices they have experienced (DeLeon). Honors programs and colleges that acknowledge these experiences and equip students to successfully advocate for social justice are more successful in recruiting, retaining, and graduating students from diverse backgrounds (Coleman). Centering honors programming on leadership, multiculturalism, innovation, and civic engagement-related skills and dispositions ensures that students are being appropriately prepared to advocate for and enact social justice reform in their future.

## Community Connections

An important step in creating honors college programming that prepares students to become effective advocates for social justice is to create opportunities for students to connect with and positively influence their communities. Honors students live on campus and within local surrounding communities, and many remain active in their home communities. Breaking down the historically siloed nature of honors by collaborating with student affairs offices or other units focused on leadership, multiculturalism, and community-engaged learning will create more opportunities for students (Materón-Arum; Yavneh Klos; Hilton and Jordan). Stepping beyond centering honors programming on honors classes to create a more broadly envisioned curriculum in which community-engaged learning also earns a student honors credit is important in emphasizing a social justice orientation that can be more attractive to and meaningful for diverse students. That honors colleges often have scale and financial advantages over honors programs, as well as more institutional autonomy, suggests they are particularly well-positioned to do this work.

### **“Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education”**

Richard Badenhausen, James Buss, and Carrie Pritchett co-chaired an ad hoc committee charged with re-envisioning NCHC’s “Basic Characteristics,” which for thirty years did not address issues of DEI or belonging. In their summer 2021 report to the Board of Directors, the co-chairs asked, “How can we address dated language that might be understood as coded language connected to antiquated, discriminatory, or outmoded ideas?” The committee recommended replacing the checklist of characteristics with a set of “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education,” a proposal subsequently adopted by the NCHC Board of Directors on 16 February 2022 (National). Central to this philosophy is a commitment to DEI work. The shared principles highlight the importance of a transparent and permeable admissions process while asking honors leaders to invite or hire faculty who have been historically

underrepresented in higher education. The principles assert that the pedagogies of honors faculty should be inclusive and understanding of different cultures and their contributions. Finally, honors programs and colleges should aim to organize co-curricular or extracurricular opportunities with student affinity groups and other organizations on campus. In many cases, the higher degree of autonomy and greater resources afforded to honors colleges permits them to make progress in multiple areas at once within these shared principles and practices.

## CASE STUDIES

### **Slippery Rock University**

Slippery Rock University (SRU) is a PWI (84.6% white, fall 2021) rural public university located one hour north of Pittsburgh, PA. As a result of strategic planning, the honors college at SRU had been tasked in 2014 with increasing its overall enrollment. The subsequent growth of the honors college relied on attracting students who demonstrated academic excellence in high school and excelled on standardized assessments for college entrance. Although the honors college achieved growth, the resulting student body was disproportionately (even for a PWI) represented by middle-class White students from non-first-generation families.

In the 2019–2020 academic year, with new leadership and a new focus on transforming honors into an inclusive space with a social justice orientation, some key changes took place. The first shift occurred in the structure of honors programming. Honors outcomes were revised to include areas meant to empower students with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to successfully advocate for future change. The new outcomes include leadership; inquiry, analysis, and research; civic engagement and responsibility; innovation; multiculturalism; and well-being. Aligned with these outcomes, requirements to graduate moved from completion of a certain number of honors classes to engagement in curricular and co-curricular experiences aligned with the honors college outcomes. By elevating the value of co-curricular experiences to equal

that of experiences within the classroom, honors transformed its programming from a transactional, credential-based system to one that values and promotes student autonomy in engagement and achievements centered on their goals and interests. Finally, the overall programming of honors at SRU turned to a gamified system for earning credit in which point values were given to all curricular and co-curricular honors opportunities, and students were encouraged to collect points and ascribe them to the outcomes in a manner that allows students to create their own pathways to graduation.

With the new program in place, the honors college turned toward ensuring the community within honors was inclusive and welcoming to all students. This effort began with the creation of a student-led Honors Diversity Council with the explicit purpose of offering feedback related to inclusivity efforts, generating ideas for change within honors, and creating programming that exposes students to culturally relevant learning and engagement opportunities. Additionally, both the honors executive board and Honors Diversity Council prioritized outreach and connection to other offices and student organizations on campuses to connect and work toward common issues in social justice. As a result, honors students have gained access to a larger set of co-curricular opportunities, allowing them to engage in community-engaged learning, service learning, leadership development, and work with advocacy groups on campus. Simultaneously, non-honors students found that they had similar interests and motivations as their honors peers and began applying to join the honors college in the middle of their degree programs.

As students from more diverse backgrounds began to see honors as a place of belonging, eligibility for entry into the honors college needed to broaden as well. Historically, eligibility required a 3.8 high school GPA and a 1220 SAT or 25 ACT score. In the 2020–2021 academic year, a holistic admissions process was implemented in which students were required to meet any two of the following six criteria: 3.8 high school GPA; 3.25 college GPA; 1220 SAT or 25 ACT; active or veteran military status; a letter of recommendation from a teacher, professor, school administrator, or work



supervisor; and/or a recommendation from one of the following campus offices: inclusive excellence, community-engaged learning, global engagement, or student engagement and leadership. Broadening to these six criteria while requiring only two made many more students eligible to join honors. College GPA benefits students who transferred to SRU and current students who had not previously participated in honors. Letters of recommendation benefit students who are heavily engaged in service or from lower socioeconomic backgrounds where employment takes the place of extracurricular activities. Recommendations from offices on campus create a pathway for recruitment and support between those offices that most often serve students from diverse backgrounds.

To support a broader student body within the SRU Honors College, initiatives in wellness and well-being have been prioritized with the goal of increasing resilience and coping skills, stress management, and a sense of belonging. At SRU, honors students have opportunities to participate in honors-specific wellness programming centered on developing growth mindsets, grit, and resilience; self-care and life-design workshops; mentoring; and programs that focus on reflection and connection to others. As one student reports, “Working on my wellness is a new goal of mine and I think this really helped me be honest with myself about where I’m at. I feel empowered to use the things I learned!” Another explained, “I feel like I have learned more about myself in how I interact with the world and in how I perceive myself. . . . I found it reinforcing to jot down what I am grateful for, identifying what drains or energizes me, or making a list on how to reset myself if I am feeling out of it.” Ultimately, the relationship between wellness and DEI efforts is bidirectional. When students are treated as valuable to the honors community, experience a sense of belonging, and recognize and feel empowered to address their unique talents, strengths, and needs, they become equipped to extend these opportunities to others in the honors community and beyond.

The development and implementation of global learning initiatives provide another avenue to support DEI initiatives among SRU honors students by providing opportunities to engage with diversity

and social awareness. Honors prioritizes global learning as a DEI initiative because it helps students explore cultures and worldviews that are different from their own, including racial, ethnic, gender, and sexuality differences. The SRU Honors College strategic global learning program provides students with the confidence, experiences, and critical thinking skills needed to understand complex challenges related to freedom, human rights, and systems of power. The ability to travel, however, is a privilege. Thus, the SRU Honors College seeks ways to build equity and address the major challenges of global learning for students, including expense, lack of confidence, increased anxiety about safety, language barriers, and their ability to navigate new cultures.

The goal of the SRU Honors College global learning program is to offer students scaffolded travel experiences. First- and second-year students are provided an opportunity to travel with other honors students to a major U.S. city and to a Canadian city. During the third year, students may participate in a global seminar course in honors and a faculty-led, short-term study abroad experience. These scaffolded travel experiences lead to the self-confidence needed to explore the option of a long-term study abroad experience some will engage in during their final year. Throughout their college experience, honors students have access to travel support to defray the costs of long-term study abroad or travel to present/perform their scholarly work. Because of these experiences and resources, students who have not had opportunities to travel are able to build skills, increase self-awareness, and develop cultural competence.

The foundation of the SRU honors global learning program is City as Text™. Students simultaneously enjoy a sense of belonging and security in small exploratory groups while also learning to appreciate the perspectives of others and to think about their own assumptions and biases. City as Text experiences provide students a chance to develop a sense of themselves in the context of global issues, helping them develop a sense of responsibility to give back to their local and global communities.

Taken together, these changes in the honors college have led to success in recruiting and retaining students from all backgrounds.

This success includes a 183.33% increase in our URM student body (18 to 51), a 33.02% increase in our Pell-eligible student body (106 to 141), and a 53.01% increase in our first-generation student body from the 2018–2019 academic year to the 2021–2022 academic year. Both our retention into second year (95.1%, fall to spring 2020–2021) and our four-year graduation rate (77.4%, spring 2021) have risen slightly from the 2018 levels (retention 93.3%, four-year graduation 74.4%), the year prior to the described changes, further demonstrating that quality and diversity are positively connected.

## **Adelphi University**

Adelphi University is a suburban campus near New York City that has traditionally been a PWI but is close to being recognized as an Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). A change in leadership in the honors college in 2019 brought with it a new commitment to the ideals of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through changes to the admissions process, the honors college is now interviewing, admitting, and yielding higher rates of underrepresented minorities, students from different regions of the country, and international students. Parallel efforts are being made to retain these students by reimagining the curriculum and cultivating a strong community, so students graduate from the institution in a timely fashion.

The honors college changed admissions practices in 2019–2020 to expand the pool of admitted students both in volume and background, resulting in 223% more admissions files than the previous year. Admissions changes included considering students with SAT reported verbal scores below 670 (the previous threshold) and reviewing students recommended by admissions staff regardless of their test scores. Eliminating the required standardized testing is important: the National Education Association has asserted standardized tests are “instruments of racism and a biased system” (Rosales and Walker). The file review is holistic and consists of reading the student’s essays, letters of recommendation, and the high school transcript, and it includes an analysis of standardized test scores if a student chooses to submit them. As a result, the honors college offered admission to a more diverse range of applicants:

39% were White, compared to 44% in 2019, and 50% in 2018; however, 53% of the students were White, compared to 48% in 2019, and 58% in 2018. In fall 2021, the college admitted students from nineteen states, a considerable increase from eleven the year before, suggesting additional impact on the regional diversity of the entering class.

In 2020 the university adopted a test-optional admissions policy, further emphasizing the need for interviews for admission into the honors college. In 2021–2022, the honors college invited some alumni to join the staff and faculty in interviewing students, with the hope of diversifying the pool of interviewers. Honors college staff drafted suggested questions for interviewers that give students the space to tell their stories. For instance, asking students about an activity they pursued that had an impact on them or their community yields a different response than inquiring about leadership in a school-sanctioned extracurricular activity. Additionally, interviews are now conducted on Zoom rather than in person. While visiting campus and the honors college space is beneficial for prospective students, it is a hardship for some local families as well as those who live a considerable distance from campus to make the trip. The honors staff wants prospective students to feel welcomed and to understand that they have been granted an interview because we believe they can be successful in the honors college. As Giovanna E. Walters et al. explain, many students do not consider themselves “honors material,” so we address this head-on in our introductory portion of the interview experience by showing a video made by a student that includes the voices of many students who reflect upon their place in the community of learners.

The honors college curriculum differs considerably from the university general education core; this component is important for honors colleges as they seek to distinguish themselves from other academic pathways on campus. It centers on two year-long courses examining great ideas and great books. All honors students must also produce a thesis based upon research or a creative project. The liberal arts focus of much of the honors coursework does not appeal to all students, and the interview provides students the opportunity

to learn more about the expectations of the honors college and to determine if they feel they can thrive there.

While most students enter the honors college in the first year, the honors college also admits current Adelphi students and external transfer students. Evaluations are made by reading an essay provided by the students and a reference letter from a faculty member and verifying a GPA of at least 3.5. This process creates a pathway for entry for those who might not have excelled in high school but have had more achievements at the university level or for students who were unaware of the honors college opportunity as first-year applicants, which is more likely the case for students from less privileged backgrounds.

All first-year students enroll in a year-long course grounded in texts that have influenced the world in which we live. This Great Ideas course has been reimaged over the past two years and now contains a lecture series on multidisciplinary thinking, an example of which includes a recent semester in which a sociologist shared her research on contemporary immigration issues with our students along with a historian whose research focuses on war and trauma. Readings have been enhanced to include a broader range of thinkers. On the advice of student members of the Honors College Diversity Council, two students were hired to work as assistants in the first-year class and charged with helping current students develop the skills they need to excel in the courses. The learning curve is steep for most students in their first year. While honors admits students it is convinced can succeed, it also offers them support so they are more likely to do well and gain the self-confidence needed to achieve their potential as honors students.

The honors college has the authority to design its courses and select its instructors, and it has expanded its teaching faculty to include more disciplines, areas of studies, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) faculty. This move helps students see themselves better reflected in the faculty and find seminar topics that are germane to their experiences and interests. The outcome has been a more multicultural curriculum. Each semester different faculty from various departments offer seminars to upper-division

honors college students. According to one student who was admitted to her first-choice medical school,

I have taken an Honors seminar about ritualistic practices and their social purposes in the Eastern hemisphere, and another on the ethics and brutality of war, with a particular focus on the Pacific Theatre during World War II. A question that comes up a lot in discussion with STEM and other pre-med/pre-dental students is “Why do I need this?” As someone whose career is centered around problem-solving, why limit yourself to one frame of thinking? The level of analysis and depth of discussion that was required for the seminars that I took prepared me immensely for the Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills (CARS) portion of the MCAT, which is notoriously difficult to study for.

Yielding a class of students with a broader range of backgrounds is just the first step. Students need to be nurtured and challenged so they persist and graduate from the institution. The honors college contains many students who study biology with the intention of attending medical school, and many are in our college of nursing. These programs are extremely competitive, but the honors college does not emphasize a culture of competition. Students collaborate and support one another when they are in the same classes, and upper-division students help those in classes they have already taken. A current senior reflected:

I did not want to be in an environment that was extremely cutthroat, pitting pre-med students against each other for the sake of ‘competition.’ That is not my learning style, nor is it how I envision healthcare to be. I wanted to be somewhere where there was existing collaboration, and that is what I found . . . within the Honors College.

The honors college synthesizes curricular and co-curricular learning experiences so learning takes place within and beyond the classroom. Honors students are required to attend three cultural events each semester with the goal of exploring the region, where a quick train ride from campus takes students to Penn Station or

downtown Brooklyn. Each semester the honors college offers tickets to cultural events such as theater, opera, dance, and musical performances in New York City and at the campus performing arts center. Tickets cost the students \$10 unless this fee is a hardship; in such cases, they are free. As a result, many students who have not seen a play or opera or visited a major museum have been able to do so and can begin to recognize that they belong in these spaces. In recent years students have attended Broadway shows such as *The Inheritance*; *Lehman Brothers Trilogy*; *Caroline, or Change*; and *Hadestown*, along with *Porgy and Bess* at the Metropolitan Opera, dance concerts, and museum exhibits. The goal is to allow students to see a broad range of performers exploring topics of critical interest today. Cultural events also forge connections with other groups on campus; for instance, in fall 2021 students saw *Pass Over* on Broadway with peers from the theater department and with alumni, and in spring 2022 students attended *Dear Evan Hansen* with the Psychology Club and *Take Me Out* with the Gender and Sexuality Alliance. Along with making students more comfortable exploring New York City and Long Island, the honors college encourages them to study abroad. Many students belong to immigrant families, and they tend to travel internationally with some regularity. Honors encourages study abroad so students recognize differences in learning in the disciplines in different regions of the world and how other cultures make sense of different programs of study.

Moreover, all incoming students are assigned an upper-division student mentor in honors. The goal is for new students to feel connected to the community and supported by staff, faculty, and their fellow students. Regular social programming coordinated by the Honors Student Council and/or the dean provide students with a multitude of opportunities to connect with one another in low-stakes gatherings like a weekly cookies and conversation hour or the once-a-semester pancake breakfast.

The college has also forged connections between students and alumni. Numerous alums have attended Ivy League law schools, and a cohort formed a mentoring program for current students interested in legal careers. Last year they helped two students gain

entrance to Cornell University and the University of Pennsylvania. One of the students claimed that being able to

    speak to Honors College Alumni who had attended such prestigious law schools was invaluable to me both during the application process and even now as a 1L. Being a low-income first-generation student the concept of applying to and attending law school can be very intimidating and overwhelming. It is quite easy to feel disadvantaged and disheartened by not having the type of support so many law students have with parents/aunts/uncles etc. who are attorneys and are familiar with the process and material. . . . I was able to enter a top law school with a preexisting network of alumni who were not only willing but eager to help me succeed.

### **KEY MARKERS FOR ASSESSMENT**

Assessment is a critical tool that honors colleges like those at Adelphi and Slippery Rock can use to demonstrate awareness and commitment to DEI initiatives. By engaging in such assessment, honors can participate in objective, systematic, process-oriented monitoring of and reflection on effectiveness; the results can be used to guide planning, solve problems, and make decisions. At the institutional level, assessment data can be used to garner support and drive funding decisions.

Through assessment, we gain perspectives and insight that guide DEI initiatives that allow for all stakeholders to feel respected, valued, and engaged in their honors community. Furthermore, our ability to use evidence to build programming allows for honors to involve students in DEI efforts in meaningful and purposeful ways. Because of their autonomy and ability to gather larger, comparative samples, honors colleges possess the capability to determine the impact of DEI initiatives using assessment tools. As honors colleges work to enrich diversity content through courses and co-curricular activities, meaningful assessment is key to our ability to understand where we are, determine strengths and weaknesses,



prioritize initiatives, gauge our progress, and redirect our efforts along the way.

## **Qualitative Assessment**

Qualitative assessment is an important tool for making sure that all voices are heard, and it serves as the basis for critical conversations about DEI. Two valuable resources for honors DEI qualitative assessment are student feedback and peer review.

Cultivating DEI requires that honors colleges build a culture whereby students can feel comfortable using their voices to provide critical perspectives about their experiences with DEI, express their needs, and provide input and ideas for DEI initiatives. Student feedback can be facilitated through reflective survey questions. Examples of questions include the following:

- In what ways does honors celebrate the diversity of ideas and people?
- How do you think honors can improve to become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive in the future?
- In what ways can we work to build an inclusive honors community, one where all students feel a sense of support and belonging?
- What are some ways that you have advocated for DEI? What successes and challenges have you faced?

Another strategy for gathering qualitative assessment data is by facilitating critical conversations. Honors programs and colleges often strive to inspire critical conversations that provide opportunities for integrative and critical thinking for students. While the current social climate has raised awareness about DEI, facilitating communication that is maximally inclusive can be difficult. In order to gather qualitative information through open dialogue, we must address a number of barriers, including the reluctance of marginalized, underrepresented students to share their thoughts and ideas as well as the defensive behaviors of honors students in

dominant social groups, such as arguing and blaming or withdrawing and shutting down.

When educators and students come together to talk, various strategies can facilitate perspective sharing and engagement to increase the overall quality of DEI conversations. Facilitators must leverage their role by mediating the conversation to ensure that all participants have an opportunity for input: they should establish an expectation that all voices are empowered, validate individual experiences, and invite others to speak. Examples of questions that have the potential to spark conversation about DEI include the following:

- What changes do we want to see in the diversity of honors in the next two or three years?
- What positive or negative experiences related to DEI have you had as a part of honors?
- What is the biggest challenge that honors faces in addressing DEI?
- What are some common misunderstandings about DEI, and how might we address them?
- What are some resources we can draw upon to grow and develop DEI in honors?

Peer review offers another opportunity to collect meaningful qualitative information. Peer reviewers can be drawn from within an institution, other comparable institutions, or the local community. For example, every university has resources that can offer objective feedback about DEI initiatives, such as campus diversity committees or the office of inclusive excellence. Inviting outsiders into honors DEI planning and assessment provides opportunities for fresh perspectives and can reveal assumptions, biases, and blind spots. Peer reviewers with expertise in DEI can be tasked with assessing the validity and impact of DEI initiatives.

## Quantitative Assessment

Quantitative assessment is critical to achieving long-term DEI goals because it provides objective, data-driven information about current efforts and opportunities for growth and action planning. Effective use of quantitative assessment is dependent upon the ability to link program and learning outcomes to specific assessment measures. The outcomes of these assessments then provide a shared definition and understanding of purpose, measures of success, and areas for growth. Specific DEI dimensions that can be quantitatively assessed in honors include strategic planning, recruitment, admissions, retention, learning outcome achievement, and student experiences. Several quantitative assessment tools can be employed to investigate DEI initiatives:

- The *Self-Assessment Rubric for Institutionalization of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Education* examines six dimensions: the philosophy and mission of diversity, equity, and inclusion; faculty support and involvement; curriculum, pedagogy, and research; staff engagement and involvement; student support and involvement; and administrative leadership and institutional support (New England Resource Center for Higher Education).
- The *Inclusive Excellence Scorecard* assesses change related to access and equity, campus climate, diversity in formal and informal curricular activities, and learning and development (Williams et al. 19–29).
- The *Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric* examines the capacity to identify individual cultural patterns, compare and contrast them with others, and adapt with empathy and flexibility to unfamiliar ways of being (Association of American Colleges and Universities).
- *General Belongingness Scale* measures student experiences related to acceptance/inclusion and rejection/exclusion (Malone et al.).

- *Sense of Belonging Scale—Revised* examines student experiences related to perceptions of peer support, comfort in the classroom, isolation, and faculty support (Hoffman and Morrow).

Effective DEI initiatives require a strong commitment by honors college leadership and must be guided by a conceptual framework developed in the context of strategic planning and honors college learning outcomes. Honors must demonstrate a strong commitment and desire to foster DEI through enhancing the institutional climate, creating communities of belonging, and thinking creatively about recruitment practices and admissions policies to diversify the honors student body. Ultimately, assessments provide accountability and validation to support the work aimed at achieving DEI goals and learning outcomes.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Honors programs and colleges are recognizing the need to enroll a broader range of students who bring different experiences and expectations to the classroom and enrich the experience for all members of the community. The assessments referenced above help institutions think about how to go about diversifying and tracking the changes that result from new initiatives. The “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education” will allow every honors program and college to determine how to improve and enhance the experiences of its students. Honors differs significantly among institutions, but these metrics and goals allow them to craft strategies and programming that best meet the needs of their students and faculty.

Embracing holistic admissions, including less emphasis on standardized testing, is an important step in making honors colleges more equitable and inclusive. The PreK–12 education system in the United States, out of which the vast majority of future honors students will hail, however, is profoundly unequal, with poorer children inhabiting underresourced schools often in neighborhoods that do not provide quality supplemental support. If honors colleges want to expand admissions and embrace inclusivity, they need

to address the systemic inequalities in the American educational system. Removing systemic barriers, while creating supportive and inclusive honors experiences that prepare students to engage in future social justice initiatives, allows honors, even in predominantly White institutions, to lead the effort to create a more diverse and inclusive future.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Honors Colleges as Levers of  
Educational Equity

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While higher education is widely imagined as facilitating social mobility, the realities of enrollment, retention, and professional trajectories betray the conservative mechanisms through which higher education reproduces the status quo of inequality. In fact, universities all too often serve more as sorting mechanisms than as ladders to success, keeping socioeconomic structures largely intact. Honors colleges can and should strive to act as levers of equity in this scenario of entrenchment, but the nature of this project looks very different depending on the institution's own class position vis-à-vis its students. Elite, highly selective institutions may

advocate for enrollment strategies that target student populations that do not typically attend those institutions, especially those that fall below the socioeconomic norm of their student body. Other institutions, however, already enroll such students in large numbers. These less selective “lower tier” institutions, such as two-year colleges and regional universities, are “institutions of access” for their regions. As the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) has argued since its 2002 executive report of the same name, these regional institutions have a responsibility to act as “stewards of place” through their “clear and ongoing commitments to the local K–12 school systems where they reside,” as well as ongoing efforts to provide “access to regional students via bridge programs, admissions and financial aid,” especially to “local first generation and underrepresented students” (Saltmarsh et al.).

Such institutions have the capacity to make a significant impact on students’ personal and professional trajectories, and honors colleges can play an essential role in that process. Regional universities, especially those that enroll large numbers of students from underrepresented groups, must develop and invest in their honors colleges in order to provide the type of support to students that brings a full spectrum of opportunities into view. The institution must support its honors college with access to high-quality facilities, direct reporting lines, and funding for student development and scholarships. Additionally, honors colleges themselves must take full advantage of their institutional autonomy and privilege by enacting inclusive enrollment strategies and developing a robust and diverse curriculum infused with high-impact practices that will prepare and encourage students to take a big next step. In this way, honors colleges in less selective, regional institutions are uniquely positioned to serve as levers of educational equity.

Some evidence does support higher education’s positive association with social mobility. According to an analysis of millions of anonymous IRS documents by economist Raj Chetty and his team of researchers, people who attend ultra-selective institutions are much more likely to become wealthy than other adults, regardless of their original socioeconomic status. This means, according to Paul Tough’s reporting in *The Inequality Machine*, “If you’re a

poor kid, . . . attending an Ivy Plus college rather than no college is truly life-changing. It increases your odds of making it into the top income quintile by a factor of *fourteen*" (18). So, a dramatic change in socioeconomic status can indeed be fueled by a college education; however, this trajectory is not, in fact, realized on a significant scale because enrollment in ultra-selective colleges overwhelmingly consists of already wealthy students and the number of institutions that fall into this category is relatively small. According to Chetty et al., "children whose parents are in the top 1% of the income distribution are 77 times more likely to attend an Ivy League college than those whose parents are in the bottom income quintile." Tough concludes: "The American system of higher education has the potential to be a powerful engine of mobility, able to reliably lift young people from poverty to the middle class, and from the middle class to affluence. But in reality . . . it functions as something closer to the opposite" (19). Therefore, the most prestigious and selective institutions are often the least capable of effecting the social mobility that accorded them prestige in the first place.

This dynamic plays out on a smaller, regional scale as well. In the state of North Carolina, one of the more selective institutions is Wake Forest University. According to Chetty et al.'s "Mobility Report Cards," only 2.3% of Wake Forest's students come from a low-income background (bottom 20% income level), making Wake Forest's enrollment of low-income students among the lowest in the state. Not surprisingly, the median family income at Wake Forest is one of the highest in North Carolina: \$221,500. In contrast, at one of the state's least selective universities, Elizabeth City State College, the median family income is \$33,000, and 18% of students are low-income (bottom 20%). Elizabeth City's enrollment of low-income students is among the highest in the state. Our university, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP), falls somewhere between these two extremes, with a median family income of \$52,000 and 13% of students designated as low income. Although there are exceptions and complicating factors at each institution, in general, students tend to enroll in universities that match their socioeconomic status.

From an admissions perspective, one way to address this disparity is to encourage high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds to apply to more selective colleges. And as an admissions strategy, this approach is, of course, a worthwhile project. But even with necessary information at their fingertips, personalized encouragement, generous financial aid offers, and other campus enticements, high-achieving high school students do not always aspire to attend the most prestigious or selective institutions available to them. Often, they are drawn to regional universities that offer lower costs, a local reputation, and the convenience and comfort of being close to home. The push, common among upper-class families, for children to aspire to the most selective college they qualify for and to submit applications widely and aggressively is not relevant to all; rather, “the issue of whether and where to go to college can feel much more complicated: emotionally charged and financially perilous, weighed down by tangled questions of family and identity and history and home” (Tough 51).

At the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP), we see this phenomenon play out every year. As we review and select each year’s honors college cohort, we encounter students who would be competitive to enroll in our state’s flagship university, UNC-Chapel Hill, or even more competitive institutions out of state; however, they choose our university: a smaller, less selective regional campus located geographically and institutionally at the margins of the UNC system, in other words, a university of access. On the surface, it might seem that students make this decision out of ignorance or fear of the unknown. After all, many of our applicants are first-generation college students who have little or no guidance from family and social networks in navigating the college admissions process. But rather than assuming students are ignorantly settling for universities below their reach, we reject this assumption and trust that their choice is both evidence-based and grounded in their lived realities.

And given the enrollment patterns that currently exist, our students are indeed making a solid bet on their future. Compared to more selective institutions in the state, UNC Pembroke offers

a higher chance of social mobility for its graduates. According to Chetty et al.'s analysis of IRS records, the likelihood that UNC Pembroke students will "move up one or two income quintiles" is 22%. While that figure might seem low, it is one of the highest in the state, coming in at 21 out of 101 institutions. UNC-Chapel Hill, the flagship in the UNC system, ranks 88<sup>th</sup> out of 101, with a 12% likelihood of modest income mobility. Thus, while it is unlikely that graduates of a small regional university like UNCP will become members of America's elite classes, it is quite likely they will see a modest gain in income compared to their parents.

UNC Pembroke was founded in 1887 by and for American Indians and is located in the historical home of the Lumbee tribe in Robeson County, North Carolina. The university's official "leadership profile" describes it as an "anchor economic institution for southeastern North Carolina" and names nine closely arrayed counties, including our home county of Robeson, that constitute our "service region." These counties composing the southeastern corner, known colloquially as the "Sandhills," are some of the most economically challenged in the state and are overwhelmingly rural, racially and ethnically diverse, and lower income. Of the approximately 8,319 students enrolled at UNCP for fall 2021, 2% identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, 9% as Hispanic/Latino, 12% as American Indian, 30% as Black/African American, and 40% as White/Caucasian (University of North Carolina, Pembroke). Additionally, 47% of students are classified as low income (Pell-eligible students), and 21% identified as first-generation students. In fall 2021, the Maynor Honors College had a total of 286 students enrolled, of whom less than 1% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, less than 1% as Hispanic/Latino, 15% as American Indian, 17% as Black/African American, and 61% as White/Caucasian. Of the honors college's student body, 43% are low income (Pell-eligible students), and 15.6% identify as first generation.

UNC Pembroke's honors college was founded in 2001; it had existed as a small program since 1979. Sometime after its founding, the college began implementing the National Collegiate Honors Council's (NCHC) "Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed

Honors College,” as discussed in Sederberg’s *The Honors College Phenomenon*. The college now reflects those characteristics. It is headed by a dean and has significant control over curriculum, admissions, and selection of faculty. As David M. Jones notes, in his chapter in *Occupy Honors Education*, “Honors programs at public universities have often served as a cost-effective way for underserved first-generation students to gain the benefits of high-impact pedagogies such as undergraduate research, smaller class sizes, and the like” (35). In this way, we see our honors college, and honors colleges like ours, as levers of educational equity.

The demographic information above reflects a complicated mix of factors. Many students do not wish to identify their race or ethnicity or to identify themselves as first-generation college students. Of course, many of these identities and categories overlap in rich and complex ways, rendering the percentages and charts in institutional fact books incomplete. For those advocating for educational equity, terms such as “underrepresented students” become necessary because they attempt to capture a large swath of identifiers, but this language obscures rather than reveals. For purposes of this chapter, we focus on class, rurality, and the challenges of first-generation students. These identifiers are always imbricated in race, culture, and ethnicity, though, and it is not possible, or perhaps advisable, to attempt to cleanly separate them in an analysis such as this one. As sociologist Jessica Sherwood has argued, the various hierarchies that constitute American institutional life overlap and intermingle with one another, meaning that “ideologies justifying economic stratification and racial stratification are related, since class is raced and race is classed” (149). Our intersectional approach attempts to lean into rather than fight against the slippages within family, race, income, education, and social position.

From our perspective, the lived reality of rural students who tend to be poor, working class, and first generation impacts the recruitment and retention of honors colleges (Ardoin xix, xxi). Rurality is an aspect of identity that is often excluded, and it shapes students’ access to resources, the development of skills, and understanding of social and cultural capital well before they enroll in

college. Education researcher Sonja Ardoin has observed that “children in rural and working-class areas are taught information and behaviors that prepare them for blue-collar work,” leading uncritical educational institutions to almost automatically “perpetuate geographical and social stratification” (11). The neutrality of the label first generation, too, as Sherry Linkon argues, further “erases the systemic and collective elements of class” and emphasizes the adoption of middle-class culture values to succeed. Too frequently, rural and working-class students are “overlooked in the college access and success literature” (Ardoin xxiii). Rurality, then, is an important aspect to consider in promoting student success and the completion of college degrees (Crain and Newlin 57). Test scores and other traditional indicators of success do not capture the emotional and intellectual growth of students who remain outside of the traditional systems of cultural and social capital accumulation. Thus, a reframing of recruitment initiatives to address other elements of lived experience will expand diversity and inclusion in honors colleges and programs.

As Ardoin points out, rural schools promote a unique identity that is supported by and supports the local community (xix). They offer historical continuity, economic development, and cultural connections that unite and celebrate students from the region (xviii). They also offer a more personalized, less isolating academic experience than larger state universities or private colleges that may be far from home. Many students who excel in regional public high schools are therefore attracted to honors colleges in regional universities, seeing them as appropriate venues to continue their educational trajectory. In this sense, rural institutions such as UNC Pembroke fit the bill as a college of choice.

In her 2017 dissertation about academic successes and barriers among Lumbee students in North Carolina, Leslie Locklear movingly relates the stories of more than a dozen first-generation college students and Lumbee tribal members. In each of these stories, the students express the sense of isolation they experienced as they began to apply to college. Although her mother was ultimately supportive of her education, Bazie, an exceptional student

and valedictorian of her high school class in nearby Cumberland County, remembered: “You don’t know what you don’t know. Like my mom didn’t really talk to me much about the college experience . . . maybe if my family had had some of those experiences maybe they could have told me more and then by the time you got to applying for grad school they didn’t know anything so once I got here I kinda really was on my own” (qtd. in Locklear 149). While the parents of the students Locklear engages are often unaware or even skeptical of the process of college application, they are substantially more familiar with UNCP because of its physical and institutional presence as a “steward of place” in Robeson County and its historical connections to their tribal community. UNCP hosts portions of the annual Lumbee Homecoming and Powwow events, invites Robeson County K–12 students to campus for regular STEM and arts events, and is one of the largest employers in the county. While applying to “college” might be an inscrutable abstraction, applying to UNCP is not.<sup>1</sup>

In her research on Lumbee students transitioning to college, Concetta Bullard found students in Robeson County and surrounding areas articulating the appeal of UNCP in ways that reinforce these notions of community value. For instance, Tara said, “I kinda felt like I needed to go to UNCP because I am Lumbee. Cause it is an Indian school. So I figured, like, my people would want me to go there because that’s alotta Lumbee people go for college. But I’m happy I came here because I like how close it is to home especially before I go away for vet school” (qtd. in Bullard 75). Tara’s articulation of her choice process shows that an institution like UNCP afforded a unique opportunity for her to invest in her Lumbee heritage and community while simultaneously creating a meaningful academic and career path that extended well outside it. She chose to attend UNCP as an undergraduate precisely because she already knew she would be leaving the community for graduate studies in veterinary medicine at a more selective, prestigious, and geographically distant institution. Especially as undergraduate enrollment continues to climb and a bachelor’s degree becomes a more widely assumed next step after high school, regional colleges of choice



allow students to save money, invest in their communities, and still create a personal and professional trajectory of their choosing.

Our goal as an honors college of access is to recruit students exactly like Tara and Bazie, high-achieving students who may not be aware of the existence or value of honors colleges or may not imagine themselves as honors college material. At UNCP our enrollment strategies are a work in progress, and we continue to build more equitable practices into our system. In 2015, the honors college moved from an application-based model to a mostly invitation-based model for incoming students. Although this shift might run counter to current opinion as expressed in a document such as NCHC's *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion*, we consistently found that the application itself—no matter how easy to find or widely available—was limiting access to our program. While we might be personally attracted to any number of holistic admissions processes that include essays and other materials, a number of factors impeded this approach. First, our limited staffing and faculty mean that we simply do not have the resources to run a parallel admissions process at the scale and scope necessary to do it effectively. But perhaps more fundamentally, we have found that an invitation-based model, which identifies incoming students based on high school GPA, coupled with an application process for those who do not receive an automatic invitation, allows us to capture the largest swath of interested and available students. Although imperfect, this strategy has led to growth for the honors college, which means more access to the benefits it offers. An invitation to a prestigious program and a scholarship are welcoming and motivational overtures.

For the recruitment of our 2021 class, we, like many institutions, went test blind. This shift was a welcome experiment, one that we will measure the impact of over the coming years. Of course, many institutions were test blind or test optional pre-pandemic; nevertheless, we cannot be sanguine about continuing the practice (Fair Test). The University of North Carolina Board of Governors is divided on this issue, and it only narrowly passed the current extension to the class of 2022. The test-blind admissions system

led to another increase in enrollment for the honors college, again extending our reach and influence, so we can only hope the administrators at the campus and system levels see the benefits of the last two years and allow us to continue with test-blind admissions.

In the past two years, we have also expanded our recruitment efforts to include transfer students and current students who missed the high school GPA cutoff or opted not to apply to the honors college upon arrival at UNCP. At campus- and community-wide recruitment events, we make opportunities to apply to the honors college a part of our message by reminding students and parents that their academic profile is not fixed in stone when they arrive on campus as first-year students. We proactively recruit these eligible current students in order to counteract the self-selection that often eliminates first-generation students from honors college applicant pools. We send out invitations celebrating the great work they have done at the institution thus far and personally ask them to apply with a short essay and letter of recommendation. Even those students who ultimately decide not to apply to the honors college have expressed surprise and deep gratitude at the institutional recognition that an honors college invitation brings, if only to their email inbox.

Two recent additions to our honors curriculum highlight the formal and informal ways that equity work can take place. HON 3200 is a one-credit-hour practicum in service learning, and HON 3500 is a one-credit-hour seminar that focuses on professional and academic development. Both courses address the issue of “success scripts,” a way of recognizing the specific assumptions, understandings, socializations that accompany students onto our campus. Following from the work of groundbreaking intersectional theorist Sara Ahmed, Richard Badenhausen has proposed “honors success scripts” as a way of understanding the unquestioned and institutionalized forms of power that prevent students from acting outside of a narrow band of established norms. In her 2010 book, *The Promise of Happiness*, Ahmed proposes the idea of “happiness scripts” to explain the myriad ways social groups structure and predetermine what counts as “happiness” and how to achieve it: “Happiness scripts could be thought of as straightening devices,

ways of aligning bodies with what is already lined up. The points that accumulated as lines can be performatives: a point on a line can be a demand to stay in line. To deviate from that line is to be threatened with unhappiness” (91).

As Badenhausen observes, Ahmed’s “happiness script” is easily applied to honors education in thinking through what counts as a “happy” student, or, more specifically, what counts as a “good” or “successful” student. Honors success scripts typically involve doing well in high school, being admitted to a prestigious university, and moving on to a prominent graduate program or lucrative job. But, of course, that is not the script shared by everyone. The “success script” valued by college-educated, middle/upper-class families is not necessarily shared by all, and particular points on the line may deviate from the standard script for many student populations. These varieties are precisely why honors colleges at rural and first-generation-centered institutions, then, are ideally placed to meet students where they are and provide opportunities and resources on their terms.

Our two recent additions to the honors curriculum address the issue of “success scripts” in diametrically opposite ways. Our professional development seminar (HON 3500) gives students an opportunity to interrogate and understand the success scripts associated with their chosen fields and make concrete plans to address them in the near term. Through class activities and assignments, students are required to develop and receive detailed professional feedback on materials connected to a specific internship, scholarship, graduate program, or to another significant opportunity. Through this process, they are introduced to the major opportunities for growth and development in their chosen field and must contact a variety of stakeholders around the campus who can assist with these opportunities, such as the Career Center, the Undergraduate Research and Creativity Center, the Graduate School, or the Office of Global Engagement. Students typically finish the semester with a robust portfolio full of useful documentation related to their academic and extracurricular work thus far. For students who arrive on our campus without deeply ingrained scripts or a reservoir of

social and cultural capital, the professional development seminar provides a leveling function. The course is meant to lay bare these honors success scripts in an effort to provide explicitly what more privileged students often received through implicit socialization.

The service learning practicum (HON 3200), on the other hand, flips the success scripts by recentring the classroom in an environment where the rural, first-generation students are fluent. Because the semester projects are almost always undertaken in collaboration with partners that serve the rural communities of southeastern North Carolina from which most of our students come, we find that the students who might be the least prepared for the success scripts of the classroom suddenly become the experts. Flipping the script in this way builds individual student self-confidence, productively disrupts or reconfigures hierarchical relationships within honors cohorts, and even reframes basic questions of knowledge in ways that reverberate widely outside the single credit hour the course provides. Going forward, we hope to continue the expansion of service learning opportunities for our students and build deeper relationships between our students and the rural communities that surround our campus. The service learning course also demonstrates the importance of “building stronger ties between honors programs and campus reform initiatives that explicitly seek equity and inclusion” (Jones 42). In spring 2021, our faculty senate passed an historic initiative called the Indigenous Cultures and Communities (ICC) requirement, which requires students to complete coursework and co-curricular activities (such as service learning) focused on indigenous cultures and communities. Our course was intentionally developed to support this initiative.

A new report using the data produced by Raj Chetty et al. along with other collections of economic data demonstrates that traditional higher education rankings do not reflect the impact universities have on social mobility. As Michael Itzkowitz notes, minority-serving institutions with high numbers of Pell-eligible students tend instead to score high on rankings that reward social mobility. Honors colleges in such universities are positioned to amplify the economic boost generated by these universities and should seize the

opportunity to provide traditionally underresourced students, who may be students of color as well as low-income, first-generation, or rural students, with the skills, knowledge, and cultural capital that they need for success.

Honors colleges are especially well suited to serve as forces of educational equity because of the degree of institutional autonomy they enjoy. This independence begins with control over factors of enrollment management: calibrating an enrollment and recruitment strategy, allocating financial aid resources accordingly, and creating messaging for current and prospective students that promotes inclusive practices. This autonomy also enables equity work at the curricular level. As an honors college, we can respond to the expressed needs of students through lasting and systematic additions, corrections, and expansions of our curriculum. At UNCP, for example, we enjoy total control over honors students' experiences in the required first-year seminar, which, together with coordinated efforts across the first-year living-learning community, provide a strong basis for success and achievement. For instance, all first-year seminar students participate in a service learning project where they exchange letters with middle school students, reflecting on the challenges and opportunities of their initial months in college, which positions them as experts and mentors. And, of course, our autonomy gives us additional flexibility and resources to provide the targeted professional and academic support that any honors operation strives to offer to students throughout their time on campus: encouragement to participate in academic conferences and to publish in undergraduate journals, connections to career center and job fair opportunities, and guidance navigating the graduate school application process. In each of these areas, honors colleges are well-positioned to open new possibilities for equity among our students.

That high-achieving students from underrepresented groups often self-select into lower-tier institutions may be discouraging on the surface; however, honors colleges at those campuses are poised to leverage their institutional powers to provide the support, encouragement, and opportunities for educational advancement. In fact,

they may offer a more personal approach and a cultural sensitivity than students may otherwise receive at more selective campuses. In the fall of 2021, our campus hosted an event with Tommy Orange, author of the *New York Times* bestselling novel *There There*, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. With a socially distanced audience full of students, Orange spoke about his decision to attend a historically American Indian institution for his MFA, the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Sante Fe, NM, rather than a more prestigious writers' program like the famous workshop at the University of Iowa. Orange explained that at majority-White institutions, indigenous students are either asked to bring too much of themselves to class—explaining every tiny nuance of Native life for a ravenous white audience—or too little—checking anything that makes them uniquely Indian at the door in the name of a White definition of universality. At IAIA, he explained, neither of those options were ever on the table, and so he felt much more freedom to simply explore and develop his craft as a writer. Those of us steeped in the academic world of hierarchies and rankings may not immediately understand why a student with a strong high school record would choose a less prestigious university over a more prestigious one, but this decision is something we encounter at UNC Pembroke often. “Deviant” success/happiness scripts value attending an institution that is affordable, close to home, “known” by the student’s family and community, and able to provide a comfortable, familial atmosphere. These considerations do not necessarily involve notions of institutional prestige and prominence. We must assume that students, in choosing a less prestigious regional university, are making an informed decision. As a result, honors colleges at these lower-ranking institutions have a responsibility to ensure students have the opportunity to succeed, that their choice is a good choice, and that this alternative success script is viable.

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>Although outside the scope of this essay, one must also note the ways in which skepticism of educational systems among

indigenous people is rooted in a history in which American Indian schooling proved to be a core part of the settler colonial project and “a systematic attempt to rid the world of American Indian culture” (Locklear 13).

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# Promoting the Inclusion of LGBTQ+ Students: The Role of the Honors College in Faith-Based Colleges and Universities

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**T**his chapter explores how honors college deans and directors at faith-based colleges and universities can facilitate the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ students who attend their universities. The essay will outline the particular problems that faith-based institutions confront when working with sexual minority students, and then it will suggest some remedies, both in climate and curriculum, for creating a more inclusive environment for those honors students. Before this essay deals directly with those issues, some introductory material related to the climate at faith-based schools will help frame the unique situation that honors deans and directors face.

Perhaps the main differences between faith-based universities and their secular counterparts are, first, faith-based schools are generally more mission driven than secular schools; second, faculty at faith-based schools often share a common commitment to a set of orthodox beliefs regarding the faith of that institution; and third, their students engage in a conversation about the ways that claims of faith and claims of academic disciplines support and critique each other. (In using the term “faith-based,” I am restricting my focus to Christian universities with honors colleges and programs and thus have not explored institutions tied to other faith traditions, like Judaism, Islam, or Buddhism, that may engage in honors education.)

While every university has a mission statement, those declarations are often generic. For example, the University of Tennessee is guided by the following broad statement: “Serving all Tennesseans and beyond through education, discovery and outreach that enables strong economic, social and environmental well-being” (University of Tennessee). Contrast that with the two-page mission statement of the University of Notre Dame, which details its commitment to freedom of inquiry, to excellence in teaching and scholarship, and to the fostering of an academic community grounded in Catholic teaching (University of Notre Dame). Likewise, Southern Methodist University (Southern Methodist University) and Texas Christian University (Texas Christian University) pledge a commitment to academic excellence and freedom of inquiry, with a nod to the ethical and moral claims of their respective religious polities.

As one moves to the evangelical and fundamentalist universities, mission statements become more pointed in their reference to Christianity and its practice. For example, Azusa Pacific University’s reads, “Azusa Pacific University is an evangelical Christian community of disciples and scholars who seek to advance the work of God in the world through academic excellence in liberal arts and professional programs of higher education that encourage students to develop a Christian perspective of truth and life” (Azusa Pacific University). Liberty University states that it “develops Christ-centered men and women with the values, knowledge, and skills essential for impacting the world. Here we *Train Champions for*

*Christ*” (Liberty University). Such mission statements presume that all administrators, faculty, and staff will be active disciples in their faith traditions and will work to foster discipleship in students in the attempt to integrate faith and learning in the classroom and in campus life.

This integration of faith and learning also constitutes a fundamental difference between faith-based schools and their secular counterparts (Holmes). On its website, the University of Notre Dame claims that one of its distinctive goals is “to provide a forum where, through free inquiry and open discussion, the various lines of Catholic thought may intersect with all the forms of knowledge found in the arts, sciences, professions, and every other area of human scholarship and creativity” (University of Notre Dame). An examination of mainline Protestant colleges and universities reveals similar commitments to an integrative approach. Even the schools attached to the most fundamentalist religious traditions aspire to offer the very best in higher education (Laats; Swezey and Ross), though for the evangelical and fundamentalist colleges and universities that sense of integration runs the gamut from “defender of the faith/considerable indoctrination” to “seeker of the truth/intellectually open” with the preponderance of evangelical schools falling in the latter category (Ringenberg xx).

The mission statement also serves as a standard for determining policies for staff and students about behavior and dress and in some cases for determining how particular subjects may be discussed inside an academic discipline. Some schools, like Liberty University, adhere to a “young earth” position, that the universe was created in six historical days and that humans were created, not evolved. Many promote a complementarian view of male and female relationships, believing that the Bible assigns church leadership only to men. Nearly every more theologically conservative school affirms that marriage is between one man and one woman. So long as these views are spelled out in public documents that prospective faculty acknowledge as a condition of employment, those schools are not in violation of the guidelines for academic freedom as expressed by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).

Since a faith-based school cannot possibly lay out all the areas it might at some future time deem troublesome, problems arise. For example, Wheaton College recently faced accusations of violating the academic freedom of Professor Larycia Hawkins, who wore a hijab to class to express solidarity with Muslim women and who reminded students that Muslims, like Christians and Jews, were monotheistic and shared much in common with the Christian community (Flaherty). Faculty at Wheaton expressed considerable concern that the reasons for the firing were not tied directly to any published proscription. Peter Walhout, chair of Wheaton's chemistry department, said he does not know how Hawkins breached that contract and worries that she has been punished based on a particular interpretation: "I am concerned that there may be many more unspoken interpretations and ramifications of the statement of faith that faculty don't know about and could unwittingly transgress" (Pashman). Likewise, Michael Mangis, a psychology professor since 1989, said he worries that faculty are being measured against the "social taboos of evangelical subculture" rather than the school's twelve core beliefs (Pashman).

If any issue falls within the social taboos of Christian subculture, it is the issue of sexual minorities, which potentially impacts the ability of honors colleges to recruit and retain students. Difficulties in denominations can influence the ways faith-based schools are perceived. For example, Pink Menno advocates for LGBTQ+ persons in general in the Mennonite Church as well as bringing pressure to bear on schools like Goshen College. The roilings in the United Methodist Church over the past six years and the ambiguities in other mainline Protestant denominations, such as the Christian Reformed Church, create similar uncertainties for their colleges and their employees and students. The theological commitments of each religious tradition determine to a large extent the nature of the challenge created by ambiguities. Many mainline Protestant denominations (United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Church USA, Episcopal Church, Disciples of Christ) have allowed local churches to determine whether or not to hire LGBTQ+ priests/ministers (single or married) and to perform same-sex weddings. Typically, universities affiliated with these groups provide extensive

support systems for their LGBTQ+ students and hire LGBTQ+ faculty. The schools affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church present a mixed bag. The doctrinal position of Catholicism is that same-sex attraction is an intrinsically disordered desire, requiring those who experience such attraction to live celibate lives (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2357–59). Most recently, Pope Francis has reaffirmed Catholic opposition to priests blessing same-sex marriages despite his compassionate language about LGBTQ+ persons (Harlan and Bailey). Nevertheless, over 130 Catholic institutions, both large and small, offer support services for their LGBTQ+ students (New Ways Ministry). In 2013, 307 of 682 faith-based schools had approved LGBT+ groups on their campuses, and 375 schools had statements of non-discrimination inclusive of sexual orientation (Coley), a figure that has likely risen in the past decade.

The struggles in the denominations and churches spill over to struggles in the colleges and universities. The decade of the 2010s was especially tumultuous for evangelical and fundamentalist faith-based institutions on practices associated with sexual minorities (Wheeler; Wolff et al.). Many schools made the news after protests by students about campus policies or after the firing of faculty on their campuses. Those schools included Biola University, Azusa Pacific University, George Fox University, Gordon College, Wheaton College, North Park University, Baylor University, Belmont University, Calvin University, Eastern University, Pepperdine University, and Whitworth University. A 2011 Dear Colleague letter sent by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to schools across the nation encouraged letting transgender students use restrooms fitting their gender identity. In 2015, the Supreme Court decision *Obergefell v. Hodges* legitimized same-sex marriage in all 50 states. These actions prompted many faith-based schools to apply for Title IX exemptions; their justification was that schools should not be forced to hire sexual minority faculty or staff in contradiction to their expressed religious convictions about marriage and homosexuality (Bader; Buzuvis and Newhall; Campbell; Hammill; Stack; Zylstra). Around the same time, two Mennonite schools, Eastern Mennonite University and Goshen College, decided to leave the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU),

a consortium of mainly evangelical institutions, after they decided they would hire sexual minority faculty, single or married. Two other schools, Union University and Oklahoma Baptist University, also chose to leave the CCCU.

The pressure on faith-based schools has not abated in the 2020s. In response to the conflict in the CCCU, the organization crafted a piece of legislation in 2021 entitled “Fairness for All” (HR 1440), which would require including the language “sexual orientation and gender identity” in statements of nondiscrimination, and it would protect religious institutions that have as an article of faith that marriage is between one man and one woman and that sexual intimacy should only be practiced inside a married relationship (Council of Christian Colleges and Universities; Shellnutt). In response to the “Fairness for All” language about sexual orientation and gender identity, 53 Christian colleges, universities, and seminaries formed the International Alliance for Christian Education in 2021.

In March 2021, the Religious Exemption Accountability Project (REAP) filed a class-action suit on behalf of 33 plaintiffs against 25 Christian colleges and universities for alleged Title IX discrimination against their LGBTQ+ students (Redden, “Religious”; Religious). In April 2021, the faculty at Seattle Pacific University voted “No Confidence” in the Board of Directors (72% in favor) after the Board refused to change the hiring standards to include sexual minority persons (Takahama). A subsequent protest by students over the policy culminated in a fundraising effort to support a lawsuit against the university. As many faith-based colleges and universities continue to navigate the tensions between their historic positions and their sexual minority students, positive shifts in public opinion and Christian opinion about same-sex marriage and discrimination against sexual minorities have created additional challenges for recruitment and retention (Pew Research Center; Public Religion Research Institute).

All these social tensions surrounding sexual minority students have highlighted problems such students regularly face, chief among them being the struggle to reconcile two seemingly opposing identities, sexual minority and Christian. While the treatment of homosexuals by churches alternated between relaxed and severe

during the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Boswell; Johansson and Percy), most churches, until recently, have taken an aggressively negative view of any sexual expression outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. And while many adolescents struggle to accept their sexual orientation/gender identity, those with a strong religious affiliation have an even greater struggle (Gibbs; Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry). Catholic theologian James Allison put it in these graphic terms, “The Christian story was specifically presented to us as one within which we could only inscribe ourselves by agreeing to mutilate our souls” (49).

The resultant impact of this struggle on physical and mental health has been documented for years with, unfortunately, very little change in the statistical likelihood of harm (Wolff and Himes). A meta-analysis of over 25 published studies revealed that LGB persons were twice as likely as their heterosexual peers to attempt suicide (King et al.; Lytle et al.). In 2012, the Surgeon General found that 30% of sexual minority adolescents compared to 8–10% of all adolescents reported suicide attempts (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). A 2020 report by the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP) entitled *Faith Communities and the Well-Being of LGBT Youth* found that sexual minority students are about twice as likely to be bullied or use illicit drugs, more than twice as likely to feel persistently sad or hopeless, more than three times as likely to inject illegal drugs and consider suicide or make a suicide plan, and more than four times as likely to attempt suicide. Among youth aged 10–19 who died by suicide from 2003–2017, LGBT youth were five times more likely to have been bullied than their non-LGBT peers (20.7% vs. 4.4%); among LGBT youth aged 10–13 years who died by suicide, 67.7% had been bullied. The proportion of sexual minority youth who have attempted suicide has increased in recent years to nearly 40%. National homeless organizations estimate that up to 40% of homeless youth are LGBT (Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry).

For transgender youth, the numbers are worse. Grant et al. found that 41% of transgender persons had reported a suicide attempt. The GAP report noted rates of suicidal thoughts two to four times higher than their peers who are not transgender and rates of suicide

attempts three to six times higher. Transgender youth experience two to three times the risk of physical and sexual assault compared to their peers. Given such sobering statistics, honors college faculty and staff must be proactive in instituting intentional programming in support of their LGBTQ+ students.

Importantly, religion by itself is not an issue for any of the national LGBTQ+ advocacy groups as long as sexual minority students are treated the same as all other students. Shane Windemere of Campus Pride told *The Christian Post* that the Campus Pride Shame Index focuses not on whether or not a school considers homosexuality a sin: the more fundamental question is how LGBTQ+ students are treated on campus. He noted particularly that Notre Dame, despite its clear teaching that homosexuality is inherently disordered desire, recognizes its LGBTQ+ student group and does not single out these students for any special discriminatory action (Gryboski). The Human Rights Campaign, the largest of the national advocacy groups, has opposed the Fairness for All legislation (Human Rights Campaign), but at the same time it has endorsed the “Do No Harm” amendment to the Religious Freedom Act (Berg-Brousseau). Finally, the *Faith Communities and the Well-Being of LGBT Youth* report concludes that “when LGBT youth experience acceptance and support by family and faith communities, they are more likely to have positive health outcomes and be protected from risks such as suicide, depression, and substance abuse. Acceptance improves self-esteem in LGBT youth and allows them to believe they can live happy adult lives” (Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry 8). While balancing historical doctrinal positions with empathy for sexual minority students poses significant challenges (New; Noble), many universities have paved the way for broader acceptance without compromising their beliefs about marriage between one man and one woman and sexual expression outside of marriage.

If religion can play a significant role in helping sexual minority students manage their college experience, how can honors college faculty, staff, and administrators at faith-based colleges and universities assist in supporting those students’ academic and personal journeys? Recent data collected by REAP suggest there are scores of



students who need such support: its survey found that “11 percent of students attending Christian colleges identified as non-heterosexual,” 22% admitted to a same-sex attraction, while 2% identified as gender nonconforming (Redden, “Being”). First and foremost, honors colleges at faith-based institutions should be a safe space for honors sexual minority students, and, for that matter, for all sexual minority students. In an ideal world, all universities would be open to having a recognized LGBTQ+ group. Among those colleges and universities who are part of the evangelical CCCU, Calvin College, Campbell University, Eastern University, North Park University, and Pepperdine University have student organizations for their sexual minority students. Eastern Mennonite University and Goshen College both also have student groups (Noble) and, as cited above, over 50% of faith-based schools have some kind of school-sanctioned services, including groups, for their sexual minority students. Some schools such as Samford University, an evangelical school in Birmingham, AL, have instituted a campus-wide safe spaces program where faculty undergo training and then post a sticker on their door. Other schools such as Gordon College and Biola University have online alumni groups, none sanctioned by their schools, where current students can converse or meet up with local alumni if they are looking for an understanding ear (Robin). In fact, in a recent article examining the increasing role alumni are playing in supporting such students, Liam Knox notes that because “LGBTQ alumni of Christian institutions often felt isolated and traumatized during their college years,” they now want to work “to make sure current students have it better.”

If a school does not have a safe spaces program and will not likely create one, deans and directors can still identify faculty across the campus who are allies for sexual minority students. In every one of the universities mentioned earlier, students were able to find one or more faculty members on their campuses to whom they could turn, faculty who were not trying to “talk about their sin” or “pray the gay away” or who, without the student’s permission, would pass their names on to the counseling center or to student life or share it with other faculty and thus risk potential disciplinary action due to their identities (Linley and Nguyen). Since normative

controls in faith-based institutions are extensive and often intrusive—for example, LGBTQ+ students may feel policed by faculty or other students—it is important to provide signaling for students so they can identify true allies. (A related challenge for employees is the potential risk associated with being an ally.) Calling attention to National Coming Out Day (October 11) and Transgender Day of Remembrance (November 20—a day to remember all transgender persons who died either at their own hand or because of violence against them) will also let students in an honors college know that that element of their personhood is seen and acknowledged.

Knowing what policies exist on campus with respect to sexual minority students is critical. As faculty, we know or we find out what policies govern our behavior and our likely prospects for tenure and promotion. If the school wants evidence of continuing Christian commitment, we want to know exactly what evidence suffices (e.g., church attendance, community and/or missional service, writing for popular Christian publications). Do we know whether the university's statement of non-discrimination includes the terms "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" in addition to gender, race, and religion? Do we know whether statements about sexual behavior among students on or off campus include specific language about homosexual acts? Do we know whether statements about appropriate dress might apply to transgender or gender non-binary students by making it a violation for a person to wear clothing typically worn by the opposite sex? Do we know if the university has applied for a Title IX exemption for sexual orientation and/or gender identity? Universities typically do not communicate these matters to the faculty, nor do they post it on their web pages. One can locate that information on the Department of Education web page, although the DOE did not report such details during the Trump administration and that page has not yet been updated during the Biden administration (U.S. Department of Education). If this information is hard to find, the campus attorney will know about it because that person is responsible for doing the filing. Another important area is knowing if the university counseling center has a check box for sexual minority students on their intake form and if counselors practice reparative therapy for those students. Several of

the schools named in the REAP 2021 lawsuit have been accused by student plaintiffs of still practicing reparative or conversion therapy; several states have passed laws exempting religious institutions (churches, K–12 schools, and colleges) from a ban on the practice; and several more conservative faith-based schools are now returning to conversion therapy.

Once the honors college community operates as a secure space, it can offer a battery of resources for sexual minority students, especially those who may not have access to such information via their other communities on campus. One resource is creating a list of accepting/affirming churches or religious support groups for sexual minority students through resources such as [gaychurch.org](http://gaychurch.org). On its webpage “Faith Resources for Christians,” PFLAG offers a list of organizations in nearly every faith group that support sexual minority members. Other resources are available through the Reformation Project and CenterPeace. In addition to providing resources online, many of these groups sponsor retreats/conferences that students can attend to find support for the intersection of their identity and their faith. Research has also shown that online communities can sometimes provide LGBTQ+ youth more support than in-person communities, reduce their sense of isolation, and put them in touch with educational and medical resources (Charmaraman).

Assembling a small group of books in the honors college library is another positive step. Several autobiographical works can help students appreciate their own struggles with their sexual identities. Justin Lee’s *Torn* is one of the first books written by a Christian trying to come to grips with his persistent same-sex attraction (2012). Poignant and honest, Lee runs through the gamut of activities like “pray the gay away” to acceptance and the search for community. In *Washed and Waiting*, Wesley Hill details his determination to be celibate after coming to grips with his same-sex attraction (2016). Sally Gary’s two books, *Loves God, Likes Girls* and *Affirming: A Memoir of Faith, Sexuality, and Staying in the Church*, trace her journey to acceptance of her sexual orientation and finally to her belief that she could, as a faithful Christian, marry a same-sex partner.

Several academic books insist that same-sex attraction is neither chosen by the individual nor transient, contrary to popular opinion in many more conservative and some mainline and Roman Catholic churches. While arguing that attraction is not wrong, but practice/behavior is, the authors in this category conclude that sexual minorities must practice celibacy or have a mixed-orientation, heteronormative marriage in order to live as faithful Christian disciples. Robert A. J. Gagnon's *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* provides the most encyclopedic treatment of the topic of same-sex attraction in its historical theological context. Christopher Yuan—ex-gay, Professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute, and author of *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless* and *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel*—offers the perspective of celibacy from someone who is same-sex attracted. Mark Yarhouse, Director of the Sexual and Gender Identity Institute at Wheaton College, offers a sociological analysis of the topic in *Listening to Sexual Minorities: A Study of Faith and Sexual Identity on Christian College Campuses*.

Other academic books advocate for same-sex marriages. Matthew Vines, founder of the Reformation Project, offers in *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* an argument written for a more popular audience. David Gushee, Professor of Ethics at Mercer University and a past president of the American Academy of Religion, makes his case to a more academic audience in *Changing Our Mind*. Finally, Robert Song's *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships* argues for same-sex marriage within a more traditional understanding of marriage as between a man and a woman.

Assembling resources will begin the process of making the invisible visible; it acknowledges the presence of sexual minority students on our campuses and in our honors colleges. But acknowledgment is not inclusion. Acknowledgement only documents a commitment to diversity. Inclusion gives those of diverse backgrounds a voice in policy making and in our classrooms (Chang). One student described creating invisibility for sexual minority students in the negative: "All they had to do was not talk about gay as if it was real. All they had to do was talk about heterosexual families. All they had to do was only address men and women relationships" (Sanders 126). One of

my Hispanic students once told me more directly in the mid-2010s, “Dr. Prill, not only do I not see anyone who looks like me in positions of leadership, I don’t *read* anyone who looks like me in my classes.” Just as our courses and reading lists used to be dominated by dead white men and their ideas until the canon started opening up with the inclusion of women, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), and non-Western voices, today’s courses and reading lists and class discussions too often create a culture of silence by implicitly reinforcing heteronormativity at every turn (Dennis). Beginning with the Stonewall riots in 1969 and the election of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in the United States, and the appointment of a gay Secretary of Transportation and a transgender Secretary of Health and Human Services, the meaning of the term “homosexual” and the place of sexual minority persons in society have become increasingly contested. (Alonso; Ambrosino). Certainly, *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), legalizing gay marriage across all 50 states, and *Bostock v. Clayton County, GA* (2020), prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, have opened up more opportunities, perhaps even created imperatives, for faith-based schools to talk more openly about the changes that have occurred in American society, giving voice and identity to our sexual minority students.

One of the purposes of honors education, according to the National Collegiate Honors Council’s “Definition of Honors Education,” is to “include a distinctive learner-directed environment and philosophy” in a way that is consistent with the mission of the university. Since deans, directors, and faculty of honors colleges generally have more flexibility in determining curricular offerings required inside the college, we are in a pivotal position to reduce the silence around sexual minority issues on our campuses and create more inclusive environments. Most of us will not, admittedly, have the luxury of creating a full-blown curriculum, although DePaul University, the largest Catholic university in the U.S., became the first faith-based school to offer a queer studies program (DeRose). Nonetheless, we can integrate the very best of academic research within a commitment to a Christian worldview, finding spaces inside of existing courses, advising students about contract

or thesis research topics, or creating a course designed to feature this research (Linley and Nguyen). Indiana Wesleyan University has a graduate-level counseling course (cns520) with an LGBTQ+ component, and Seattle Pacific University has a continuing education course (EDCT 5714) entitled “Letters of Equality (LGBTQ Plus).” The often-interdisciplinary nature of honors curricula and use of practices such as honors contracts that create flexibility in course design suggest honors colleges are particularly rich spaces for students to explore issues related to queer studies. Creating courses or topics within courses and encouraging independent student research does not require that either faculty or an institution become affirming of same-sex behavior or same-sex marriage or of transgender identity if those are the doctrinal positions of the university. But if we are serious about the integration of faith and learning, we should welcome the opportunity to open up a conversation that includes our sexual minority students.

In that spirit, based on research by Linley and Nguyen, here are some topics or modules that might be incorporated into our regular curricular offerings. Since almost all faith-based schools have a religion requirement that may or may not include a study of the Bible, these courses provide a natural and easy opportunity for raising contested questions that have an impact on LGBTQ+ students. The American Bible Society estimates that, starting with the first English translation of the Bible by William Tyndale in 1526, there are almost 900 translations and paraphrases of the Bible in English (American Bible Society), although only about 50 have substantial use (Antonio). Students typically get some instruction about how translators wrestle with original languages and the original cultural context in an effort to produce a version both readable to the audience and faithful to the Hebrew and Greek. The apostle Paul uses a neologism in 1 Corinthians (*arsenokoites*). That word now appears as “homosexuals” in most English translations, but that translation first appeared in English in the 1946 Revised Standard Version where it was challenged in committee, with a few members expressing concern that it would be used to persecute gays and lesbians (White; Jordan). In the past 30 years, scholars across the theological spectrum have argued whether Paul is talking only about the rape/

shame culture in existence since before the days of Sodom and the pederasty that was also present in Paul's day or whether Paul intends for consensual same-sex relationships also to be condemned. Arguing for the latter are Robert Gagnon (2001) and William Webb (2009), while James Brownson (2013), David Gushee (2015), Sarah Ruden (2010), Robin Scroggs (1983), and Karen R. Keen (2018) argue that Paul does not condemn consensual relationships. Since almost all students and faculty rely on translations to understand how Christianity should respond to social events as well as to personal matters of salvation, the ambiguities around this term seem like a good conversation for honors students seeking to integrate faith and the best scholarship available to us. This topic could easily be incorporated into an introductory course in religion or a course on the world of the Bible. Likewise, the current debate about the theology of marriage could become a subtopic in several Bible courses (Song; Williams; Wolterstorff). Further scholarship on the issue of the theology of sexuality can be found in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender* (Thatcher).

Biology offers a second avenue for asking questions inside the intersection of faith and learning. The most common understanding of "God created them male and female" would suggest a sexual dimorphism that challenges *prima facie* the notion of sexual minority status. Indeed, until genetic information about men and women became available, most scientists supported a male-female genetic binary (Messer; Johnson). Most Roman Catholics and evangelical and fundamentalist Christians support that binary. Genetics has helped us to see that the male (XY chromosomes) and female (XX chromosomes) provide a typical but incomplete picture of human sex characteristics. Anne Fausto-Sterling has suggested that as many as 2% of births evidence some phenotypic (physical presentation) or genotypic anomaly (true hermaphroditism, Klinefelter Syndrome, Turner Syndrome, and congenital adrenal hyperplasia). While the implications of these anomalies for sexual orientation and gender identity are incomplete (Sax), they do raise questions about how we nuance discussions of assigned sex at birth, one of the major issues in the current public debate about the rights of transgender persons. They also raise ethical questions for parents



and surgeons about whether to assign a sex early in a child's life. A current debate about gender assignment surgery in newborns and adults is taking place (Danker et al.) in the medical community and in the division of bioethics in the National Institutes of Health.

Just as genetics occasions nuance for the expression "male and female" in Genesis, discoveries in zoology invite similar questions for Paul's statement in Romans 1 that homosexuality is "against nature." Historically that phrase has been understood as an affirmation of procreation as the natural end of intercourse, a description of natural "fittedness" between male and female genitalia (Gagnon; Blackford), and the absence of observed homosexual activity in the natural world. While zoology does not address the first two issues, it certainly has weighed in heavily on the last one, with studies over the past two decades documenting the presence of same-sex behavior in most of the phyla in the animal kingdom. (Bagemihl; Kamath et al.). While few scholars make an immediate leap from scientific observation to moral reasoning in favor of homosexuality, those observations have been used in legal arguments challenging the sodomy laws (Owen).

Psychology offers ample opportunities for conversation about issues of concern to sexual minority students. The debate about consensual homosexual relationships does not begin until the mid-to-late nineteenth century (Ulrichs; von Krafft-Ebing) and continues through the Kinsey studies of 1948 and 1953. It was not until 1974 that the American Psychological Association discontinued calling homosexuality a disorder and not until 1987 that it dropped out completely from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (Burton; Drescher). Moreover, debates about the efficacy of reparative or conversion therapy continue today (Lambert; Mallory et al.), especially among more conservative denominations and the universities affiliated with them (Robertson; Rodriguez).

This brief overview of recent scholarship could extend for several more pages. The aforementioned Supreme Court cases along with the appointment of Pete Buttigieg and Rachel Levine and the recent controversies in states seeking to regulate whether or not teens who self-identify as transgender can obtain hormone blockers offer numerous opportunities for discussion in political science.



This politics of sexuality (sodomy laws and HIV/AIDS) extends those opportunities into history. Research on same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples can be introduced into religion, sociology, and social work courses. Literature, including graphic novels (Vernon), music, and the arts provide copious options for introducing students to sexual minority voices.

Co-curricular programming can also provide a rich host of opportunities for breaking the silence. Films such as *The Imitation Game*, about how Alan Turing developed one of the first computers to break the secret code used by the Nazis, would appeal to a wide variety of students across disciplines. The film hints at Turing's sexual orientation throughout before openly declaring it, reminding viewers that Turing's suicide was brought on by his forced sterilization. Likewise, *Rent* and its reimagining of Puccini's *La Boheme* invite questions about intertextuality in literature and the politics of AIDS in the 1980s. *Milk* also explores the politics of AIDS, and the documentary *Pray Away* explores the well-documented problems with conversion/reparative therapy practices, a theme also in the films *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* and *For the Bible Tells Me So*. And *1946: The Mistranslation that Shifted a Culture* traces the history of the Revised Standard Version committee and the decision to use homosexuals as a dynamic equivalent of *arsenokoites*, with the feared consequence of widespread religious persecution of LGBTQ+ persons. Other relevant co-curricular programming might include support for student diversity councils, "Pizza with Profs" meetings with faculty conducting research on relevant topics, and place-based learning opportunities, such as City as Text™, that have LGBTQ+-themed itineraries.

I will close with two stories about my students. In the late 2000s, I took a student to an NCHC national conference in Washington, D.C. He informed me that he was going to attend all the sessions on queer studies and queer theology because he knew he would never hear any of that material discussed on the Lipscomb University campus. Perhaps that was a result of self-censorship on the part of the faculty, uncertain at the time about how openly discussing LGBTQ+ literature and issues would be received by their colleagues and by the administration. Things have changed quite

a bit since that conference. The university has a staff person in the Office of Student Life who is a liaison with sexual minority students; our counseling program has a set of well-trained counselors prepared to assist students with whatever anxiety, stress, depression they are feeling as a result of their sexual orientation/gender identity; and several faculty members make at least some mention of issues raised in the above discussion in courses in Bible/theology, sociology, and psychology. Sexual minority students meet as a group informally off campus, albeit without any formal recognition as yet by the administration.

This past year, another student, John Broadwell, completed a Master of Arts degree in public history at Middle Tennessee State University. His thesis was an oral history of the experiences of sexual minority students at Lipscomb University, his alma mater. He interviewed students from the 1960s to the present to see how the climate might have changed. Not that much as it turns out. Shame, guilt, anxiety, closeting, trauma, even suicide attempts and suicides can all be part of being gay, especially at faith-based schools. Broadwell reminds us that LGBTQ+ students have always been on faith-based campuses and always will be. Consistent with mission statements that affirm a commitment to the development of individuals and to the integration of faith and learning, honors deans and directors at faith-based schools should work diligently and compassionately to ensure that our sexual minority students feel fully a part of the community we are trying to create across the campus and inside our honors colleges.

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# HONORS COLLEGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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Part VI:  
Supporting Students



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# Who Belongs in Honors? Culturally Responsive Advising and Transformative Diversity

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The lack of diversity in university honors programs and colleges across the country is a perennial problem. Long acknowledged as potential sites of transformational education, honors nevertheless all too often lags behind on many measures of diversity. (See Pittman 87–88, 93, 95; Scott 118–19; Jones 36–39; F. Coleman, “Blueprint” 338; Cantrell 22–23; and Cognard-Black and Spisak, “Forging” 82–84, 92, 100.) The key paradox at the heart of honors education is the problem of how to reconcile the inherent exclusivity of honors with an ethos of inclusivity. From Frank Aydelotte’s advocacy for an exclusionary system of honors in the structure of American higher education in the first half of the twentieth century,<sup>1</sup> a philosophy of exclusivity has been at the heart of honors education, and, as a result, access to honors has been so limited

that “Honors students are (metaphorically and often literally) the 1%” (Stoller 9). Furthermore, as Anthony A. Pittman points out, “Since its inception, honors education has been exclusive to White students” due to gatekeeping measures such as IQ and other standardized tests (95). Indeed, the most recent data generated by a 2021 census of U.S. honors colleges indicates that almost 70% of the student population in honors colleges at research or master’s universities identifies as White (Cognard-Black and Smith 46).<sup>2</sup>

Structural barriers to honors admission such as minimum GPA and standardized test scores continue to reinforce inequality and prevent wider access to honors programs. (See Yavneh Klos, “Thinking” 7–8; Badenhausen 9–11; Cognard-Black and Spisak, “Forging” 84, 87, 90–91; Hilton and Jordan 122, 125–28; Radasanu and Barker 45–47, 52, 59–61; Davis 64–65; and Yarrison 14–17; as well as the National Collegiate Honors Council’s recent paper on inclusive enrollment, *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion*, for more detailed discussions of these issues.) Yet admissions is by no means the only area that requires rethinking in order to make honors more inclusive, especially if transformative diversity, not just structural diversity, is the goal.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, honors programs and colleges must not attend solely to the recruitment of a diverse student body; they must also nurture and support students once they enter the honors environment. A sense of belonging and access to support services are significant factors in helping honors students, and especially students from backgrounds that are historically underrepresented in honors, to persist through graduation. Holistic academic advising and related programming must play a central role in any honors program or college with a true commitment to inclusivity because advising work is the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion; although to be fair, honors colleges have some advantages over honors programs in enacting change in this area because of increased levels of autonomy, the advantages of scale, and access to greater financial resources. This essay brings together the too-often disparate threads of advising, honors, and diversity to advocate for a practice of culturally responsive advising within the honors environment in order to pursue truly transformative diversity.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

During the past three decades, researchers and advisors have produced a rich body of scholarship that engages with the importance of advising in honors. Literature that focuses on strategies for advising honors students has been published by NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising and by the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) (sometimes in collaboration with one another), although more work in this area is needed because, as Samuel Schuman notes:

honors students can be expected to have at least as many, and as complicated, problems as other students. . . . In fact, because their academic expectations and goals are oftentimes higher than those of their non-honors peers, honors students will sometimes have more academic and personal counseling needs than other students. (63)

According to those who have studied the advising of honors students and those who have directly advised this population, honors students frequently display positive attributes, such as high levels of ambition, campus involvement, academic drive, creativity, and multipotentiality, as well as qualities that have the potential to be barriers to success, such as perfectionism, fear of failure, anxiety, a tendency to overextend by focusing on breadth of experiences rather than depth, and a propensity to follow directions, all of which can foreclose creativity and productive risk-taking. (For academic studies on advising high-achieving students, see Gerrity et al. 50–51; Huggett 77–78; Clark et al. 24–26; Johnson et al. 106, 114–16, 120; Cuevas et al. 80–82; and Cognard-Black and Spisak, “Creating” 149. For discussions of advising honors students, see Klein; Digby; Schwartz, “Advising” and “Matching”; and Hanna 33). As Cuevas et al. note in their study of honors student thriving, appreciative advising is a high-impact practice that has the potential to positively influence many aspects of an honors student’s life (104), while Johnson et al.’s study similarly concludes that “specialized academic advising for honors students is an important component of maximizing their potential as well as addressing myriad needs

of this population” (106). Given the specific characteristics and needs of honors students, the NCHC states that dedicated advising for honors students should be one of the defining features of honors programs and colleges (“Shared Principles”). According to the 2021 honors college census, approximately 83% of U.S. honors programs and colleges offer dedicated honors advising, with 100% of universities with a Research 1 Carnegie classification reporting they have dedicated advising services available for honors students (Cognard-Black and Smith 64).

Academic studies carried out by researchers and articles penned by practicing advisors also note that advising and mentoring are crucial to supporting students of color, although Eric G. Carnaje notes that additional research in this area is urgently needed (39). The literature emphasizes that advising and mentoring play important roles in the support and retention of Latinx, Native American, Asian American, and Black students in higher education, especially at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), because careful advising on academic as well as co-curricular, preprofessional, and personal matters contributes to students’ sense of belonging, as well as their development of self-confidence and purpose. (See Hernandez 580–83; Jackson et al. 548–49, 554, 562–63; Escobedo 14, 16–17; Museus and Ravello 47–48, 55–56; Harding, “Advising”; Carnaje 38–39, 44; Gilbert; Harrell; and Lee 77, 82–84.) In their study of the academic advising strategies that contribute to the success of underrepresented students at PWIs, Museus and Ravello conclude that “incorporating a human element into advising, providing holistic academic advising, and practicing proactive advising” are the key elements that advisors can use to “communicate that they are interested and invested in the success of their racial and ethnic minority students” (56). Further, Jasmine A. Lee urges that advisors apply Critical Race Theory to their advisement of students of color (particularly Black students at PWIs): “Engagement through affirmation, support, and advocacy establishes safe physical and emotional spaces to encourage student development in a holistic fashion while acknowledging the varied experiences with structural oppression for students matriculating through college” (84).

A number of studies additionally point to the need for better attention to diversity within honors. To put it bluntly, honors has a diversity problem. As Anthony A. Pittman explains in *Whited Out*, a study of Black students' experiences with honors at a northeastern PWI, honors programs are perceived as "elite institutions that are reserved for academically inclined, mainstream White students" (96), and that "little has changed to counteract the elitism and exclusivity that is associated with these types of programs" (93). Honors' systemic exclusion of Black students extends both to Black men and Black women, as discussed, respectively, by Stephen C. Scott (118–19) and A. Musu Davis (47–48),<sup>4</sup> while Aramburo and Bhavsar call attention to the need for better support for undocumented honors students (49–50). Richard Badenhausen enumerates the many institutional factors, "from our admissions procedures to pedagogical methods to allocation of financial support," that alienate students of color from "honors success scripts" (9–10). Betsy Greenleaf Yarrison identifies the unfortunate reality: "Honors programs seek diversity, but in truth . . . practice assimilation" (15), and that the exclusion of students of color from honors spaces—resulting in students of color seeing themselves as "strangers in a strange land" (16)—is caused, in part, by admissions practices that rely on GPA and standardized test scores (14, 16). NCHC's 2020 paper on honors enrollment management also reminds us that honors admissions practices that rely on ACT/SAT scores and high school GPAs create inequitable access to honors programs because cognitive measures like standardized test scores tell us more about students' socioeconomic status and access to resources than their aptitude (*Honors* 7). Radasanu and Barker confirmed these findings regarding standardized tests in their 2021 study, which showed that standardized test scores "can act as barriers to college admissions and honors programs, particularly for students in underserved communities" (45). The overwhelming, system-wide tendency toward Whiteness in honors becomes apparent not only when we look at data on race and ethnicity for honors students, but also when we examine such data relating to the administrators leading honors programs, a topic taken up by Pereira et al. in

this monograph. According to the 2021 honors college census data, nearly 90% of heads of honors colleges and programs in the U.S. identify as White and non-Hispanic, while nearly 83% of the administrators who function as second-in-command of honors colleges and programs identify as White and non-Hispanic (Cognard-Black and Smith 66–67). Clearly, as Reddick et al. observe: “Predominantly White institutions are still plagued with the consequences of structural and historical barriers to inclusion and equity” (102).

While some studies that have called for increased diversity in honors point to advising as one of the strategies that can be employed to support students of color, first-generation students, low-income students, and other underrepresented student populations, few have focused on advising itself as a specific site of transformation. Pittman’s *Whited Out* provides numerous examples of the adverse effects of the lack of high-quality academic advising for Black honors students. The glaring absence of structural supports for Black students in the honors program with a “predominantly White framework” featured in Pittman’s study was exacerbated by “miscommunication about program requirements”; such administrative and systemic failures contributed significantly to several Black students’ lack of success in the program (21). For instance, one of the students Pittman interviewed who was ultimately not successful in continuing in the honors program stated that if students decide to join honors, “they need to find out all the facts . . . make sure you know the gpa, make sure you know deadlines, make sure you know the requirements, because no one is going to tell you . . . at least they didn’t tell me” (75). The same student told Pittman: “A lot of the information I needed to know I found out from reading on my own” (13), but this proactive fact-finding didn’t prevent her from being abruptly dismissed from the program due to a low GPA, a consequence that contrasted with what she had been told would happen by one of the honors program staff members whom she liked and trusted (13–14). Rather than being placed on academic probation, as the student expected she would be (which is what would have happened to non-honors students at the university with low GPAs), she was instead immediately expelled from

the honors program (14). Another student, who remained in the honors program, pointed to “Poor advisement” as a notable problem with the program (114). Finally, another student who chose to remain in the honors program pointed to her positive relationship with her faculty advisor, who showed “some level of concern about what I was going through as a student,” as the only reason that she “got involved with this honors business” (151–52). The student also acknowledged that her positive experience with her honors advisor was likely a fluke: she noted that “he’s different from a lot of the honors professors that I have had contact with since getting involved with honors” (149). Although Pittman’s study makes it abundantly clear that poor advising has catastrophic consequences for Black honors students, while strong advising contributes to their success in honors, poor academic advisement is only one of the many structural failures within honors harmful to Black students that his study brings to light.

Two important monographs on honors and diversity, *Setting the Table for Diversity* (2010) and *Occupy Honors Education* (2017), also bring much-needed attention to the myriad ways in which American honors education is exclusionary, particularly toward students of color, and (as the first words of each of their titles imply) both essay collections offer suggestions for actions that can be taken in order to make honors a space of inclusive excellence. Advising is mentioned in passing by some of the contributors to both volumes, but none of these chapters make advising their focus. In her contribution to *Setting the Table for Diversity*, Lisa Brockenbrough Sanon-Jules calls attention to the needs of first-generation African American students in honors and advocates “increasing counseling and advisement services for all honors students, including first-generation and minority honors program students” (107): “Programs that incorporate structured formal mentoring and increased counseling services may help students become acclimated to the college environment” (108). Similarly, in his chapter on supporting Latinx honors students at an institution in Texas, honors advisor Michael R. DeLeon argues that “honors education requires specialized advising by uniquely qualified staff and professors,” particularly to

serve underrepresented students in honors (69). In the same volume, Esther Materón-Arum's chapter on African American men in honors urges honors programs to admit students who may not meet all their admissions criteria and then to offer the advising support and academic guidance necessary to nurture and sustain those students through the program (94).

Advising and mentoring are also briefly mentioned by several contributors to *Occupy Honors Education*. In one of the opening essays, Aaron Stoller asserts that establishing "meaningful relationships" in higher education involves "going beyond advising students or administrating courses and toward developing authentic mentoring relationships among students, faculty, and staff, as well as creating environments and cultures where relationships can be fostered in meaningful ways" (25). Likewise, the chapter by Dziesinski et al., which confronts the language of privilege surrounding honors by reframing the honors space as a site for social justice, describes the specific advising strategies that their Michigan honors program uses to support underrepresented students:

Although the honors program staff tries to develop personal relationships with all of our students, we are more intentional with students from underrepresented groups including students of color, first-generation college students, international students, students with disabilities, and others who have been identified as being at greater educational risk. (88)

Although Dziesinski et al. identify a few of their strategies for carrying out inclusive, equitable advising work, their discussion of advising is limited to a single paragraph in the chapter.

Despite these important interventions, the literature on advising, honors, and diversity has still not fully explored the vital role that advising plays in welcoming underrepresented students and fostering their sense of belonging and potential for success within the honors environment. This gap in the literature can be confirmed by examining Hilton and Jordan's 2021 study of the recruitment and retention of a diverse student population within honors, which undertakes a comprehensive literature review of 66 manuscripts

concerning diversity in honors published over the past twenty years. Although in their analysis, Hilton and Jordan note that mentoring relationships (both faculty-to-student and peer-to-peer) are an important part of community-building for underrepresented students (123), in their list of the six themes that can contribute to promoting diversity in honors—“program-level improvements (including curriculum and co-curriculum), inclusive community building, course-level improvements, holistic admissions, recruitment practices, and study abroad/cultural immersion experiences” (122)—advising was not highlighted as a specific area of focus. Thus, my aim in this essay is to begin to fill this gap in the existing research by focusing specifically on advising as a practice that contributes to diversity, equity, and inclusion within honors colleges and programs.

### **ADVISING WORK IS THE WORK OF DIVERSITY**

For advising to meaningfully support a diverse student population in the honors environment, it must be culturally responsive. Many different advising theories and models have been developed over the past five decades, and Jasmine A. Lee reminds us that not all advising methods or advisors are supportive of students of color: “When advisors, particularly White advisors, bring little knowledge, experience, or desire to advising interactions, they cannot understand the way racialized experiences may impact Black students or develop helpful relationships with all of their students” (79). Furthermore, when advising services are offered in a “Panopticon”-like setting in which student-advisor interactions are treated in an assembly-line fashion and closely monitored for adherence to time and subject matter constraints, Black students are likely to feel alienated from their advisors and the advising process, particularly in the context of PWIs with mostly White advisors (Mitchell et al. 295, 297, 301–302; Lee 79). As Mitchell et al. argue, such prescriptive advising approaches are less effective for advising Black students than holistic developmental and intrusive/proactive advising approaches that allow for “the types of relationships” between advisor and advisee “that lend themselves to culturally responsive educational service”



(299–303, 305). Mitchell et al. suggest that a culturally responsive approach to advising is informed by a “critical understanding of race and space in the history of schooling in the U.S.” and is built on trusting, authentic relationships between advisors and the students with whom they work (305). Although, as Lee cautions, advisors operate from a privileged institutional position and thus may contribute to the “perpetuation of racialized oppression” as members of the group that “makes, defines, enforces, and defends the rules” (80), I would add that trusting and authentic relationships between advisor and advisee—relationships that can only be built through culturally responsive advising—help to guard against this danger.

While known by a number of different names—such as “culturally sensitive advising” (Carnaje; Pittman 138), “culturally relevant” advising (Pittman 138; Lee 77), practicing “equity-mindedness” in one’s interactions with students (Bensimon 446), or advising with “multicultural awareness” (Cunningham), “multicultural competence” (Carlstrom), or “cultural competence” (Harding, “Advising”; Harrell)—culturally responsive advising involves at its essence the advisor’s awareness and acknowledgment that students’ academic lives are shaped by their identities, families, cultures, and lived experiences (Carnaje 41), and that the advisor does not actually enter the advising interaction as the “expert.”<sup>5</sup> Rather, the advisee is the expert on their own situation—their identities, goals, interests, concerns, and challenges—and the advisor is in the position of learning who the student is. In order to foster this dynamic (which most certainly inverts the expected roles of advisor as expert/teacher, and the advisee as student who must be taught), the advisor must, above all else, engage the advisee with respect, which is, according to Blane Harding, the most important element of culturally competent advising (“Expanding” 00:29:28–00:30:03). Culturally responsive advising requires humility on the part of the advisor—a recognition that the advisor must always learn who the student is, who they want to become, and what barriers they may be encountering along the way—before they are able to bring their institutional knowledge to bear on the advising interaction. Culturally responsive advising calls upon advisors to ask questions, not to make assumptions (Schwartz,



“Advising”), and to be aware not only that identity is complex and influenced by multiple intersecting positionalities and identities (Carlstrom; Cunningham), but also that we are all “cultural beings” (Carlstrom) whose values and backgrounds shape our world-views and, unfortunately, implicit biases (Harding, “Expanding” 00:35:18–00:35:45). Ford and Harris argue that college counselors must be trained in working with high-achieving students of color (449), and Pittman (153–67) and Gilbert both note that understanding the stages in the identity development of Black students is helpful when laying the groundwork for practicing what Pittman calls “culturally sensitive intervention mechanisms” (138).<sup>6</sup> Mitchell and Rosiek concur that “knowledge of cultural discourses” (101) and “practical knowledge of cultural difference” are key to culturally responsive advising (103). As previously stated, an authentic and trusting advising relationship—what Carnaje calls a “rapport” (42)—between advisor and advisee is needed in order for culturally responsive advising to take place because advisors cannot expect students to share their weaknesses, insecurities, and plans for the future (including their questions and concerns about undergraduate research and the thesis or capstone project) if the advisor has not earned the student’s trust by being a reliable source of information regarding day-to-day academic questions and concerns.

A number of discussions of advising in honors assume that faculty members affiliated with honors (and in some cases, even the heads of honors themselves) provide advising and mentoring for honors students (Schuman 62; Cuevas et al. 104; Haynes 21–22; and Ticknor et al. 70), while others acknowledge that professional advisors as well as faculty advisors may provide honors advising and mentorship (Spurrier 71–72, 74; Hause 155, 157; Clark et al. 27). As previously mentioned, 2021 census data reveal that approximately 83% of the U.S. honors programs and colleges surveyed offer honors advising from dedicated honors staff members, although the survey did not specify whether these staff members are professional or faculty advisors, or some combination of the two (Cognard-Black and Smith 64). NCHC’s new “Shared Principles and Practices” indicate that “honors students receive honors-related academic advising

from qualified faculty and/or professional staff” and emphasize the importance of moving away from transactional advising to more culturally responsive approaches: “Advisors are trained in and employ inclusive-based advising strategies so that rather than serving as mere sources of information they can provide student-centered growth opportunities to a diverse body of students” (7).

Although there can be no question that professional advisors are well-positioned to provide strong, effective, culturally responsive honors advising—provided they are not expected to advise in the panoptic, factory-like setting described by Mitchell et al.—faculty advisors are also well-situated to provide effective culturally responsive advising to their honors students. While, as Robert Spurrier points out, “the trend over the years has been toward professional staff advisors” and thus away from faculty advisors (72), faculty advising is still vitally important to honors colleges and programs, especially those that are modeled on small liberal arts colleges (SLACs).<sup>7</sup> (To clarify, I am distinguishing between faculty academic advising—which is typically more formally structured, and which is equipped to address curricular and programmatic questions as well as more developmental issues—and faculty mentoring, which may be somewhat less formal and less structured in nature.)<sup>8</sup> In general, as Kuh and Hu confirm, “for most students most of the time, the more interaction with faculty the better” (329).<sup>9</sup> “Out-of-class contact,” they write, “appear[s] to positively shape students’ perceptions of the campus environment” (329). Similarly, Gary L. Kramer notes that the overall student experience—including students’ “satisfaction with faculty, the quality of instruction, and in attending college altogether”—is enhanced by faculty-student relationships (18–19). Importantly, in a study of the factors that influence students’ recruitment and persistence in an honors program at a midwestern university, Nichols and Chang found that “connections to honors faculty” scored as one of the top factors that contributed to student persistence (123). In addition, Lundberg and Schreiner’s study on faculty-student interactions found that “frequent and high quality” interactions between faculty members and students of color lead to better learning outcomes for those students (563–64). Indeed,

Museus and Ravello's work supports previous studies' findings on the positive impact of faculty interactions with students of color; such studies "indicate that faculty members who are warm to, provide holistic support for, and go above and beyond their normal duties to serve racial and ethnic minority students can have a positive impact on their college experience" (48).

Given the benefits of close contact with faculty, it is little wonder that students value the opportunity to interact with faculty members outside of the classroom; however, without a formal faculty advising framework, these connections may not happen for every student. While informal mentorship and even formal collaborations on research opportunities are certainly two pathways to faculty-student interaction, the reality is that each faculty member can extend these kinds of special one-to-one collaborations to only a small handful of undergraduate students at any given time—not to mention that those students who have the social capital or confidence to approach a faculty member outside of the classroom space are also more likely to benefit from these spontaneously occurring mentoring relationships than their less confident and more introverted peers. When faculty members take on an academic advising role with a formal caseload of advisees, however, they can meet more students for conversations that may begin with what might seem like transactional academic advising interactions but that eventually build toward trusting, authentic mentoring relationships. By creating advising structures that allow all students to build a relationship outside of the classroom with at least one faculty member from whom no grades or similar assessments are likely to be at stake, we can ensure that no student is denied the opportunity of developing a trusting relationship with a faculty member who is perceived by the student as a confidante and advocate. The importance of such relationships for students cannot be overstated. According to Shannon R. Dean's discussion of the literature on faculty-student interactions, "Meaningful interactions between faculty and students promote a sense of connection. This increased type of interaction, particularly outside of the formal classroom, decreases student attrition and increases persistence

until graduation” (108). If students lack the confidence to introduce themselves to a faculty member (which may all too often be the case for students who are historically underrepresented in honors), the advising relationship (especially if the faculty advisor engages in the outreach associated with proactive advising) gives the students the opportunity—even the excuse—to engage with a faculty member whom they may otherwise not have had the courage, or a perceived reason, to approach.<sup>10</sup> Faculty advising provides a formal framework for faculty-student interactions that dismantles the barriers to those interactions.<sup>11</sup>

While the question of whether faculty members or professional advisors (or perhaps some combination of the two) are best suited to advise honors students is not explicitly addressed in the extant literature, the scholarship related to advising and diversity is clear on the need to diversify faculty and staff who work in the honors environment, including those who advise students. Hilton and Jordan invoke several studies that “point to the need for faculty and staff within honors programs who are diverse themselves and appropriately trained in diversity issues” (123). As Schuman argues, “If an honors program offers itself as the institution’s best, it needs to pay careful attention to the racial, ethnic, class, and geographic demographics of its student body and its faculty and staff” (24). Mitchell and Rosiek argue that “advisors who share the cultural positionality of their students are often better able to serve these students” (106), although they also affirm that the knowledge of different cultural discourses that enables culturally responsive advising “can be, at least in part, acquired by persons who are not members of the marginalized communities” (96) as long as they “are willing to work hard, listen, and question their own taken-for-granted worldviews” (106). An interesting point of contention, however, with regards to the qualifications for honors advisors (and other honors staff members) also has implications for diversifying honors faculty and staff. In *Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook*, Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurrier discuss the qualifications for honors advisors and offer this recommendation: “Honors College personnel who provide Honors academic

advising shall have earned an undergraduate Honors Program or Honors College Degree” (45). Esther Materón-Arum provides a powerful counterargument to this recommendation, as she posits that putting such restrictions on the population from which honors staff members can be hired excludes people of color and others who have been historically marginalized in honors: “**Hire minorities.** I have noticed that honors programs often hire people who have graduated from honors programs. . . . In my estimation, this practice makes honors insular and prejudicial” (94). Although discussing advising more generally (that is, not in the context of honors), Cornelius Gilbert also cautions: “Higher education needs to be concerned with the fact that most student personnel workers, and faculty members, do not resemble minority students.” Honors programs and colleges should lead the way in diversifying their personnel, including advisors, while also giving all faculty and professional advisors the professional development opportunities that they need to conduct culturally responsive advising. Honors colleges, in particular, typically have the autonomy, resources, and student-centered culture necessary for making progress in this area.

### **ADVISING WORK IS THE WORK OF EQUITY**

Advising work also furthers the work of equity in honors because culturally responsive advisors are well positioned to help students to continue seeing themselves in honors, even when they struggle academically, and to advocate for these students at the institutional level. This support is especially crucial for students whose identities are historically underrepresented in honors and who thus already encounter structural barriers to feeling a sense of belonging in the honors space. As Lee reminds us, the extant research demonstrates that advocacy is an important part of the work that advisors do, particularly if they wish to support students of color:

[A]dvisors who are focused on equitable college campuses for students, identify institutional, communal, or policy

factors hindering academic or social engagement; collaborate with stakeholders and cross-campus community partners to develop a vision for guiding change in established advising practices, the curriculum, the department, and the institution; and help students gain access and maintain the availability of needed resources. (83)

An especially important area in which honors advisors can advocate for their students is with regards to academic standing processes and procedures, given that many honors programs and colleges have minimum GPA requirements. As previously mentioned, one of the students in Pittman's study was dismissed from her honors program when her GPA fell, an expulsion that was not preceded by any of the academic probation notifications or offers of institutional support that she quite reasonably expected to receive. Without being given the opportunity to consult with an advisor about how to improve her academic performance, as well as the time and resources needed to make those improvements, the student was prematurely dismissed from an honors program in which she might have flourished. Unsurprisingly, the student did not feel compelled to approach an honors administrator to redress the situation: "Considering all the stuff I went through with this program and to be treated unfairly like that, that was enough for me to just let it all go" (Pittman 14). As a result, the student lost the opportunity to receive an honors education, and the honors program lost the opportunity to support a promising student.

These are undoubtedly the situations that Materón-Arum has in mind when she urges, "**Do not drop minority students from the program after their first slip.** Schedule an appointment with them to explore why the grades slipped. Perhaps they only need to learn about and practice strategies for success to raise their grade point averages. Give them a second chance" (95). NCHC's paper on inclusive enrollment management goes even further by asking honors programs and colleges to consider whether minimum GPAs for continued honors enrollment should be required in the first place (*Honors* 14). The paper also calls into question the practice of putting students on academic probation when their GPAs slip

(*Honors 14*). While I am in complete agreement with the authors of the NCHC paper that questioning the entire concept of a minimum GPA for continued honors enrollment is worthwhile, I argue that if an honors program chooses to enforce a minimum GPA, a system of academic probation with realistic time horizons for academic improvement must be implemented so students do not find themselves in the situation of the student in Pittman's study, a point reinforced by NCHC's "Shared Principles and Practices." An equitable academic standing process—one that is transparent and forgiving, and in which culturally responsive academic advisors play a vital role—is needed if an honors program requires a minimum GPA for continued participation.

In order to implement an equitable academic probation process, an honors college must ensure that the process minimizes harm as much as possible, especially for student populations that may already feel vulnerable and unwelcome within honors and higher education, more broadly. As many honors educators and advisors are aware, an honors student's first B grade can be devastating (Schwartz, "Advising"; Gerrity et al. 44), and a C grade, to say nothing of a failing grade, can seem like the end of the world to a high-achieving student. Honors students are not immune to the academic challenges that non-honors students encounter, but their situation is complicated by how their expectations for themselves are often much higher (Schuman 63), and their self-identities are often tied to academic success, which can all too often be destructive to honors students' mental health and overall well-being. Therefore, honors advisors must play a central role in the communications and culturally responsive advising practices surrounding the academic standing process.

I offer the following practices to guide the implementation of an equitable and constructive academic standing process for honors students in which honors advisors play an integral role:

- Consider not putting students on academic probation after their very first term at your institution and/or in your honors program because this is a time when many factors can be influencing a student's adjustment to their new academic

environment. Instead, send a supportive message that normalizes academic challenges, which is especially important messaging for high-achieving students, to students whose first term/semester GPA did not meet the minimum required GPA. Invite them to meet with an honors advisor to discuss support resources.

- Letters that notify students about their academic status, such as academic warning or probation letters, should likewise be supportive in tone, should clearly explain how the academic warning or probation process works, and should avoid charged language emphasizing punitive measures like “expulsion.” Students should be given at least a full year, if not longer, to recover their GPA before disqualification from the honors program or college even becomes a possibility. Some students may require two years or more to bring their GPA back up to the required level, and if they are showing even slight improvement along the way, they should be empowered to continue in honors.
- Academic standing letters should require that the student meet with an honors advisor before registration opens for the next term/semester. Think carefully, however, about whether that advising meeting “requirement” should be a true requirement. Will there be some sort of consequence such as a registration hold placed on the student’s account for not meeting with their advisor? Or is a strong recommendation with no registration holds or other consequences if a student is unable to make it to the advising meeting sufficient? Remember that consequences such as placing registration holds can be perceived as punitive, and, if not mindfully applied, they also have the potential to erect further barriers to the student’s persistence and success.
- Consider asking students to complete a self-reflection exercise of some kind prior to their academic standing advising meeting; for instance, students might complete a short questionnaire that asks them to reflect on a myriad of academic



and non-academic factors that may be impacting their lives as students. Sanon-Jules's point that first-generation African American students "face conflicting obligations of school, work, and family" (103) can also be applied to students of color more generally (DeLeon 69), so it is important for culturally responsive honors practitioners to signal through the implementation of the academic standing process that they are aware and respectful of the many non-academic variables that influence a student's academic performance.<sup>12</sup>

- In the academic standing meeting itself, the advisor should normalize academic challenges and listen carefully to, and learn from, the student's own assessment of the factors that caused them to struggle, so the advisor will be able to connect the student with the campus and community resources that are most helpful and relevant to them.<sup>13</sup> A question that Melissa Mokel recommends asking during all advising meetings can be especially helpful during advising meetings regarding academic standing: "Is there anything I should know about you that would prevent successful completion of the program?"
- Rarely, if ever, disqualify a student from an honors program or college. If a disqualification decision must be considered, apply an ethic of care to the decision-making process.<sup>14</sup> Each disqualification decision should be made on a case-by-case basis, taking each student's individual circumstances into account. Consider at what point it may be more harmful for the student to remain in honors than to be disqualified. For instance, if it is not likely that the student can recover their GPA and thus receive their honors degree in a reasonable timeframe, is it fair to allow them to continue in honors with unrealistic expectations about what is possible? Consulting the student's honors and major advisors is also crucial to making sure that the impacts on a student's academic record if they are disqualified from the program/college are fully understood. (For instance, can students still finish their degree on time if they are disqualified from honors?) The

honors advisor often has important information about the student's circumstances that could constitute grounds for the student to submit a GPA requirement exception petition to the honors program/college.

- If a student is disqualified, which should be a rare occurrence if the previous suggestions have been adopted, a path to return to honors should be offered if the student is able to demonstrate improvement.

If an academic standing process of this kind had been implemented in the case of Pittman's abruptly expelled interviewee, this period of academic challenge might have been just a small blip on an ultimately successful honors transcript; instead, it became a defining moment and potentially traumatic experience in her academic journey.

Finally, the honors environment has the potential to become more equitable when honors advisors (professional as well as faculty) have a meaningful voice in the shared governance—including on curricular and academic policy matters—of an honors college or program. At Westminster University, for example, the Honors Council that governs the honors college reserves a committee position for a representative of the professional advising staff. After all, advisors are typically the first to notice if a well-meaning policy creates an unintended barrier or if a new curriculum does not actually work from an academic planning standpoint. This is yet another reason why it is helpful for faculty members to serve as advisors whenever possible; when faculty members can observe up close the impacts that curricular and policy decisions have on students' day-to-day lives and academic paths, they are enabled to design more equitable curricula and policies with culturally responsive principles in mind.

### **ADVISING WORK IS THE WORK OF INCLUSION**

While the one-on-one advising that culturally responsive advisors provide is critically important, the programming they build is also crucial for creating a strong, inclusive honors community.

According to Cuevas et al., “In all thriving studies, a psychological sense of community (PSC) makes the greatest contribution to thriving levels of college students” (85); Yavneh Klos concurs: “Authentically welcoming students and listening to their stories can create the ‘sense of belonging’ that we know has a profound impact on whether students persist in or graduate from either honors or its institution” (“Congregational” 12). Young et al.’s study found that connectedness and community are key pieces of the student experience in honors that contribute to retention (182–86). Furthermore, in the literature they review in their meta-study, Hilton and Jordan identify “inclusive community building” as a significant strategy for the “recruitment and retention of diverse students into honors programs” (122). Culturally responsive advisors must therefore prioritize creating opportunities for honors students to connect not only with their advisors but also with their honors student peers. Such community building must begin in the first year in the honors college or program and continue through to graduation.

First-year programs play an important role in students’ adjustment to the honors and university environments, particularly for students of color. Citing research on the importance of high-impact first-year experiences, Harrell suggests that such programming can have a positive effect on African American students. In their review of the relevant literature, Clark et al. report: “First-year seminars and summer bridge, peer mentor, and supportive health and mental health programs have been associated with positive adjustment and college success” (21). Sanon-Jules concurs: “Peer mentoring programs are particularly useful for first-year college students,” including first-generation and African American honors students (107), and Materón-Arum (94) and Hilton and Jordan (123) suggest that peer-to-peer relationships are vital to supporting and retaining underrepresented students. As such, first-year experiences for honors students that are designed with inclusion and belonging in mind should include peer mentoring programs that connect new students with each other as well as with more advanced honors students. The Clark Honors College’s (CHC) first-year program, designed by the CHC’s Director of First-Year Experience, Angela

Rovak, strives not only to ease the transition of first-year students into the honors and university environments and to establish a strong peer-to-peer network through the CHC's peer mentoring program, but also to introduce service and a social justice ethos into freshman programming. As Yavneh Klos asserts, "we need to address how honors education can promote justice institutionally" ("Thinking" 6), while Hilton and Jordan (122, 124) and Scott (111, 123–25) identify social justice and service as important drivers of underrepresented students' engagement in honors. Support for the transition to college, peer-to-peer networking, and service and social justice work can all potentially be woven into the first-year experience for honors students and meaningfully contribute to a sense of belonging for students who have historically been excluded from honors.<sup>15</sup>

Particularly at PWIs, however, first-year peer mentoring programs will likely not be sufficient on their own to ensure that underrepresented students are able to connect with honors peers, as well as with faculty and staff members who share their identities. To facilitate such connections, Pittman proposes employing Gandara's practice of "cocooning"—that is, creating communities of students with shared identities that are advised by faculty or staff members who also share those identities—in the honors environment as a strategy for combating the marginalization of students of color at PWIs (198). Students in such identity-based groups may also be better-positioned to serve as student leaders in honors than they might in a more centralized honors student government association. Several of the students whom Pittman interviewed for his study noted that their honors program was full of "cliques" or was "cliquey" (16, 104, 113, 209) and that the program's honors council, which was the student government organization within honors, was particularly plagued by this problem (112–13) while almost entirely comprising White students (126). The tendency that Pittman noticed in his institution's honors council was consistent with DeLeon's assertion that student honors councils frequently lack heterogeneity and thus "often fail to act as agents of change for diversity" (70). (See also Antonio et al. 507.) Decentering the

structure of honors student leadership from a single homogeneous entity into different identity- and affinity-based groups may enable students from diverse backgrounds not only to provide peer-based support for one another, but also to contribute more meaningfully to student leadership in honors and to serve in an advisory capacity to the program's deans and directors.

In creating inclusive programming for honors students, we must also remember that culturally responsive advisors can help students keep in view the relevancy of the honors curriculum, especially if it is a liberal arts curriculum, to their future career paths. Failure to address the question of curricular relevancy is elitist and does not address the concerns of students for whom the additional costs and curricular requirements associated with an honors education might not seem to be applicable to their future job search or career pathways. Further, contrary to an earlier study's findings that career concerns were not relevant to honors students,<sup>16</sup> Ticknor et al. discovered that it is, in fact, "critical to stress that honors experiences are relevant and add value to career preparation when seeking to recruit students of color into honors programming" (84–85). In their study of students of color who were eligible for honors at their institution but chose not to participate in it, they found that study participants "seemed keenly invested in their future careers and were attracted to experiences that could help them move forward toward possible future selves engaged in these careers" but that honors did not appear to be an environment that spoke to those students' concerns (Ticknor et al. 82–83). In recognition of honors students' concerns about the relevance of the honors curriculum to their future careers, the Clark Honors College's Second-Year Advisor, Dulce Castro, is developing career-readiness initiatives and programming that will integrate preprofessional preparation into the second-year student experience in the college and help students better articulate the transferrable skills they have gained from the honors curriculum. As Hause puts it, "By appeal to vocation, advisors ensure that discussion of the student's life goals is not haphazard but focuses on helping the student articulate her identity and grow further into it" (160). Because the extant literature supports the benefits of alumni

mentoring programs for the retention of students of color in honors (Jengelly and Ware 159), Castro is also collaborating with Elin England, the CHC's Director of Alumni and Community Engagement, to investigate how alumni mentoring opportunities can be incorporated into the college's career-related programming.

## CONCLUSION

Because advising is connected to so many facets of student success in the honors environment, diversity, equity, and inclusion must be a fundamental part of honors advising practice in order for honors to become a place of inclusive excellence. Opportunities and programming for honors students, however, must not simply engage with diversity, equity, and inclusion in a superficial way—characterized solely by what Finnie D. Coleman terms “transactional” diversity (“Blueprint” 322–23)<sup>17</sup>—but rather must be conceptualized through the lens of “transformative” diversity, which “appreciate[s] the manifold differences that set us apart” and “earnestly celebrate[s] the remarkable variety of traits, characteristics, beliefs, and values that bring us together” (324).<sup>18</sup> In order for culturally responsive advising to contribute to the transformative diversity that will ultimately overcome the elitism and racism inherent in the obsolete, exclusive model for honors education and open the honors environment to all who are eager to learn, honors advisors must be committed to learning from, and being transformed by, their students.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Aydelotte's philosophy of honors, as represented by his faculty colleagues at Swarthmore College, states in no uncertain terms that “the honors method . . . is not meant for all” (Swarthmore College 17).

<sup>2</sup>The census data on the average racial composition of U.S. honors colleges excludes data about student race from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). See Andrew J. Cognard-Black and Patricia J. Smith's “Characteristics of the 21st-Century Honors College” in this collection for more context surrounding census data.

<sup>3</sup>“Structural diversity” refers to the numbers of various student populations on a given campus, while “transformative diversity” suggests a vision for diversity that fundamentally transforms the university itself as every member of the community is welcomed and valued (Hurtado et al. 19, 55; F. Coleman, “Problem” 245–46; F. Coleman, “Blueprint” 320, 324).

<sup>4</sup>When I say that U.S. honors programs and colleges systemically exclude Black students, I am not referring to the honors programs and colleges affiliated with historically Black colleges and universities; the 2021 honors college census notes that at the two HBCUs that reported data for the study, an average of 97.3% of honors students identify as Black (Cognard-Black and Smith 46).

<sup>5</sup>I prefer to use the term “culturally responsive advising” throughout this essay because there is action (responsiveness), not just awareness (which doesn’t necessarily imply action), built into the method’s name.

<sup>6</sup>Pittman and Gilbert both discuss William Cross’s theory of Black identity development as a framework for teaching and advising Black students who may be at different identity development stages.

<sup>7</sup>In the interest of transparency, my institution (the Robert D. Clark Honors College at the University of Oregon) is built on the SLAC model, with a resident core faculty who provide holistic academic advising and mentorship to honors college students alongside two cohort-based professional advisors, one who works with first-year students, and the other who works with second-year students. All assistant and associate academic deans in the college (myself included), as well as the acting dean, are core faculty members who have advising caseloads.

<sup>8</sup>To clarify further, in distinguishing between “advising” and “mentoring,” I want to acknowledge that there can be both formal and informal aspects of each type of faculty-student interaction, but for the purposes of this paper, I am defining faculty advising as formally structured relationships between faculty members and students that involve assigned advising caseloads and a range of topics to cover during advising meetings that could include curricular questions, course registration, preprofessional preparation, discussion of

future goals and post-graduation plans, and referrals to academic support resources and other student services. By contrast, I am defining faculty mentoring as a relationship between faculty members and students with fewer formal structures or expectations in place; these encounters involve conversations that are predominantly future-oriented. Mentoring also perhaps involves more of the mentor's personal characteristics (that is, the mentor may have followed the same career or life path that the student hopes to follow and/or the mentor may share life experiences or identities with the student). The best faculty advising always includes some form of mentorship, but not all faculty mentorship includes a formal academic advising component. Sometimes, in programs where professional advisors are more numerous, faculty mentorship is distinctly separated from academic advising, although as Allen and Smith point out, in some hybrid advising models with both professional and faculty advisors, the opposite is the case: faculty advisors take on academic and curricular advising, and professional advisors focus on co-curricular and other non-academic matters (623). Margaret C. King offers a helpful summary of the different ways in which faculty advisors participate in the various types of academic advising models (127–35).

<sup>9</sup>Interestingly, however, purely social interactions between students and faculty members outside of the classroom, without any academic or career-related components, do not seem to be as beneficial for students (Pascarella and Terenzini 1: 150, 394, 412, 479; Kuh and Hu 310; Pascarella and Terenzini 2: 122–23).

<sup>10</sup>Shannon R. Dean's study of how honors students develop connections with faculty found that the "approachability of faculty" was one of two main factors that influenced whether a student was likely to build a relationship with a faculty member; the other factor that Dean identified was student motivation (113). By proactively reaching out to students, faculty advisors can exhibit warmth, and by being given a reason to see their faculty advisor (for instance, to ask questions about academic planning), the students are motivated to respond to the faculty advisor's invitation to meet.

<sup>11</sup>One effective method of giving students an excuse to meet with their faculty advisor early on in their academic journey is to require



them to bring a four-year academic plan to their advisor for review. Not only will the student have questions about future terms' registration answered by such an academic planning conversation, but the meeting will also organically lead to conversations about the student's majors, future plans, research, thesis or capstone project, and career objectives.

<sup>12</sup>Communicating care for and interest in each individual student's unique life experiences could also constitute a "validating experience" that could, as Hurtado et al. put it, "convey the message that students are accepted and welcome in the college community, they can be successful, previous work and life experience are legitimate forms of knowledge, and their contributions in the classroom are valuable" (55).

<sup>13</sup>Part of being a culturally responsive advisor, especially when working with students who are struggling academically, involves what Harding calls "coalition building"—that is, learning about the student support resources and services on campus and establishing relationships with them ("Expanding" 00:40:50–00:41:22). Cuevas et al. found over the course of their study on honors student thriving that "many honors students struggle with balancing priorities and managing their time and stress levels" (103). They continue: "Honors faculty and staff need to establish proactive relationships with the campus counseling center liaison" in order to proactively provide wellness programming and support that works to prevent student mental health crises (103).

<sup>14</sup>According to psychologist Carol Gilligan, an ethic of justice demands that "everyone should be treated the same," while an ethic of care ensures that "no one should be hurt" (174). The differences between an ethic of justice and an ethic of care reflect the differences between equality (that is, treating each person in the same way regardless of circumstances) and equity (that is, taking each individual's circumstances into account when interacting to make sure that no harm is done, which will mean that different strategies and actions are appropriate in different cases). Harding applies a similar framework with regards to culturally competent advising, which requires "treat[ing] students equally by treating them differently" ("Expanding" 00:03:59–00:04:02).

<sup>15</sup>Rovak's conception of the trajectory of the CHC's first-year experience involves, during the first term, a focus on helping new students transition into the university and honors environment; while in the second half of the academic year, first-year programming incorporates more and more connections to the academic and social support systems in the wider university community, as well as service and social justice-oriented projects by the end of the academic year.

<sup>16</sup>Wolfensberger and Offringa, who make the assertion that career concerns are not of primary importance to honors students in their coursework (176–77), have studied the Dutch honors environment, which I would argue presents an entirely different social and cultural landscape with relation to both higher education and honors from the U.S., so their findings are not easily generalizable to the context of honors in the U.S.

<sup>17</sup>Transactional diversity involves “bringing people of varying backgrounds together to celebrate a culture or an event” and is an important pillar of diversity, though, if misconstrued, can fail to “challenge the essentialist notions of us-versus-them rhetoric” (F. Coleman, “Blueprint” 322–23).

<sup>18</sup>As F. Coleman points out, Sylvia Hurtado has also done important work on the concept of transformative diversity (“Blueprint” 324).

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# Fostering Student Leadership in Honors Colleges

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### INTRODUCTION

Strong student leadership groups enhance honors colleges while Honors student leaders can benefit from strong faculty and staff mentorship. In a 2006 call to action, “Ah well! I am their leader; I really ought to follow them’: Leading Student Leaders,” honors college dean Keith Garbutt challenges his decanal colleagues and directors of honors programs to take an active role in developing leadership capacities among the motivated, curious, creative, and energetic students we serve. He also warns that “different structural models can have different impacts on students” (Garbutt 46). For example, student representation on advisory committees with majority, long-term faculty membership may lead to students feeling tokenized or trivialized. In light of that admonition, how should honors colleges create meaningful leadership opportunities

for students and how do these honors leadership groups support the honors college? This chapter identifies structural models for student leadership and compares how those structural models are employed and how they impact students in numerous examples across honors colleges in the United States.

## RELEVANCE

Honors deans and other stakeholders tasked with developing and leading honors colleges must make informed decisions about programming while also balancing the pros and cons of competing priorities. It is vital that honors college decision makers understand the structures of student leadership across the honors college landscape and how those structures affect students' development as leaders. As a decision point, the architecture of student leadership within the honors college not only frames the college but strongly influences levels of student engagement. Student leadership in the honors college not only supports the ideals of an honors education in student learning and student development but also sustains the practical operations of the college. Indeed, effective student leadership groups in honors colleges can "have responsibility for the social and academic programming upon which the honors college depends" (Leichliter 156). For example, student leaders can help facilitate orientation, run peer mentoring programs, serve as tutors and classroom assistants, liaise with stakeholders, act as ambassadors to prospective students and local high schools, run social media campaigns, plan and implement social and/or community-based activities, and publish newsletters. Insight on effective models can provide helpful foundational information that will inform institution-specific student learning and program assessment goals. A broad view of student leadership structures and functions across honors colleges can also help directors of honors programs as well as honors deans benchmark against peer and aspirational institutions.

The National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) recognizes that a hallmark "of honors education is the community that emerges from a shared experience featuring intense student-to-student and mentor-to-student interaction in an engaging learning environment"

(“Shared” 6). That sense of community established within honors colleges is distinct from other academic units, and deans must ensure that the values of the honors college are understood throughout the community. Developing strong student leadership groups can aid the honors college in developing its mission and promoting those values. And given the typically larger scale of honors college operations relative to honors programs, honors colleges need to be more intentional about establishing community and enacting their missions. In fact, Adam Watkins makes a compelling argument for student leadership as a driver of culture. He considers how student leadership in the honors college at Purdue University affects those leaders’ sense of belonging and their sense of connectedness with the college’s mission-based value of inclusive excellence (Watkins 105). In a two-year study of 160 student leaders in their “peer mentor program” (a Mentorship Cadre structure, which is discussed below), Purdue researchers demonstrated that, in addition to gains in leadership skills, student leaders in the program developed a “greater sense of connection with the honors college and its values” and that the students’ sense of community and level of involvement in the honors college increased (Watkins 111–13). Their mixed-methods study, which included survey results and focus group interviews, also revealed student leaders’ feelings that they had a greater connection with honors faculty; it was “an integral part of their enhanced sense of connection with the college” (Watkins 114).

## DEFINING STUDENT LEADERSHIP

Definitions of student or peer leadership are described infrequently in the present honors literature. Authors rely on a shared cultural understanding of the nature of leadership and how it is practiced. Leichliter, quoting Peter Guy Northouse, provides a useful definition for student leadership in honors as encompassing both *action and process*—“a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (qtd. in Leichliter 156). For the purposes of this chapter, the scope is restricted to student groups, organizations, and/or opportunities that support honors college goals, functions, and operations, that

is, student leadership *in* the honors college. Although honors students frequently serve in leadership roles across campus (Polk 146), that aspect of student leadership development is understood as a secondary effect and not addressed directly in this essay.

The development of student leaders, their capacity and efficacy, needs to be situated within the honors college's mission. One such example occurs in West Chester University (Pennsylvania) Honors College's statement that "leadership involves shared responsibility for creating a better world in which to live and work which manifests in a passion to engage others in bringing about purposeful change" (Polk 140). Honors colleges can and should embrace a definition of student leadership that will accentuate their unique mission. Therein is an opportunity to distinguish aspects of the honors college and its institution.

### **STUDENT LEADERSHIP AS A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF HONORS EDUCATION**

According to one honors college director of programming, "Providing intentional, rigorous, and intellectually challenging education opportunities for students to develop leadership skills is a core mission of honors programs and colleges . . ." (Leichliter 155). While NCHC's "Definition of Honors Education" does not prescribe leadership mandates, the call for honors education to be "measurably broader, deeper, or more complex" and to rely on a "distinctive learner-directed environment" is consistent with student leadership goals, activities, and outcomes. As Paul W. Ferguson and James S. Ruebel explain in "The Catalytic Impact of Honors," developing leadership capacity is a fundamental value of honors endeavors:

Traditionally, discussion about the value of honors education focuses on the outcomes for students: enhancement of skill sets that are a) academic, b) social, c) leadership-oriented, d) personal, and e) vocational or professional. These are all real outcomes, but they can also be achieved outside honors. What makes honors special is that it provides a place, a program, and the resources for nourishing these outcomes in the company of other high-achieving students



who are undergoing the same transformation and who show respect for these high ambitions in their peers. (12)

NCHC’s “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education” calls for honors students to be “assured a voice in the governance and direction of the student-centered honors program or college” (3) and suggests that a student governance committee is one way to achieve this purpose. This guiding document also calls for honors student representation on other advisory committees and explicitly positions leadership as an important component of co-curricular programming. Honors colleges might also consider students’ prior leadership experiences as part of honors college admissions decisions, include leadership development in the honors college curriculum, integrate leadership into the honors college’s policies and programs, and showcase leadership opportunities and success in college development and external relations. George L. Hanbury II and Don Rosenblum describe the necessity of student leadership in the honors college when they state that the Farquhar Honors College at Nova Southeastern University in Florida “was born out of our recognition that high academic performance is coterminous with leadership. . . . Our honors college is designed to unleash a crucial potential in all students: the ability to lead” (92).

Available data show that developing student leadership is an embedded, if not explicit, tenet of a majority of honors colleges and a goal in terms of outcomes. In the 2021 “Census of U.S. Honors Colleges,” a survey of 248 U.S. honors colleges, 69.7% of honors colleges indicated they use co-curricular activities (volunteer work) in high school as part of admission decisions. The percentage of honors colleges at R1 institutions employing this criterion is higher, at 81% (Cognard-Black and Smith 58). Furthermore, 43.3% of honors colleges describe *leadership* as an overall pedagogy or curricular orientation that “best describes” the honors college experience at their institution (Cognard-Black and Smith 61–62). In a survey of 106 honors alumni from the honors college at South Dakota State University, 63.9% of respondents felt they had gained skills from their honors experience in the area of “demonstrating effective leadership” (Kotschevar et al. 146).

## MODALITIES OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP

Several common modalities of student leadership in honors colleges are recognizable although titles and specific details vary. For the ease of establishing a shared vocabulary for this discussion, four common modalities are summarized in Table 1. In terms of function, student leadership in honors colleges often cross lines and are packaged in different combinations.

- **Governance Committee:** most closely aligned with NCHC's call for assuring student participation in the governance and future direction of the honors college, this approach involves students in policy discussions, new directions, and program assessment. These committees are sometimes structured as a representative body and may have elected membership.
- **Programming Committee:** frequently associated with residential honors colleges, this group allows student leaders to design, plan, and execute programming, such as tutoring services, academic enrichment, and social activities, for the benefit of honors students. Programming committees may be specialized, perhaps focusing on organizing community outreach opportunities or service.
- **Mentorship Cadre:** frequently involved with mentoring activities for new students during their transition into college life, selected honors college students work directly with first-year and/or newly admitted honors students. They may or may not be associated with a new student transition course and are frequently compensated.
- **Ambassador Committee:** focusing on external relations and closely associated with the admissions and recruitment activities of the honors college, this group typically has a high social media profile and members may be compensated.

Other student leadership models combine one or more of the common modalities described here, or they adapt their functions to meet the needs of the honors college. For example, a diversity, equity, and inclusion committee may involve elements of all four

of the common modalities listed here to support the success of traditionally underrepresented communities within honors. Honors college staff can support the success of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts by reaching out directly to students to encourage them to consider the leap into a leadership role. This kind of proactive support can be especially effective when students do not envision themselves as leaders in the honors community.

The structural implementation of these modalities typically engages three key issues: the extent to which the leadership group is open, the extent of the training requirements, and whether the students are compensated. Table 2 summarizes some basic questions related to these characteristics while also acknowledging that

**TABLE 1. COMMON MODALITIES OF STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN HONORS COLLEGES**

Structure	Function
Governance Committee	focuses on honors college policy and planning
Programming Committee	focuses on college-wide programming, which may be associated with residential living
Mentorship Cadre	supports new student transition
Ambassador Committee	externally directed to support recruitment and external relations

**TABLE 2. CHARACTERISTICS ACROSS STUDENT LEADERSHIP MODALITIES**

Modalities	To What Extent Is the Group Open?	To What Extent Is Training Required?	To What Extent Are Student Leaders Compensated?
Governance Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is there an application or selection process?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is training required?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are student leaders paid?</li> </ul>
Programming Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are members elected?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what training is required or offered?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• do student leaders receive non-monetary compensation, or perks, such as housing benefits?</li> </ul>
Mentorship Cadre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is membership limited or restricted?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is training one-time or ongoing?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are there training prerequisites or corequisites?</li> </ul>
Ambassador Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how are members recruited?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are there training prerequisites or corequisites?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• do student leaders earn credits?</li> </ul>

a wide variety of approaches to these questions exist across honors colleges.

This section offers specific examples within each of the four common modalities and some distinguishing characteristics across a range of honors colleges that are diverse in terms of location, size, and type of home institution.

## **Governance Committees**

- The Clemson University Honors College (1,500 students) has an Honors Student Advisory Board. Their HSAB “is a group of students from all majors and years within the Clemson University Honors College who aim to represent the interests and needs of students within the college. We strive to serve as a link between the Honors College staff and the honors student body. The goal of the HSAB is to increase the amount of communication and student input that is exchanged between the student body and members of faculty to better plan and improve the college.” (Clemson University)
- At the W. A. Franke Honors College (4,000 students) at the University of Arizona, the Honors Student Council seeks to “be the collective voice for the Franke Honors students.” In addition to liaising with staff, this student leadership group also allocates funding, provides programming, and works to create “a small community atmosphere.” (University of Arizona)
- The honors college (800 students) at the University of Wyoming relies on the Wyoming Honors Organization (WHO) to serve as the student voice of the honors college. “WHO is committed to promoting the qualities of Scholarship, Service, Excellence, and Community, to increasing student and faculty involvement [through] activities within the College, University, and Community, to determining and suggesting goals and requirements for the Honors College so as to ensure quality for the students, faculty, and curriculum, and to recognizing student and faculty excellence.” (University of Wyoming)

## Programming Committees

- In the honors college (2,600 students) at West Virginia University, the Honors Student Association (HSA) is associated with the college's Living Learning Community. The HSA “provides opportunities for Honors College students to engage with one another, serve the community, enrich their academic experiences, and also serves as a source of information and fellowship for students.” (West Virginia University)
- In the Clarke Honors College (400 students) at Salisbury University, the Honors Student Association (HSA) focuses on community service. Their goal is “to create an environment to foster social and intellectual interaction among students, striving to build a strong bond with the surrounding city of Salisbury through community service, outreach events, and honors student presence at social activities.” (Salisbury University)
- Mahurin Honors College (1,300 students) at Western Kentucky University has an Honors Social Planning Board that serves to “create enjoyable experiences through service, community and development by providing meaningful opportunities for MHC scholars.” (Western Kentucky University)

## Mentorship Cadre

- Referenced earlier in this chapter, the Mentor Program in the honors college (2,200 students) at Purdue University provides student leaders with the opportunity to work with faculty in leading “small teams of first-year students in HONR 19901: Evolution of Ideas . . . [and] guid[ing] students through project-based coursework, helping them develop the academic and teamwork skills they need to become successful Honors College students. This context provides mentors a unique leadership laboratory, in which they can observe how

teams function and discover best practices for teambuilding, inclusion, and problem solving. Mentors are also provided a structured environment in HONR 299: Mentors, where they engage in personal reflection and guided discussions to ensure they get the most out of their leadership experience” (Purdue University).

- The honors college (700 students) at the College of Charleston “employs approximately 20 Honors students to serve as Peer Facilitators for the Honors FYE course.” Their Peer Facilitators serve as “mentor, teacher, advisor, coach, and crucial connecting link for first-year students.” They receive training through the Center for Excellence in Peer Education. (College of Charleston)
- The honors college (950 students) at Washington State University offers an Honors Facilitators program “intended to help incoming students adjust to college life, to build a sense of community, and learn to work with the Honors curriculum” as well as an Honors College Mentors program that “pairs incoming freshmen with current Honors students based on shared academic areas of interest.” While the Honors Facilitators take the lead on a “one-credit freshman course, Honors 198,” the Mentors “strive to integrate the new students into the Honors community . . . by being resources to answer questions and by organizing activities where new friendships are forged” outside of a particular course. (Washington State University, “Honors Facilitators” and “Honors College Mentors”)

### **Ambassador Committee**

- In the honors college (2,000 students) at Rutgers University, Honors Ambassadors are “current students who share their experiences and stories with prospective students and their families. Ambassadors volunteer in providing tours of the Honors College, connecting with prospective students at events such as showcases, open house, and other special

on and off campus events. . . .” Lead ambassadors facilitate ambassador recruiting, prospective student outreach, events, and ambassador development. (Rutgers University)

- Schreyer Honors College (1,900 students) at Pennsylvania State University has a Scholar Ambassador program in which students “represent the College at special events for alumni and donors, provide tours of campus and honors housing, develop and lead philanthropic campaigns, meet with visiting families, and share their experiences as Schreyer Scholars.” (Pennsylvania State University)
- In the honors college (1,100 students) at James Madison University, honors students apply to serve as an Honors Ambassador and if selected “assist in formal recruitment events, including fall Open Houses . . . and Orientation.” They also assist with outreach efforts, attend alumni receptions, and present information to prospective students. (James Madison University)

Characteristic of honors colleges, student leadership groups like those described above may also combine with and/or complement other student leadership groups in honors, thus creating a suite of student leadership opportunities for their students.

- In the Brinson Honors College (1,200 students) at Western Carolina University, where this author serves, an ambassador group embodies many of the characteristics above. We also have an Honors College Student Board of Directors—which serves both as a Governance Committee and a Programming Committee—and a Mentoring Cadre in our Honors Peer Academic Coaches: these students work with faculty and students in our first-year Honors Forum transition course. Our Student Board also sponsors a more informal and social Mentoring Cadre made up of experienced students who engage socially with new students one-on-one or in small groups during the first few weeks of the semester to ease their transition and welcome them to campus. (Western Carolina University)

- Barrett, the Honors College (6,900) at Arizona State University has honors student leadership options organized at each of its four campuses. Barrett's Honors College Council is "composed of elected students from all four campuses who work together to foster community within Barrett." They aim to "improve the well-being of Barrett students and advocate on their behalf," working with other Barrett student groups and the administration. Barrett has Ambassador Committees, Mentoring Cadres, and Programming Committees at each campus. For example, the Honors Devils assist with prospective student recruiting activities; the Barrett Leadership and Service Team works on events to serve the community; and the Barrett Poly Mentoring Program supports first-year students at the Polytechnic campus. (Arizona State University)
- Fishback Honors College (700 students) at South Dakota State University has an Honors College Student Organization that serves as a Programming Committee and "hosts a multitude of service and social events" (South Dakota State University, "Honors"). Comprising honors student members from each of the academic colleges at the university, a separate Dean's Student Advisory Council advises the Dean on "matters relevant to honors students and implement[s] programs and initiatives that support student success." The college offers a Peer Mentoring Program (volunteer mentors who "serve as resources for the incoming students") and a Teaching Assistants opportunity for their Honors Orientation course "and other introductory Honors courses." Fishback also has a Student Recruitment Team that offers prospective students "a better idea of what it is really like to be an Honors student at SDSU and allows current honors students to gain communication skills and experience." (South Dakota State University, "Student")



## ASSESSING LEARNING GOALS OF LEADERSHIP

Once a leadership program is adopted, the honors college will benefit from having a rigorous assessment of the leadership goals in order to identify key program components that lead to those desired outcomes, articulate return on investment (ROI) for stakeholders, and provide data for making incremental improvements over time. Three broad categories for assessing student leadership development are generally accepted, ones based on position (specific roles), capacity (knowledge, skills, and behaviors), and efficacy (beliefs) (Komives et al. 60–62). Learning goals for student leadership, if they are to be meaningfully assessed, must be well defined within the context of the honors college's own goals and mission.

A 2020 paper by Leigh E. Fine reports on an outcomes assessment of the “first-year seminar facilitators,” a Mentorship Cadre, at the University of Connecticut, in which honors students serve as peer leaders in a first-year honors seminar. This study may serve as a model for how honors college deans and staff can design assessments that address learning outcomes for leadership goals in honors. Fine used a pre-test/post-test survey design to evaluate effects of the leadership experience in three dimensions of leadership development: leadership efficacy, teaching efficacy, and sense of belonging to the [honors] program (64–67). Quantitative results showed significant gains ( $p < 0.001$ ) in both student self-reported leadership efficacy and teaching efficacy for these peer mentors and modest gains ( $p < 0.05$ ) in sense of belonging to honors (Fine 69). Qualitative results indicated that their training had a strong effect on their learning, especially in the dimension of empathy as a skill (74).

## CONCLUSION

Honors colleges typically go beyond having a single student leadership organization or token representation of students on faculty/staff committees. Today's honors colleges support and celebrate student-led efforts across many aspects of the honors college enterprise, providing specialized leadership structures that serve in numerous ways to support the mission, values, and activities of the

honors college. Student leaders have been shown to benefit from these leadership experiences in understanding, in skills, and in the affective domain. Similarly, important functions of the honors college such as external relations, retention efforts, and program development benefit from having these energetic, capable, and creative student leaders taking an active role in meeting the mission of honors colleges.

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# HONORS COLLEGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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Part VII:  
Honors College  
Curricular Innovation



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Honors Liberal Arts for the 21st Century

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**INTRODUCTION**

**H**onors colleges are rearticulating their mission and purpose within the changing landscape of higher education in the United States. Many honors colleges were originally designed to offer students transformative undergraduate experiences similar to

those of a small liberal arts college but within the context of a larger university. They often featured a Great Books-based curriculum with a primarily Western canon of texts taught chronologically, as well as a history of ideas that, once controversial and debated, became part of “paradigm shifts” (Kuhn). While this curriculum aligned with traditional notions of the liberal arts, honors colleges that historically offered a curriculum based on classical “great books” and “big ideas” increasingly faced tensions between that curriculum and the crucial concerns of inclusion, anti-colonialism, anti-racism, equity, diversity, and social justice—all of critical interest to contemporary students. Many honors students and faculty in such programs have asked why they should devote time to reading the canon of “great books” when the standards of greatness were developed by closed groups of Western intellectuals, whose power, influence, and wealth were often built on the exploitation of others through systems of colonialism and enslavement. Western canons have been criticized for their racial, ethnic, and gendered biases, as well as their elitism and failure to represent the diversity and complexity of contemporary U.S. college students. As universities and colleges have increasingly brought global challenges into undergraduate classrooms, many honors colleges have asked how they can modernize the liberal arts for the twenty-first century.

We argue that honors colleges can deploy the power of the liberal arts to emphasize diversity, equity, global citizenship, and empowerment by combining liberal arts and STEM fields in interdisciplinary approaches to global challenges, such as climate change, the pandemic, and forced displacement. We advocate for the goal of inspiring the next generation of ethically engaged global leaders, scholars, and practitioners. Traditionally, the liberal arts included arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, grammar, logic, music, and rhetoric, but today the liberal arts have evolved to include such fields as art, science, history, languages, and literature, to name a few. A liberal arts education embraces the breadth and depth of human existence. In a society increasingly motivated by material culture, the liberal arts allow for an expansiveness of thinking, an exploration of human creativity, and an emphasis on understanding and



bettering the human condition. Beyond pragmatism and application, a liberal arts education allows for the unfettered contemplation of human possibility. (See the Forum on Honors Beyond the Liberal Arts.)

This chapter builds on our experiences of retaining a commitment to the liberal arts and humanities while developing interdisciplinary majors, courses, and programs emphasizing STEM training and featuring partnerships across the liberal arts and professional schools. At two very different institutions—a Research 1, Division 1 public university, Texas Tech University (TTU), and a large private urban research university, Boston University (BU)—we shifted the honors curriculum away from a focus on great books/great ideas to one on interdisciplinary approaches to grand challenges. While preserving the free inquiry characteristic of the liberal arts and resisting cuts to the humanities, the new curriculum brings these values to the most contemporary issues and approaches, thus positioning students to center humanistic and ethical perspectives, regardless of their future professions.

## **BACKGROUND**

When TTU founded its honors college twenty-one years ago, transforming the small program housed in the College of Arts and Sciences into a full-fledged college, TTU students, faculty, and staff were invited to create a small liberal arts-like college within a large research university. In these twenty-one years, the TTU Honors College has developed a mission “to provide an enriched learning experience for intellectually capable and curious undergraduate students” and “serve as a catalyst for innovative growth and change at the University” (Texas Tech). Working closely with all TTU colleges and schools, the honors college invites the most talented, generous, innovative scholar-teachers to sustain an environment in which academically ambitious students have access to the resources of a major research university. They engage in intense, intellectually rigorous conversations in small seminar-style classes. The honors college’s enriched curriculum hones students’ critical thinking and multi-modal communication skills and exposes them

to extraordinary educational experiences such as a senior thesis, study abroad, community service and engagement, and internships. TTU honors courses dig deeper into a topic, introduce and seek solutions to the grand challenges facing society today, and question the validity of orthodox truisms.

Preparation of honors students at TTU is based on the integration of a liberal arts education within the student's major. Like many students in other honors colleges, TTU honors students may major in any area the institution offers. The TTU Honors College remains one of the few honors colleges, however, that hosts its own major, Honors Science and the Humanities (HSH).

Boston University's Arvind and Chandan Nandlal Kilachand Honors College, founded in 2010 and renamed in 2011 after a record \$25 million gift from trustee Rajen Kilachand, was designed to offer a four-year undergraduate program and living-learning community to BU's highest-performing incoming first-year students. Students enroll in one of BU's degree-granting undergraduate schools and colleges and take approximately a quarter of their credits through the Kilachand Honors College. The initial goal of the college was to provide the small classes, personal attention, close interaction with faculty, and communal atmosphere of a small liberal arts college, together with the intellectual range and resources of a major urban research university. The curriculum emphasized great books and big ideas, interdisciplinary exploration, and the ethical dilemmas of history. The value of this version of the liberal arts was difficult to articulate, particularly to students enrolled in BU's professional schools, including engineering, business, education, and pre-med; moreover, retention of these students was a challenge.

Despite their commitment to offering small classes and additional resources to high-achieving students, the honors colleges at TTU and BU have each faced the challenge of convincing a new generation of parents and students of the malleability, utility, and foundational importance of the liberal arts and humanities as the number of science and engineering majors continues to increase. To meet this challenge, we reconceptualized and rebranded liberal arts education for the twenty-first century while maintaining

a strong emphasis on the humanities and critical inquiry, a shift we believe provides a model for other honors colleges. Although the histories and missions of TTU and BU are different, a similar approach to modernizing the liberal arts was applied successfully at both honors colleges.

## **IMPLEMENTATIONS:**

### **TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY HONORS SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES**

In the past ten years, as discourse about economic recessions, employment challenges, and other structural disruptions permeates the media, more students understand college as focused professional training rather than an opportunity for intellectual exploration. Even in honors colleges, where the principles of creative and critical thinking are a prominent focus, students are burdened with major requirements that are becoming increasingly specific, skills oriented, and narrow in perspective.

By the fall of 2018, the number of students in TTU Honors College's previous liberal arts major—Honors Arts and Letters—had become critically low, causing the TTU Honors College to rethink how to commit students to creative and critical thinking in the liberal arts. Evaluation of major choices helped in determining the direction and focus of what this revamped liberal arts major should be in light of the fact that TTU Honors College students may choose to declare a major offered by any of the colleges at Texas Tech. In fact, most students have declared a STEM field major within either the TTU College of Arts & Sciences or the Whitacre College of Engineering. The Honors Science and Humanities (HSH) major was created to modernize the liberal arts curriculum, bringing the ancient Greek trivium and quadrivium into the twenty-first century while focusing on the development of STEM fields and talents. HSH majors can choose from four concentrations, all of which center the vocabulary of the humanities as the driving factor in human discovery and action:

- *Medicine, Global Health, and the Humanities*. This concentration encourages pre-health honors students to broaden

their educational experiences in order to become more competitive applicants to professional healthcare programs and more well-rounded professionals. Through a profound exploration of the intersections between health, healing, and the humanities, graduates will be able to better communicate the compassion, creativity, and innovation of scientific thinking in humanistic terms.

- *Environment and the Humanities*. With its foundation in the sciences, this concentration focuses on the study of the human relationship to the environment. Courses draw upon science, engineering, philosophy, literature, and the arts. Honors students delve profoundly into environmental sciences through the historic relationship between human beings and their surroundings.
- *Politics, Philosophy, Economics, and the Law*. This concentration is designed to offer students the opportunity to gain a solid sense of the human-constructed world, where it came from, and where it may be going. The track explores the world's greatest intellectual and cultural achievements, as well as the struggles and tensions that are always part of politics, power, and privilege. Honors students will hone their skills in writing, multi-modal communication, scholarly research, and critical analysis, better preparing them for graduate school and/or a broad range of careers in law, business, communication, education, and advocacy.
- *Humanities-Driven STEM (HDSTEM)*. The HDSTEM focus is now being developed with the generous support of an NEH Connections Planning Grant. This concentration offers honors students interested in engineering, architecture, structural design, urban planning, natural resources, and life cycle analysis the opportunity to contextualize construction, manufacturing, and industrial practices within a discourse on human and natural environments. Students engage with complex questions in the areas of sustainability, marketing, and fabrication even as they connect to the

historic and social impacts of scientific, industrial, and technological revolutions.

Each concentration is made up of a selection of five courses developed in collaboration with the other colleges, the Museum of Texas Tech, the School of Law, the TTU Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC), the STEM CORE, and Mexican American and Latinx Studies. The TTU Honors College works in collaboration with the Creative Process Commons and the Humanities Center to create curricular and co-curricular offerings that foreground the humanities pedagogically and methodologically in each of these concentrations. Moreover, interdisciplinary collaboration through team teaching is strongly encouraged for all programs within the HSH major. This interdisciplinary focus allows students to see the interaction between fields firsthand and learn the challenges and triumphs of an interconnected world.

## **BEYOND HONORS SCIENCE AND THE HUMANITIES**

HSH is the hallmark of TTU's honors liberal arts education. The defined coursework and tracks give students control of their education as they confront the rigor of critical thinking and innovative ideation. While some honors students may choose a different major than HSH, HSH courses are available to all honors students. Further, the many programs the TTU Honors College provides for students are guided by the same principles of HSH and a liberal arts education. In their exit surveys, graduating seniors note the following as evidence of our teaching excellence and commitment to student academic success:

- Undergraduate Research Scholars (URS) Program is the largest undergraduate research program at the university; it pairs students committed to research with faculty mentors (including those at the School of Law and TTUHSC); supports undergraduate travel and registration fees to present at professional research conferences as well as publications and honors college theses; and results in work in graduate labs, archives, and libraries;

- Honors seminars dare students to think creatively, innovatively, and beyond the four walls of a classroom with such offerings as Sustaining the Global Ecology and Economy in the 21st Century; Exploring Human Interaction Through Video Games; Introduction to Scientific Illustration: Bones, Birds, and Botanicals; Epidemiology of Infectious and Chronic Diseases; and Icons of Popular Culture: Mystery Science Theater 3000;
- Honors Summit courses bring theory and praxis together in experiential ways with such offerings as Global Grand Challenges: Past, Present, and Future; Hamlet, Unlimited; Science Fiction and Science; Principles of Public Health; and Making a Sustainable Future: Environmental, Economic, and Social Impacts of Sustainability;
- First-Year Experience (FYE)/Learning Community Group (LCG) Program offers core curriculum taught by some of the best teachers/scholars at TTU to help the transition of first-year students to university life. Special Topics Workshops in LCGs encourage first-year students to become familiar with the vocabulary of the timeliest issues (mental health, substance abuse, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, rape culture and campus safety, and microaggressions) and understand best practices in engaging in civil dialogues;
- TTU Honors HDSTEM Film Series—a collaboration with Alamo Drafthouse that invites the honors community, the wider TTU campus, and members of the city of Lubbock to view films and then hear from two speakers, a humanist and a scientist, as they discuss the intersections of the arts, humanities, and STEM in popular culture;
- TTU Honors special guest lectures—with a particular focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and with the support of other entities on the TTU campus, honors students are invited to have one-on-one discussions with some of the most important thinkers, writers, and innovators of the age,

followed by a larger public lecture. Guests have included Julio Ricardo Varela, Harriet Washington, Katharine Hayhoe, and many more.

Ultimately, the honors college asks our students not just *what* they want to be when their academic career ends, but *who* they want to be and *what* it means to be human. And we ask the fundamental question of what it *means* to grow and learn. TTU Honors College students rise to the challenge and seek solutions to our grand challenges through research, creative activity, writing, teamwork, and innovation. Our in-house faculty, affiliated faculty, and staff are committed to undergraduate education and work to create the space and ambience that allows for inquiry, invention, and application. With creative approaches to pedagogy, interdisciplinary classes, team teaching, and non-traditional coursework, our students, faculty, and staff make every experience one in which we can grow and excel together.

## **IMPLEMENTATIONS:**

### **BOSTON UNIVERSITY'S INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL CHALLENGES**

Faced with many of the same challenges as the TTU Honors College, the BU Kilachand Honors College rearticulated its mission to provide a liberal arts education and small living-learning community with a focus on three interconnected pillars: Community, Knowledge, and Humanity.

## **Community**

Through co-curricular and social events, personal and professional development opportunities, peer mentoring, and empowerment spaces, we invite students to participate fully in our diverse community. Each course also develops its own community, fostered by a common pursuit of knowledge.

## **Knowledge**

Kilachand Honors College offers a challenging liberal education grounded in exploration, discovery, creativity, and the real-world applications of knowledge. We rearticulated the goal of a liberal arts education as one that nurtures the capacity to engage affirmatively and skillfully with diverse social, cultural, scientific, and philosophical discourses and perspectives. We emphasize a free exchange and expression of ideas, constructive debate that respects intellectual and cultural diversity, and the principle of pluralism as a source of strength and insight. We apply perspectives from the sciences, arts, humanities, and professional schools to understand the shared conditions of our humanity.

## **Humanity**

Kilachand students consider important global, social, corporate, and geopolitical challenges both inside the classroom and outside in our experiential learning program, which offers students opportunities to learn by doing and reflecting on the experience of doing. Our students imagine and execute a substantial work of empirical or scholarly research, creativity, or invention that we call the Keystone Project. The Kilachand Internship Program supports students participating in unpaid social justice internships. Through our collaboration with Boston Medical Center's diversity initiative, our students may teach and mentor Boston Public High School students interested in health careers through a unique pipeline program. Finally, Kilachand students can participate in short-term study abroad programs in challenging environments through our Initiative on Forced Displacement.

### **EXAMPLE:**

#### **BOSTON UNIVERSITY'S FOCUS ON FORCED DISPLACEMENT**

Kilachand Honors College's multi-pronged work on the global challenge of forced displacement is perhaps the clearest example of our approach to modernizing the liberal arts for twenty-first-century



learners. Our program responds to a series of crises that have led the United Nations' refugee agency (UNHCR) to identify over 100 million people of concern in May 2022. The challenge of forced displacement is rooted in myriad factors, ranging from conflict and colonialism to corruption and climate change. Refugees and internally displaced communities are without financial and political agency and regularly languish in camps for decades. We developed three interrelated tiers to address this situation:

1. Interdisciplinary honors coursework;
2. Experiential learning in complex environments; and
3. Co-curricular discussions, events, and project support. Each tier is fully interdisciplinary and seeks to bridge classroom-based learning and practical experiences.

We established an honors course that is team-taught by faculty hailing from international relations, engineering, the humanities, anthropology, and law. A central argument of the class is that the insights and methods of every discipline are needed to understand forced displacement and propose ethical solutions. The class balances the goals of studying the massive scale of the problem with lectures on, for example, the history and legal framework of the UNHCR with a focus on a particular displacement context. Another topic was the Afghan refugee crisis; it had, even before the end of the U.S. occupation in August 2021, produced more than two million refugees, with many more fleeing Taliban rule. Human displacement is an aspect of human mobility and involves all facets of what it means to be human, including, but not limited to, gender and sexuality, health and well-being, race and ethnicity, religion, creativity, technology, and urban cultures. Displacement is not a phenomenon limited to a particular group or a specific region: it is a human condition to which we are *all* potentially, albeit differently, vulnerable. Rejecting the narrative that refugees contribute little of cultural value or are helpless victims in need of aid, we invite students to reflect on the resilience and ingenuity of refugee communities as well as their art, literature, and culture.

Connected to the interdisciplinary course on forced displacement, we have established an experiential learning program with partners at the American University of Beirut (Lebanon); Makerere University in Kampala (Uganda); Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá (Colombia); and two Texas-based NGOs, Refugee Services of Texas and Rio Valley Relief Project. Our students and faculty in the program study the refugee crisis for two to three weeks alongside their counterparts at partner universities and participate in established efforts to respond to forced displacement. The courses open with discussions of the context, demographics, and history of displaced populations and how any particular group (Syrian refugees in Lebanon or South American asylum seekers at the Mexico-U.S. border) fit into the international refugee paradigm. We discuss the emotional and physical health challenges faced by refugees and the all-important concerns of respect, sensitivity, cultural understanding, and ethical conduct of research in humanitarian crises. We work directly with local NGOs, government institutions, and policymakers, as well as domain experts, and we ultimately ask our students to identify opportunities to improve the health and well-being of displaced populations.

As in the semester-long honors course, students in our short-term, immersive programs benefit from watching faculty with different disciplinary expertise and personal perspectives work together and even disagree with each other: a scholar of gender might critique the biases of international refugee policies and discuss gender-based violence, including child marriage in refugee communities. An anthropologist points to the West-centric cultural assumptions underlying many efforts to stop child marriage and how some feminist projects fail to consider religion and cultural beliefs. Some engineers celebrate the impact of humanitarian engineering interventions while others point to the technophilia and ethical complexity of many projects. Students in interdisciplinary teams can help each other recognize blind spots, cultural biases, or an inability to communicate a design idea to diverse stakeholders.

Fieldwork and direct engagement with displaced people and humanitarian workers are crucial aspects of the program, as are

conversations about the ethical dangers of voluntourism or disaster-tourism. Students and faculty alike must face the complexity of establishing courses, conducting research, and developing projects in a humanitarian crisis. Our students want to help and feel like they are good citizens of the world. At the same time, we must admit that students and faculty are benefitting more from the program than are the refugees, aid workers, and asylum seekers. Faculty might publish studies, design a new technology, develop teaching and research expertise, or otherwise advance their careers. Students add unique skills and experiences to their résumés. We all secure a story to discuss at interviews, professional meetings, and social engagements. We must acknowledge that our motivations include ambition and fascination as well as a desire to help.

Knowing that neither a short-term experiential program nor an entire semester is enough to address forced displacement, we provide spaces for students to process their experiences and develop projects further in the third and final tier, our co-curricular program. We offer opportunities for students to engage with practitioners, writers, and scholars; watch and discuss films and plays; or visit exhibitions. We also provide structured support for students to develop projects or research they began in courses and short-term intensive programs. Students who participate in the co-curricular programs do not earn course credit, but they do fulfill general education requirements. We recognize that the three tiers of the initiative cannot do justice to the challenge of forced displacement, but we offer multiple opportunities for students to engage with the problem and hope that they will pursue other disciplinary tracks and courses to further their education in this area.

### **TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY IMPACTS**

The approach of blending fields and reinvigorating the liberal arts is also working at TTU: HSH course enrollments and major declarations have both increased. Such innovation is a common theme in many honors-related publications: essays on interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, and integrative learning are well represented in both *Honors in Practice* and the

*Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council.* These pedagogical and education research efforts in the honors education field have been helpful in guiding the TTU Honors College in the development of the HSH major and investigating the effectiveness of the new liberal arts approach. Through this investigation, the TTU Honors College has been successful in receiving grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). These grants have helped grow and promote the HSH major and HDSTEM curriculum via research on interdisciplinarity, especially the relationship between the humanities and STEM and the manner in which STEM students can benefit from exposure to creativity and innovation (Bequette and Bequette; Henriksen). While the humanities have traditionally played little or no role in STEM education (Wisnioski), natural connections exist between the humanities and STEM that deepen students' educational experiences (Hudson et al.). For example, new technologies designed and manufactured by scientists and engineers have an impact on how we communicate within and across societies (Ertas). The HSH degree program explicitly makes these connections and links humanities to STEM through the interdisciplinary background of faculty.

HDSTEM expands upon current interdisciplinary approaches by introducing STEM problem-solving skills and methods within a humanities framework, which in turn may help students develop empathy. When students are provided a context of where and why problems arise and are asked to use typical STEM problem-solving approaches, they are encouraged to empathize with those impacted by the problem and to explore the larger needs of society, the motivations of actors, and quality of life considerations. Further, students have more to say about a situation when they are asked to problem solve and empathize with a given topic (Carrell et al., "Using Humanities"; Carrell et al., "Humanities-Driven STEM").

Students change their perspectives in these interdisciplinary settings, particularly when problem-solving. For example, in HDSTEM courses, students move from a very technical and hard science approach in problem-solving to a more well-rounded approach when they attend more to the social, political, and ethical implications of their decision-making. This type of problem-solving

is helpful for all honors students, especially those in STEM. As Walther et al. note, in line with guidelines put forth by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (“Criteria”), engineering students should learn skills that promote teamwork, effective communication, and reflection on the role that engineering plays in society—each of these skills requires an empathetic disposition. Many STEM programs focus only on developing scientific, mathematical, and engineering content knowledge, divorcing these topics from the emotional and social contexts in which they are situated (Hoople and Choi-Fitzpatrick; McCurdy et al.).

### **BOSTON UNIVERSITY ASSESSMENT, CHALLENGES, AND FURTHER WORK**

Kilachand Honors College’s approach to liberal arts education and our program on forced displacement have been successful when measured by student and faculty satisfaction. We have seen marked improvements in student retention, one metric for student satisfaction that is a challenge for some honors colleges. First-year student retention in Kilachand Honors College has increased from a low of 65% in the prior curriculum and remained above 90% for all four cohorts matriculating under the current program, an increase of 38%. Four-year graduation rates per class year have reached and exceeded 60% for the first time in the history of the college (from a low of 38% for the class of 2017), an increase of 71%.

We have certainly faced difficult moments in the classroom and experiential learning program, but these challenges have regularly reinforced the depth of learning taking place. Students have asked crucial questions: Do we have the right to discuss and/or represent refugees when we have not experienced displacement ourselves? Can we avoid patronizing narratives and white saviorism? How do we ask our students and ourselves to persevere in the face of the inability of academia to solve the problems we discuss? Ultimately, these questions demand that we face our own inadequacy, culpability, and privilege in relation to forced displacement with humility and compassion.

Our program will never solve the problem of displacement, but one of our future goals is to find ways to support the further development and possible implementation of student projects, many of which have been excellent. Several of our students and faculty members have published research articles, essays, and op-eds. A team of four Kilachand honors students (all pursuing liberal arts majors) and an engineering student from the American University of Beirut won the concluding pitch competition in Lebanon in 2018 with their prototype for an educational platform they designed to prepare Syrian refugee children for Lebanese schools. The team continued to work on their design and took first place in BU's Hult Prize competition in the fall of 2018, then moved on to the regional competition. Still, our program cannot boast that any of our students have implemented their work.

Although most of the assignments from university professors, including BU's, do not result in implementation (nor are they designed for this purpose), we feel a responsibility to the displaced people and aid workers who speak with our students and give them their valuable time and energy. If we are not contributing solutions, how is the program avoiding voluntourism, or worse, disaster tourism? We engage this question with students, without pretending that we have an easy answer. We are bolstered by the student reflections on experiences, including their thoughts on the potential pitfalls of the program:

My time in Uganda was one of the most challenging and eye-opening experiences that I have ever had. . . . After the first week of our trip to Uganda, I was ready to go home. I was extremely critical of the program, other students, and struggling with culture shock. However, by the last week, I found myself surrounded by so many new, life-long friends in a beautiful country and not ready to go home. I have learned to be more flexible, optimistic, and open-minded on this journey in ways that I never planned to become.

—Education Student

I learned so much more about how the world works, and I also learned so much more about myself. Travelling and living in a country completely different from the United States or even anywhere else I've visited exposed me to so many new, different perspectives on how to view the world . . . over the course of the trip, I rediscovered myself. I regained my confidence in my abilities to lead and work in teams.

—College of Arts and Sciences Student

The course afforded me a brief glimpse into the vivid complexities of life as a refugee which only helped reinforce my beliefs in the responsibilities of the privileged towards those who are not so. What was most unexpected was that despite the seemingly endless nature of the war back home and the grave hardships the refugees face day to day, not one of the people we met saw a future not based in their homeland. Such determination and hope was a stark and refreshing counter to prevalent narratives about refugees being aimless and uncertain in the determination of their future.

—Engineering Student

Many comments in the student evaluations reveal that the program changes lives. Yet, as with any university course, the long-term impact on students is difficult to measure. Since 2018, several have taken professional positions relevant to forced displacement, studied international law, or pursued other relevant graduate degrees.

We are challenged to make sure our program is feasible and sustainable into the future. Interdisciplinary team teaching is central to the BU Honors College, but it is also resource-intensive. We depend on the chairs and deans of other colleges to release faculty to teach in the honors college, which does not have faculty lines. Currently, the core faculty who teach and travel for our co-curricular and short-term intensive programs do so at their own expense or use research funds. We are committed to making the course accessible to all students, regardless of personal resources, so we must raise funds to support their participation as well. We have been honored by the support of donors and charitable foundations,

and deans of other schools and colleges have provided funding for their students to participate. Thus, we can demonstrate the larger contributions of honors education and programming to the entire university and fulfill another valuable mission of honors colleges, that is, to serve as incubators for innovative pedagogies and programs focused on interdisciplinary approaches to major global and ethical challenges. The incubation for our work on forced displacement took place within the honors college, but we are extending it to benefit the entire university.

## CONCLUSIONS

The “Census of U.S. Honors Colleges” included in this volume reveals that only 10.8% of honors colleges at all institutions surveyed consider their pedagogical orientation to be a “Great Books” curriculum in 2021—a curriculum that is often mistakenly collapsed into understandings of the liberal arts. The new approach, for 87.9% of honors colleges, emphasizes “Interdisciplinary/cross-disciplinary” pedagogies, but only 24.8% highlight “Global studies” (Cognard-Black and Smith 62). The survey did not ask honors colleges to comment specifically on a “liberal arts framework,” but at TTU and BU, we have brought the best features of the liberal arts approach, including its interdisciplinarity and ability to critique the foundations of the so-called “Great Books,” to global challenges and STEM education. We believe this approach is crucial to the effort to recruit and retain diverse students who pursue STEM and professional degrees with the highest ethical standards, especially given the troubling low number of underrepresented minority students in honors colleges and the lack of diversity of the leaders of honors colleges, topics taken up in other chapters in this volume (Dinan et al.; Pereira et al.).

Our honors colleges have redefined the liberal arts and sciences for the twenty-first century by bringing the best interdisciplinary approaches to global challenges and grand problems. Our programs have focused on the human dimension of all disciplines, ensuring courses benefit from the skill of humanists at broaching difficult conversations and ethical challenges. Exciting developments



include team teaching and collaborations that, for example, bring the design thinking that is a crucial skill in STEM to humanities and social science projects. Honors curricula at our colleges have served as incubators for innovative courses and pedagogies in other programs. They have advanced arguments for more inclusive undergraduate communities, and our honors colleges have used their exciting curricula to recruit diverse and historically underrepresented students and faculty into honors while also equipping those students with the crucial skills of being able to analyze some of the world's most pressing problems.

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# Honors Colleges, Transdisciplinary Education, and Global Challenges

PAUL KNOX  
VIRGINIA TECH

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VIRGINIA TECH

In addition to providing challenging and enriching educational opportunities, preparing students for “what’s next,” and ensuring that students graduate with a strong sense of purpose, honors colleges must adapt to institutional expectations that are increasingly attuned to the demand for active and experiential learning, “bridge” experiences, and transdisciplinary capabilities. For students to understand the complex challenges they will face after graduation, they must learn how to work effectively with others who may have fundamentally different ways of approaching, talking about, and responding to professional and public issues. Many of the most interesting research projects that graduates may encounter will be situated at the intersection of two or more traditional academic

disciplines, while employers increasingly seek graduates with collaborative problem-solving skills developed through well-designed and effective experiential learning opportunities (Roberts). Transdisciplinary capabilities are especially critical in the context of the challenges posed by issues such as climate change because of the complexity and interdependence of the factors involved (Nowell et al.). Whereas interdisciplinarity involves the integration of knowledge and methods from different disciplines, transdisciplinarity provides a holistic intellectual framework for understanding issues and the interdependence between them. (Cross-disciplinarity, meanwhile, simply involves viewing one discipline from the perspective of another; multidisciplinarity involves people from different disciplines working together, each drawing on their disciplinary knowledge.)

Universities must lead the way in identifying and understanding the complexities of global challenges and national economic and social development (Foray and Sors), and honors colleges are well positioned to play a significant role because they are able to bring together multidisciplinary groups of students and faculty from a wide range of disciplines needed to address complex societal and environmental issues. Just as honors programs were reimagined and grew exponentially as part of the massive U.S. educational response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik I in 1957, amid “urgent calls for better training in science and technology and improved preparation of future national leaders” (Andrews 22), honors colleges today can help reimagine undergraduate education to address urgent matters of national security, national competitiveness, and social well-being in the context of contemporary global challenges. And in this context the latest international rankings are sobering. The United States sits behind Japan, South Korea, and China in technological expertise and behind Japan and Germany in entrepreneurship (*U.S. News & World Report/Wharton School*). More worryingly, the United States stands fourteenth on the United Nations Development Programme’s education index and twenty-eighth on its Human Development Index when accounting for internal income inequality (UNDP). The United States is nineteenth in terms of “social purpose” (human rights, care about the environment, gender equality and religious

freedom, respect for property rights, racial equity, animal rights, commitment to climate goals, and social justice) and twentieth in terms of quality of life (affordability, employment opportunities, economic stability, income equality, political stability, public education, and public health care) (*U.S. News & World Report/Wharton School*). Education is the key to improved national standing across these issues, and honors colleges have the potential to play a crucial role in that project.

## **GLOBAL ISSUES AND TRANSDISCIPLINARITY**

Global issues such as climate change, environmental degradation, human health, food and water security, income inequality, migration, and gender inequality involve complex interdependencies that affect large populations and impact individuals in multiple locations and occupations; they cannot be effectively tackled by any single community, organization, or academic discipline. Rather, they need coordinated and collaborative efforts across organizations and disciplines. Such efforts, then, require systems thinking as well as transdisciplinary capabilities. Honors colleges have a significant advantage here: gifted and motivated students from every academic discipline on campus and the ability to establish interdisciplinary curricula that train students to integrate diverse perspectives. This essay will discuss how to harness this advantage to provide a truly transdisciplinary education through collaborative, project-based learning, both on campus and beyond.

Transdisciplinary, systems-thinking approaches to undergraduate education have been recognized as effective in many disciplinary fields—from agriculture (Bawden et al.) to business (Seiler and Kowalsky), chemistry (Nagarajan and Overton), ecology (Hiller Connell et al.), engineering (Zou and Mickleborough), hydrology (Lee et al.), and even aesthetics and design (Sevaldson)—as well as in general education (Mobus). Using project- and problem-based learning and cultivating systems thinking allow students to identify interdependencies and contingencies within complex systems, identify feedback, understand dynamic and cyclical behavior, and learn to develop conceptual models, think

temporally, make predictions, and evaluate policies (Ison; Thornton et al.). As Jacobson and Wilensky observe, “The conceptual basis of complex systems ideas reflects a dramatic change in perspective that is increasingly important for students to develop as it opens up new intellectual horizons, new explanatory frameworks, and new methodologies that are becoming of central importance in scientific and professional environments” (12). Additionally, incorporating collaborative and experiential approaches increases the impact on students’ overall academic success (Kuh 20–21), and honors education has been centrally preoccupied with high-impact practices that enhance a student’s academic experience.

The siloed structures of academia, however, often pose a major barrier to establishing transdisciplinary capabilities among undergraduates: “Centuries of tradition have produced institutional silos, reinforced by layers of policy and cultural differences between academic departments, between colleges, and between academic and non-academic units” (Amoo et al. 5). Gibbons et al. characterize the siloed character of academia as producing “Mode 1” knowledge, which as Stoller notes is “often context-free and validated by standards of logic, measurement, or consistency of prediction within the context of a traditional discipline” (47). But Mode 1 knowledge “is inadequate for honors as an occupation because it severs theory from practice, reduces epistemic diversity, and thereby inhibits the transformational potential of our work” (Stoller 49). All too often, even multidisciplinary efforts are lost in a Bermuda Triangle of disciplinary hierarchy, departmental silos, and institutional barriers (Association of American Colleges and Universities; National Academies). Macfarlane notes that in addition to being constrained by disciplinary rigidities, academia is siloed in terms of sector (e.g., humanities versus social sciences), level of analysis, methodology, ideology (e.g., structuralist versus neoliberal), and regional focus. Institutional frameworks and practices also tend to reinforce disciplinary silos (Dymond et al.). Governance structures mean that much information and decision-making, including productivity ratings and rewards, faculty reviews, and promotion and tenure processes, sit squarely in disciplinary departments. Honors curricula with an emphasis on theses and capstones can also reinforce

the culture of disciplinary silos because students often opt for in-major topics at the encouragement of faculty members with an eye to supplying graduate schools and the future professoriate with mini-me's.

### **BEYOND "BUSINESS AS USUAL"**

Yet, honors colleges are in a unique position to circumvent these silos by convening multidisciplinary groups of students guided by faculty from a wide range of disciplines. This long-standing, underappreciated subversive aspect of honors—its ability to formalize dialogue across disciplines so as to expose participants to new ways of thinking—has never been more important. As Stoller suggests, honors education can provide a “Third Space” that transcends not only disciplinary silos but also the binary distinction between academic and applied approaches. Honors colleges can do so by focusing on “Mode 2” knowledge that is integrative, applied, and socially accountable, “committed to innovative and exploratory applications of the disciplines that directly bridge and integrate diverse forms of understanding in the service of engaging complex, real-world problems” (Stoller 49). For us, this goal means developing a curricular vision with structured flexibility (not student-driven serendipity or faculty preferences); incorporating active learning in collaborative project- and problem-based contexts; exploring critical, real-world problems; collaborating across disciplines to research the problems from a variety of viewpoints; and working through multiple iterations of design thinking toward better understanding and potential interventions.

Studios and workshop-style classes provide the ideal pedagogical setting. Architecture and allied design disciplines, for example, have long relied upon the strengths of the studio: collaborative settings that facilitate shifting between analytic, synthetic, and evaluative modes of thinking; formal and informal communication; and self-directed learning. Project- and problem-based work in studio settings allows students to learn from failure, handle ambiguity, develop the capacity to think across scales, and learn the practice of reflective inquiry. It is a teaching model “in which the

functional and the structural, the social and the technical, must be successfully blended” (Kuhn 349). The extended presence of faculty in studios provides the necessary scaffolding: continuous, formative feedback; asking “directing” questions; setting appropriate goals; nurturing required skills; ensuring everything is recorded; helping to keep student work focused; summarizing the learning that has occurred; and encouraging self-reflection (Chance et al; Lin et al.). As a result, studios become social spaces, important seedbeds for a “relationship-rich” education (Felten and Lambert). After all, the undergraduate experience, at best, is fundamentally about conversations and encounters (Giamatti). The conversations must be constant: between students, among faculty, between students and faculty, between the certainties of the past and the possibilities of the present. The encounters are both with people and with ideas. Like good conversations, they will challenge students’ assumptions, stretch their imagination, and develop their self-awareness.

One criticism of studio pedagogy in architecture programs is that it is too often framed around competition among individual projects instead of promoting cooperation and collaboration. Another is the isolation of students from their peers in other disciplines because they are cloistered in the studio. The studio becomes the center of their social lives, and consequently the world outside the studio becomes less important. Inside the studio, students are easily gaslit by faculty who are overly ardent followers of the taken-for-granted ideology and precepts of the field, reinforcing certain ideas and dispositions while making others invisible (Knox). Thus, a “hidden curriculum” of unstated values, attitudes, and norms that stem tacitly from the social relations of the school and classroom as well as the content of the course can emerge (Dutton 16). Meanwhile, the studio inevitably propagates a distinctive habitus among students:

All the subtle signs of cultivation—accent, manners, deportment, dress, attitudes, tastes, dispositions—cannot be obtained second-hand. They must be slowly absorbed from those who are already cultivated. . . . By saturating students with the objects of architectural culture, by presenting



them with role models, living examples of embodied cultural capital . . . ; by displaying in all the slight ways of manner, dress, and taste that one is becoming what one wishes to be, students absorb cultural capital in the only possible way, by presenting to the studio master's gaze their whole social being. (Stevens 199)

By the end of their course, “the students are fully assimilated into the social mores of the architectural world. Students enter as normal, situated, humans and come out as rather abnormal, detached, members of the tribe” (Till 18).

Such criticism can be precluded in studio settings designed for students from a wide spectrum of majors and supported by faculty from several different disciplines. Honors colleges can not only convene such settings but also provide the kind of curricular structure or framework that maximizes their impact. Precedents for multidisciplinary studio pedagogy exist, including the *Wissenschaft, Technologie, Gesellschaft* workshops at the Center for Technology in Society at the Technical University of Munich and the cross-disciplinary “ecosystem” connecting science and society through design at the University of Twente's DesignLab. Such programs signal a huge opportunity for honors colleges because of their ability to convene students with foundational knowledge and experience from a broad spectrum of disciplines. A studio setting, as Kuhn notes,

lends itself well to multidisciplinary teaching and learning. Because of the heterogeneous issues considered in studio courses and the way in which students are encouraged to look at the totality of what they are doing, multiple perspectives on the problem at hand are more easily introduced and assimilated into the flow of the course. Faculty may teach in multidisciplinary teams, students may work in multidisciplinary teams, and judges, critics and clients may introduce multiple perspectives. (352)

How, then, might honors colleges take advantage of studio-based pedagogy? Establishing an honors curriculum featuring active,

collaborative, and project-based learning in multidisciplinary studio settings requires a carefully structured curricular vision.

### **COLLABORATIVE, PROJECT-BASED, AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY**

The Virginia Tech University Honors Program was transformed into an honors college in 2016 as part of the university's Beyond Boundaries visioning process that identified transdisciplinary Destination Areas to foster faculty members' collaborative research and teaching efforts, including Adaptive Brain and Behavior, Data and Decisions, Equity and Social Disparity in the Human Condition, Global Systems Science, and Intelligent Infrastructure for Human Centered Communities. The honors college was tasked with developing the kinds of collaborative, project-based, and multidisciplinary pedagogies that would support students' transdisciplinary learning in the Destination Areas and similar spaces. Our signal resources in these efforts are three collegiate professor positions, a large studio space, and an honors diploma that specifically requires students to engage in honors-level transdisciplinary learning.

First, the collegiate professor positions are non-tenure but career-track positions with long-term, renewable contracts and with job descriptions and expectations that value teaching, research in the scholarship of teaching and learning, and service, in that order. Our three current faculty hold terminal degrees in computational biology; public administration; and design, innovation, and sustainability. They teach two courses a semester and publish research on their ongoing, collaborative pedagogical experiments in these courses. Second, the Honors College Studio space—formerly a ballroom in the Virginia Tech student union building—is a large and flexible space with mobile furniture, whiteboards, projection equipment, secure storage spaces, a PA system, and secured access, a place where students from every discipline on campus can meet to work on collaborative projects ranging in size from five to ninety-five participants. Third, the Honors Laureate Diploma at Virginia Tech requires students to engage in two equally weighted kinds of honors-level learning: collaborative discovery and experiential learning.

While students will bring foundational knowledge and experience from their individual disciplines when they enter the honors college transdisciplinary curriculum and learning spaces, they will also tend to bring siloed approaches to methodology and analysis. Calling out those disciplinary perspectives explicitly can be an initial step toward transdisciplinary self-awareness. Another early consideration is helping students understand just how complex contemporary global challenges are and thus appreciate the need for transdisciplinary approaches to addressing these challenges. Global migration, for example, is a challenge to be tackled by historians, economists, geographers, political scientists, sociologists, climatologists, and many others working in concert. Faculty in the Virginia Tech Honors College have, therefore, recently instituted a series of 3-credit honors transdisciplinary seminars in which students from any disciplinary background can meet to explore the difficulties in addressing “wicked problems” (Rittel and Webber), such as climate change, sustainability, homelessness, health care, hunger, refugees and displaced populations, obesity, poverty, and terrorism. In a recent seminar entitled “Understanding the Global Socio-Environmental Emergency,” for instance, students synthesized perspectives and data from natural sciences, philosophy, engineering, technology, social sciences, and the arts. They also explored environmental history, meteorology, economics, agriculture, psychology, urban studies, ethics, biology, wildlife studies, environmental justice, and literature in an effort to grasp the interconnected complications involved in addressing this emergency and the value of harnessing multiple domains of knowledge in those efforts.

A second consideration in helping students move toward transdisciplinary thinking and action is to provide them with a shared understanding of the ways in which focused research questions can be generated, research protocols can be designed, different kinds of data can be managed, and findings can be analyzed and reported. Recognizing that students will have different levels of appetite or ambition regarding undergraduate and graduate research, faculty in the Virginia Tech Honors College have created a suite of four 3-credit courses to help students develop their understanding and

skills in integrated quantitative/qualitative research methods. These courses begin by helping students generate focused research questions, find scholarly literature, organize data, and conduct ethical research; they then offer instruction and experience in how to identify funding opportunities for research, how to collaborate across disciplines, how to design introductory research protocols, and how to manage transdisciplinary research projects; and finally, they help students learn to collect and work with multiple types of data, report primary and secondary data, evaluate the work of others, and communicate conclusions to general audiences. While these courses can be taken sequentially, we employ careful advising and multiple “on ramps” and “off ramps,” so students can enter and exit the sequence at individually appropriate junctures.

Some thought also must be given to the most effective ways of organizing studio-based courses to best foster transdisciplinary capabilities among students. At Virginia Tech, we offer both stand-alone 3-credit discovery and innovation studios and a massively collaborative 4-credit SuperStudio model, which brings together students from across multiple sections. The stand-alone sections are available to students from any major, may be taken up to four times for credit, and offer instruction and experience in discovering and defining critical, real-world problems, transdisciplinary collaboration, design thinking, reflective evaluation of both the students’ individual and collective problem-solving efforts, and communication of solutions to diverse stakeholders. Recent topics for these studios include “Big Data and Social Justice,” “Natural Disasters and Eldercare,” and “Wildfire and the Human Condition.” The stand-alone studios offer strong preparation for the SuperStudio experience. In SuperStudio, students enroll in concurrently scheduled discovery and innovation studios and a one-credit transdisciplinary studio course. All these classes meet at the same time in the same large, modular learning space so that students can both meet in their separate sections for in-depth topic exploration and combine with students from the other sections for vertically integrated, massively transdisciplinary collaborative activities. Through a set of carefully coordinated practices, the SuperStudio

empowers students to engage confidently in the collaborative work they will need as professionals and citizens to address critical twenty-first-century issues (Lewis et al.). For example, a recent SuperStudio included discovery and innovation studios on environmental policy and social change, data analysis for health reform, drone technologies for the public good, the future of higher education, and the future of employment. These studios converged into a SuperStudio through their collective examination of the promises and challenges of the Green New Deal, an emerging framework for addressing interconnected crises in climate change and economic inequality.

The Virginia Tech Honors College has taken a similar approach in its honors study abroad program, creating a semester-long transdisciplinary, collaborative research community known as the VT Presidential Global Scholars Program (PGS), based at the university's study center in Ticino, Switzerland. The goal of PGS is helping students become global citizens, public intellectuals, and change agents, people capable of addressing "wicked problems" in the civic/public sphere. First, the program helps students identify an exigence, that is, "an imperfection marked by an urgency" (Bitzer 6), a wound in the body politic, a tear in the social fabric, something they feel is wrong and needs to be fixed, something they personally care about and feel compelled to work on. Second, PGS helps students engage in transdisciplinary research to understand the various ways we think about, talk about, and respond to that exigence/issue here in the United States. Third, the program gives students access and resources to engage in transcultural research and study how various European cultures think about, talk about, and respond to that same exigence/issue. The students' semester abroad concludes with their comparing and contrasting the many differing disciplinary and cultural responses they have encountered to synthesize a set of best practices to guide their advocacy and actions on their exigences when they return to the U.S. Recent PGS student research projects include "Abuse of Prescription Stimulants by College Students in the United States and Switzerland," "Elder Abuse Programs in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the

Netherlands,” “Prison Education in the United States and Norway,” and “Black Rhino Breeding Programs in American and European Zoos.”

Finally, however progressive our goals and however valuable our collaborative, project-based, and multidisciplinary honors offerings may be, honors programs and colleges need to compete for their students’ attention and commitment in the highly competitive institutional space outside their primary majors, a marketplace in which second majors, minors, second minors, and extracurricular and co-curricular activities of all kinds vie for their students’ finite time, attention, and tuition dollars. Such competition has become even more acute in light of the pressure state legislatures are putting on universities to accelerate student learning and the related inflation of equivalency credit that students—especially honors students—bring to our doors as a result of concurrent enrollment work, AP testing, and early college experiences. The VT Honors College has thus recently configured all of our recent curricular innovations—our transdisciplinary seminars, transdisciplinary research courses, discovery and innovation studios, SuperStudio, and experiential learning opportunities like PGS—into a new minor in Honors Collaborative Discovery, offering students a clear and unified path toward a highly incentivized credential that will appear on both their transcripts and diplomas.

## CONCLUSION

University educators stand at an inflection point. Much like the beginnings of the Space Race, the United States again faces unprecedented threats to its security and survival. The difference today is that these threats do not stem from a single nation but rather from an intricately connected set of wicked, global, transdisciplinary, environmental, economic, scientific, social, and political problems, a dynamic that current, siloed, undergraduate educational efforts seem ill-prepared to address. Honors colleges, however, seem uniquely positioned to address these critical needs as they work with gifted and motivated students from every academic discipline on campus. Careful development of an honors curriculum

featuring active, collaborative, and project-based learning in multidisciplinary studio settings can lead the effort to provide the kinds of transformative curricular and pedagogical change that students will need to be scholars, professionals, and citizens capable of addressing issues of critical national and global interest.

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# HONORS COLLEGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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Part VIII:  
Community Engagement



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Teaching and Learning in the Fourth Space:  
Preparing Scholars to Engage in Solving  
Community Problems

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The world increasingly faces complex, wicked, and multi-causal problems (Uhl-Bien et al.; George et al.). In response, the United Nations has identified seventeen sustainable development goals that are international in scope (United Nations Development Programme), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture has identified Grand Challenges of concern (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities). Solutions that rely on one individual's efforts are largely insufficient to address the thorniest issues of our time because there are few, if any, proverbial silver bullets that can rectify all social issues unilaterally and to everyone's benefit. Now, more than ever, leadership for social change requires convening interdependent stakeholders with broad bases of expertise to co-construct bold solutions with sensitivity regarding navigating

multiple competing ethical commitments in any developed solution (Priest et al.; Uhl-Bien et al.). College students regularly agitate for social change in their communities (Priest et al.; Earl et al.) furthering higher education's civic mission. Yet, few introductory leadership courses include an explicit civic component (Johnson and Woodard), and honors students are particularly well-positioned to address contemporary social challenges for a number of reasons. Since honors education is interdisciplinary in nature, many programs in postsecondary institutions emphasize the integration of multiple epistemologies (Chancey and Butts; Kotinek). Above all, honors education and those associated with it tend to demonstrate an abiding commitment to addressing human social concerns through their intellectual and civic engagement (Renzulli; Chancey et al.). Today's world demands bold leadership that is collaborative and creative. Honors education can play an important role in helping students, faculty, staff, and community partners to co-create transformational and justice-driven new realities.

Honors education is particularly well suited as an educational and institutional context for fostering interdisciplinary, extra-campus, sustainable social change because it embraces collaborative leadership and sensitivity to multiple viewpoints. Community-based research and service work have become *de rigueur* in higher education (Fine; Kliever and Priest; Bott-Knutson et al.). Land-grant institutions, whose missions often center on serving the people of the state, have a pronounced interest in generating programs that enrich communities while contributing to research and teaching (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities). Honors programs and colleges likewise share a history of collaboration with communities off-campus to further students' learning while leveraging their talents to create lasting change (Bott-Knutson et al.; Coleman et al.; Collins and Niva). Honors students' sensitivity to social concerns, commitment to asking difficult questions, and ability to synthesize disparate strands of knowledge allow them to make enduring contributions to communities of practice while they pursue an honors education (Renzulli; Chancey et al.; Polk). Common honors pedagogies, such as City as Text™ (Braid and Long; Long) and Reacting to the Past (Watson and Hagood), ask

students to engage critically with extant social structures and the complex interrelationships among social actors.

Honors education is, of course, not monolithic. The specific structure, curriculum, and goals of any one program or college depend a great deal on situational factors. Sometimes these variations are a result of purposeful approaches and values, while perhaps more often they reflect differences in resources. The latter is most readily expressed in terms of whether honors education is housed in a college or a program, with colleges generally exercising more control over curriculum and the ability to attract and deploy resources with greater scope than what is possible in honors programs. The cross-institutional collaboration discussed in this essay involves both honors colleges and honors programs. As a result, it leverages the strengths and differences among the various institutional resources available and employs the collaborative and bridge-building skills of honors leaders to express honors interdisciplinarity and innovative educational approaches beyond the limits of any individual institution. And, while the resourcefulness of the honors leaders who have learned how to build programming in under-resourced environments is important, the collaboration highlights the importance of building individual programs into college-level enterprises, which have the autonomy to design curricula, the resources and freedom to attract personnel committed to interdisciplinarity, and the fundraising experience to attract donors to this cause (Andrews).

The project is led by a group from the Council on Honors Education (CoHE), an affiliate group of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) dedicated to transforming higher education, developing students holistically, expanding the accessibility of honors education through inclusive excellence, and addressing the world's greatest challenges. As part of a cross-institutional, multidisciplinary team of honors educators, we believe our students and resources are positioned to make meaningful progress on some of the most difficult social issues of our time. Here, we outline a body of theory that explores civic and community-based engagement through an honors lens to conceptualize a new space



for student civic engagement. Borrowing from previous work on the construction of a third space that exists in the fusion of educational and private spheres for students (Gutiérrez), the fourth space we propose exists at a nexus of student worlds—private and public, academic and social—while integrating actor capacities, community needs, and mutually exercised leadership for the common good (Komives et al.).

We believe students inhabiting this fourth space can make meaningful connections between their honors education and the tackling of complex problems. Informed by systems thinking (Goodman) and deliberative engagement approaches (Nabatchi et al.; Chrislip and O'Malley), we provide an example of our work in creating a socially informed honors education initiative in the fourth space. Because several of the world's most intractable social challenges are connected to systems of food security, production, and justice, it is to this nexus of wicked problems that this group first turned its attention and out of which the framework we describe here arose. The fourth space framework we propose gives voice to our current endeavor while providing directions for future innovations in honors education.

### **A GENERAL MODEL FOR HONORS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: THE FOURTH SPACE**

Although postsecondary institutions have long engaged with those outside the immediate campus community, a recent paradigm shift has challenged earlier conceptualizations of the role that service plays in pedagogy. Prior conceptualizations of citizenship relied largely on basic forms of engagement, such as voting or volunteering (Block). We refer to such behavior as civic engagement: the rudimentary duties of participation in democratic society. The challenges of contemporary social problems, though, call for something beyond civic engagement: globally informed, sustained *community engagement* at the micro-level that strives to address root causes of problems and thereby create enduring change at the structural level. Ash and Clayton emphasize a together/with

approach to community-based learning as opposed to a for/without approach where those providing service may not critically interrogate their roles in creating change or the needs of the communities they serve. Similarly, work on the voluntourism phenomenon encourages college and university representatives who wish to engage in ethical service learning experiences to examine how to create lasting change, defer to local expertise in assessing needs, and engage in related work beyond the time and place of service (McGloin and Georgeou) to enjoy the sights and tastes of the distant and exotic ‘other’, the ‘experience’ touted as a useful addition to the curriculum vitae. Myriad works have explored best practices related to acknowledging positionality of all participants in community-engaged endeavors and developing common goals (Bott-Knutson et al.; Fine; Priest et al.; Ash and Clayton).

Humans inhabit a series of social spaces that give rise to perspectives and social identities that can differ substantially among individuals with different experiences. First space usually refers to the domestic sphere, the family and home. Second space usually refers to places outside the home where a significant amount of time is spent, such as school and work. Third spaces have been used to describe novel combinations of spaces themselves or the perspectives they generate (Oldenburg). For example, the design of some public spaces is intended to bring people together outside of home and work to interact in civic third spaces. There are recreational and commercial third spaces like sports venues, churches, bars, and shopping malls. More recently, the online environment is referred to as a third space, as are some co-working spaces and workplace experiments that combine living and working environments (Morisson). In contrast, combinations of perspectives—such as the multiple literacies, ethnicities, or other lived experiences of children or young adults in classrooms—have been conceived as a third space (New London Group). This last use of third space is the one most relevant to honors education with its discussion-based courses in which students share and debate diverse perspectives.

Fourth spaces have been described as another kind of informal social setting that facilitates interaction among strangers

(Aelbrecht). Fourth space also refers to the intentional integration of an individual's perspectives and experiences with both their formal academic training and their communities. Like third spaces, they, too, create departures from the routines of work and home, of familiarity and social comfort, but are more public than typical third spaces. This context includes the multiple new "public spaces" inherent in the knowledge economy (Morisson).

Here we invoke the concept of fourth space as the deep engagement of honors students in their communities as part of their formal honors education. Thus, students are not mere volunteers but participants in community-participatory problem solving founded in complex systems thinking and multidisciplinary approaches. As such, our proposed concept of Fourth Space of Honors incorporates third space concepts of infusing community into notions of self—the self of the honors student—and adds an additional focus on community-engaged action through community-engaged problem solving. This approach addresses complex societal issues in a way that considers the many perspectives involved and the many consequences of proposed solutions. Effective progress on these issues requires active listening to the concerns of many stakeholders so that potential solutions are holistic and without unintended consequences. This approach immerses students into a unique environment for true discovery-based learning. This methodology goes back to educational pioneers such as Dewey and Montessori but continues to be relevant and successful today. These types of approaches allow the student autonomy and an essentially democratic educational experience with the instructor providing support rather than dictating direction. Students do acquire some content knowledge through these methodologies; however, more importantly, they begin to learn the process of discovery, which will provide tools for continued and expanded learning (Allchin).

Thus, the Fourth Space of Honors is where honors academic learning meets community-engaged learning (Table 1). It embodies the intersection of technical and lived expertise, of historical challenges and future solutions. This blending can happen in or out of the classroom, but we argue here that it needs to be an intentional

focus of honors education and that honors colleges are especially well suited to take up this charge for the reasons enumerated above. We propose that for students to engage effectively with complex societal issues, they need skills that are not the focus of most academic majors and are only partially developed within honors education. Students need to be able to identify and collaborate effectively with stakeholders in the community, to understand and employ systems thinking, to value diverse perspectives (academic and otherwise), and to develop communication skills for conflict management.

### COLLABORATIVE AND SYSTEMS-BASED PEDAGOGIES IN HONORS

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) and integrated knowledge transition (IKT) are examples of practices used by knowledge seekers (researchers) and intended knowledge users (community entities) to advance the collaborative creation of knowledge (reviewed in Jull et al.). Their strength lies in their ability to yield the *right* questions to examine within the context and needs of a specific community. Thus, the community emerges from the experience with tangible results or a process through which it can effect positive movement. These practices, typical of public health and other health sciences, are increasingly used in numerous other fields. There are several successful examples of this kind of

**TABLE 1. FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, AND FOURTH SPACE, AND FOURTH SPACE HONORS**

Space	Hallmark Characteristics
1st Space	domestic sphere
2nd Space	school or work
3rd Space	public spaces (in person or virtual); spaces providing convergence of multiple perspectives among individuals
4th Space	integration of individual perspectives with their formal academic training and with their communities
Honors Invocation of 4th Space	community engagement as an intentional focus of an honors experience

community engagement within honors education (Bott-Knutson et al.; Dunbar et al.; Twang et al.) that specifically prepare honors students to be engaged with their community by addressing issues pertinent to local communities.

Discipline-specific training is, of course, necessary to address linear discipline-related problems. The most critical problems facing society, however, are more often complex rather than linear and require a rich diversity of thought and consideration. Students need to be able to hone their disciplinary skills as well as identify and partner with stakeholders in the community to ensure that focal issues are, in fact, community priorities so that there is the potential for real and sustained impact. They must be prepared to consider and plan for both intended and unintended consequences of actions and to consider problems as well as solutions in context.

Systems thinking provides a framework to understand complexity and feedback loops, to avoid missing or misunderstanding aspects of the focal issue, and to anticipate unintended consequences. When solutions to problems are developed without consideration of systems, then unanticipated consequences are likely. For example, the frantic move of replacing carbon-emitting vehicles with electric vehicles has sent the demand for cobalt, a relatively rare and expensive metal that is a key component of batteries, soaring worldwide to impact systems such as supply chains (global shortages); financial markets (extreme price increases); environmental, socioeconomic, and human rights issues (mining); and even world powers and political systems (dominating cobalt distribution) (Desai and Nguyen; Mining; Lipton et al.; Searcey et al.; Wang; Searcey and Lipton). When solutions are devised outside the confines of an academic discipline and are informed by the perspectives of multiple disciplines, then the complexities of the problem are better understood. When system-wide thinking is prioritized, misunderstandings of the impacts of potential solutions are minimized and more robust solutions are generated, advantages that were understood at least as far back as the 1400s, for Leonardo Da Vinci is commonly credited with the following quotation referring to systems: “To develop a complete mind: Study the art

of science; study the science of art. Learn how to see. Realize that everything connects to everything else” (Da Vinci).

Although the list of interacting systems is endless, colleges and universities still tend to teach within distinct silos typically framed as programs, departments, or colleges. True, these structures provide an immediately accessible community of academics pursuing related disciplines, and those communities may be advantageous for synergies and advancements within a particular field, but they likely lack the scope of perspectives necessary to address the world’s most pressing societal issues. Honors education can open the silos and work in the real world of systems, where everything connects to everything else, diverse academic perspectives are useful, and changes in one area have impacts on many others. For example, interdisciplinary, team-taught seminars that often sit at the center of honors curricula institutionalize cross-disciplinary conversations in the learning experience and thus are especially fertile grounds for systems thinking. This institutionalization can happen more readily for honors colleges than for honors programs because often the former can recruit faculty who value interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary pedagogical approaches. These kinds of experiences can prepare honors students to participate effectively in civic engagement. Honors courses and experiences can bring these students together in a common experience of systems thinking.

To be effective in engaging with complex societal issues, students need strong communication skills. By definition, community engagement involves people with different perspectives; thus conflict can be normal. Successful community engagement requires conflict management that is conducted with openness and that can navigate multiple perspectives and power differentials. This model of conflict management is distinct from conflict resolution, which is usually conducted confidentially (Palma). In community engagement, conflict management is the responsibility of all participants and not just the task of a designated leader, even though a leader may have more experience navigating such tensions.

The skills of conflict management in community engagement begin with the skills used in personal interactions, such as the ability to listen well, empathize, express viewpoints clearly, and consider

divergent or opposing views. Community engagement requires the additional dimension of exercising these skills while engaged with a larger number of voices with possible cultural differences in values and communication styles. Because honors communities almost always draw students from all majors and programs across campus, their classrooms provide an especially fertile ground to help students practice conversation across difference. The many tools to facilitate effective communication among diverse stakeholders range from models of interaction, such as the Collaborative Communication Framework (Dumlao) and Adaptive Positive Deviance (Benjamin et al.), to the physical arrangement of participants (Lipmanowicz and McCandless).

Preparing honors students to participate effectively in conflict management begins with an understanding of how one tends to listen, communicate, and respond to conflict. There are multiple assessment tools to evaluate these tendencies (Janke and Dumlao). Informed of their own communication styles, students can practice their communication skills in low-risk classroom environments, first with low-controversy topics and then with more controversial issues. All these experiences should be followed by self-assessment and reflection. This experience with conflict management in the classroom and the practice and assessment of personal skills provide a foundation for effective communication in more complex situations involving an array of stakeholders. Eventually, real experiences in community engagement provide opportunities for students to exercise conflict management skills while engaging with perspectives that are more diverse. Over time, they acquire a repertoire of communication skills and experiences to know what is likely to be successful in a given situation (Dumlao).

**THE JUSTICE CHALLENGE MODEL:  
ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THE FUTURE OF  
FOOD, CLIMATE, AND ENERGY**

A specific model for addressing the fourth space through honors entails a multi-institutional, multidisciplinary, collaborative approach

involving honors colleges and programs at land-grant, public, and minority-serving institutions of higher education. This national network of fifteen institutions develops and supports broad access to cutting-edge resources for future leaders to innovate and transform their respective fields through integrative, transdisciplinary, and systems approaches. This specific model was first developed to address the world's most pressing challenges in food, agricultural, natural, and human (FANH) sciences. It focuses on a developmental series of interdisciplinary, experiential, and problem-based initiatives that build students' system-level thinking skills to integrate technical, social, and political issues around the Grand Challenge theme of food justice (food production, food security, hunger, obesity, food safety) and to incorporate Grand Challenges 5 and 7 of the Science Roadmap for Agriculture (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities), Climate Justice (National Academy of Medicine), and Sustainable Energy Justice (National Academy of Engineering). The aim of this project is to increase the number of graduates in FANH disciplines who are well prepared for the workforce and/or advanced study, with specific knowledge and professional skills needed to meet the Grand Challenges articulated as priority need areas by the United States Department of Agriculture—National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA).

The use of the term *Grand Challenges* to describe problems of a magnitude and complexity that offer no simple, short-term possibility of solution but are vital for the development and health of humans and the planet seems to have originated with the Gates Foundation's 2003 program of Grand Challenges in Global Health. The concept was expanded by the Gates Foundation in 2014 simply as Grand Challenges (Gates Foundation). In a more academic context, the National Academy of Engineering published its 14 Grand Challenges for Engineering in the twenty-first century in 2008 (National Academy of Engineering). In the context of this essay, which grew out of a collaboration to respond to an RFP from USDA, the Agricultural Grand Challenges were laid out by the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy—Science and Technology Committee of the Association of Public



and Land-grant Universities in a 2019 publication called “A Science Roadmap for Food and Agriculture.” While they were identified explicitly as Grand Challenges in this publication, they certainly owe much to a previous publication with the same title published in 2001 (Association of State Universities and Land-grant Colleges).

Instead of a conventional intervention with a linear cause-effect approach, this project draws on systems theory to investigate large-scale complex systems and their impacts on issues of food, climate change, and sustainable energy. The intention is for students and faculty to learn the tools of systems thinking and then apply them to the contexts of Grand Challenges. The questions raised by Grand Challenges are especially appropriate for systems analysis because there is never only one viable approach (and there are hosts of non-viable approaches), but there are approaches that are more or less challenging to implement, and more or less beneficial to diverse stakeholders. The importance of broader systems approaches and the development of, and collaboration among, FANH scholars from diverse backgrounds are emphasized throughout our Grand Challenge Scholars Model. Further, the model capitalizes on the collaborative and innovative backbone of honors education that facilitates the preparation of future leaders, including underrepresented minority students, in FANH-related sciences.

Partnerships formed and strengthened through this project create the foundation for transforming honors education in the FANH sciences in a way that is readily exported beyond honors education, which reminds us that honors education has long been a testing ground for innovative ideas that may be scaled across the rest of the university. The framework expands models of civic and community engagement beyond the responsibilities of citizenship, philanthropy, and service to reimagine the promotion of equity, diversity, and inclusion within our institutions and across our communities. The project is pedagogically innovative because it addresses Grand Challenges with a suite of high-impact practices common within honors: collaborative, cross-disciplinary work with skills development in communication; critical thinking; problem solving; service; and leadership. The systems-thinking focus in this project draws

on expertise from multiple FANH disciplines, including biology, chemistry, agriculture, humanities, and social sciences. The experience of traversing these disciplinary boundaries in professional development activities and collaborative problem solving prepares students to effectively navigate complex problems with broader academic and social skills. Faculty are trained in systems approaches; gain skills in providing students with immersive, problem-based experiences; and learn to work collaboratively across disciplinary boundaries to enhance their teaching and research productivity and to establish professional networks for pursuing future work.

The project model (Figure 1) provides an example of the application of the concepts developed above. Each of the following components of the model exposes students to the complexity of the Grand Challenge and the need for a broader cross-disciplinary approach to higher-level problems.

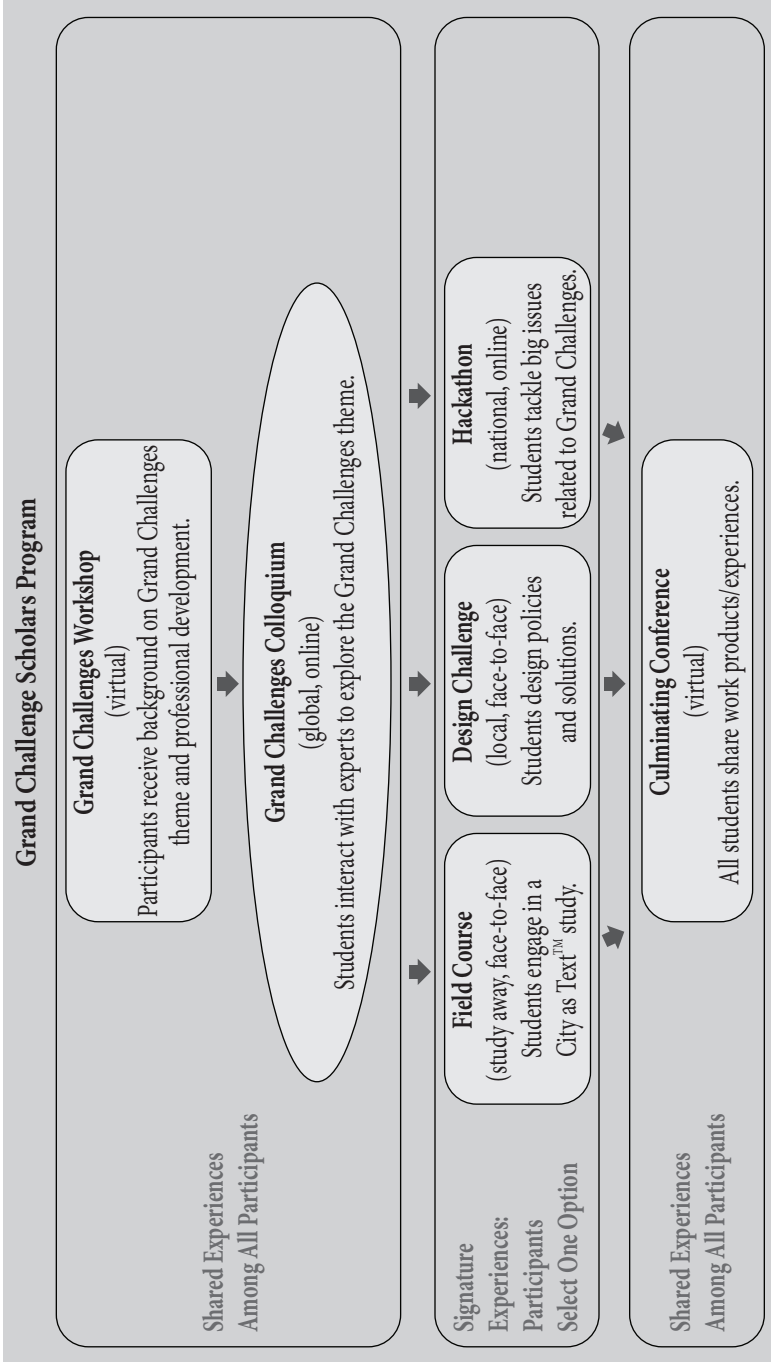
### **Grand Challenges Workshop**

To ensure continued learning about systems thinking and complex approaches (Uhl-Bien et al.), we created two bookend experiences for students woven together by a continued professional development thread. To begin, all students participate in an online Grand Challenges Workshop providing an interactive and accessible common virtual experience. The workshop introduces participants to one another and the reflective process, encouraging them to reflect on the complex nature of FANH Grand Challenges and the importance of collaboration and stakeholder analysis in goal setting.

### **Grand Challenges Colloquium**

This Colloquium is the common, grounding experience through which an annual cohort of students is introduced to the scope of the Grand Challenge Annual Theme. Held virtually, the Colloquium provides the context and science-based content knowledge that students will need to credibly take on the challenges subsequently explored in the Signature Experiences. In addition, the Colloquium

FIGURE 1. A SPECIFIC MODEL DEPICTING INNOVATIVE OCCUPATION OF THE FOURTH SPACE IN HONORS



provides students with professional development. The cross-institutional resources built into this project provide knowledge experts and professional development experts from within participating institutions and their networks. The Colloquium is envisioned as an eight-week intensive course that meets twice per week, once to host an expert or experts and discuss the material of the week and a second time to move from knowledge acquisition to application, using professional development strategies. Learning objectives for the Colloquium ensure that participants acquire a strong foundation in the Grand Challenge Annual Theme and FANH topics.

### **Field Course**

This seven-day experience immerses students in a deeper exploration of the theme within a given community. The Field Course provides student participants with experiential learning opportunities through the application of the widely used place as text model to explore the Grand Challenge Annual Theme. Thus, students experience real-world constraints, opportunities, and realities of the topic from the blended scientific expertise of the Field Course coordinators and the lived expertise of local communities. The curriculum is packed with local visits, team building, problem solving, and culminating projects.

### **Design Challenge**

The semester-long Design Challenge provides students an opportunity to identify and propose solutions to a local problem related to the Grand Challenge Annual Theme. Design Challenges are delivered as an honors seminar with students from multiple majors participating. Three institutions are selected to host design challenges each year. Local faculty leaders are mentored, supported, and led by a subset of the broader Signature Experience Committee. A pedagogy built upon design thinking encourages creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration on solution design in an iterative process with great potential to transform higher education (Björklund et al.). A key concept in design theory is understanding

the interrelationships and complexities of what are termed wicked problems, intractable challenges that are so interrelated that a singular solution may lead to further problems unless they are tackled at a systemic, structural level. In this framework, design theory is firmly grounded in seeking bottom-up solutions by working closely in the community. As such, the Design Challenge provides participants with a lesson in participatory democracy.

## **Hackathon**

Hackathons have quickly gained acclaim for promoting and accelerating innovation well beyond their origins in the information technology community (Kienzler and Fontanesi; Falk Olesen and Halskov). During a typical hackathon, enthusiastic problem solvers gather, form working teams, and develop innovative solutions for the given challenge, concluding the event with solutions presented and evaluated based on workability, feasibility, and usability (Brenner). Hackathons serve as an educational problem-solving model and tool because of the ease in recruiting students to participate. They are “fun” and informal, an excellent learning platform that attracts a diverse spectrum of students, especially those interested in branching out from traditional classroom settings and with a hunger for experiential project-based learning (Nandi and Mandernach). Participation of students from multiple institutions is encouraged in each virtual Hackathon to enrich each team’s background and perspectives.

## **Culminating Conference**

The annual program ends in a Culminating Conference for students to reflect on their learning and provide a forum for cooperative learning among students from their Signature Experiences. Student participants share their e-portfolio artifacts from the experience and then participate in interactive Q&A sessions with their peers, faculty, and guest experts to detail the extent of their learning with one another in real time.

Once funded, we will pilot the full model to directly impact up to five hundred honors students over three years. Until then,

the team will pilot components of it informally within the group. In addition, CoHE piloted a related, hackathon program in fall of 2021 in which 32 students participated. We must emphasize the translational nature of our proposed induction of the fourth space in honors. While our first focus was food, agriculture, and natural and human sciences, the concept of the fourth space and the specific model of honors pedagogy can, and arguably should, both be employed in myriad foci.

### **ACTIVE LEARNING PEDAGOGIES IN THE FOURTH SPACE**

Often described in contrast to “traditional” pedagogies where students are passive recipients of information, active learning is a pedagogical approach that engages students in the learning process through activities such as reading, writing, and discussion (Bonwell and Eison; Carr et al.), and it requires higher-order thinking skills and reflection (Freeman et al.). Active learning strategies—and especially experiential learning, in which students are asked to engage real-life problems and data—have long been a hallmark of honors education and undergird the “high-impact practices” described by AAC&U (Kotinek; Kuh). Active learning pedagogies ask students to apply existing knowledge in novel situations, either expanding or modifying their mental frameworks to accommodate new information and perspectives (Bransford et al.). For this reason, active learning strategies are particularly powerful in stretching students’ abilities through teaching an appreciation of the strengths that each participant brings to group work and using that shared understanding to scaffold problem-solving beyond individual students’ current ability (Vygotsky). Not only do active learning pedagogies provide a mechanism to appreciate the diversity of experience and perspective in a learning environment, but mounting evidence suggests that active learning pedagogies help close achievement gaps (Haak et al.; Huber; Lorenzo et al.).

Active learning can support conceptual development, knowledge acquisition, and learners’ metacognition—students’ thinking about their own learning. With its emphasis on collaborative work, systems thinking, and deliberative engagement, the fourth space

approach demands a significant amount of active learning. This approach can be resource-intensive, but again, honors education is already committed to low student-teacher ratios and multidisciplinary frameworks and thus particularly well suited to developing the kind of transdisciplinary capabilities that are needed to address complex issues. As a result, this approach within the framework of honors education holds great potential for creating transformational leaders. This is particularly the case with honors colleges, where curriculum development can be more independent than in other honors spaces, and the process of learning and reflection can be more broadly prioritized over the possession of specific disciplinary knowledge.

Active learning pedagogies are fundamental to the project and to the problem-based learning that is required in addressing complex issues. They may involve specific techniques such as concept maps, influence diagrams, and storyboard-type illustrations of complex systems (Brame); but all involve active research on the part of learners: asking a question, acquiring data, and, collaboratively, interpreting those data. Learning technologies such as modeling software can support active learning methodologies (Hung; Klopfer; Van De Bogart and Wichadee). To be fully effective, however, active learning pedagogies also require careful scaffolding: providing faculty support in framing questions, facilitating communication and resources (Lee et al.; McDermott and Salado), and supporting learners' conceptual development and metacognition.

## Research

The process of asking a question, acquiring data, and interpreting those data is a particularly effective active learning tool. In 1984, David A. Kolb published a cyclic model whereby experience is transformed into knowledge in the facilitation of learning. Kolb's experiential learning cycle is characterized by four steps that are hallmarks of each iteration of the cycle. First, learners actively participate in doing something (i.e., an experience). Next, learners should assess that experience and reflect upon what they experienced and observed. These reflections should then be utilized in

the conceptualization of improvements or modifications that can then be implemented through active experimentation. This model is predicated on the principle that learning occurs when the learner actively approaches an experience via participation, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation.

Community engagement is essential to deliberative democracy, and, as such, understanding processes involved and developing necessary skills are essential for students in this era of contested truths and cultural and political perceptions. In the deliberative dialogue model endorsed by the David Mathews Center for Civic Life at the University of Alabama, students meet with community members and incorporate embedded community learning experiences. Shared learning experiences, such as workshops or courses, set the foundation for this community engagement. The process for students to immerse themselves in civic learning varies and can include the following:

1. identifying a community asset inventory,
2. writing a thoughtful weekly response,
3. developing public journalism, and
4. organizing an event to showcase local knowledge significance. (David Mathews Center for Civic Life)

Directors of the engagement experience play an essential role in making sure that students have familiarity with the tools and theory of deliberate democratic practices, that they have access to appropriate contacts in the community, and that they understand the necessary logistics for meeting with community members. This model creates an active learning foundation for the fourth space, one that guides a project from planning to implementation.

In models like these, students will

1. gain civic engagement skills, dispositions, knowledge, and efficacy while developing their professionalism;
2. partner with the community to practice these skills to build the community's understanding of itself and its assets;



3. collaborate with the community in the context of its unique history and environment;
4. develop a working knowledge of deliberative, democratic processes and their relationship to humanities, history, and community-engaged scholarship;
5. apply the asset-based principles in partnership with community members to expand the capacity of the citizens of the region to both maintain ownership of their regional history and remain principal members of future efforts regarding the growth and development of their community; and
6. create co-written works of public journalism.

Coupling learning technologies with active learning pedagogies can provide powerful synergy. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education published a meta-analysis of best practices in blended approaches to education. Key findings included that learning is enhanced when

1. multiple instructional materials, approaches, and media are utilized;
2. faculty lead or collaborate with students in the instruction process (as opposed to students working independently); and
3. blended approaches to education, including some online and some face-to-face instruction, which offer benefits over strictly online approaches, are employed.

In addition, if feasible, the positioning of support services for written communication, oral communication, and library research all in one central location allows students to realize their synergistic relationship. These best practices were embedded in an online activity within a traditional face-to-face course where small teams of students were asked to work together online to solve real-world case studies related to the class content (Gilbert et al.). Student performance on the case studies was positively correlated with scores on other forms of assessment such as class examinations, and

students reported strong agreement with the applicability of the learning experience in the field.

## **CURRICULAR AND CO-CURRICULAR APPROACHES TO THE FOURTH SPACE**

Curricular and co-curricular approaches present advantages and disadvantages to the implementation of the Fourth Space model and programming associated with it, particularly across such a broad and diverse group of institutions. The advantages and disadvantages associated with each approach are summarized in Table 2.

In the context of this collaboration, we discourage a one-size-fits-all approach and recommend that honors student participants are provided with maximum flexibility and a sense of agency to combine both curricular and co-curricular elements of the experience. In this way, students' needs, interests, and aspirations can drive their choices and allow them to select the opportunities most meaningful and valuable for them.

## **RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT OPPORTUNITIES OF THE FOURTH SPACE**

Engaging students with their honors peers, with honors staff and faculty, and with the community has numerous benefits, including improving the student experience and thus retention, as well as providing concrete examples useful in the recruitment of new students. Below, we examine some of the ways that this collaborative endeavor supports recruitment and retention.

For current students, opportunities to build relationships with their peers, honors staff and faculty members, and community leaders generate considerable enthusiasm (Nichols and Chang; Rinn and Plucker; Young et al.). Collaborating and learning together and from each other both enhances students' understanding of and respect for other disciplines as well as allows them to make contributions from their own area of study and experiences. Further, students learn firsthand from community members and leaders working to address these challenges, increasing the likelihood

that the approaches formulated will be relevant, applicable, and workable. The innovative, active learning approaches and variety of activities and methods of engagement serve to sustain student interest across the project phases (Clark et al.; Miller).

**TABLE 2. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CURRICULAR AND CO-CURRICULAR APPROACHES**

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
Curricular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured experience</li> <li>• Implied higher expectations for engagement/performance</li> <li>• Enhanced faculty commitment</li> <li>• More formal assessment</li> <li>• Potential for sustainability/systemic program change</li> <li>• Revenue stream following from student credit hour generation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost (i.e., tuition) for students to participate (also variable rates between institutional partners)</li> <li>• Expense (i.e., faculty compensation); also variability between institutional rates and expectations</li> <li>• Challenges of student participation (e.g., fitting another experience into academic schedules)</li> <li>• Variable academic calendars between institutions</li> <li>• Different instructional technologies, online learning platforms</li> </ul>
Co-Curricular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ease of entry into the experience</li> <li>• Less formal structure for cost and compensation</li> <li>• Liberation of program design from more rigorous academic/course-based approaches and structures</li> <li>• Fewer concerns around formal assessment</li> <li>• Potential to engage non-instructional staff in facilitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty in recruiting students and faculty (i.e., “What does this count for?”)</li> <li>• Challenge to have high expectations for deep engagement</li> <li>• Potential for offerings to be less structured and content rich</li> <li>• Perceived lower prestige within the institutions and academic communities</li> <li>• Lack of credentialed experience via credits, transcript</li> </ul>

Working toward meaningful, real-world goals that result in useful deliverables is not only foundational to education, but also likely to capture the passion of high-ability students (Alger and Newcomer). Rather than formulate responses to hypothetical problems, these students will use their intellect and skills to address key challenges of today and try to create better, more equitable tomorrows for others. In the process, they forge an understanding of teamwork and develop needed leadership, followership, and communication skills, enabling them to spark future impactful collaborations. The excitement associated with this work and the collaboration's tangible outcomes, in terms of both skill development and products, increase the likelihood that students will be engaged and retained. Although there is no research yet on the impact on student retention of the kind of community engagement proposed here, service learning experiences are known to have a positive impact on student retention (Bringle et al.; Yue and Hart). The more active participation of students in community problem solving in our model, compared with that in service learning, is likely to yield even greater benefits. The excitement of students for community engagement also extends and contributes to the recruitment of new students, for current and past participants can share their experiences with potential students by highlighting the most compelling features of the programming and its relevancy to students' futures (Rhea and Goodwin).

## **THE POWER OF INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION IN DEVELOPING THE FOURTH SPACE**

Inter-institutional collaboration can empower development of the Fourth Space through the opportunities it provides for sharing expertise, perspectives, student populations, and other resources. Whereas institutional-level collaborations, often following from athletic conference affiliations, have long fostered partnerships and opportunities through the sharing of academic resources, such collaboration has rarely extended to honors colleges and programs. Instead, peer-to-peer collaborations, and sometimes regional affiliations, have been the norm in honors.

Civic engagement is by nature interdisciplinary and largely place-based. Collaborating honors colleges and programs can achieve great synergy by combining their resources, perspectives, and local experiences to enhance students' understanding of complex social issues and to prepare them for productive engagement with their communities. By placing pedagogies common to honors within the context of civic engagement, these collaborations can have profound and far-reaching impacts on our students. The Collaborative formed by the authors of this chapter is piloting aspects of the Grand Challenge model described above while continuing to seek opportunities to fund our full vision for the Fourth Space in Honors. The possibilities are infinite.

### **CALL TO ACTION**

We have embarked on an exploration of a Fourth Space in higher education: a collaborative, multi-university effort featuring student community engagement as an intentional focus of honors education. We hope to exploit the multidisciplinary character of honors student populations through participatory problem solving scaffolded by complex systems thinking and deliberative engagement. We recognize that we have much more to do and a great deal to learn. Some next steps include delivering proof-of-concept through the operationalization of our theory, which requires funding in addition to the goodwill and further collaboration of team members. We believe that the innovative nature of our approach and its focus on sustainable social change will appeal to philanthropic foundations as well as government funding agencies. The collaboration has been from the beginning a simultaneous and ongoing effort to develop and leverage theory and practice around the themes we outlined in this chapter. We foresee the need to create a professional development workshop on systems approaches to problems in the context of honors education, as well as to improve our capacity to manage hackathons, field courses, and design challenges.

We recognize that we can learn from the experience of private colleges and universities in collaborative programs and study

abroad activities and from the logistical lessons of National Student Exchange study-away programs or place-based honors semesters run for many years by Northern Arizona University in its Grand Canyon Semester, a program sponsored by NCHC's Place as Text Committee. More broadly, we believe there is an opportunity to emphasize to university provosts and presidents the importance and innovative potential of honors education as something that extends well beyond individual student pathways (to scholarships, fellowships, graduate school, medical school, and law school) to meet the higher goal of producing graduates with the kind of trans-disciplinary capabilities and collaborative experiences that will enable them to be effective citizens in twenty-first-century society. With this broader perspective in mind, we hope to engage in dialogue with our colleagues in regional and national honors networks, standing NCHC committees, and HERU member institutions, and to assess and document our continuing efforts in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

Serving Our Communities:  
Leveraging the Honors College Model at  
Two-Year Institutions

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**INTRODUCTION**

As colleges of the community, two-year institutions provide a vital service throughout the country by offering post-secondary education that is local and accessible. Honors colleges at two-year institutions play a uniquely important role by providing additional opportunities, services, and programming that support positive outcomes for the community, especially for those members

of underrepresented and underserved populations. Peter C. Sederberg argues in his introduction to *The Honors College Phenomenon* that those involved in honors education across the nation often “recognize that excellent honors educational opportunities can be cultivated across the diverse settings of American higher education from two-year community colleges through large, comprehensive research universities,” and though we “find somewhat less diversity among honors colleges . . . the emphasis must be placed on ‘somewhat’” (6). Even in the early 2000s, Sederberg and others recognized that the phenomenon of honors colleges was taking root at myriad institutions, and two-year colleges were no exception.

That trend holds true more than a decade later. Some may wonder how the honors college structure could be valuable, particularly when honors programs are already well established, recognized, and understood among the faculty and staff as an important opportunity for students. A significant reason is that they are supported by administration. The honors college is primarily distinguished from an honors program in the administrative structure (being led by a dean or executive director), access to campus-wide planning and development, and enhanced funding and other support. Obviously, giving honors an equal seat at the table in deans’ councils, budgetary discussions, campus planning conversations, and curriculum development allows for better advocacy for the needs of the students and faculty invested in the program. Having honors participate in these higher-level discussions, however, also allows us to share what we have learned in honors instruction, advising, and recruiting with campus partners and through our community development work. If we think of honors as a kind of laboratory—as suggested in the National Collegiate Honors Council’s (NCHC) new “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education”—where we can experiment with various approaches to education with engaged faculty and students who are willing to take academic risks, it stands to reason that the resources we are offering academically motivated students would be useful in other areas of instruction and student development across campus. The benefits of establishing an honors college at a two-year institution are vast. The benefits to the student

and faculty will be fairly straightforward for readers of this monograph. Alexandria Holloway, writing in 2008, argued further for the benefits outside of the honors college itself:

Administrators benefit with the return on investments or by having a proven number of successful graduates over a short period of time, a contented faculty, and exemplary student representatives. The entire community benefits from receiving over 10,000 hours in cumulative service learning projects. Ultimately, the advantage to The Honors College and the community is the prestige of having provided accessibility to a local institution that prepares its academically gifted students at an affordable cost. (60)

We couldn't have said it better ourselves.

Recognizing that honors colleges at two-year institutions cannot be built from a one-size-fits-all mindset, this chapter explores the role of honors colleges at two-year institutions in enriching the campus and local communities. Through the lens of three honors colleges that serve different geographic locations and uniquely different student populations—including large numbers of minority, first-generation, and low-income students—we will explore how honors can fulfill unmet needs and solidify its place as a cornerstone of opportunity and success in the community.

## **INTRODUCING OUR HONORS COLLEGES**

The Cleveland State Community College (CSCC) Honors College was established in 2019. CSCC is the second-smallest two-year college in Tennessee with one main campus and two remote sites. The total CSCC headcount (including dual enrollment) is about 2,700 students, a number that has dropped due to COVID impacts that significantly reduced enrollments. Honors college enrollment at this institution can range from 80 to 120 depending on the semester, the size of recent graduating classes, and the size of recent incoming classes. The application process for the honors college focuses on a student's academic motivation rather than academic preparedness because the curriculum is designed to develop

advanced academic skills in motivated students. The service area is largely rural, with a population made up of a stark contrast: notable wealth and devastating poverty. As is likely the case with many honors colleges, the establishment of the honors college at CSCC was intended as an initiative that strengthens students, the campus, and the surrounding community.

\* \* \*

Located in Miami-Dade County, Miami Dade College (MDC) is a large multi-campus public urban Minority and Hispanics Serving Institution (MSI & HSI) serving about 92,000 students and awarding bachelor's and associate's degrees, as well as vocational, technical, and college credit certificates. Born from an honors program that allowed students to take different courses across all eight MDC campuses, the honors college was established in 2002 to provide a centralized, streamlined, and coherent honors cohort experience. Today, it is a "college within a college" serving five of the eight MDC campuses, and at full enrollment, it boasts 750 students distributed equally across those campuses.

Over the past two decades, the MDC Honors College has provided an opportunity for almost 5,000 students to transform their lives by earning their associate of arts degree, transferring to their best-match institution, and ultimately achieving their goals of academic, career, and personal success. Admission is competitive and limited to only first-time-in-college (FTIC) students intending to earn an associate of arts degree and transfer. Acceptance rates vary depending on the number of applicants each year (between 34%–45%), but thanks to brand recognition and improved marketing, applications have significantly increased during all years of the pandemic. Students must have a minimum 3.7 high school GPA (weighted or unweighted) to apply, and they submit the following materials: admissions application, standardized test scores, GPA, transcripts, personal essay, and letters of recommendation, all of which are then evaluated by the campus honors directors for college fit and potential for success. Through the Honors College Fellows Award, all honors college students who are accepted and matriculate are provided funds to cover tuition, fees, and books,

and they are also awarded a stipend for other expenses. The financial awards provided by the honors college mean that the vast majority of students receive a quality education free of charge. Uniquely, the nature of the awards are stackable in nature, which means that students can apply for and receive other support and use those additional banked funds as they continue their academic journey at the college and beyond it when they transfer to their institution of choice.

\* \* \*

Prior to the existence of the Houston Community College Honors College (HCCHC), HCC honors used a contract system and was supervised by a single honors director with a one-course release. While the contract approach worked for quite some time with one director, an increasing number of students interested in honors credit and more professors signing contracts created an unsustainable system. In 2006, a small delegation of HCC representatives traveled to Miami Dade College to study their diverse and well-structured honors college. Soon after, the Board of Trustees approved the operation of the HCCHC with a \$175,000 budget and a charge to serve HCC's central campus. In the fall of 2007, the HCCHC enrolled 16 students and ended up with a budget of around \$105,000 (including merit scholarships). The college stabilized its enrollment of 25 students the following year.

The HCCHC eventually opened at two more campuses and hired two directors to serve our Northwest and Southwest regions. In January 2016, they opened their doors to their first cohorts. In 2019 and 2021, the institution launched two additional honors colleges serving HCC's Southeast and Northeast sectors. Today, the HCCHC is led by an Executive Director who reports to the AVC of Curriculum and Learning Initiatives, has five full-time directors, serves 250 students (from a college-wide student body of about 57,000 students), and operates with a budget of around \$334,000. Directors are responsible for the total operation of their respective honors colleges, including recruiting, degree advising, and event planning among a host of responsibilities. They receive an 80% course release on a 12-month contract.

As of May 2020, the admissions process consists of an online application and an oral interview. Students need a 3.5 GPA, test scores (e.g., SAT, TSI, ACT), unofficial high school or college transcripts, a 500-word essay discussing one of three topics, and two letters of recommendation that speak to the applicant's character. Once applications are screened, directors hold a one-hour interview with applicants who meet the minimum requirements. Accepted students receive the Chancellor's Merit Scholarship and a Barnes and Noble Book Scholarship to cover tuition and books.

### **WHAT DOES AN HONORS COLLEGE DO THAT A PROGRAM DOES NOT?**

As outlined in this chapter, the main differentiators between an honors college and an honors program include autonomy, control, influence, and institutional support rather than size or programming. Some honors colleges may have significantly smaller student populations than large honors programs even while both may engage in similar programming. An honors college is generally led by a dean instead of a program director. Through convention, the title of dean may carry more respect and authority among those who work in academia (staff, faculty, and administrators), while a director is generally considered a mid-level administrator with limited power or influence. Operating under a dean and with the gravitas of a college, an honors college has greater autonomy to act independently as a unit, has greater levels of control to manage its own affairs including a designated budget, can influence other units more readily, and generally receives greater financial support.

### **INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES**

Because variabilities exist across both colleges and programs with no one specific, predetermined model for either, individual differences abound. While some honors colleges employ a dean specifically dedicated to the administration of that program (as at MDC), others may have a dean who oversees the honors college

and various other departments on their campus (as at CSCC). Still others may have their honors college reporting to an Executive Director (as at HCC), a Vice President, Assistant to Associate Vice President, or Provost. This elevated reporting line stands to reason since the general rationale behind having an honors college report to higher levels of administration leadership is to allow it enhanced gravitas within the structure of the college. Similarly, some honors colleges, given the fiscal ability to do so, may have staff specifically dedicated to the administration of honors scheduling, recruiting, and events, while others may be structured so that this work falls primarily to the dean or is shared by staff members shared among departments. The MDC Honors College largely handles all aspects of its own operations independently, including course scheduling, recruitment and admissions, events, and other types of regular and special activities. In short, an institution's financial investment in the honors college is often dictated by its enrollment, state funding, grants, and endowments. and the resulting fiscal solvency/freedom to prioritize honors and other educational and engagement initiatives. Because the goal of establishing an honors college is to give honors more impact on campus and more influence when advocating for what it needs to serve students, faculty, and communities as effectively as possible, the resulting structure is, nevertheless, dictated by both limitations and possibilities as well as the vision of senior administrators and the long-standing priorities of the college.

While NCHC's "Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education" offer standards for honors programs and honors colleges, some units may be beholden to different standards and expectations, such as those associated with state or regional honors councils, state organizations, or Boards of Regents. Others may be limited by financial and structural constraints imposed by the college's leadership. For these reasons, the "Shared Principles and Practices" are framed by the acknowledgement "that honors programs and colleges exist in vastly different institutional and environmental contexts, possess a wide variety of missions and approaches, and have varied access to resources to bring about these

outcomes” (1). Efforts to create consistency across various honors programs and honors colleges, while valiant, will always be subject to growth and development; honors colleges will have to adapt just as higher education does to meet the needs of a changing world.

### **DOING MORE**

The semi-autonomous nature of the academic unit of a “college” gives honors colleges greater operational latitude and an ability to largely determine their own destiny. If managed correctly and according to the norms of the institution, a college allows the dean to control most operations such as staffing, budget, marketing, recruitment, admissions, probations/dismissals, programming, activities, alumni affairs, partnerships, articulation agreements and memorandums of understanding with other institutions, and to a lesser degree curriculum changes. Depending on the academic bylaws of the institution, minor curricular revisions and adjustments may be under the dean’s control while significant and programmatic curricular changes usually are not.

### **IMPACTING CAMPUS**

Based on the weight of the dean title and depending on the political climate and norms of the institution, an honors college dean can influence key internal and external stakeholders and constituents for the benefit of the college. Influential internal and external partnerships and alliances, both formal and informal, do much to support the mission of the college. Honors program directors can exert influence to support honors; however, this influence is largely related to the personal political capital of the individual director and/or the norms and background of the institution. The subordinate nature of a director title can be a limiting factor on influence.

Moreover, a college is generally considered a quasi-independent operating unit standing either alone or within a large unit such as a college or university, whereas honors programs are generally subordinate in the hierarchical structure of an academic



institution, which usually limits their ability to operate with complete autonomy. While some honors programs may enjoy levels of independence equal to that of a college, these situations are rare and unique to particular institutions that are usually smaller in size.

## **BEST PRACTICES**

As noted throughout this chapter, *standardization* is not a word that applies to honors colleges at two-year institutions. Honors colleges are as diverse and unique as their institutions and the students they serve. A one-size-fits-all approach, even across similar institutions and student types, would not lead to optimal outcomes and would likely require significant revisions as the honors college evolves within the existing college structure. In spite of this caution about one-size-fits-all approaches, some best practices do emerge from a study of honors colleges at two-year institutions.

## **RESOURCES**

Adequate resources are critical to the success of any honors college. Financial resources, human capital, extensive course offerings, and a variety of student programming are essential to success. In a climate of shrinking budgets, creativity is the key to finding the resources needed to sustain a robust honors experience. Cross-campus partnerships with other academic and non-academic units can often yield funds and resources. Shared programming and cost-sharing can augment budgets and provide quality programming that benefit both honors and non-honors students alike.

External partnerships and alliances can augment shortfalls and provide greater community visibility. The MDC Honors College worked with the University of Miami to create a partnership that provided STEM internships to students during the summer. The partnership benefited both institutions and provided high-quality paid internship experiences with research-focused faculty that ultimately better prepared honors students for transfer and success in several STEM fields. The partnership was extended for the summer of 2022 to include STEM internships at three local research-focused

universities: the University of Miami, Florida Atlantic University, and Florida International University. This program expansion benefited the students and institutions by diversifying the research internship subject specialties available to students, increasing the total number of internships open to students, and providing greater opportunities for the institutions to benefit from these partnerships.

Along with external and internal partnerships, repurposing and expanding staff and faculty roles can also help fill gaps. Faculty can support programming and activities in ongoing roles or in special circumstances. Staff can be cross-trained to serve in several capacities, and cross-unit sharing of personnel can provide support where needed. Honors leaders should partner with other departments on campus and in the community as often as possible. Small programs and those with few staff members may fall into the trap of tackling every task, event, or need on their own, but other campus entities, including the admissions office, student life, or student-run clubs, may be willing to collaborate on particular projects. Service projects may appeal to existing community partners; of course, seeking out new collaborators may be necessary on occasion, but that search can be time consuming and labor intensive. When honors-specific resources are scarce, honors colleges can use their increased influence on the campus and surrounding community to involve them in a particular honors enterprise, to enlighten them about honors education, and to recruit more students into the honors community.

Just as honors college leaders must understand their available resources, senior administrators must fully understand the range and value of the honors programming supported by these resources and their contribution to the institution. New directors who have not made requests for honors faculty from a department chair, space for an honors lounge from a president, or funding from student life for an honors event may struggle with this charge. The distribution of needed resources can be complicated for large institutions or institutions whose top honors officials may not fall under the jurisdiction of traditional academic governance. Both scenarios operate at HCC. Thus, the success of an honors college is tied to

a dean's ability to educate senior leadership about its needs and impact on campus-wide recruiting, retention, and success.

## **AUTONOMY**

Honors colleges benefit from having their leaders sit at the table where decisions about funding, staffing, and strategic planning are made. An honors dean sitting on the deans' council, for example, would be able to take part in decisions about budgeting and program creation. While this arrangement provides the honors college with a direct line to resource allocation, it also provides honors leadership with more knowledge of the goings on of the entire campus, which in turn may inform decisions about honors curriculum design, alignment with a college's evolving strategic plan, and funding and staffing requests.

The honors college at CSCC has seen increased autonomy in curriculum design and staffing of honors classes after establishing the dean's position. Participating on CSCC's Deans' Council gives the dean access to timely reports from senior staff about shifts in college-wide operations and more lead time on programming and scheduling decisions. For example, when the current strategic plan was built, the dean could make the case for tactics that would enhance honors recruiting and programming. When the college decided to move to 7-week course schedules, for example, the honors college had time to redesign its course structure accordingly.

The autonomy of an honors college can take many forms. For instance, HCC honors directors remain full-time faculty in their respective departments (e.g., history, philosophy, or English); however, at the time of their appointment, their reporting line changes from the department chair to the executive director of the honors college, and they receive an 80% course release. The honors college operates on its own dedicated budget (excluding director salaries), thus generating more freedom. In some cases, this institutional positionality has shielded the honors college from the encroachment of other departments and programs that might have otherwise funneled students and other resources away. This autonomy is bolstered by the honors college's ability to set its own

academic curriculum, which also leads to diversity in programming. Whatever form this autonomy takes, the honors college must have control over its own operation while still remaining aligned with the institution's mission and vision and conforming to state and federal mandates.

At MDC, the honors college functions with a specific structure, purpose, and charge that have endured and proven successful over the past two decades. The college operates under a distributed campus model, which is led by a dean and where each of the five campus non-faculty full-time directors operate on their campuses in a semi-autonomous fashion. This structure provides for the autonomy of each campus to program and operate uniquely as they serve their particular student population and community, even as they also support the overall functioning and mission of the larger institution.

### **SERVING A UNIQUE STUDENT BODY AND COMMUNITY**

While honors colleges come in a variety of shapes and sizes, the most successful ones reflect the unique needs of their students and community, which is the case with each of the honors colleges profiled in this chapter. At MDC, the Honors College Padron Campus (one of the five honors campuses in the system) is located in the neighborhood of Little Havana, which draws many low-income first-time-in-college (FTIC) Hispanic/Latinx students from often Spanish-only speaking households. To better serve the area and capitalize on the unique nature of the community, Padron Campus Honors offers a Dual Language associate's degree program, the first of its kind in the U.S. Offering an intensive curriculum in both English and Spanish, the program supports academically gifted bilingual students in a manner that considers community interests, needs, and demographics.

CSCC is located in rural eastern Tennessee. While some of the high schools in this service area are relatively affluent, many have relatively few resources. Students in the more affluent areas often gravitate toward the main campus in Cleveland, while students in the northern service area where resource are scarce tend to gravitate

to the Athens campus. Students arrive with varying degrees of preparation for college-level work, and the programming offered at each campus must account for the differences in preparation and the differences in reliable internet access and access to technology. The admissions process, curriculum, and course modality have also been adapted to meet those needs. A holistic admissions process is now in place, and it focuses on attracting students who are academically motivated and want to use honors to help them build their skills before they graduate. A common refrain at two-year institutions is that honors is in the business of developing honors students. This approach runs counter to attracting students who already have the necessary skills and motivation expected of honors candidates. Often this situation means designing an admissions process that does not consider standardized test scores and allows students to submit a written application or request to interview for the program. Classes focus on research and writing skills, leadership techniques, and team-based, problem-based learning. These tracks often appeal to adult students, and we offer online options for students with full-time jobs, caretaking responsibilities at home, and other obligations that make attending a traditional classroom impossible.

There are, however, ways in which honors colleges, be they a single campus or multi-campus operation, uniquely serve and benefit their communities and that is by producing remarkable students (Andrews, “Multi-Collegiate” and “Coordinating”). Misconceptions about what and who honors students are remain fairly common. For instance, hearing comments that honors students are the “best of the best,” the “cream of the crop,” or “top tier” is common, and while some students do come to honors much more intellectually and emotionally developed than others, we also note that what makes an honors college unique to its students and larger community has more to do with how students complete the requirements of the honors college than how they enter it. Rather than coming to us as the “best of the best,” students entering honors colleges at two-year institutions are likely to range from advanced learners to relatively above average and average students; nevertheless, in the honors environment they can go on to graduate as “top tier.”

At each of HCC's five campuses, the honors college offers its students leadership training, cultural activities, opportunities for international study and travel, a unique cohort experience, and much more ("HCC Honors College"). Yet because HCC is open enrollment, each honors college pulls from the same population of general enrollment students in the greater Houston Area. And while students must meet a 3.5/4.0 GPA requirement to enter the honors college, they must maintain a 3.2 thereafter. Clearly, this figure is the bare minimum, and most students end up well above a 3.5. In any case, as any experienced instructor would probably admit, a 3.5 or better GPA is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for determining the quality of a student. The same can be said about high test scores and glowing recommendation letters. What the HCCHC does is take students at varying levels of academic achievement, socioeconomic status, religious and ethnic background, and provide them, at no cost, with the intellectual, emotional, and educational resources they need to develop into the high-achieving students they are by the time they leave. Of course, any given student from the general population or from one of the other special programs available at HCC could similarly obtain a "high-achieving" status. The HCCHC makes a difference because it is a one-stop shop for personal development unlike any in the region.

## **OUTCOMES ORIENTED**

Like all academic programs, a successful honors college should be outcomes oriented. Defined outcomes also help with recruitment and retention, and they are key to achieving a good student/program fit. For example, CSCC Honors College has built its curriculum around five specific program goals: Academic Excellence, In-Depth Subject Exploration, Presentation Skills, Leadership Skills and Techniques, and Service to Campus and/or Community ("The Honors College at Cleveland State"). These goals guide the curriculum and the development of individual classes. Students must engage in all five of these goals through their honors courses before they graduate. To that end, we make sure that these goals

are accounted for in the core honors curriculum, which is made up of an honors first-year seminar, a leadership development studies course, and an honors capstone. The honors leadership team works with the honors faculty to develop honors projects and workloads that emphasize these goals in every honors course. Students must take a minimum of 13 hours of honors credit and demonstrate mastery of each of these program goals during their honors capstone course, which they take in their final semester before graduation in order to earn the honors diploma.

The MDC Honors College also has specific outcomes that are embedded in its mission statement:

The mission of The Honors College is to be an equitable, diverse, and inclusive scholarly community of excellence that admits, supports and graduates high-achieving learners who transfer debt-free to highly selective institutions and go on to lead responsible, productive and engaged lives while continuing their lifelong connection with The Honors College at Miami Dade College. (“The Honors College”)

From the initial recruiting meeting, through transfer institution selection and application, to future engagement in alumni programming, students are personally invested in the outcomes that drive honors college activities. One of the major focuses for students while in the program is transfer preparation, which is guided by what is known as the “best-match transfer process.” In this process, students work closely with their assigned director and assigned alumni mentor to select and apply to their best-match transfer institutions. They also help students pursue additional financial support if it is needed. By many accounts, the honors college has experienced success in preparing students to transfer and be successful and advance in their studies. Over the past three years (2019–2021), honors college graduates have received over 550 acceptances to the 2021 Top 50 Ranked Institutions according to *U.S. News & World Report*, which were accompanied by almost \$18 million in financial support (Miami Dade College). Moreover, since inception, the MDC Honors College counts 38 alums as Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholars, the most in the nation

by any institution. The latest data also points to 96% of students graduating from their transfer institution and 21% going on to earn a graduate or professional degree. Finally, the honors college has been tagged an “Ivy Stepladder” by *Time* magazine for the number of students that transfer to top institutions each year (Padgett).

A major outcome for the HCCHC is that honors students earn an academic AA or AS while completing all the honors courses assigned to them during advising. Retention rates and the number of students who complete their honors college degree are important metrics that attest to its success. Other tangible outcomes include the record of volunteerism for honors students, how many remain probation free, student participation in leadership positions in college and community clubs and organizations, and their participation in events and activities sponsored by the honors college. To be poetic, the honors college treats the whole person and considers itself successful when its students graduate as better people and students than when they first entered.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the value of establishing an honors college at two-year institutions and offers various models for bringing this to fruition instead of offering a one-size-fits-all approach. Our analysis has been rooted in a community-needs approach, focusing on how honors colleges at two-year institutions serve their students, faculty, campus, and larger communities. Ultimately, we hope this essay has freed readers from the trap of believing that an honors college must be based on a single popular or best-practice model by offering various models for designing, building, and administering an honors college structure that will serve the needs of the institution and its service areas.

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interdisciplinary pathways for students through curricular and co-curricular innovations.

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## ABOUT THE NCHC MONOGRAPH SERIES

The Publications Board of the National Collegiate Honors Council typically publishes two to three monographs a year. The subject matter and style range widely: from handbooks on nuts-and-bolts practices and discussions of honors pedagogy to anthologies on diverse topics addressing honors education and issues relevant to higher education.

The Publications Board encourages people with expertise interested in writing such a monograph to submit a prospectus. Prospective authors or editors of an anthology should submit a proposal discussing the purpose or scope of the manuscript; a prospectus that includes a chapter by chapter summary; a brief writing sample, preferably a draft of the introduction or an early chapter; and a *curriculum vitae*. All monograph proposals will be reviewed by the NCHC Publications Board.

We accept material by email attachment in Word (not pdf).

Direct all proposals, manuscripts, and inquiries about submitting a proposal to the General Editor of the NCHC Monograph Series:

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## NCHC Monographs & Journals

***Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook*** by Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurrier (2005, 98pp). This monograph includes an overview of assessment and evaluation practices and strategies. It explores the process for conducting self-studies and discusses the differences between using consultants and external reviewers. It provides a guide to conducting external reviews along with information about how to become an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor. A dozen appendices provide examples of “best practices.”

***Beginning in Honors: A Handbook*** by Samuel Schuman (Fourth Edition, 2006, 80pp). Advice on starting a new honors program. Covers budgets, recruiting students and faculty, physical plant, administrative concerns, curriculum design, and descriptions of some model programs.

***Breaking Barriers in Teaching and Learning*** edited by James Ford and John Zubizarreta (2018, 252pp). This volume—with wider application beyond honors classrooms and programs—offers various ideas, practical approaches, experiences, and adaptable models for breaking traditional barriers in teaching and learning. The contributions inspire us to retool the ways in which we teach and create curriculum and to rethink our assumptions about learning. Honors education centers on the power of excellence in teaching and learning. Breaking free of barriers allows us to use new skills, adjusted ways of thinking, and new freedoms to innovate as starting points for enhancing the learning of all students.

***Building Honors Contracts: Insights and Oversights*** edited by Kristine A. Miller (2020, 320pp). Exploring the history, pedagogy, and administrative structures of mentored student learning, this collection of essays lays a foundation for creative curricular design and for honors contracts being collaborative partnerships involving experiential learning. This book offers a blueprint for building honors contracts that transcend the transactional.

***The Demonstrable Value of Honors Education: New Research Evidence*** edited by Andrew J. Cognard-Black, Jerry Herron, and Patricia J. Smith (2019, 292pp). Using a variety of different methods and exploring a variety of different outcomes across a diversity of institutions and institution types, the contributors to this volume offer research that substantiates in measurable ways the claims by honors educators of value added for honors programming.

***Fundraising for Honor\$: A Handbook*** by Larry R. Andrews (2009, 160pp). Offers information and advice on raising money for honors, beginning with easy first steps and progressing to more sophisticated and ambitious fundraising activities.

***A Handbook for Honors Administrators*** by Ada Long (1995, 117pp). Everything an honors administrator needs to know, including a description of some models of honors administration.

***A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges*** by Theresa A. James (2006, 136pp). A useful handbook for two-year schools contemplating beginning or redesigning their honors program and for four-year schools doing likewise or wanting to increase awareness about two-year programs and articulation agreements. Contains extensive appendices about honors contracts and a comprehensive bibliography on honors education.

## NCHC Monographs & Journals

***The Honors College Phenomenon*** edited by Peter C. Sederberg (2008, 172pp). This monograph examines the growth of honors colleges since 1990: historical and descriptive characterizations of the trend, alternative models that include determining whether becoming a college is appropriate, and stories of creation and recreation. Leaders whose institutions are contemplating or taking this step as well as those directing established colleges should find these essays valuable.

***Honors Colleges in the 21st Century*** edited by Richard Badenhausen (2023, 536pp). With essays written by 56 authors representing 45 different institutions, this volume is the largest and most comprehensive group of faculty, staff, and administrators ever to appear in print together discussing honors colleges. A wide range of institutional perspectives are represented: public and private, large and small, R1 flagships and regional, two- and four-year, religious and secular, and HBCU.

***Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices*** by Anmarie Guzy (2003, 182pp). Parallel historical developments in honors and composition studies; contemporary honors writing projects ranging from admission essays to theses as reported by over 300 NCHC members.

***Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges*** by Samuel Schuman (Third Edition, 2011, 80pp). Practical and comprehensive advice on creating and managing honors programs with particular emphasis on colleges with fewer than 4,000 students.

***The Honors Thesis: A Handbook for Honors Directors, Deans, and Faculty Advisors*** by Mark Anderson, Karen Lyons, and Norman Weiner (2014, 176pp). To all those who design, administer, and implement an honors thesis program, this handbook offers a range of options, models, best practices, and philosophies that illustrate how to evaluate an honors thesis program, solve pressing problems, select effective requirements and procedures, or introduce a new honors thesis program.

***Housing Honors*** edited by Linda Frost, Lisa W. Kay, and Rachael Poe (2015, 352pp). This collection of essays addresses the issues of where honors lives and how honors space influences educators and students. This volume includes the results of a survey of over 400 institutions; essays on the acquisition, construction, renovation, development, and even the loss of honors space; a forum offering a range of perspectives on residential space for honors students; and a section featuring student perspectives.

***If Honors Students Were People: Holistic Honors Education*** by Samuel Schuman (2013, 256pp). What if honors students were people? What if they were not disembodied intellects but whole persons with physical bodies and questing spirits? Of course . . . they are. This monograph examines the spiritual yearnings of college students and the relationship between exercise and learning.

***Inspiring Exemplary Teaching and Learning: Perspectives on Teaching Academically Talented College Students*** edited by Larry Clark and John Zubizarreta (2008, 216pp). This rich collection of essays offers valuable insights into innovative teaching and significant learning in the context of academically challenging classrooms and programs. The volume provides theoretical, descriptive, and practical resources, including models of effective instructional practices, examples of successful courses designed for enhanced learning, and a list of online links to teaching and learning centers and educational databases worldwide.

## NCHC Monographs & Journals

***Internationalizing Honors*** edited by Kim Klein and Mary Kay Mulvaney (2020, 468pp.). This monograph takes a holistic approach to internationalization, highlighting how honors has gone beyond providing short-term international experiences for students and made global issues and experiences central features of curricular and co-curricular programming. The chapters present case studies that serve as models for honors programs and colleges seeking to initiate and further their internationalization efforts.

***Occupy Honors Education*** edited by Lisa L. Coleman, Jonathan D. Kotinek, and Alan Y. Oda (2017, 394pp). This collection of essays issues a call to honors to make diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence its central mission and ongoing state of mind. Echoing the AAC&U declaration “without inclusion there is no true excellence,” the authors discuss transformational diversity, why it is essential, and how to achieve it.

***The Other Culture: Science and Mathematics Education in Honors*** edited by Ellen B. Buckner and Keith Garbutt (2012, 296pp). A collection of essays about teaching science and math in an honors context: topics include science in society, strategies for science and non-science majors, the threat of pseudoscience, chemistry, interdisciplinary science, scientific literacy, philosophy of science, thesis development, calculus, and statistics.

***Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks*** by Joan Digby with reflective essays on theory and practice by student and faculty participants and National Park Service personnel (First Edition, 2010, 272pp). This monograph explores an experiential learning program that fosters immersion in and stewardship of the national parks. The topics include program designs, group dynamics, philosophical and political issues, photography, wilderness exploration, and assessment.

***Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks*** edited by Heather Thiessen-Reily and Joan Digby (Second Edition, 2016, 268pp). This collection of recent photographs and essays by students, faculty, and National Park Service rangers reflects upon PITP experiential learning projects in new NPS locations, offers significant refinements in programming and curriculum for revisited projects, and provides strategies and tools for assessing PITP adventures.

***Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning*** edited by Bernice Braid and Ada Long (Second Edition, 2010, 128pp). Updated theory, information, and advice on experiential pedagogies developed within NCHC during the past 35 years, including Honors Semesters and City as Text™, along with suggested adaptations to multiple educational contexts.

***Place, Self, Community: City as Text™ in the Twenty-First Century*** edited by Bernice Braid and Sara E. Quay (2021, 228pp). This monograph focuses on the power of structured explorations and forms of immersion in place. It explores the inherent integrative learning capacity to generate a sense of interconnectedness, the ways that this pedagogical strategy affects professors as well as students, and instances of experiential learning outcomes that illustrate the power of integrative learning to produce social sensitivity and engagement.

***Preparing Tomorrow's Global Leaders: Honors International Education*** edited by Mary Kay Mulvaney and Kim Klein (2013, 400pp). A valuable resource for initiating or expanding honors study abroad programs, these essays examine theoretical issues, curricular and faculty development, assessment, funding, and security. The monograph also provides models of successful programs that incorporate high-impact educational practices, including City as Text™ pedagogy, service learning, and undergraduate research.



## NCHC Monographs & Journals

***Setting the Table for Diversity*** edited by Lisa L. Coleman and Jonathan D. Kotinek (2010, 288pp). This collection of essays provides definitions of diversity in honors, explores the challenges and opportunities diversity brings to honors education, and depicts the transformative nature of diversity when coupled with equity and inclusion. These essays discuss African American, Latinx, international, and first-generation students as well as students with disabilities. Other issues include experiential and service learning, the politics of diversity, and the psychological resistance to it. Appendices relating to NCHC member institutions contain diversity statements and a structural diversity survey.

***Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education*** edited by Peter A. Machonis (2008, 160pp). A companion piece to *Place as Text*, focusing on recent, innovative applications of City as Text™ teaching strategies. Chapters on campus as text, local neighborhoods, study abroad, science courses, writing exercises, and philosophical considerations, with practical materials for instituting this pedagogy.

***Teaching and Learning in Honors*** edited by Cheryl L. Fuiks and Larry Clark (2000, 128pp). Presents a variety of perspectives on teaching and learning useful to anyone developing new or renovating established honors curricula.

***Writing on Your Feet: Reflective Practices in City as Text™*** edited by Ada Long (2014, 160pp). A sequel to the NCHC monographs *Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning* and *Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education*, this volume explores the role of reflective writing in the process of active learning while also paying homage to the City as Text™ approach to experiential education that has been pioneered by Bernice Braid and sponsored by NCHC during the past four decades.

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***Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)*** is a semi-annual periodical featuring scholarly articles on honors education. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology, articles on interdisciplinary efforts, discussions of problems common to honors programs, items on the national higher education agenda, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education.

***Honors in Practice (HIP)*** is an annual journal of applied research publishing articles about innovative honors practices and integrative, interdisciplinary, and pedagogical issues of interest to honors educators.

***URCA: The NCHC Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity*** is a web-based, peer-reviewed journal edited by honors students that fosters the exchange of intellectual and creative work among undergraduates, providing a platform where all students can engage with and contribute to the advancement of their individual fields. To learn more, visit <<http://www.nchc-ureca.com>>.

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# from *Honors Colleges* in the 21st Century—

“*Honors Colleges in the 21st Century* contains the work of 56 authors representing 45 different institutions, which makes this the largest and most comprehensive group of honors leaders ever to appear in print together discussing honors colleges. Particularly notable is the fact that eleven of the chapters are co-authored by individuals from different institutions. . . . A wide range of institutional perspectives are represented: public and private, large and small, R1 flagships and regional, two and four-year, religious and secular, and HBCU. The professional positionality of writers is similarly diverse, including faculty, staff, and administrators. Because the diversity of settings in which honors education takes place is one of its great strengths, this volume is not meant to provide a single prescriptive account of how honors colleges should be set up or run. The book very much endorses the framing comments in NCHC’s ‘Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education,’ which ‘acknowledge that honors programs and colleges exist in vastly different institutional and environmental contexts, possess a wide variety of missions and approaches, and have varied access to resources to bring about these outcomes.’ The authors hope similarly that its contents will . . . ‘spark generative conversation around how honors education can help transform an institution and the students it serves.’”

—Richard Badenhausen