

HONORS ONLINE

*Teaching, Learning, and
Building Community Virtually
in Honors Education*

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Building Community Virtually
in Honors Education*

Victoria M. Bryan AND
Cat Stanfield, EDITORS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The collection you hold is the result of extensive collaboration among forty-six authors and two editors who have worked over the course of five years to bring together a comprehensive view of virtual education in honors. Engaging in and writing about virtual learning, particularly that which rises to the expectations of honors education, quickly became a true labor of love. It morphs into a losing battle, however, if the expectation is to assemble a definitive and unchanging handbook of how to do this “correctly” because virtual education changes constantly in keeping with the ever-evolving landscape of learning technologies and modern pedagogy.

The editors of this collection would like to thank the forty-six contributors in this volume for their insight, expertise, and collaboration—but also for their willingness to acknowledge that this collection represents a snapshot in time. The conversation about what makes for intentional and effective virtual pedagogy, program design, programming, teaching, and learning in the world of honors education will continue to change long after this volume’s publication. We are grateful for the opportunity to play a small role in molding that conversation, and we are excited to see where the conversation goes from here.

We would also like to acknowledge the work of the three anonymous reviewers of this collection who offered thorough, thoughtful feedback on the ideas contained in these pages. Further, we would be remiss if we did not extend our gratitude to Jeffrey A. Portnoy, the General Editor of the NCHC Monograph Series, for his eagle-eye editing and discerning feedback at several steps throughout this process. This collection would look very different without the contributions of NCHC’s Publications Board.

We also extend our utmost appreciation to honors educators and students and their constant efforts to innovate the means and mediums by which education is delivered. Their collective willingness to adapt, explore, and innovate both within and beyond the honors classroom has not only enriched the experience of countless students as it is, but it has likewise opened the door for a future in which learning knows far fewer bounds. Their passion for teaching, for learning, for research,

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and for the relentless pursuit of educational excellence inspires us all. Their creativity and adaptability have transformed what could be challenges alone into expansive opportunities for their fellow educators and students alike. Thank you for your invaluable contributions and your steadfast belief in the transformative power of education. Together, as a community of teachers, scholars, and lifetime learners, we stand poised at the forefront of a new era in honors education—a future in which innovation, collaboration, and an eagerness to experiment with new and unfamiliar modalities promise to propel us ever forward.

Finally, the editors would like to thank our spouses, Rob Marshall and Eri Cruz Valdez, for their parts in bringing this project to fruition. Academic work is privileged work, but even our research and writing about collaborative efforts like teaching can feel solitary from time to time. We would wager that each author in this collection has some network of friends or family who have bolstered them through their careers and academic efforts, and we are grateful to those people as much as we are the authors themselves. Speaking specifically for ourselves, Rob's and Eri's love and support played a notable role in bringing this collection to print. We are lucky and ever grateful.

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INTRODUCTION

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This collection is not about teaching during COVID-19. At least, it is not *only* about teaching during COVID-19.

This volume is intended as an argument for honors education in online spaces—an opportunity to demonstrate how courses and programming can operate virtually while maintaining the rigor, innovation, and community on which honors education prides itself. We started floating the idea for a National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) monograph in 2019 with presenters from a 2018 NCHC roundtable panel on virtual education in honors. Online honors courses may not have been the most popular idea at the time, but those invested in that work knew from experience that academically motivated students can come to our campuses with scheduling limitations, extensive extracurricular commitments, caretaking responsibilities, a need for physical or curricular accommodations because of disabilities, and all manner of other needs and obligations, and these students require or benefit from online learning opportunities. For all intents and purposes, this collection maintains that central focus.

March 2020 came at us full speed and sidelined that proposal (along with untold numbers of other research projects brewing in academia). Classes went online with very little notice. According to an *Inside Higher Ed* survey from 2019, only about 46% of faculty reported having taught online at the time (Lederman, “Professors”). We were all—from those of us with decades of experience to those of us figuring out how our learning management systems worked for the first time—suddenly engaged in a kind of slow-burning crisis management. Charles Hodges et al, argued as early as 27 March 2020, that this was not online instruction but “emergency remote instruction,” or ERT—a term adopted quickly and widely to distinguish between crisis

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management in education and a truly effective and necessary kind of virtual instruction that well-trained faculty have been offering for decades (Hodges et al.).

With the reticence to teach online had come deeply ingrained beliefs about the ineffectiveness of online instruction. This lack of faith, Doug Lederman argues, was brought on not necessarily by anything inherent in the delivery method but by “campus administrators or technology advocates herald[ing] digital forms of higher education by focusing on cost savings or efficiency over quality, or set[ting] instructors up for bad outcomes by imposing solutions on them without seeking their input or giving them adequate training” (“Faculty Confidence”). Online learning is not appropriate for every student. All faculty members who have taught in a virtual environment know this in their bones. Couple that fact with the collective trauma of trying to continue life as usual amidst an ongoing and deadly global pandemic, and we can see why skepticism about online instruction colored the COVID-19 era and persists after. We also know, however, that faith in online instruction did increase in 2020, and by August of that year, we saw forty-nine percent of faculty reporting that they saw value and validity in online instruction compared to the thirty-nine percent who reported similar beliefs in May, just a few months earlier (Lederman, “Faculty Confidence”). This increase existed across higher education, and honors programs and colleges were no exception. Lederman argues that faculty on average felt more prepared to teach online in the coming semesters, and “they generally credit[ed] their institutions for helping to prepare them” (“Faculty Confidence”).

The rays of light for many of us in the world of honors education were those in our worldwide honors community who had engaged in online honors instruction for many years before COVID-19 changed our profession in irreversible ways. We depended on those who had given online honors a try—who had probably failed at it a handful of times and had come back to that online space again and again, knowing that our efforts toward designing quality online courses were appreciated by the students who needed those options. These professors offered guidance on their own campuses, trained other faculty members who needed support, shared what they knew and what they were learning at regional and national honors meetings (also conducted online that year), and generally embodied the spirit of honors education as an

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opportunity to learn through innovation, challenge, and community. Many of the contributors to this collection had been doing this work in online spaces for quite a while before COVID-19, and because of their years of experience, trial and error, and commitment to student learning, many others of us were able to keep our heads above water.

While this collection's focus is not primarily teaching during COVID-19, divorcing the two completely after the collective trauma we all experienced during 2020 and 2021 would be difficult. For many years, we will likely hear most conversations about online instruction tangled up with reflections on our experiences teaching and learning during COVID-19. Our pedagogical development will, for the foreseeable future, comingle with reflections on our endeavors to offer quality learning experiences during a deadly global pandemic.

As such, readers will notice that many chapters demonstrate the same kind of intermingling of reflection, trauma processing, and presentation of academic findings and pedagogical approaches. It would be easy to assume that these reflections are all the same. Many of these chapters carry similar rings of panic, reaction, despair, reflection, reimagining and revision of classes, and ultimately, pride for what was accomplished in unprecedented times.

Despite some commonalities, each experience was unique. Small colleges reacted differently from large colleges. The effects on community college enrollment were different from those on university enrollment. Residential colleges faced distinct challenges related to housing and safety measures with which campuses without dorms did not have to grapple. Honors colleges and programs overseen by college and university leadership entrenched in "what we've always done" reacted more slowly than those more able to adjust their approaches based on what was needed in that particular moment. These divergent experiences are worth bearing witness to as we move forward in our profession because we must value each other's experiences in times of collective trauma.

The contribution this monograph makes, however, is a deep dive into the opportunities that await honors programs and colleges if they choose to adopt true online programming. While this is very different from emergency remote teaching, we find ourselves at a crossroads as a result of that collective trauma that could prove beneficial to our program development, our students, and our faculty. We know that

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effective online instruction is driven by formal training in online course design, development, and instruction and the sharing of resources and practices among a committed community of practitioners (Walsh et al.). We know also that online programming does not have to come at the expense of in-person instruction in our honors programs and colleges. While one program may commit to offering enough quality online courses for fully online students to complete an honors diploma, another might offer online extracurricular and co-curricular opportunities that supplement in-person classes. A college or university with a robust online presence might invest heavily in developing a fully online honors curriculum, while an institution without such a presence might invest in developing a limited number of online courses with the intention of allowing students an easier time scheduling their honors requirements among their myriad other obligations on and off campus. Some might see this situation as an opportunity to improve equitable access to honors programming. Some might seize the chance to develop an online conference to serve students across their state or in an extensive network of honors colleges and programs. The opportunities are myriad, as is the research-driven dialogue that has grown out of this kind of instruction over the last several decades.

Quality online programming is not a monolith. The beauty of this kind of instruction—when done well—is that it is adaptable. In its flexibility lies opportunity, and the chapters that make up this collection demonstrate just how much opportunity we have before us.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

The first section of this monograph, *Harnessing Virtual Connection in Program and Course Design*, focuses on online honors programs and course design; the authors therein offer a combination of research and experience to demonstrate how the metaphorical “soul” of honors education may be translated from brick-and-mortar classrooms to virtual spaces. Key among these pieces is the idea that we cannot simply emulate the physical classroom and expect those methods to be sufficient in an online course. Rather, to do this work well—to offer a high-quality honors experience—we must be open to and engage with innovative approaches to teaching and learning. It is integral to the quality of our instruction that we keep our learning objectives at

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the forefront of our thinking as we design (and redesign, and redesign again) our courses for a notably different delivery format.

In the collection's opening chapter, "Through the Looking Glass: Honors in Virtual Reality," Betsy Greenleaf Yarrison centers honors programs and colleges as dialectical, community-focused leaders in higher education, arguing that we have an obligation to adapt to the changing needs of our students, whether those students are in our seminar rooms or are seeking connection in an online learning environment. To fulfill this obligation, Yarrison encourages honors educators to avoid a "risk-averse," neophobic approach to online instruction and calls for a collective movement to lean *into*—rather than *away from*—the new opportunities provided to us through the virtual classroom (5). By doing so, she envisions various techniques through which we may better prepare our students for lifelong learning in a world where online engagement is now inevitable.

Yarrison's work is followed by Kristy Spear and Pavlo D. Antonenko's "Exploring Incoming Honors Students' Beliefs About Online Courses," which opens with a succinct, compelling analysis of the "Community of Inquiry" model used in online course design, proceeding thereafter to discuss a study conducted by the authors in which this model was utilized to analyze incoming honors students' beliefs about online classes. Truly, the weight and value of this study cannot be overstated as we approach the post-COVID era of our respective honors careers. While our students will continue to enroll in honors courses for years to come, craving the academic challenge, community, and personal educational responsibility that define honors education, Spear and Antonenko stress that, well beyond the pandemic, many will expect (or even need) the flexibility that online education can provide. This chapter provides a thorough framework for synthesizing the best of honors education and the best of online instruction to ensure that students' needs are met.

In "Reimagining Honors Curriculum—Delivered Through Technology Utilizing Our Alumni Community," Mollie Hartup, Amy Cossentino, and Lexi Rager address the redesign of Youngstown State University's Introduction to Honors seminar to efficiently engage students in an online learning environment. Throughout the chapter, the authors emphasize the cruciality of agile hybrid course modalities, adapting to new and/or unfamiliar technologies, and

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building relationships within the classroom, as well as the roles of teaching assistants and alumni engagement. Although this redesign began as a response to COVID-19, the design of the course provides valuable insight as to how similar seminar courses at other colleges and universities may be reimaged for honors students who prefer, or require, online learning opportunities.

Next, we turn in “Online Faculty Professional Development and Community as Nexus” to John Zubizarreta, Beata M. Jones, and Marca V. C. Wolfensberger’s work to develop HIFLO, or Honors International Faculty Learning Online. This high-impact, online professional development event for honors educators seeks to preserve and foster the invaluable sense of community that has come to define honors education online and offline. The authors argue that, while we have long-established meaningful communities among our students that assist them in learning effectively, we must offer the same support and community building for our honors faculty as well. We crave that connection just as much as our students do, and this chapter calls upon us to remember that we are less equipped to support our students if we, as faculty, are without meaningful connection and a strong community.

Lauri B. Cockfield’s “Building a Pipeline for Transfer and Scholarship Through (Virtual) Honors Research Partnerships” provides a framework for familiarizing students with advanced undergraduate research and, in turn, preparing them for professional and/or graduate-level work. Cockfield’s tangible plan puts forth the means to make this work a central focus of an honors college and its curriculum. Investing in faculty/staff positions, preparing students for research opportunities via online workshops, and multimodality conferencing characterize this hands-on approach to honors education.

In “Reaction to Intention: Developing Hybrid Honors Courses in the Wake of the Pandemic,” the final chapter in this section, Megan Woller discusses her firsthand experiences in the redevelopment of her Music and Gender course over multiple stages of pandemic teaching and learning, including not only the abrupt shift to remote learning in spring 2020, but also her intentional decision to redesign the course for hybrid modality in future semesters. Woller asserts the practical and pedagogical value of hybrid learning opportunities in honors and provides a detailed “blueprint” to assist in satisfying institutional honors outcomes while keeping students’ needs in mind. (99)

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Honors is not just about what happens in the classroom. The next section of this volume, *Virtual Experiential Learning and Conferencing*, explores virtual programming. To offer a quality honors experience to our students, we must prepare them for professional development opportunities—such as conferencing—and find effective methods to engage them in experiential learning. While many of the five chapters comprising this section present ideas born from the crisis of teaching and learning during COVID-19, they also ask us to consider what we may take forward into our post-COVID world. We have endured decades of shrinking budgets and travel limitations, and we are unlikely to leave that behind anytime soon. The adjustments we were forced to make, however, during COVID-19 lockdowns to keep our programs and conferences afloat may—if we allow them to—continue to facilitate a sustainable way of serving our students amid the ongoing budget cuts that plague higher education. This section provides a number of powerful frameworks for additional development in honors virtual programming.

Ian McIntosh’s “International Virtual Exchange During and Beyond the Pandemic” kicks off this section by demonstrating how utilizing Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis’ (IUPUI’s) CN (or Course Networking) allows students the opportunity to engage globally even when unable to travel internationally. For example, the communication between students and their “international partners” during the Indiana-Rwanda SDG Virtual Exchange was seamlessly integrated into the course through commonly used and widely accessible services such as cloud-based video conferencing platforms (i.e., Zoom) and free international messaging apps (i.e., WhatsApp). These services were not only a welcome opportunity at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic but also a welcome opportunity for students who otherwise lack the resources to fund a study abroad experience. Additionally, McIntosh discusses the importance of the U.N.’s Sustainable Development Goals in the structure of this course and its projects.

Next, Randi Polk outlines the practices that an inclusive, equitable virtual study abroad course should consider, as well as specific learning outcomes that we may present to our students in this unconventional travel modality; notably, Polk uses her successful online adaptation of a canceled study abroad course as an ongoing point of reference. Polk emphasizes that while a traditional study abroad course focuses on

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learning by virtue of being in a space, a virtual study abroad course utilizes videos, readings, and online interactions to deliver information and challenge students to think about their roles as global citizens. “For Here or To Go? (Re)Packaging the Takeaway” includes a detailed description of her virtual study abroad course and the various resources she used to create this enriching experience for her students. Polk concludes with a powerful reflection on issues of equality related to study abroad and how virtual experiences could begin to close equality gaps for students otherwise unable to partake in study abroad because of deterrents such as financial constraints, health reasons, or caretaking responsibilities.

In much the same vein, Sara E. Quay, Season Ellison, Leslie Heaphy, Amaris Ketcham, Toni Lefton, and Andrew Martino’s “Re-Reading Local Spaces: City as Text™ Goes Virtual” provides a succinct description of how the National Collegiate Honors Council’s City as Text faculty institutes were successfully converted into an online modality in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors present a tangible outline of the two delivery formats, thereby asserting that adjusting what we do in the honors world to meet the increasing need of virtual education requires a precise focus on what we are trying to accomplish and what we want our students and faculty to retain from an experience. It also requires adapting the focus to fit the modality in which we are operating. As this chapter demonstrates—like many others in this collection—merely mimicking what has proven successful when face-to-face in a virtual context does not always yield positive results. Instead, we must examine our objectives, as well as the benefits and constraints of the delivery method, and build from the ground up.

Kevin S. Amidon and Gregory Atkins’s “Online Education, Honors, and the Engaged University: Modeling Experiential Learning for Fully Online Students at Fort Hays State University” is a powerful chapter. It outlines the development of a fully online, student-centered honors curricular model that features the extracurricular experiential learning opportunities that Fort Hays State University in Kansas implemented. The authors expound upon their honors college’s prior and ongoing efforts to accommodate online students while retaining experiential learning, opportunities for substantial research, and engagement activities that commonly characterize the on-campus honors experience. Additionally, Amidon and Atkins emphasize the necessity

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of considering local demographics to further inform student needs and develop relevant academic opportunities for career preparedness.

“Cultivating Delight, Crossing Divides, and Solving Impossible Problems: Lessons Learned from a Year of Virtual Conferences” wraps up this section. Jon Blandford, Kathy J. Cooke, Erik Liddell, Kathryn M. MacDonald, and Tara M. Tuttle seek to disprove the notion that experiential learning opportunities cannot be adapted to the virtual world; rather, they suggest that innovative educators must ensure their work is available to online students, particularly those who could not access it without the presence of a virtual option. While the authors were indeed motivated by the COVID-19 pandemic, their work in this collection explores the far-reaching impact that such innovation may have on students with financial constraints, caretaking responsibilities, full-time jobs, disabilities, and other restrictions. For these groups, crucial honors experiences such as international travel, City as Text™ workshops, and conferencing prove difficult—if not impossible—tasks when offered only in traditional formats. This chapter discusses three virtual conferencing opportunities offered in the honors community in 2020 and 2021: the Southern Regional Honors Council, the Northeast Regional Honors Council, and the Kentucky Honors Roundtable. These organizations took painstaking steps to convert their traditional conferences to a virtual format using software such as Zoom and Teams, even embedding social events and interactive challenges to engage students in community building. Blandford et al. provide valuable descriptions of their work, their successes, their challenges, and the tools they used to facilitate these conferences successfully.

The third section of this collection is *Creating Community In and Out of the Virtual Classroom*. Community and a sense of belonging are central to everything we do in our honors programs and honors colleges; that is, to take the personal and academic risks that honors courses ask of our students, they must first have trust in their classmates and the professor engaged in that learning with them. Anyone who has taught (or taken) an online course knows firsthand, however, that establishing a community in an online learning space may be a significant challenge when reckoning with course synchronicity, location-specific distractions (such as family members or pets), and varying levels of technological fluency. Although this section is markedly shorter than the prior two, we found it necessary

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to draw attention to the challenge of creating community in virtual spaces and demonstrating how we can meet this challenge head-on.

Anne Dotter and Kathleen King's "Building and Fostering Honors Communities: Lessons from Social Distancing" outlines the emergency responses implemented during COVID-19 (with particular importance given to social distancing) and a forthright reflection on what did—and did not—work while likewise providing a theoretical overview of the importance of sociality in learning. Relatedly, the authors discuss the challenges and advantages inherent in creating such sociality in virtual environments. The central concerns of this chapter demonstrate the power of community and our responsibility as educators in helping our students build it. Dotter and King powerfully expressed this idea; they write:

In many ways, the pandemic made visible what had previously gone unseen or was previously taken for granted. It forced us to recognize the value of online learning as a pedagogical practice in its own right—one that, some would argue, is better suited to certain content than in-person learning. It made our students' inequality come into focus, and it helped us to see how important community and sociality are to learning. Students and faculty in honors have come to realize that an inclusive community, whether online or in person, supports and drives much of their success.... The pandemic sharpened our awareness that... we have a responsibility to preserve at least some, if not all, of the COVID-inspired emergency practices that led our students to success during this challenging time. (214–15)

Writing with collaborators Gillian Wenhold and Jacquelyn McBride, Laura G. Eldred details the inspiring measures enacted at Pennsylvania's Lebanon Valley College to successfully implement an honors living-learning community in fall 2020, requiring high-touch recruitment and the onboarding of students in an exclusively virtual environment. This chapter includes the voices of two students, Gillian Wenhold and Jacqueline McBride, who contribute their perspectives on this experience and the impact it had on their education. Although "Before They Set Foot on Campus: Building a Virtual Summer Community for Incoming Honors Students" focuses primarily upon how these practices were implemented out of necessity, as well as the

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results they provided during the COVID-19 pandemic, it also serves as a blueprint for recruiting and onboarding incoming honors students in the post-COVID era. Higher education is unlikely to yield its newfound reliance on virtual recruiting, interviewing, and onboarding in the coming years, and Eldred provides concise instructions in doing so while maintaining community and connection.

In “Building Virtual Community: The Power of Peer-Led Engagement,” Emily Clossin, Shane Collins, Lisa Ruch, Kristina Horn Sheeler, and Kara M. Woodlee close this section by focusing on virtual engagement events held during the COVID-19 pandemic that were designed as peer-led events across several honors-related organizations; simultaneously, honors students were provided with the opportunity to engage virtually and meaningfully with their peers. Students adopted leadership roles (whether by leading events or through associated student internships), served as peer mentors, and even participated in virtual service learning. This chapter also includes a survey of student engagement and perceptions of belonging in the honors college as well as an analysis of what the authors plan to bring forward into the post-COVID era.

This monograph’s final section, Quick Takeaways, diverges slightly from the others. These chapters are somewhat shorter than those in previous sections, and they often focus more on experience than research. The authors of these eight chapters have contributed brief descriptions of software, assignment ideas, and teaching techniques meant to help readers use virtual spaces to create innovative and challenging learning opportunities.

In “Harnessing Flip in Both Hybrid and Fully Online Honors Courses to Build Community,” Monica VanDieren and Sylvia A. Pamboukian demonstrate concrete examples of how honors instructors at Pennsylvania’s Robert Morris University utilized Microsoft’s Flipgrid (now known as “Flip”)—a social learning app—to disrupt their discussion boards in online and hybrid courses. From on- and off-campus scavenger hunts to interdivision peer support, the discussions and suggestions contained within this chapter are immediately accessible and easy to replicate in other classes. This chapter provides a valuable discussion of bringing life and community to virtual modalities.

Christian Rubio’s “Lasting Lessons from COVID-19: A Story of Successful Community Building” details the methods by which

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Massachusetts' Bentley University sought to expand the role of its preexisting student honors council in response to declining enrollment; importantly, students cited a "lack of community" as a primary reason to abstain from an honors distinction (288). Upon expanding the student honors council from eight to over twenty-five students, the council facilitated a series of hybrid-model extracurricular events to include not only on-campus students, but also those who attended Bentley University through a variety of modalities.

Jennifer Schlegel and Alexis DuHadaway provide an approachable description of hybridity and detail the virtual resources utilized in the evolution of Kutztown University's honors peer mentoring program. The authors succeeded in "flipping" their nascent peer mentoring program to one that prioritized multimodality and student agency in a virtual environment while negotiating unprecedented obstacles (294). "Peer Mentoring in a Pandemic: An Honors Experiment in Community Building" concludes with an inspiring outline of what Schlegel and DuHadaway plan to take into the future.

In "Connecting Honors Students in a Virtual Environment: Activities for Engagement," Sarah Sudar and Colin Sisk propose and illustrate a series of virtual honors events, which may span a semester—or an entire year if structured as such, that are intended to bring students together to foster community among their honors peers and faculty. The authors detail successful events such as a virtual summer kick-off with a live, synchronous unboxing event of college swag, an online orientation, and myriad workshops, including (but not limited to) assisting with virtual transfers and providing instruction for networking online.

Lauri B. Cockfield details an ongoing effort to supplement a strong online honors curriculum with a vibrant online honors community. She eagerly expresses how we may capitalize upon the movement toward virtual learning by using online tools that were, prepandemic, often neglected. "Transcending Distance: Connecting During Imposed Seclusion" also emphasizes the potential for convenience, cost-effectiveness, and increased participation when implementing various virtual modalities. The book clubs, guest speakers, mixers, and even acoustic jams discussed by Cockfield provide accessible opportunities to establish a strong foundation for an online honors community.

Elizabeth M. Hodge, Bhibha M. Das, Tim Christensen, Teal Darkenwald, Gerald Weckesser, and Wayne Godwin illustrate the

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means by which this faculty team’s “wicked problem”—how to transition intensive honors curricula and experiential learning to an online format—was mediated through human-centered design, creative problem solving, and disrupting the often-stark line between professor and student (313). The authors assert in “Navigating Without Knowing” that social media is an invaluable strategy to engage students, such as an Instagram hashtag (#) to connect posts not only to relevant class content, but also to span various lives, experiences, and contexts existing simultaneously in the virtual classroom. This chapter concludes with step-by-step recommendations for program implementation.

In “Creating Virtual Honors Spaces with Discord and WebEx,” Trista M. Merrill and Ce Rosenow provide a compelling case for the inclusion of Discord and WebEx—two virtual chat and video call services—to create a virtual community for students that may be accessible on- and off-campus. Notably, these services may be used to connect students within a particular institution and beyond it, as exhibited by using Discord to connect honors students with Phi Theta Kappa members and by hosting an array of guest speakers through WebEx.

Jacob Arnold closes this collection with “The Tightrope Walk of Academic Creativity: Eliciting Growth in Online Honors Courses,” asserting that honors education has flourished in online spaces prior to the pandemic and ensuing shift to online modalities. Arnold propounds the need for creative, expressive honors curricula, using an example of the high-impact, hands-on work wherein Arnold’s students undertook the production and publication of an issue of *The Quibbler* in a Harry Potter-centric literature course. Additionally, the author poignantly encourages both instructors and students to embrace “the delightful discomfort that true learning brings,” particularly in times of change.

These twenty-two chapters demonstrate that virtual education has taken place in honors programs and colleges for quite some time, and this work exists outside of the context of COVID-19. Quite different from the emergency remote teaching and learning we all did during 2020 and into 2021, high-quality online course and program design requires understanding content delivery, communication,

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assessment, and interpersonal connection specific to virtual spaces. The perspectives offered in this collection are intended to inspire honors professors and administrators to embrace the value of online learning and programming for the benefit of their students and the ability to bring quality honors education to a broader array of students seeking the challenge and connection that honors education provides.

We do not do the work of online teaching simply because we are a community of learners determined to support each other. We must also do this work because honors is and always has been intent upon healing some of what is broken about higher education, causing good trouble in the college classroom, and figuring out how to meet our students where they are and help them along the road to where they want to go. Online learning will be a part of that journey in various ways depending on individual student needs and preferences, changes to public health practices in the wake of the pandemic, and a world of work awaiting our students after graduation that may very well be drastically different from what we have known in the past. Our hope is that these chapters offer some guidance and support on the road to doing this work well.

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HONORS ONLINE

*Teaching, Learning, and
Building Community Virtually
in Honors Education*

PART I

**Harnessing Virtual Connection
in Program and Course Design**

CHAPTER ONE

Through the Looking Glass: Honors in Virtual Reality

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UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE

Honors was never intended to be virtual. It was never imagined on a flat screen. If a class is not held in a classroom, then surely it takes place across a conference table in a meeting room reimagined as a classroom, or in a museum, or on the deck of a ship, or in a crime lab or a gaming lab (not a computer lab with plastic partitions), or in a park with partners. Honors is not supposed to consist of solitary reflection; it is dialectical. It depends on team building and community building and is nourished by intellectual interaction that is intimate and three-dimensional. It depends on collegial relationships among faculty and students that enable them to tackle wicked problems and address controversial topics together.

After 2020, however, higher education will never be the same. Neither will honors. The apocalyptic COVID-19 pandemic forced college and university faculty to pivot and reboot violently in order to extract

higher education from its comfortable working space and relocate it to an entirely new environment: a brave, new world of remote, computer-mediated instruction. Suddenly, we and our students became refugees, virtual prisoners trapped in our own homes. We found ourselves suffering from transplant shock, starved for the familiar, incapacitated by PTSD, and very likely lost in cyberspace. This displacement was especially wrenching for honors programs and colleges, which depend on small, in-person classes and tiny seminars; service learning, much of it experiential; study abroad; and other high-impact educational practices, all of which had to be suspended in favor of lectures and student presentations delivered via video conferencing software and online discussion, both synchronous and asynchronous.

Professors worked diligently to be flexible in delivering their course content through remote learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially at the outset, however, both faculty and students reported that they felt undernourished by the online version of the college experience, or simply shared that they expected to be. As Kristy Spear and Pavlo D. Antonenko illustrate in “Exploring Incoming Honors Students’ Beliefs About Online Courses,” students who were subjected to online learning when they had not signed up for it had low expectations. Professors worried that if they could not read the room and feel the interpersonal dynamics, they would be unable to tell if they were getting through to their students. Honors faculty and students felt the distance and two-dimensionality acutely, and for both it was magnified, as always, by grade anxiety. Honors students know how to earn good grades in familiar settings, but this new setting robbed them of many of the tools in their academic toolkits. Many felt panicky out of their comfort zone and were concerned about what their expectations should be for courses that started out face-to-face and then suddenly went online. They worried whether any expectations they might have, or any assumptions they might make, would be valid or reliable. Since most had little experience, if any, with honors courses delivered online, they felt as if, like Alice, they had fallen inadvertently through a looking glass and discovered that the world on the other side was upside down and backwards. Many of their teachers felt the same way. For many, especially at first, it felt like a dystopian nightmare. Everyone longed to return to “normal.”

But what is “normal” going to look like in the twenty-first century? This book will introduce us to the new “normal” for honors education that this pandemic inadvertently provided. The lecture and dialectic model may not prepare students very well for a workplace that, in the future, may exist predominantly in cyberspace. Teaching for a year with Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, and other synchronous meeting platforms designed for use in business showed us that we can use the powers of the internet to create a cloud workplace in which a college classroom and a corporate meeting room are indistinguishable from one another. This is the workplace of the future. If we expect to prepare our best students for it, we must be the universities of the future. Everyone else looks to honors for leadership. We cannot catch ourselves saying: “There go the people. I must follow them, for I am their leader.”

The pandemic crisis actually gave a surprising number of university faculty their first-ever experience with online instruction, and many found themselves paralyzed by neophobia and overcome with a desperate longing for the familiar. Having taught themselves to teach merely by delivering a lecture or a PowerPoint presentation to a live audience, many just made the minimum technical concessions necessary to continue to do what they were already doing—that is, lecturing remotely, not teaching online. They taped lectures, with and without accompanying slides, and broadcast them to students at the appointed time just the same way they participated in online conferences throughout 2020 and 2021. Since most colleges and universities now own software that allows professors to broadcast live, in real time, and allows instantaneous written and video feedback from students, distance learning is a technological relic. But many faculty were too risk-averse to try to re-engineer their courses for online delivery. Lecturing to an empty room, like a cellist playing to an empty concert hall or a basketball player shooting critical free throws with no fans cheering and booing, they felt justifiably confirmed in their conviction that all online teaching is a watered-down and unsatisfying version of classroom teaching.

As soon as universities proposed investing in technologies that could make online instruction more widespread, the counterinsurgency began. Social media posts appeared, urging faculty not to get too good at online teaching lest they be asked to do more of it. The underlying

assumption persisted that all online teaching is, by definition, inferior to the live experience.

A videotaped lecture is never as engaging as a live one. Just as is the case with a concert or a basketball game, achieving an exciting headspace is much easier to do when the audience can inhabit the performance space and the electricity of emotions can fill the room. But we have learned to substitute films for live theater. It is a different experience. On the other hand, a virtual choir is not the same experience for the participants as a live choir, but to the audience, it sounds almost identical, especially if one closes one's eyes and exists entirely in the soundspace. Recorded music has coexisted with live music from the moment the earliest recording and broadcasting technologies came into existence, and they provide access to those without the means to enjoy the live experience. Taking honors students to a concert or to a play is generally considered enrichment, not ordinary classroom pedagogy. Now, through the magic of visual technology, students who have never traveled outside their home counties, let alone their home states, can visit the Louvre or the Uffizi, see the David close up, or experience the Hagia Sophia, the Dome of the Rock, or the Sistine Chapel.

As the essays in this book will confirm, faculty unfamiliar with the pedagogical demands have now discovered that online teaching is highly labor-intensive with a steep learning curve. But if we do not put in the time to learn to use online tools to maximize the learning experience for students, it will be inferior and the self-fulfilling prophecy will come to pass. Online classes can become powerful Communities of Inquiry.¹ They can greatly broaden inclusivity in honors (Yarrison, "Honors the Hard Way"). After all, education is a social construct. We have the power to deconstruct and reconstruct it. We are supposedly preparing these students for a work environment that will be global and heavily mediated by computers. Thomas Watson was right. It is time for the "wild ducks" of academia to take charge (qtd. in Lowenstein).²

We spent virtually all of 2020 through the looking glass, but what if that looking glass, like Alice's, or Milo's in *The Phantom Tollbooth*, Dorothy's in *The Wizard of Oz*, or Max's in *Where the Wild Things Are* is not a mirror at all? What if we can come to see it, as these characters and all the readers of these famous books eventually do, as a window into a magical new universe of learning in which all reflex expectations and ancient axioms must be discarded? Anything familiar can be

transformed into something entirely new if we do not insist on looking at it through our own tired eyes.

Oz is in color: it is Kansas that is in black and white. “Virtual” honors need not be perceived as something that appears to exist but (in reality) does not, or as something that is almost or nearly—but not completely or accurately—as described. “Virtual” honors could be perceived as a perfectly legitimate alternative reality if we could see it as Rhyme and Reason see the Empire of Wisdom—as a place that is a bit chaotic in the moment, but can be set right, and which is *home* to those who live there, however topsy-turvy it may seem to us. In the Emerald City, it is perfectly normal for everything to be green and for the Horse of a Different Color to change his. Max, a rebel and an out-cast in his own country, is proclaimed king of the Wild Things once he arrives on their island. Alice begins the chess game as a pawn but, through her own choices, and by learning, becomes a queen.

The entire 2020–2021 academic year was a gigantic field test of online learning—the Operation Warp Speed of online teaching—which had to be mass-produced for a target population of reluctant conscripts without having been fully lab tested in advance. We had to learn how to bring higher education to the students rather than having them come to us. It was Mass from the back of a pickup truck rather than in a cathedral, or a traveling circus, or a location roadshow. What happened? Attendance went up. When we put classes on the internet, it permitted more democracy and more diversity. Accommodating students in assorted geographical locations became easier. Classes were suddenly more accessible; students with disabilities or crippling mood disorders could stay safely in their private comfort zone and be transported to a cloud classroom. Students could attend class even if they were sick or recuperating or deployed or new parents or quarantining or marooned overseas. The production infrastructure originally designed to provide the Rolls Royce of educational experiences found that it was able to produce a solid Toyota, an inexpensive model that is affordable, runs forever, and never needs fixing. It is not a residency at Oxford or Plato’s Academy, but it is not elitist either, and with universities and the government picking up the bill for laptops and software, those without means had access. Honors has committed itself to inclusion despite its history of exclusivity. Moving it online permits greater democratization just when that is most needed.

Traditionally—and it is a longstanding tradition that predates most modern communication technologies—the majority of college courses consist of face-to-face briefings with simultaneous Q&A. When distance learning first arrived, those classes were still constructed in this format. The “hybrid” courses to which universities are now turning, where students can attend either in person or electronically, still follow this design. The “whiteboard” feature that Zoom added in 2022 is a nod to this instructional preference. Yet, while faculty may be in their element giving oral presentations, with or without media assistance, and listening to themselves talk about a subject they love, this environment is not always the most conducive to learning for students. Most of them, like most bright employees in a large, boring meeting, sit in the room quietly reading on their phones, daydreaming, or thinking about something other than the lecture material. This behavior is especially true of honors students, many of whom—like most faculty—enjoy the gift of attention surplus.³ We can require them to attend classes and events at the peril of their GPA, but we cannot make them listen any more than we can make them listen to a graduation speech or the homily at a worship service.

The lecture/Q&A method of instruction translates much better to online platforms for students than it does for teachers. In a Zoom gallery, students can hide their faces rather than let their bored affect be self-evident to all since in a Zoom class everyone can actually see everyone else in the room without needing to turn their heads to look at someone and making themselves conspicuous. Professors insist fruitlessly that online students be required to keep their cameras on as if that could guarantee their attention. You can tell immediately on a screen full of windows into students’ private homes if someone is bothered by a dog or a child, or must get up and leave and come back. But in a face-to-face class, especially in a big lecture, faculty members could never tell if students were actually listening or if they were playing with their phones or reading something in their laps, and they certainly could not get close enough to them to guess much from their faces. Faculty play on their phones, knit, or doodle in meetings all the time but do not make the inference that, if students are doing that in a lecture, they are bored and have lost interest.

A public lecture with a Q&A to follow will lose its momentum at about an hour and a half—perhaps sooner. Studies on attention,⁴ the

Pomodoro Technique,⁵ workshop and conference planning models, and our own anecdotal experience have all taught us that the traditional fifty-minute to eighty-minute lecture does not, in fact, hold the attention of listeners. In a live classroom, they must sit there quietly and patiently, without fidgeting or doing something else, and try not to let their minds wander. They cannot get up to stretch and walk around, or leave and come back refreshed so they are more receptive to learning. Yet we continue to deliver classes this way and argue passionately that it is the best way to do it, even though research on the Forgetting Curve has been warning us ever since Hermann Ebbinghaus first proposed it in 1885 that people forget approximately 50 percent of what they hear within an hour, 75 percent within 24 hours, and up to 90 percent within a week.⁶

Honors education has always been offered up as an alternative to this method of course delivery. It seeks to engage students in the exchange of ideas, but it has traditionally required that they travel to the professor, meet as a group, and do it in person. Today's students do not remember when there were no personal cell phones, so their idea of a group includes members who are not present in person but can join via Skype, FaceTime, or Google groups. During the pandemic, people have attended weddings, graduations, christenings, and funerals via livestream. They have also attended concerts, recitals, staged readings, and plays on the internet and have been able to see the performers much more clearly than they could from row KK. Most of us rarely attend the Olympics in person, but that does not mean that we do not expect them to be on television just because it will not be the same. In the fall of 2018, my Political Rhetoric class watched the Kavanaugh hearings live in class on YouTube while they were actually going on, just as on July 28, 1965, when my International Relations class trudged over to the library to watch Lyndon Johnson announce on television that he was sending a hundred thousand troops to Vietnam. The professor took us because he had been a graduate student on Wilson's team at Versailles, and he assured us that we were watching history in the making. I have never forgotten that morning with all of us clustered around a little black-and-white television. I do not remember anything else I learned in the course.

In the spring semester of 2020, both students and faculty were surprised to discover that some ways in which online teaching is

actually superior to the live classroom experience have emerged *a posteriori* and are now demanding recognition. To properly reach twenty-first-century students, who spend most of their waking hours in digital environments, universities will need to give serious attention to introducing mixed modalities into their one-dimensional delivery paradigms. Faculty will have to be retrofitted for a more complex kind of teaching that involves more than one kind of interaction design. Professors will need to give serious thought to the fact that the in-person lecture, while comfortable and familiar for them, may not always be the best option for all instruction and may, in fact, be on its way to playing a supporting role rather than a starring role in higher education. This applies more to honors classes than to any others if they are to lead the way into student-centered learning for everyone.

One enormous advantage of online teaching over real-time lecturing with Q&A is that live lectures and discussion are necessarily linear and time-constrained. People can talk only one at a time. There is not enough time in a single class period for everyone who has something to say to say it. Even the professor may not complete the entire planned lecture, especially if he or she needs to stop regularly to answer questions, as good teachers do. In discussion, students must take turns, and the first one to the answer accrues all the points. Extroverts have the upper hand; introverts are disadvantaged. Students rarely have the time to carefully compose a question or a response before the moment has passed. Anyone who thinks of a question or a comment after class has ended has no mechanism for sharing it.

All of these limitations can potentially be made to vanish if the synchronous class meetings are embedded into an asynchronous 24/7 learning environment such as a threaded discussion on a learning platform. Students can chat with one another while the lecture is going on if they want to add points of their own, post links, comment, or ask and answer questions. They can use the chat feature in online meeting software for the same purpose. In a live class, such behavior would not only disturb and distract others but would be highly discourteous. Recorded lectures can be posted; discussions can continue after class; people who were absent can catch up. Everyone can add material to the site between classes, and the class can exist in a virtual space that includes the time between lectures as well as the lecture time itself. Students can put “go slower” or “go faster” right into the chat so the professor does not have

to guess at what they already know and what they are learning for the first time. The students who need more than one or two repetitions for learning do not have to stop the professor to ask to hear the point over again because they know they can replay the recording as many times as they need. They can ask questions in an asynchronous thread if asking on the chat would slow down the whole class unnecessarily. If the professor (or a student) has to miss class for a conference, or for heart surgery, or to have a baby, the class can be delayed or postponed or recaptured asynchronously. What was once a fixed-time appointment, one at which all the participants had to be present simultaneously, can now be transformed into a “massively multiplayer online role-playing game” (MMORPG)—that is, a persistent open world where people drop in and out at their leisure and catch one another up so that everyone arrives at the end of the game simultaneously. Everyone can work simultaneously or collaboratively: no lines form to hold the conch shell, and no class discussion devolves into a conversation between the professor and one or two highly engaged students.

Asynchronous discussion is particularly valuable in honors classes. Students have time to compose their posts thoughtfully and provide depth. Rather than jump into a class discussion extemporaneously just to say something, even just to get a toe in quickly, they can develop an idea with supporting evidence. A long written post will take longer for them to create than an impromptu speech, but it will take much less time for classmates to read and absorb than it would take if delivered orally, and it will be more valuable for peer learning and for pushing the discussion forward because it will not be transitory. The post can be revisited and mulled over rather than evaporating immediately after being spoken in real time. Honors students who enjoy an intense academic conversation around a conference table or in an honors lounge have already begun to push back with the complaint that professors are assigning more work in online classes but what they likely mean is that the discussion in online classes is far more time-consuming because it must be written out. (For a rich discussion of this talk, see the National Collegiate Honors Council’s online discussion.)

Professors who teach online already know that online teaching is labor-intensive. Certainly, students will have to adjust their time management strategies to make room for the hours it takes to compose written academic conversations, but the practice is not completely

unfamiliar to them because detailed academic debates have been taking place on social media for many years. Moreover, faculty will not have to reconstruct the ephemeral when assigning grades for participation, protecting them better from student complaints about favoritism or from claiming that they were judged unfairly. If students are willing to consent legally to having their discussion recorded, a video transcript of every class that shows all the professor/student interaction should make good professors feel happier and safer.

Lectures with simultaneous discussion are impossible in face-to-face classes, but they are engaging and efficient, and online delivery through technology makes them possible. America's houses of worship found during the pandemic that livestreaming services and other celebrations such as weddings and *bar mitzvahs* could be quite effective, especially with the chat feature that allowed people to talk to one another and even to the celebrants during the service. America's colleges and universities could learn something from their quick pivot and their near-universal choice to continue livestreaming even after returning to in-person worship. Classroom technology that allows students to chat with one another and pose questions to the professor on a screen has been around for some time, and it can make face-to-face classes much more participatory, but it had been used only sparsely before the "Plague Year." Online meeting technology also enhances access; it allows students either to attend a lecture in person or to view it remotely, so it helps students who are sick or have child care duties to attend from home, reducing absenteeism that cannot be avoided, eliminating the parking problem that plagues every campus, and enabling the instructor to deliver the lecture only once and still reach everyone. Medical schools have been using this strategy to deliver lecture material for some years now. Nothing online need be ephemeral; it can all be recorded and replayed as the exam approaches. Class participation is all in print or on video and therefore recoverable when grading time rolls around. It is not necessary to ask students to be quiet because their talking among themselves is disturbing others; everyone is in on the side conversations. This communication creates a three-dimensional lattice of information exchange.

Online classes are particularly easy to flip because, in a flipped classroom, students do most of their work asynchronously and come together synchronously only for brainstorming, Q&A, and group

discussion. Also, with online delivery, there is no need to use class time to give tests or require students to journey to campus all at the same time to take them. This flexibility makes test-taking much less arduous for students who require accommodations and for anyone who is unable to attend a class in person on a test day. Students would not need to come to a central location for student presentations, either; these could be done as webinars, as they are in the business world, and those attending could use the chat feature to ask questions. They could also be recorded for later viewing, leaving professors free to use class time entirely for information exchange and discussion.

Synchronous meeting platforms are particularly powerful for discussion-based classes. With meeting management software, professors can see all the students at once without anyone in the class knowing who, in particular, is being observed. Although professors may not think so, they can actually see a student's face more accurately on camera than in a classroom because it is closer and enlarged. One reason why students want to turn off their cameras is because affect can be perceived pretty accurately on screen. The cameras on most phones are more sensitive than the human eye; moreover, in a lecture hall, students are at a safe distance from the instructor. In a synchronous web class, however, everyone in the class can see everyone else, so no one is behind anyone, or too far from anyone, or close enough for a private chat that is just loud enough to be annoying. The classroom is neither too crowded nor too socially distant for conversation. As physics professor Eric Mazur put it in an online forum for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*: "When you teach online, every single student is sitting in the front row."

The main problem with online discussions is that they are tiring, and people's attention may wane, but that is also demonstrably true of in-person lectures, especially if students are sitting in a hard seat in a hot room. While professors lecture, their adrenaline is pumping; nevertheless, students drift even as they try to pay attention. Moreover, it is easier online for professors to post documents and images from their own computers, or switch to pre-recorded content, than it is to wrangle classroom equipment while continuing to talk. There is no chance of equipment failure because the last professor who used the room left the projector on and burned out the bulb or because an Apple file will not play on the PC in the classroom. On the other hand, students in

an online class can indulge in behaviors that might be rude in person. They can wear comfortable clothes, eat and drink, take a break and come back, talk among themselves, or check something in the lecture on their computers while it is taking place. They can raise their hands electronically, participate in table discussions electronically via break-out rooms, or just make a comment without interrupting or making noise. All of these behaviors are discouraged or banned in face-to-face classrooms by the same professors who may routinely engage in these same activities when attending meetings. Ample literature on attention deficit, especially in children, tells us that learning is facilitated, not inhibited, by comfort and freedom.

The model of the class as a briefing with Q&A delivered in person to a group of eager listeners who do not mind sitting still and focusing intently on one thing for an hour or two is a luxury that colleges and universities may no longer be able to afford. Because delivering anything in real space and real time is costly, clinging to the traditional paradigm for all types of classes drives up the cost of higher education. Skyrocketing costs make higher education less and less accessible to anyone but upper- and middle-class students, which means fewer members of minority groups, working adults, and the economically disadvantaged. For faculty to provide an online experience that is just as rich and nuanced as the conventional model, perhaps even more so, they have to believe that online delivery can be just as good, perhaps even better. To achieve such levels, faculty cannot think of online teaching as simply face-to-face instruction delivered remotely. Teaching is far more than just public speaking: it is mentoring, tutoring, supervising, and engaging in serious civil discourse with fellow learners. Online teaching requires that faculty must make sure that cyberspace operates as a professional environment and that students are trained to work in that world.

Honors faculty must be convinced of the importance of moving honors education onto the software now being used by organizations in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors alike to conduct business without having to put groups of people together in the same room at the same time. That practice is too expensive, the carbon footprint is too great, and the resulting synergy is not so extraordinary as to justify the cost. Few organizations will ever be returning entirely to in-person work when working from home has proven to be at least as productive,

even more so when the time spent by employees commuting and dealing with office distractions is factored into the equation. Absenteeism is down in the workplace. People can still go to work from their living room couches when they have sick children, snow days, or no-show childcare providers, and they can now go to consecutive meetings in different places on the same day. They can work on their phones from their cars or from the doctor's waiting room or while waiting at home for the technician to come to fix the dishwasher. All of those notions apply to schools as well, which will permit more nontraditional and marginalized students of all kinds to participate in honors programs when they have conflicting responsibilities and cannot attend either classes or events in person. Part of our job will also be to help the younger and more entitled students transition from an online secondary school to an online workplace, where they will find a much more formal environment and will be expected by employers to dress appropriately, behave politely, pay attention from beginning to end, and use their cameras if asked to do so. To give them a brick-and-mortar education to prepare them for a virtual workplace does them a profound disservice.

Honors through the looking glass depends, above all, on its embrace by faculty. If college professors believe that, even in honors, online instruction has limitless possibilities, and they invite their students to journey with them into what John Zubizaretta has already called a "brave new world" (2), then, even if they are suspicious and risk-averse, students will follow:

Undoubtedly, the sudden demand to 'go remote' has upended much of what we have always done well in honors and why and how we have done it. The need to adapt has been difficult, but it has also opened up new opportunities, new avenues for rethinking and redesigning our pedagogical approaches. For instance, perhaps now honors is ready to reconsider the notion that honors and 'distance learning' are antithetical propositions. Having been compelled to adapt to remote teaching, learning, and program management in order to continue to challenge, encourage, support, and reward our students (and faculty), perhaps now we can reimagine how the honors experience can be sustained and even enhanced by technology. (2)

Perhaps the power to define and claim an honors education for themselves needs to be shifted from faculty, rooted as we are in our antediluvian ways, to the people who truly inhabit this new world in which we are the strangers. Perhaps we must set aside our egoistic vantage point and learn to see this world from the point of view of its inhabitants and, furthermore, to see ours as others see it. Perhaps we need our point of view reversed and upended so it can be shaken free of cobwebs. Perhaps we need to think about virtual honors not as virtual teaching but as virtual learning. Like every other strategy that meets honors students where they are rather than forcing them to make pilgrimages to a sacred space, online adaptations will broaden our reach and make us more attractive to a wider assortment of highly motivated students who need honors to be accessible. The answer to Ada Long's question—"Will the technologies that have been thrust upon all educators and students be a threat to future learning or a doorway into enriched educational options?" (x)—is this: they will be what we choose them to be. We can see them as portals into a new world of honors education that is more democratic and pluralistic and where our students have already begun to live, or we can choose to play "Nearer My God to Thee" (exquisitely) and go down with the *Titanic*.

ENDNOTES

¹The term "Community of Inquiry," based on a concept drawn from John Dewey, was originally popularized by D. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson, and Walter Archer in the 1980s. The theory is described at length in Kristy Spear and Pavlo D. Antonenko's "Exploring Incoming Honors Students' Beliefs About Online Courses."

²A version of this legendary quotation by Watson can be found in Richard A. Lowenstein's "Wild Ducks."

³The term "attention surplus" was coined by Edward M. Hallowell in 1992. See "What's It Like To Have ADD?" as well as Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey, *Driven to Distraction*. This chapter puts the term in contemporary context for the general public: nytimes.com/2006/03/07/health/07essa.html.

⁴Accessible literature reviews can be found in Neil Bradbury and in Karen Wilson and James H. Korn.

⁵Francesco Cirillo developed this well-established time management technique as a student in the 1980s: francescocirillo.com/products/the-pomodoro-technique#. It is often used to help people successfully manage their ADHD.

⁶Almost 150 years later, the theory that Ebbinghaus first advanced in the late nineteenth century remains axiomatic. In an age in which people now suffer from significantly greater information overload, that retention rates have not really declined is a little surprising.

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CHAPTER TWO

Exploring Incoming Honors Students' Beliefs About Online Courses

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INTRODUCTION

Technological advances and recent public health concerns have given dramatic rise to the number of online courses offered in educational settings. Despite this movement toward virtual education, a strong penchant for face-to-face learning persists among college students. A 2019 Educause Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology survey of 53,475 students from 160 institutions in seven countries indicated 70 percent of undergraduate college students preferred face-to-face courses (Gierdowski). This trend presented locally as well in multiple distributions of the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) at one institution, with the preference for face-to-face learning more pronounced for honors students. In the 2019 distribution, 76 percent of honors students preferred face-to-face

courses over their online counterparts while 59 percent of non-honors students expressed this preference. The existence of this phenomenon begs for an understanding of students' beliefs about online courses and how in a world where online education has become prevalent, honors educators can create online courses that best support learning and engagement.

High-achieving honors students exhibit many of the behaviors that positively correlate with successful online learners: they are often highly motivated, self-directed, self-disciplined, independent learners who read and write well and are technologically capable (Barbour 17). At the start of online education, a significant portion of the courses targeted high-achieving, advanced placement students (Johnston and Barbour 16), and today, a substantial portion of online K-12 learners are still high achieving. Little is known, however, about these students' beliefs about online learning, particularly as they transition from high school to rigorous academic programs in college. Although numerous studies have examined online courses with a focus on academic performance, this metric is flawed for honors students who persistently exhibit academic success. Exploring beliefs about online courses with honors students provides the opportunity to remove the question of academic success from the equation and gain a deeper understanding of the educational experiences that shape students' beliefs about learning in this environment.

Understanding the dynamics of epistemologies, conceptions, and beliefs related to online learning is complex and challenging. Beliefs are an important source of motivation for students' educational choices; they influence perceptions and attitudes that, in turn, affect behaviors. The terms "perceptions" and "beliefs" have been used, sometimes interchangeably, in educational research to explore online courses, but differences exist: ultimately beliefs shape perception. Pajares contends, "All human perception is influenced by the totality of this generic knowledge structure—schemata, constructs, information, beliefs—but the structure itself is an unreliable guide to the nature of reality because beliefs influence how individuals characterize phenomena, make sense of the world, and estimate covariation" (310). The author goes on to argue that beliefs are deeply personal to each individual and unaffected by persuasion; they can be formed through experience, events, and sometimes chance. Asking honors students about online

courses and their strong convictions provides evidence that what they think about online courses can be clearly defined as a belief.

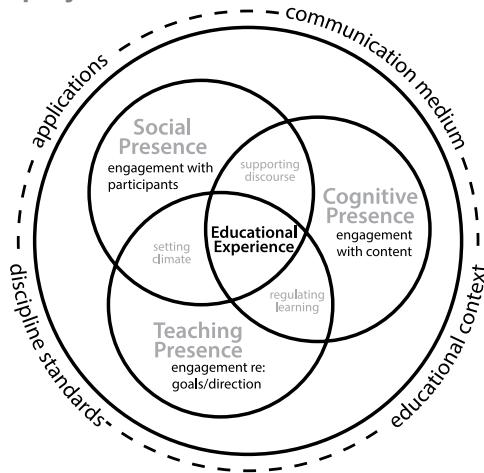
This essay highlights the findings of a 2018 longitudinal mixed-method explanatory sequential design study conducted at a large research institution with this purpose in mind. The study explored incoming honors students' beliefs about online courses and how beliefs changed after the first semester of college coursework. Beliefs about online courses were deconstructed using the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer 88), a questionnaire aligned with this theory (Arbaugh, Cleveland-Innes, Diaz, Garrison, Ice, Richardson, and Swan 135), and semi-structured interviews. The findings, highlighted in this essay, provide valuable insight into design and instructional strategies that support online learning and engagement for honors students.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

The complex nature of online learning and the educational and transactional issues that occur therein make understanding from a theoretical lens effective online course design and instruction a challenging area of exploration. A few theories about online courses have emerged in recent years; currently, the most comprehensive conceptual framework designed to study online learning effectiveness in higher education is the Community of Inquiry (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer 88).

The Community of Inquiry is one of the leading models guiding research and practice in online and blended learning. It offers a methodological solution to examine online learning and a means to monitor knowledge construction in a collaborative online learning environment. The structure of the framework has been confirmed through factor analysis and studied extensively over the last two decades. The model contends that educational experiences occur at the intersection of three unique but interdependent elements: Cognitive Presence, Teaching Presence, and Social Presence (Figure 1). The interdependence of the elements is essential to their effectiveness in an online learning context and their ability to impact the quality of the educational experience and learning outcomes in a university setting. Each element is broken down into descriptive categories and operationalized through observable indicators.

Figure 1. Integration and Implementation of Community of Inquiry



(Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000)

Social Presence is the students’ ability to project and establish meaningful personal and purposeful relationships within the context of the course. Review of the Social Presence in conjunction with Cognitive Presence has resulted in a revised definition focused on, according to Cleveland-Innes, Garrison, and Vaughan, “the ability of participants to identify with the group or course of study, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop personal and affective relationships progressively by way of protecting their individual personalities” (69). Open communication, group cohesion, and personal/affective projection define a successful Social Presence and describe the way students feel effectively connected. Social Presence can vary based on the types of learning activities present in the course and the opportunities available for students to benefit from the perspectives of others; it requires the creation of a climate that supports probing questions, skepticism, and expressing and contributing to ideas.

Teaching Presence encompasses the methods employed to construct a quality online educational experience. It represents the structure of a course and its leadership, which are two components that play a critical role in the interaction and discourse needed for higher-order learning. Teaching Presence has proven to be a critical element for realizing intended learning outcomes. It can be broken

down into three categories: (1) design and organization; (2) facilitation of learning, including discourse; and (3) direct instruction in an online course. Sample indicators associated with the Teaching Presence may include curriculum design and methods and creating opportunities for constructive and collaborative exchanges. Evidence suggests that Teaching Presence shapes the educational experiences that create space for Cognitive Presence.

Cognitive Presence is associated with higher-order acquisition and application of knowledge. It derives from Dewey's reflective thinking model, which contends critical thinking and discourse deepen the meaning of our experiences and the learning that occurs through this process. The phases include (1) a triggering event, where a problem or issue in need of further inquiry is presented by the instructor; (2) an exploration phase, where students discuss the issue and develop meaning through critical thinking, discussion, and discourse; (3) an integration phase in which students construct meaning; and finally, (4) a resolution phase, where newly gained knowledge is applied and tested. Of the three elements, the definition of Cognitive Presence has changed the least over the years.

With decades of research to support its validity, the Community of Inquiry is a valuable framework in the design, creation, and assessment of online learning and instructional design strategies. It offers a concrete method to understand online education and strategies for supporting critical thinking and higher-order learning. The remainder of this essay will discuss the key findings of a study designed using the Community of Inquiry framework to explore honors students' beliefs about online courses and how beliefs about online courses evolved as students transitioned from high school to college. Implications and specific strategies for creating a successful community of inquiry in an online course designed for honors students will be discussed.

ONLINE COURSE DESIGN AND INSTRUCTION FOR HONORS STUDENTS

A recent study conducted with honors students sought to explore incoming students' beliefs about online courses. The findings offer a rich understanding of techniques for building and teaching online courses that support learning and engagement for honors students. The

recommendations provided in the remainder of this essay are based heavily on the findings of this study as well as on existing literature surrounding online learning and the Community of Inquiry framework. Each section contains a discussion of the key research findings and recommendations to be incorporated into practice. The examples are derived from various data points: pre-survey and post-survey Community of Inquiry questionnaire and open-ended questions, interviews conducted using maximal variation sampling, and the integrated data.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING PRESENCE

Numerous studies have determined the importance of Teaching Presence in an educational community of inquiry (Huang et al. 1882; Akyol and Garrison 65; Gallego-Arrufata et al. 81). During every phase of this study, Teaching Presence played a major role in influencing honors students' beliefs about online courses. Survey results showed that students' beliefs about Teaching Presence significantly improved from high school to college. Statistically significant improvements were noted in two Teaching Presence categories: (1) Design and Organization, and (2) Facilitation. Qualitative data and interviews provided evidence of the essential role instructors play in student engagement and active learning in online courses. The honors students in this study articulated clear discontent with the lack of instructor presence and supported learning in high school online courses; many felt online courses were "self-taught" and "impersonal," with one student stating, "Instruction of course material was highly automated with minimal teacher input. Shortcomings of the automation would leave me feeling frustrated, I would often have to go outside the course for a better understanding."

The importance of course instructors providing intellectual and scholarly leadership was a consistent theme. The relationship between Teaching Presence and Cognitive Presence directly corresponded with honors students' beliefs about online courses. Many believed the lack of instructor visibility directly impacted the learning that took place in the classroom. In regard to high school online courses, one student argued, "Online courses seemed like a chore to everyone and nobody expected to really learn with any sort of quality instruction. To some extent it was like reading a poorly formatted textbook with

the occasional Wikihow.” Another stated, “Online courses don’t allow opportunities for learning unless the student is self-motivated and interested in learning all the course material on their own. The teachers through an online course most times are practically useless at teaching concepts to each student because it is physically impossible in an online setting.” Students desired a personal connection with instructors; one student noted: “I appreciate when the instructor records their lectures so that you can actually see the person talking to you. Because even though they aren’t there, it feels more like you know that professor and they seem more approachable.” Others talked about how instructor involvement in learning, including emails and instructors asking questions to clarify challenging topics, allowed the opportunity for students to feel comfortable asking questions in an online class. Students valued the presence of the instructor, particularly in the form of lectures, which provided an opportunity to hear from an expert who could expand on the topic in a more meaningful and memorable manner.

Beliefs about online courses were more positive when instructor involvement was pronounced and there was evidence of instructor support for learning through regular and personal connection. Regular communication via email, course announcements and reminders, and virtual connection points outside of class hours proved beneficial. Personal connection was fostered through instructor visibility and the use of webcams and videos in online courses. In asynchronous courses, students appreciated seeing the instructor and not just slides or material on pre-recorded videos. Furthermore, expressed concern for students’ ability to learn and personal connections were formed when instructors were responsive to requests, were accessible, and provided timely feedback on assignments.

Implications for Practice

Instructor Visibility. Being able to see and hear the instructor offered a personal connection that proved valuable to overall learning and course engagement. The lack of a physical instructor left many students feeling as if a course remained impersonal, automated, and unsupported. Courses offering regular, live, or recorded lectures were preferred over self-guided readings and content that engage learners in independent exploration. Students felt a deeper connection with

instructors in courses where the content was delivered by the instructor through unscripted lectures that offered dynamic anecdotes, real-world context, and an opportunity for memorable storytelling.

Regular Communication. A high degree of instructor communication was essential for learning, building relationships, and forming community within an online course. Students valued meaningful communication in the form of timely and frequent feedback on assignments, regular email communication and course announcements, instructor communication outside of content discussions, and instructor responsiveness. Communication that offered encouragement, direction, and opportunities for critical thinking were beneficial in support of meaning-making. Students expressed appreciation for instructors who were highly interactive and present in the course (e.g., sending out weekly announcements, check-in emails with individual students, engagement in discussion boards).

Course Design. Clear communication was also expressed as a need in relation to online course design and navigation. Students appreciated when course requirements were well articulated and activities and supplemental resources were explained in a way that emphasized their support for learning and course objectives. For many, intentional course design reinforced the purpose of each assignment and how it contributed to overall learning. A clear and shared understanding of the course goals enhanced students' willingness and ability to cognitively engage. Reminders of due dates and exams provided directly by the instructor or the Learning Management System positively impacted beliefs.

Course Content. Students desired the opportunity to engage in higher-order thinking and learning and valued the role instructors played in helping them accomplish this goal. Critical thinking, higher-order reflection, and discourse were important, and honors students appreciated when instructors incorporated learning-focused activities and supplemental resources where they could achieve resolution into online courses. The inclusion of media (e.g., articles, external videos, or links) without clear context or connection to the course learning objectives proved a source of frustration and negatively impacted engagement

and learning. The relevance of activities and external material should be discussed by the instructor or among the course participants to build buy-in.

LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS AND PREFERENCES

Historically, a strong argument has surrounded the role gender plays in student learning and development. Based on the findings of this study, learner characteristics, specifically gender, impacted the way honors students engaged in online courses and the level of support needed in this learning environment. This study provided evidence that gender was a significant between-subjects factor for first-year high-achieving students' beliefs about online courses, particularly relative to Teaching Presence. Among this population, males consistently reported more positive beliefs about the role the instructor played in their online courses than females.

Females placed more importance on relationships and instructor interaction in online courses than males. Females desired more guidance, direct support, and interaction from course instructors to facilitate learning and engagement in online courses. Males expressed a difference in instructional needs as they pertained to social engagement and learning supported by online course instructors; they viewed course materials provided by the instructor as tools for guiding the class toward an understanding of the topic and engaging students. Females did not equate engagement with course content and materials with teaching. For instance, one female student stated, "There would be 10 long articles or websites and one small assignment to follow up all of it. [If the instructor said] make sure you pay special attention to these articles or sections of these articles, I think it would be a lot more encouraging with figuring out what I was actually supposed to be learning." In contrast, a male said, "I would go through videos again or through the homework to see what I could have done better. And just the fact that I was working through different things, I learned a good amount." Males were more willing to leverage external resources and seek outside answers to unknowns instead of asking for help from instructors (Gunn, McSporrán, Macleod, and French 22).

Implications for Practice

Resources. Students valued the inclusion of resources that supported learning and meaningful connections; incorporating a variety of avenues for support into online courses without students expressing this need was appreciated. Students noticed and appreciated when instructors accounted for and supported unique learning styles, engagement preferences, and capabilities. Supplemental activities and resources that allow learners to build knowledge with the support of the instructor proved to be beneficial to different populations of learners. Examples include a discussion of the reading that highlights important points or a class demonstration of a practice problem.

Connection. While much of the instruction provided in online courses, particularly asynchronous courses, is driven by relatively passive and impersonal pedagogical approaches (e.g., graded assignments driven by readings), learning is often influenced by interpersonal exchanges and the discursive negotiation of knowledge. Offering multiple avenues for connecting with course instructors and regular communication was appreciated and aided in overall learning. Females valued relationships and interaction in online courses and appreciate direct communication with the course instructor. Virtual office hours or providing an office phone number to speak directly with the instructor created positive opportunities for connection and support. Opportunities for one-on-one support through video conferencing or virtual meeting check-ins were also noted as valued experiences. Students appreciated when instructors initiated connection; many feared how they would be perceived if their first interaction with the instructor was a question about the course content. Instructors who created virtual classroom environments where questions were encouraged made students, particularly females, more comfortable reaching out for help.

SOCIAL PRESENCE AND RETENTION IN ONLINE LEARNING

Education as a social construct is not a new idea, nor is the idea that social exchange contributes to critical thinking and inquiry. A recent meta-analysis (Richardson et al. 402) confirmed that student satisfaction and perceived learning in online courses were strongly related to

Social Presence. The findings of this study also argue for the importance of Social Presence in online learning in the context of course discussions and peer acknowledgment. Additionally, findings indicate the more online courses honors students take at the college level, the more likely they are to appreciate Social Presence. These results were consistent with existing literature (Boston et al. 67).

Statistically, both pre-survey and post-survey responses indicated that Social Presence played a significant role in first-year honors students' intent to enroll in future online courses. Pre-survey agreement with the statement, "I felt comfortable participating in the course discussions," strongly predicted intent to enroll in future online courses. In the post-survey, students who expressed agreement with the statement, "I felt that my point of view was acknowledged by other course participants," were almost seven times more likely to intend to enroll in future online courses. Acknowledgement from their peers was expressed in several interactive course elements including real-time discussions, discussion boards with debatable topics that take place in a comfortable environment, games, icebreakers, semester/term-long group projects, and informal learning environments. Many of the students expressed value in the interaction, support, and learning that took place through GroupMe.

Many honors students expressed boredom and dissatisfaction with "checkpoint" assignments intended to engage them in learning through social exchange, unmonitored peer discussions with limited learning objectives serving as a prominent example. Students described online course discussion boards as superficial, especially when the instructor was not part of the conversation. One student stated, "I've never been a part of a discussion where I thought—wow, we're really talking about something. That's one of the things I hate about discussions. They feel very robotic and like busywork. We're supposed to communicate and share ideas, but most of the time we're just trying to finish our posts by the end of the night."

Implications for Practice

Online Discussion Boards. Students expressed disdain for the artificial exchanges that occur in online discussion boards and the lack of thought and effort that go into completing these sorts of assignments.

Anchoring text-based discussion prompts around debatable questions and shared artifacts that fostered the negotiation of knowledge proved to be more effective than just posing a question about the reading and requiring students to respond to their peers. Consistent and facilitated instructor interactions in discussion boards were described as a means for supporting engagement and learning.

Voice. Students benefited from the opportunity to have a voice in the virtual classroom. Providing activities and assignments that socially engaged them in discourse, discussion, and critical thinking was valued. Providing intellectually stimulating opportunities for information sharing or the facilitation of a course discussion was appreciated. Examples included team projects that spanned the semester and allowed students to build deeper peer connections and check-ins where instructors would ask thought-provoking review questions at the start of each class session.

Informal Classrooms. Many honors students expressed an appreciation for the social channels used for support and knowledge acquisition when they were established and maintained by their peers. GroupMe, in particular, was noted on several occasions as a valuable resource, with many students feeling more comfortable checking in informally with peers than with the course instructor if they did not understand a concept or assignment. While instructor creation of these connection points or instructor interference in the discussion would likely change the dynamic, instructors may consider unintrusive strategies for encouraging and supporting the creation of these informal learning spaces.

Open and Inclusive Environment. Honors students needed to feel safe and confident among their peers to ask challenging questions and engage cognitively with the course content to confer meaning. Students desired the opportunity to ask probing questions, offer skepticism, and express and contribute to ideas, but they required meaningful connections (student-to-student, student-to-instructor) before they felt comfortable enough to engage. Honors students craved the opportunity to be acknowledged and valued by their peers. One way to achieve this in online courses was through small group discussions in place of an

entire class discussion. Finding ways to engage students from the start of the course, be it through introductions, breakout rooms, learning-based games, or dialogue relevant to course content, helped to create a more open and inclusive environment and, thus, more positive beliefs.

CREATING ENVIRONMENTS THAT FOSTER KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION AND LEARNING

Post-survey (after the first semester of college coursework) responses showed improvement on all Community of Inquiry elements—Teaching Presence, Social Presence, and Cognitive Presence. This finding indicates honors students’ beliefs about the quality of the educational experience afforded in online courses improved from high school. Improved beliefs are attributable to the quality of the educational experiences afforded in online courses at the university level and their ability to support knowledge acquisition and learning. One student argued online courses at the college level offered more of an academic experience: “I believe in their capacity for academic information a little more now just because they feel a bit less watered down now that I’m at [college]. The course materials [are] elevated compared to the cartoons and videos that they would show [in high school], and I appreciated that a lot [sic].”

The consistent rise in scores across Teaching Presence, Social Presence, and Cognitive Presence from pre-survey to post-survey supports the theory that these elements are independent but highly interdependent in creating a community of inquiry. The connection between the three elements was similarly pronounced in the interview phase with students talking about how their interactions with instructors and peers created an environment that supported learning and knowledge acquisition.

Implications for Practice

Intellectual Challenge. Honors students desired the opportunity to engage in constructive and collaborative activities that promoted knowledge acquisition in online courses. Critical thinking, higher-order reflection, and discourse were essential. High-achieving students appreciated when instructors incorporated learning-focused activities

and supplemental resources that promoted “actually learning.” Assessments that required little thought or understanding of the material (e.g., quiz questions tied directly to answers in the text, unmonitored discussion boards) left students feeling frustrated and as if the learning was transient and superficial.

Shared Resolution. Students valued online course assignments that provoked higher-order thinking and provided an opportunity to achieve resolution within the virtual classroom setting. An example would be incorporating the opportunity for students to lead an online course discussion; this activity gives students voice and strengthens relationships and overall learning.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study on beliefs about online courses conducted with incoming honors students identify Teaching Presence as the factor with the greatest influence on beliefs about online courses. Gender differences were found, with females reporting higher expectations of online courses, particularly Teaching Presence. Additionally, this study found a significant link between Social Presence and online course retention: implementing meaningful discussions and fulfilling students’ desire to feel acknowledged by their peers were drivers of future intent to enroll in online classes. Overall, beliefs about online courses improved from when students entered college to the end of their first semester: they felt the online collegiate environment better fostered learning and knowledge acquisition. Evidence suggests that honors students’ beliefs about online courses can be influenced by the quality of the educational experiences afforded in online courses. Providing honors students with high-quality online educational experiences through intentional design and instruction built to support a meaningful community of inquiry has the potential to create positive beliefs about online learning.

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CHAPTER THREE

Reimagining Honors Curriculum— Delivered Through Technology Utilizing Our Alumni Community

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INTRODUCTION

Good things can come from adversity. This comment was made by a former colleague and has proven applicable to the experience of incorporating online learning in honors education. Like everyone else, when our worlds were uprooted in March of 2020 from the beginning of a global pandemic, we needed to look at what technology offered. Our proactive response resulted in online town halls, weekend and evening remote office hours, and a buddy system to help our students gain their footing. Once we were sure our current students could stand on their own, we turned our attention to our next big challenge: our incoming freshmen.

The Youngstown State University (YSU) Honors College prides itself most on putting students at its center and on building lasting relationships. As students commit to honors, we assure them that they will have increased opportunities, be surrounded by a community of learners who push them to be their best selves, and gain a family who will support them personally and professionally. The key to engaging our freshmen has always been our Introduction to Honors seminar, a class designed to start cultivating our honors community and giving students the tools they need to succeed at YSU and beyond. Our traditional face-to-face delivery—complete with in-person icebreakers, days of service in the community, and a freshman retreat—was no longer an option; with hopes of retaining the seminar’s core missions of enriched student learning and engagement, we began a necessary online redesign. What started as an exercise in flexibility not only turned into an effective course, but it also became a significant method of teaching, learning, and building community. Alumni perspectives, teaching assistants, technology, and an enhanced yearlong experience to connect with our students contributed to another successful, albeit insane, year in honors.

This chapter describes our thought process and the practical steps we took as we created a new course. It also provides student, faculty/staff, and alumni perspectives on our triumphs and tribulations throughout the year. We hope that by sharing the early results of our efforts, other honors colleges or programs also looking to reimagine their first-year experience will benefit from the lessons we have learned.

THE HONORS EXPERIENCE

Building relationships has always been central to the YSU honors experience, from recruiting new students, supporting them throughout their journey, and continuing to engage them as alumni. Susan E. Dinan, in her contribution to a National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) monograph on teaching and learning, talks about the benefits of making connections with faculty members in terms of unlocking networking or research opportunities (38). We witnessed the formation of faculty and student relationships in an online space.

We have always known that honors provides an additional layer of support for students, which Dulce Diaz et al. articulate as a positive

for students because that support spans so many different areas such as social, emotional, informational, financial, and academic (61). Of course, many of those relationships begin in the first-year seminar, but honors goes beyond simply building community. It does so in a way that benefits all (Bell 50).

We know the classroom has the potential to become ground zero for the formation of friendships, especially for our incoming freshmen beginning their collegiate journeys. We borrowed two best practices for cultivating community from Arthur Chickering—maximizing interactions during class meetings and encouraging connections between classes (29). We told our students to spend some time talking to each other and getting to know their fellow honors students. Caring environments can foster human connections that lead to a heightened sense of belonging (O’Keeffe 608), and a sense of belonging can inspire students to be more engaged with their studies, to persist, and to succeed (Tinto 5).

COLLEGE AND COURSE BACKGROUND

Youngstown State University is a research institution situated in Northeast Ohio. Its population sits around 12,000 students with 1,200 of them classified as honors students. With 336 incoming students, we welcomed our largest incoming class in fall 2020. Our applicant profile can be described as follows:

- Average 3.96 GPA;
- Average 28 ACT or 1280 SAT;
- A little over half (51.14%) female;
- 37 underrepresented applicants;
- 64 international applicants.

During fall semester, we offered 16 sections of Introduction to Honors, with 20-25 students in each class. While most students could register for any section, we funneled all residential students into four sections to help us begin to build up our honors living-learning community in the Cafaro House residence hall. Classes were split between four instructors: three current staff members and one honors alumnus. To increase contact time with students, an undergraduate teaching

assistant was also assigned to each section. Their input and assistance in teaching course content, grading assignments, and connecting with students has been an invaluable component of Introduction to Honors since 2017.

An agile-hybrid course modality gave us flexibility in bringing small groups to campus for class or engaging with students synchronously online. We did request that all students join us in person, if able, for the first three weeks of the semester. To allow for safe social distancing in a space large enough for us all, we taught in tents on our front lawn. Those unable to come to campus met with an honors graduate assistant and other online students instead to start building their own relationships and to cover course content.

Although this chapter focuses on Introduction to Honors specifically, in spring 2021 we extended our first-year experience to a second semester with the introduction of the Campus Community Partnership seminar. The course helps us further develop the community within honors and connect students to volunteer opportunities in Youngstown. Many of the lessons learned from Introduction to Honors helped us in our course development and teaching practices.

MOLLIE HARTUP: ON THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

We know how important Introduction to Honors is for incoming students. Having taught an 8:00 AM section in the past, I was struck by the significance, as I greeted them, that I could be the first faculty member to come into contact with new students for their first-ever college class. Teaching the seminar was an opportunity I never took lightly, knowing my role supported delivering promises made while recruiting students to our institution. I was keenly aware of this responsibility during the summer of 2020 when we embarked on a journey to redesign the course. We asked ourselves the following questions:

- How do we provide students access to the content we want them to become familiar with, regardless of the modality?
- How do we create community online?

We designed the course around a modality called agile-hybrid, which would allow us to bring in students in small groups while connecting

simultaneously with online students. In our quest to set up a system that could easily pivot from hybrid to online, we turned to our alumni with expertise in various content areas such as communication, networking, leadership, critical thinking, well-being, and financial literacy, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion. In total, twenty-five alumni volunteered their time and allowed us to harness their knowledge for the benefit of students.

None of us had even heard of the Webex video conferencing platform before the need to shift to online learning in spring 2020, but we quickly learned the ins and outs of what would become a powerful tool in connecting with our students during class and student office hours. Technology allowed us to gather content from alumni regardless of where they lived. I met with most of the twenty-five alums on Webex, making it easy to record video. A few opted to record videos on their own and upload, and one came to campus to record in person.

We often talk in honors about how we learn through stories. During the process of talking with alumni about their content area, some pleasant surprises emerged. One alumnus who was primarily discussing the graduate school application process also shared his own personal experiences of being homesick when he started college. He talked about how he was encouraged to stick it out for a while, to give it a fair chance; he ended up having a wonderful experience. Another alumnus, who works in law enforcement, was slated to discuss being a law-abiding citizen, but he also talked about the importance of followership (i.e., the concept of being willing to emulate a leader's behavior) (Sivers 0:46), a concept he felt was not discussed enough when he was an undergraduate student. The addition of these unscripted topics into the course added another layer of virtual connection between our students and alumni, allowing students to learn from real-life experiences.

During the course design process, I used online tutorials to learn how to edit video in Adobe Premiere so we could curate content for our classes. This skill allowed me to easily trim alumni videos into multiple segments so we could strategically place videos in various modules within the course. Although simpler programs that allow users to edit video exist, Premiere was a better choice for also creating marketing videos. We have since transformed video creation into a student development opportunity, hiring a talented student videographer to help produce videos for the college.

Technology became as important in teaching the class as it was in designing the course materials. While we have the tools to teach in-person and online students simultaneously, hybrid is hard. The additional layer of trying to engage equally with students in both spaces is challenging, and monitoring the chat by oneself on top of that proved exhausting. Teaching assistants became critical for helping to manage the online space to ensure all students had the best experience possible.

In fall 2020, our university had professional level access only to Webex, which became our primary video conferencing platform. Students, faculty, and staff were familiar with it, and it interfaced well with our Classroom of the Future unit (essentially a large television that broadcasts the video conference and has a camera that follows the action in the classroom). Webex was constantly adding features with updates. I will never forget the day Webex added breakout rooms—I felt like a kid on Christmas! I noticed the update while teaching and shared the news with my class. They too were excited they did not have to move out to their groups in the LMS whenever small group time was needed. At that moment, I felt like we really were all on this journey together.

Student camera use is a complicated topic. I make it clear that I do not require cameras, but I strongly encourage their use. I realize that there are valid reasons not to use cameras, such as equity concerns and poor internet connections, but being able to see each other—student and faculty—creates a better experience for everyone. We all know that being in a meeting with a camera turned on forces participants to pay attention and makes it tougher to multitask. Our students reap far greater benefits when they turn on their camera and engage in the class. I recall one of my fully online class sessions when only my teaching assistant and one student had their cameras on for the entire class. I was so grateful for that one student willing to put herself out there all by herself to make me feel less alone in the virtual room. After class I thanked her, and she indicated she had hoped having her camera on would encourage others to turn theirs on and to “hang in there.” These unsolicited words of encouragement from a student were one of the many reminders that we were building relationships online.

One benefit to teaching online has been the opportunity to share glimpses of our lives with our students. We have bonded over virtually introducing pets, siblings, and children. The early pandemic was especially challenging for me as I tried to balance my roles as a professional

and a parent to two young children. Yet, there was a spirit of being in it together. For example, when I got hit in the head with a Nerf dart while teaching, my class and I embraced the comedy of this moment. In fact, I still laugh about this experience with my students who witnessed the incident. So many lessons beyond the classroom were learned.

STUDY DESIGN

The faculty of the Introduction to Honors Seminar submitted the IRB to the YSU Institutional Review Board near the conclusion of fall semester 2020 in an effort to gather information from our students about what and how students learned, the nature of the course modality, learning management system, online learning, and experiences that enhanced the honors community. We chose a qualitative inquiry research design so we could collect student thoughts and share the story of their experience. Additionally, we surveyed undergraduate honors teaching assistants and honors alumni connected to the course to develop a holistic perspective of the honors learning experience set in motion for new students.

Surveys, focus groups, course exit cards, and student reflections as well as faculty observations helped us better understand the impact of our new course design as well as how to improve it for future semesters. Students were offered volunteer hours for their participation as a way of thanking them for their insight into the study. We also utilized the help of a focus group facilitator, who was external to the institution and our honors college, to lead the sessions as a way to encourage comfort and honest responses from the participants. Out of the 336 incoming students who were enrolled in our seminar in fall semester, 85 participated in the survey and an additional 7 participated in the focus group. Five teaching assistants and two alumni responded to their respective surveys.

Artifacts reviewed included two course reflections—one at the beginning of the term and one at the end. The first reflection asked students to share hopes for the beginning of their collegiate journey and experience in honors. The second assignment focused on students reflecting upon the small and big wins, challenges, and the community built in honors whether online, in the residence halls or apartments, or from their home off-campus. Exit cards, serving as mini assessments

of course modules, were also artifacts used to gain valuable insight into the learning, teaching, and community established by our course. Interview data was analyzed using a phonetic iterative approach that calls for oscillating between research questions, existing theory, and emerging qualitative data (Tracy 211).

STUDENTS: ON LEARNING AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ONLINE

On Course Modality

It was no surprise that our students were initially opposed to learning online. Their feedback about its difficulty after the semester had ended, however, was much more nuanced. Some students, of course, had chosen to dig their heels in and resent its every aspect, but many more had seen its silver linings or embraced it altogether. “I still learned tremendously,” one student told us. “I was able to interact with teachers and students, and this class had a very personable relationship.” Their challenges with online learning mimicked our own from working and teaching online: getting distracted during courses, especially when working at home, was easy; they sometimes lacked motivation to get started on their work; and as freshmen, they were still learning how to be accountable for assignments and deadlines.

Regardless of modality, students felt they benefitted the most from the interactions with faculty members and their peers. Although sometimes they felt it was easier to interact during an in-person class, they mostly just appreciated structure and opportunities to engage with the material rather than passively listening to us teach. Breakout groups were incredibly successful: more than any other time, students had their cameras on and actively participated in the chat. Maybe being in a small group was less intimidating, or maybe there were just fewer places for them to hide. Regardless, from even those brief minutes together, students began forming relationships that we saw extend beyond the classroom as well.

On Course Content

From students' exit cards and reflections, we were able to get a better sense of what students wanted from their semester with us, what content resonated with them, and how we had lived up to their expectations. From their first reflection, we learned they had hopes and fears similar to any class of incoming freshmen. They looked forward to joining the family of honors students, going out into the community to give back, and attending honors events. Their nervousness hinged on making friends, managing their time wisely, and developing the study skills that had once served them well in high school but might not make the cut at the university level. Many expressed even more serious challenges. "Anxiety and depression have been dark clouds that have haunted me," wrote one student. "Staying motivated with mental illness is already a battle, let alone when you have the expectations of a stellar report card on your shoulders."

Their exit cards, given at the end of each class throughout the semester, provided ongoing feedback about how students were responding to the class and now serve as a template for how to approach future semesters. Luckily, students generally enjoyed our modules although videos longer than ten minutes did not seem to capture their attention. Students rated three modules particularly helpful:

- Well-being, which covered taking care of oneself mentally and financially. Students took to this practical knowledge and found opportunities to apply it in their everyday lives. In a freshman class riddled with anxiety, depression, and perfectionist tendencies, opening up a constructive dialogue on how to tackle such issues proved to be beneficial academically, socially, and emotionally.
- Communication essentials, which dove into writing a professional email and creating video content for classes. Students called this module "pivotal" because emails and videos were often the only forums through which students have the opportunity to interact with faculty and peers.
- Critical thinking, where alumni gave students the tools and examples they need to sift through information in a largely online world.

Although feedback about course content on the students' post-course reflections was largely positive, one aspect of the class seemed to stand out to them the most: relationships.

On Teaching Assistants

By far, students' favorite part of our course was the teaching assistants. The same words came up to describe them in each reflection and survey response: supportive, approachable, and relatable. Although we as faculty try our best to empathize with our students' struggles, our circumstances do not compare to the support TAs can provide when they themselves were the new arrivals only a year ago. Rather than trying to motivate students with a "you can do it," TAs are able to say, "I have done it," and that distinction makes a world of difference in getting students across the finish line.

TAs were also able to devote additional contact time to students, which is sensed and appreciated in these classes. Students come to them for questions or encouragement and feel that they would be "always available to help." Our teaching assistants go above and beyond to help our students succeed in class. One student wrote that my TA made a spreadsheet that acted as a checklist to ensure that everyone finished their work on time. This was beneficial for me because it allowed me to visually check off the project when I finished." That extra bit of reassurance also helps students gain the confidence they need to succeed independently.

Teaching Assistants

While students appreciated having the TAs in the classroom, the teaching assistants viewed serving in this role as an opportunity to help future students enjoy the same honors experience they had as a freshman. "I was inspired by my TA during my freshman year, and I wanted to provide additional support for other first-year students, too," said one TA.

TAs provided feedback that the course was highly organized, with one TA indicating they wished their other courses were arranged in a similar way. One challenge TAs reported was engaging with students online who were "unable to share their audio and video components."

When students did not use cameras, TAs described it as a barrier blocking them from their students.

Training sessions to prepare TAs for their role were held on Webex throughout the summer. What began as a pivot to online out of necessity ended up being a highly efficient way to host a training. Sharing screens allows for the dissemination of information and makes recording and distribution easy. TA feedback on the extent of their preparation was positive. “I think the training was perfect and gave me everything I needed to be a good TA,” shared one participant.

Alumni Engagement

Collecting the alumni content for the Introduction to Honors seminar inspired ideas for additional ways that alumni could connect with current honors students. We invited alumni from various career fields to serve as panelists during a series of networking nights hosted during fall 2020. Webex allowed us to bring together alumni from all over the country. A student moderator asked a series of questions before opening up the floor to students.

The alumni who volunteered their time expressed their enjoyment meeting current honors students and being able to contribute. “I loved having the chance to share my experiences and learn about their own talents and experiences,” shared one alumna via the survey. Others indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to share advice based on what they wish they had known during their first year of college.

Alumni also offered suggestions for enhancing the classroom experience; instructors and teaching assistants should also share their own personal experiences related to course content as an additional means of enhancing relationships with students. Additionally, alumni suggested helping students consider the course modules from the perspective of their future careers or college majors as a way of helping them derive greater meaning from the material.

One of the alumni who contributed inspired an idea for a culminating course project called the 4Ws, which required students to consider these questions: Who am I? What have I done? Where am I going? and Why do I deserve it? It was an exercise in self-reflection, critical thinking, and goal setting. “It was nice to take an introspective look at myself, and really ask why I’m here [and] what I’m going to be

doing,” one student responded. We are currently exploring incorporating the 4Ws into the senior capstone as one way to articulate students’ transformation from first year to graduation from college.

LEXI RAGER: ON SMALL WINS

Anyone who knows me knows I appreciate “small wins.” In my day-to-day life, small wins look like packing my lunch the night before or clearing some emails out of my inbox. (In comparison, having zero emails in my inbox would be the shining accomplishment of my career). These minor triumphs, almost unrecognizable to the outside eye, keep me going because big wins are harder to come by. When we started this journey, I tried to define realistic expectations; while maybe I would not know my students as well as before we were online, if I could see I was making some impact, keeping them tethered to honors even by a thread, I would be happy.

Now that I have the opportunity to reflect back on the year, I realize I have been handed the biggest win of my career so far; I built relationships—lasting, meaningful relationships—with all 120 students I taught. I know more than their names and faces; this year, they have shared their fears, hopes, and dreams with me. They have come to me when they were anxious about a class, excited about an upcoming job interview, or needed advice on changing their major. I have shared more smiles and tears and written more letters of recommendation this year than ever before.

I would like to take the credit for this transformation, but in actuality, it was mostly because of the students along with a small contribution owing to the structure of the course itself. First-year students are hungry for social interaction, but they have no clue how to conjure it. Our course gave them everything they needed to fill the gap. We created a safe place for students to share their ideas and meet like-minded, quirky, procrastinating perfectionists. We broke down communication barriers, freely utilizing emails, text messages, online office hours, and teaching assistant meetings to give them all the opportunity to reach out to talk about anything or nothing at all. The alumni perspectives provided in our class emphasized the value of networking and developing relationships; taught them how to compose a professional email and eloquently introduce themselves; and perhaps most importantly,

demonstrated that it is okay to ask for help or admit when they are feeling overwhelmed.

My students absorbed the information and, in record time, turned around and used it. Before I knew it, study groups, group chats, and friendships were popping up all over the place. Students were jumping in and out of office hours just to say hello, being more vocal about their own feelings of failure and self-doubt, and supporting their classmates through similar emotions. All my previous worries were replaced by feelings of gratitude that my students had found a way to overcome the challenges handed to them and create even more memories than I could have hoped.

As a final anecdote, during the last week of the semester, a student stopped by my office. He explained that he would be transferring to another university closer to home but wanted to express his thanks for our class and assure me that his leaving had nothing to do with honors. On the contrary, he felt that of his classes, all of which were online, our class was the only one where he had built relationships. I never thought a student leaving our institution would be a “win,” but it was; my teaching assistant and I had poured everything into our class, and in return my student poured his trust and appreciation into us. Hearing this comment all but assured me that all the headaches and heartbreaks were worth it, if only to one student, if only for one year. I will take that win any day. Here’s to many more small wins.

AMY COSSENTINO: ON BRIDGING PAST AND FUTURE

I remember back to the first National Collegiate Honors Council conference I attended in Pittsburgh, PA, more than two decades ago. On the drive back from the conference, the other attendees and I spoke of a first-semester introductory course and what elements would be contained in the learning experience. The following year the Introduction to Honors seminar launched with the goal to connect students to honors, the campus, and the community. Even after two decades of teaching, assessing, refining, and redesigning honors seminars, I still was not sure how an online experience could replicate the organic learning that takes place in a face-to-face setting.

Through the agile-hybrid course design that allowed for ease of transition from face-to-face to online and teaching assistants who

connected with students because of their relevance, we thought we could deliver an equivalent experience. The addition of the alumni and their thoughtful contributions to course content and extended engagement with students to share their experiences through Webex motivated them to learn. No computer screen created an impenetrable barrier to learning, teaching, and thriving in a supportive community. With all of the tools to find success in the online environment, we just had to persevere, to be creative, and to show each other kindness always.

I will always be reminded of a TED Talk I had used a year prior in a different class, “How to Start a Movement,” which focused on the importance of both leadership and followership (Sivers 00:46). Derek Sivers talks about how a leader who starts a movement, “a lone nut,” needs to not fear standing out in front of a crowd. I pulled the video to use in our leadership module for Introduction to Honors, which became a weekly prompt to increase camera usage. The video became my signature piece to opening class on Webex. I would ask, who will be my first lone nut? Remarkably, one by one, student cameras turned on. And when the technology was not cooperating, the chat was filled with commentary.

In any case, the course was alive with connections from smiles on screen to emojis in the chat; the human connection was alive and well and served as a reminder that online education can be successful when teachers and students are open to the possibilities. From there, more opportunities were created to utilize this newfound technology. Dinners with the dean (online, of course), cultural celebrations, and numerous service projects all manifested from the online course connections. Students in all sections of our class even created a get-well video in class to send to a student seriously injured in a car accident. We taught content, but we also taught how to show compassion to others. Our students learned from multiple voices across diverse backgrounds and disciplines and recognized that their faculty were there for them no matter the difficulty.

While we went through the process of reimagining the curriculum and courses in an online environment and engaging every talent pool at our disposal, what remained constant was the genuine culture of caring that is central to the honors community. One of our students summed up the experience:

Throughout this course, what I enjoyed the most was the atmosphere of the class as a whole. While the content and coursework given was still something to be taken seriously, I felt it was a much more relaxed space and generated a very comfortable and honest environment for conversation. I was much more at ease in my Intro to Honors class than any other class I took this semester.

OUR TAKEAWAYS

At the beginning of the semester, we had a singular goal: build relationships with the students, and they will learn. Face-to-face online interaction in class resulted in reducing student anxiety and maximizing student success. While some students had technological difficulties or their physical space was not as they wished it to be seen, the care and flexibility provided to students were overwhelmingly cited as the top factors that helped them transition to college. The addition of the teaching assistants added value in the form of a relevant perspective for the students from someone who had just quickly learned how to transition to online learning from the spring semester. The TAs also helped faculty manage burgeoning online communications resulting in expediency of grading assignments and answering questions. Alumni, giving back in the form of their time and talent, not only communicated their expertise within the content areas of the modules, but also provided real-life lessons of what strategies lead to student success.

Alumni communicated the value that the honors experience played in their lives and continues to do so today. Relationships became the glue that strengthened and bound the honors community. Recorded online interactions in courses remain for the benefit of future and current students.

Opportunities that online interactions present will persist in teaching, learning, and building community. Reimagining the curriculum with an open mind to possibilities will benefit our honors experience for years to come.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Online Faculty
Professional Development and
Community as Nexus

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INTRODUCTION

Since the spring of 2020, much has been discussed at academic conferences and written in blogs, journals, and books about the challenges of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in higher education. Honors education has not been immune to the hardships. Virtually all honors programs and colleges worldwide—mirroring their

home institutions' reactive protocols—have had to redesign how to continue to deliver their courses, activities, and benefits throughout the pandemic and, looking ahead, in a changed post-pandemic world while retaining what makes their work distinctly honors. The challenges have not been solely pedagogical or organizational: honors professional development has also experienced obstacles that have stimulated new thinking about how to ensure continued faculty growth in the field. In 2020, for example, both the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) meeting in Dallas, Texas (U.S.A.), and the International Conference on Talent Development in Groningen, the Netherlands, were canceled to prevent the dangerous spreading of the coronavirus; both were repurposed or rescheduled as totally online events. The same was true for the highly successful Honors International Faculty Institute (HIFI), held four times before in person but converted to the Honors International Faculty Learning Online (HIFLO) institute, conducted twice since the widespread cancellations of other in-person faculty development opportunities. All the NCHC's professional offerings have followed the same pattern during the same period.

Hence, while attention to teaching skills and methods of promoting student learning is a necessary aim of general faculty training, a pressing reality is that honors has had to rethink how to deliver such professional development options to ensure ongoing innovation and, perhaps more urgently, how to preserve the valuable sense of community that undergirds much of what defines the honors enterprise. Consequently, our emphasis in this chapter presents some ideas for adapting honors and other professional development efforts to our evolving post-pandemic world while preserving the core principle of community that is so essential in honors. We use the creation of HIFLO as our main practical example, but we propose that the experiences and strategies we describe can be modified and used as the basis for creating additional honors and general faculty development occasions with community at the center.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY: A FRAMEWORK

Why focus on community? We contend that community is more than a lucky byproduct of professional development activities: it is a vital

component that is grounded in sound honors pedagogy and practices, and community building should be a foremost consideration in designing professional growth in honors, whether in person or online. As Wolfensberger says, “By ‘community,’ we mean the sense of community that is created through face-to-face, reciprocal interaction[s] between a lecturer and students and among lecturers and students themselves”; such interactions within “an engaged community,” she maintains, are “difficult to explain or to operationalize and have been missed during the pandemic” (“The Power” 1). Given such challenges to building community, especially in an online environment, we determined to anchor our professional development efforts on creating community. Our resolve is supported by a framework derived from an abundance of evidence-based research on the importance of community in honors and general teaching, learning, and organizational pursuits.

One key source is Wolfensberger’s model of the three “pillars” of honors education: “creating community, enhancing academic competence, and offering freedom” (*Teaching* 37). Wolfensberger points out that “community and connectedness are ubiquitous in the honors literature” and help to “create a constructive atmosphere of academic rigor” (*Teaching* 25–26). In a later piece, reflecting on the effects of the pandemic on academic community building, she adds that the interactions that occur in a positive community are “the key to personal, academic and professional growth and transformation” (“The Power” 1). Such observations apply equally to professional development for faculty as they do for relationships among students and between teachers and students. Faculty—especially in the dynamic, creative, risk-taking culture of honors—are eager to learn from the lessons of pivoting to remote or online instruction during the pandemic, but as Wolfensberger indicates they also hunger for the power of face-to-face human exchanges:

[P]eople miss the sense of community... [W]e are hoping for a better post-COVID-19 world where there is a focus on building a sense of community. Many lecturers and students do not believe that returning to the ‘old normal’ is realistic. We want to keep the good aspects of online learning after the pandemic is over, but the need to build a sense of community has not simply disappeared. We are keen to make progress and to develop a vision. (“The Power” 2)

Indeed, in many ways, the creation of HIFLO has been a response to the call for a vision of how to design professional development that retains a strong focus on community. In fact, of the three virtual HIFLO events we have led since the emergence of travel and social distancing restrictions, two have concentrated on the theme of building community in both face-to-face and online modes of interaction.

Another very recent and influential source in our framework is Felten and Lambert's book on *Relationship-Rich Education*. Although the authors concentrate on undergraduates as the beneficiaries of the kind of relationship-rich community that has "the power to be transformational for individuals, for our institutions, and for our world," their argument stands as a reminder that faculty, too, benefit from growth opportunities that foster the kind of "human-to-human connection" that many feel has been lost or at least altered by shifts to online interactions (160–61). As the authors reveal in their coda prompted by the unplanned pandemic, the effects on community of going virtual have stressed not only students but also faculty: "From our own personal experiences interacting remotely with our students, colleagues, and extended families during these past weeks of isolation and social distancing, we feel deeply the loss of sustained, authentic human connection. The sense of loss is real for many educators ..." (162). Felten and Lambert propose several "guiding principles" for creating a robust culture of interpersonal as well as academic and personal community. The principles include the following: members of a supportive community should "experience genuine welcome and deep care," should recognize that "relationships are a powerful means to inspire [learning]," and should "develop webs of significant relationships" (Felten and Lambert 10). We believe that in the design of not just the topic of two HIFLO events centered on community but also the various intentional interactive strategies and activities of the online institutes, we have incorporated the principles outlined by Felten and Lambert. As we describe later in this chapter, we have included in our virtual HIFLO (and in the original pre-pandemic and, we hope, post-pandemic HIFI version) multiple ways of welcoming our participants and highlighting the significance of care and respect in our interactions; we have used the power of collaboration for sharing insights, tips, resources, and inspiration; and we have provided diverse options for networking and staying in touch after each event, including Zoom and YouTube recordings, open-access Google document files,

Slack postings, LinkedIn social networking, and, of course, email. In short, HIFI and HIFLO are relationship-rich professional development opportunities that deliver content information and provide space for learning and practicing skills; more importantly, they actually model how and why community is an essential facet of effective faculty development in honors and beyond.

Other valuable resources—such as Cox; Eib and Miller; Johnson et al.; Massetti and Lobert-Jones; McCabe; Neff; Nussbaum; Palmer; Sacks; Equity Unbound’s list of activities; and others—factor into our framework for prioritizing the value of community and team building in working collaboratively and interactively with faculty to improve practice. Even more sources include Sosniak; Van Eijl et al.; Van Lankveld and Volman; Wals; and Zhao and Kuh. These works uncover additional aspects of skills for community building as a transformational dimension of professional development. Influenced by such research, in our HIFLO 2021 institute, we shared the following attributes that are characteristic of an engaged community of practice working on improving teaching, learning, and collegiality on both personal and professional levels:

- Open-mindedness;
- A drive for seeking diverse perspectives and honoring the dignity of difference;
- A desire for making sense of complex issues;
- An ability to develop an inner compass to help guide individual and collective practical and ethical decisions as professionals;
- A strong sense of compassion for others and, as Neff advocates, for oneself (*Self-Compassion*).

Such key attributes are more than simply the basis for developing skills necessary for building community: they are, in fact, habits of being and knowing, as Palmer argues:

I want to try to connect concepts of community to questions of epistemology, which I believe are the central questions for any institution engaged in a mission of knowing, teaching, and

learning. How do we know? How do we learn? Under what conditions and with what validity?

I believe that it is here at the epistemological core of our knowledge and our processes of knowing that our powers for forming or deforming human consciousness are to be found. I believe that it is here, in our modes of knowing, that we shape souls by the shape of our knowledge. It is here that the idea of community must ultimately take root and have impact if it is to reshape the doing of higher education. (22)

When the key attributes and skills named above are combined with the lessons learned from our other framework resources, we arrive at the drivers that have motivated us to offer HIFI and HIFLO institutes as vital community-building opportunities in person as well as online. Community, after all, has at its center the directive of love: love of what we do, love of our disciplines, love of our honors and institutional contexts, love of our students, love of each other, love of ourselves. In his recognizable voice, Palmer puts it this way: “If you ask what holds community together, what makes this capacity for relatedness possible, the only honest answer I can give brings me to that dangerous realm called the spiritual. The only answer I can give is that what makes community possible is love” (25).

HIFLO AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

In summer 2020, we planned to offer what would have been our fifth HIFI, an in-person, international, highly interactive occasion for teachers, researchers, and leaders to engage in presentations, experiential activities, place-as-text explorations, collaborative group work, and reflective exercises; attendees could also showcase projects designed to improve teaching, learning, and programming in honors. Suddenly, the coronavirus upended our world, and we had to reimagine the institute that we had previously organized four times alternately at Hanze University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands) and Texas

Christian University (U.S.A.). As an alternative, we decided to create two fully online versions of HIFLO with free registration to encourage participation and create resources accessible to all members of our international community: one focused on “Creating Community—Experiences from Honors,” the other on “Remote Honors—Teaching for Deep Virtual Learning.” To maintain a high degree of collaborative interaction, we limited enrollment to twenty-five participants each to allow for dynamic group work, online chat room discussions, and showcasing of work—in essence, to promote a strong community. In the end, fifty-two faculty members from forty-six higher education institutions on three continents participated in the two HIFLO sessions.

We updated and reprised the HIFLO event on community in summer 2021 while interest in the subject continued to soar as teachers, students, programs, and institutions struggled with and continued to face the effects of a long, draining year of social, physical, financial, and emotional stress. In both instances of HIFLO seminars on community, we used the Zoom platform, enabling us to see all our participants and preserve a sense of community, use the breakout room feature for small group work, interact through the chat function, display shared screens of presentation slides, view selected videos, and generate written ideas. One of our main objectives has been to make sure that participants recognize that we are not only delivering information and asking them to collaborate and present as a faculty learning community but also modeling for them the strategies and tools that we propose as viable approaches to online honors pedagogy with community building at the center. Thus, we have not simply suggested applying virtual tools for building community, developing online discussion forums, taking advantage of small-group work, tapping the power of reflection, and showcasing participants’ learning: we have actively engaged our colleagues in using the tools and practicing celebrated pedagogies of honors education in an online environment. Such meta-level engagement has helped point the way forward to reclaiming and sustaining a vibrant sense of honors community in a post-pandemic scenario.

Both HIFLO events on the theme of community are available as public video files posted after each gathering. The videos are available here:

- Creating Online Community: Experiences from Honors (Wednesday, 17 Jun. 2020), [youtube.com/watch?v=ikpbSrVUZnA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikpbSrVUZnA);
- Creating Honors Online Community (Wednesday, 23 Jun. 2021), [youtube.com/watch?v=O2MnZQxtf3Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2MnZQxtf3Y).

We also put supplementary materials—such as the presentation slide decks, handouts, selected articles, sample assignments, lists of reading resources and websites, and more—in an open, editable Google Drive folder so that our colleagues can benefit from freely sharing additional tips and insights as they revisit the various items in the different folders. The link to the Google Drive folders for 2020 and 2021 can be found embedded in the presentation slides that appear in the videos, and they can be accessed directly here: tiny.cc/4fh3vz.

Was HIFLO 2020 successful? Reading participants' feedback, we think HIFLO fulfilled a need and offered a suitable framework for faculty development. We integrated the feedback in our *Journal of the European Honors Council (JEHC)* article (Zubizarreta et al.), and we included comments such as the following:

- I enjoyed building community with you today.
- Thank you SO much for the HIFLO events you organized so brilliantly! Indeed, I may say that I have learned a lot of new teaching and learning methods. And, most importantly, HIFLO meetings contributed to creating new ties in our honors community, thus making it stronger. Thank you very much again!

In 2021, we thought we could improve the session by including students' voices—after all, building community becomes more powerful when all parties involved are part of the conversation. Thus, we invited five honors students from different countries, including the United States, Russia, Norway, the Netherlands, and Austria. We made sure that a student was present in each of our breakout rooms

to emphasize the importance of having both teachers and students in a conversation about building community. Additionally, HIFI and HIFLO both have an international dimension in their core, helping to embody the importance of Sacks's "dignity of difference" as described in his 2003 book. The resulting open-mindedness prompted by the multidisciplinary and multicultural background of the students helped the participants to make sense of complex issues of pedagogy and community building, reminding us of our common humanity and common purpose in honors education.

To facilitate the inclusion of students' voices in our institute, we organized a virtual Fishbowl experience (Zubizarreta) asking students to converse freely about the various ways that they felt community was successfully built in their honors programs during the year's required isolation and social distancing. The teacher participants just listened. The online environment limited some of the typical in-person, interactive spontaneity of the Fishbowl activity as students took turns expressing their thoughts. Nevertheless, the students confirmed for us the importance of community and shared various student-led activities to keep their respective communities strong during the pandemic, ideas that could continue to be useful in post-pandemic circumstances. Their insights and suggestions are fully available in the 2021 "Creating Honors Online Community" HIFLO video ([youtube.com/watch?v=O2MnZQxtf3Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2MnZQxtf3Y)).

LESSONS FROM VIRTUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING

We have learned many important lessons about overcoming challenges and implementing guiding frameworks while organizing and delivering HIFLO sessions. Some of the challenges are probably no different from those encountered by all directors of teaching and learning centers and other faculty development professionals accustomed to interacting with colleagues in face-to-face workshops, conference sessions, and individual consultations. The required shift to how we traditionally have created community and delivered professional development opportunities has not been easy. Perhaps Wolfensberger says it best in her reflections on the hurdles of trying to replicate real human

interaction in the technological, virtual environment spawned by the pandemic:

Despite all the innovative solutions that lecturers have found to the challenges posed by coronavirus restrictions, it is clear that creating a sense of community has not been easy. Interaction with others as the key to personal, academic, and professional growth is impeded by the lack of face-to-face contact. Online learning often involves the standardization and compartmentalization of content and interaction: this is useful when it comes to labeling, but it is inadequate when it comes to social contact and personal development, not least because the peer group is no longer [present] as soon as the online session is over. We must acknowledge this [problem] and focus more on ‘what am I doing and why?’ (“The Power” 3)

Some of the important lessons we have learned in providing an online professional development institute for an international audience of honors educators are outlined below. The following points are about the preparation of the online professional development sessions on the theme of community; we have shared some of them previously in a report in the *Journal of the European Honors Council* (Zubizarreta et al.), but we hope that they will serve here as useful guideposts for designing such opportunities after the ravages of the pandemic on our treasured sense of honors community:

1. Carefully consider the issue of different time zones. We selected an hour that we felt was the best compromise possible, given that our participants spanned seventeen time zones. For example, one of our participants logged in at 4 a.m., while another logged in at 9 p.m., a considerable challenge for both.
2. Another lesson related to time is that, despite our meticulous planning for a ninety-minute session and with many concessions to give up content we felt was important, we still wished we had more time to allow for more open discussion and more attention to group work and reflection. We would have preferred perhaps an hour

and forty-five minutes or as much as two hours with a ten-minute break midway.

3. It took time for the authors/facilitators to reach a shared vision concerning our HIFLO online sessions. For instance, we had several conversations about whether to livestream the HIFLO events or not. We decided not to livestream but to make our HIFLO seminars public afterward on YouTube after making sure that participants consented to be recorded and that we cleared any copyright issues with music and other shared media. Such a decision has consequences for the organization and delivery of the seminar; for instance, we were unable to record all the different Zoom breakout sessions, so they are not available on the video, even though we wanted to share the full experience of the seminar with the YouTube viewers.
4. Preparing HIFLO seminars of ninety minutes each took us at least three full, busy days for each session, not to mention the time each of us spent preparing and revising our plans before and after our virtual meetings. Such intensive investment of time mirrors many teachers' experience that teaching and learning, as well as engagement in professional development online, require considerable amounts of time; some faculty may even say that COVID-19's call for going virtual in all facets of our work as educators has doubled or tripled our working time.
5. Practicing the various activities we had scheduled was also crucial, alerting us to technical glitches, delays, and other problems we could troubleshoot before the live sessions. Such trial runs allowed us to make changes in our plans for maximum success. Of course, during the pandemic, most of us became more digitally literate, but we still have much to learn, and there can be many digital hurdles.

6. We used the Zoom platform for the virtual meetings, but not all participants were familiar with the technology; some universities, for instance, do not permit the use of Zoom. In addition to sharing guidelines for using the selected virtual meeting platform, advance notice of the various online tools to be used during the seminar helps participants to be ready for the various assignments and activities. We deliberately engaged our members in using Zoom's chat functions, whiteboard, and breakout rooms, but we added other tools such as Slack and Mentimeter to model how they can be used to enhance online teaching, learning, and community building. We wanted participants to know ahead of time what applications to download and how to use one's computer and other devices simultaneously to enable multiple screen tasks. As facilitators, we, too, learned much from the process of coordinating the online institutes and discovering ways of using technology to offer our content and maintain a focus on effective community.
7. Participants were asked to prepare themselves for the sessions by watching several short movie clips related to our theme of community on the European Co-Talent website (cotalent.eu). Topics included creating a collaborative atmosphere for students, stimulating active teaching and learning, providing useful feedback, appreciating questions and remarks—all designed to promote community in both in-person and remote instruction. This kind of easy homework appeared manageable for most participants. Watching the movies created a shared experience and knowledge base at the start of each seminar, which helped to open fruitful conversations and to encourage a growing sense of community. We also are aware, however, that not all participants will prepare themselves diligently in all cases (just as in class), which may influence the outcomes.

8. Following Felten and Lambert's recommendations, we created an environment of genuine welcome and deep care by asking participants to introduce themselves in the beginning and respond to a short icebreaker question. The icebreaker generated laughter or insights, inspiring all to engage in the community and to learn from each other. We also later reflected on the time required by icebreakers, since with twenty-five participants some icebreakers take a long time and are less effective online.
9. We politely asked all members to enable their device's camera so that all our participants could enjoy seeing each other and benefit from connecting a name and a face, a not-so-small encouragement to maintain relationships after the seminar, perhaps at future honors conferences. Instead of lingering on a dominant slide on the screen, we would quickly switch to viewing all our participants to continue fostering a sense of community, even if only virtual.
10. We insisted on making the seminars as interactive as possible with the use of chat functions and breakout rooms for discussion. Our plan worked quite well, but it was difficult to keep up with the chat posts while trying to maintain the pace of the live presentation. Also, the breakout rooms, especially energized by the presence of a student in each room, were a highlight—generating many practical ideas, strengthening community, creating a genuine environment of collaborative learning, and producing inspiring showcased outcomes. But transitioning from the full group in the central meeting “room” to the various groups was tricky and took more time than anticipated. Having an expert with technological skills on our team of presenters was an invaluable asset.

11. Given the work involved in both seminars—taxing participants’ attention, interest, and stamina—we incorporated some physical and mindful activities early and midway through the seminars. The purpose of such interludes was to remind our colleagues that both community and deep learning are enhanced through kinesthetic exercise and restful moments for calm reflection and refreshment.
12. In each breakout session, we asked each team to co-create a relevant artifact, which fostered a sense of community among the team members by prompting them to engage in a creative process (Wolfensberger and Vroom) as each team anticipated presenting their ideas/creations/projects to the entire group. The projects were creative, inspiring, and practical, helping participants to brainstorm approaches to building community in honors. Some of the projects presented by the groups included the following:
 - a. Establishing an opportunity for students to publish collaborative podcasts that help create community as well as deepen and extend content learning;
 - b. Creating a virtual advising platform to promote closer relationships between faculty and students;
 - c. Setting up an art gallery where teachers and students can exhibit personal expressions of challenges and triumphs;
 - d. Using community-of-practice models to establish focus groups on strategies for community building;
 - e. Finding ways of redesigning honors orientation as an online retreat to highlight community or “connectivity” over delivering program or college information;

- f. Developing ways of “humanizing” faculty and student members of an honors community by encouraging shared personal moments, images of family or pets, favorite foods, and such while interacting online.
13. A supremely important lesson from all HIFLO sessions is making sure to incorporate opportunities for critical reflection, allowing participants to think about not just what they have learned in the seminar but how and why they will synthesize and apply new ideas, strategies, and tools to enhance honors teaching, learning, and community whether in an online format or in future, post-pandemic, face-to-face interactions. We encouraged such reflection in both sessions on community, using the available chat, breakout rooms, polling, whiteboard, and open discussion functions in the Zoom platform; we invited our members to think, write, and share as they reflected on the various topics we discussed in real time. As presenters, we, too, engaged in critical reflection after each seminar to share what we learned from the experience and how to improve our work. For instance, we discovered that keeping time when participants present during face-to-face sessions feels different and a little friendlier than when a session leader must stop presenters abruptly during online sessions, which can be more difficult.
14. After the seminars, we urged participants to join Slack, contribute to the Google Drive folder, connect on LinkedIn, and use email as a way of sustaining our reflective and collaborative faculty learning community, creating a web of significant relationships, as previously suggested by Felten and Lambert.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We opened this chapter by expressing our goal to share ideas and experiences related to the design of dynamic, interactive

professional development opportunities that focus on learning skills for managing remote or online teaching but more importantly that create a relationship-rich sense of community. Our HIFLO model is a successful example in honors, but it offers reasonably adaptable strategies that can be used in future virtual professional development ventures inside or outside of honors. No matter what other topics may be addressed in later HIFI or HIFLO seminars, the essential principle of community will always be a vital component.

Professional development without community is a dry, rote accumulation and exercise of technical skills without what Palmer would call spirit or love. By reporting on the process of creating our Honors International Faculty Learning Online (HIFLO) seminars, we aim to inspire others to engage in similar endeavors, thus enriching not only their local community but the international honors community. In short, we built HIFI and HIFLO as relationship-rich professional development opportunities that deliver content and provide space for learning and practicing skills; more significantly, the sessions actually model how and why community is an essential facet of effective faculty development in honors and beyond.

We look forward to other HIFI or HIFLO occasions, in person or online, as professional development opportunities to learn together with enthusiastic, creative, dedicated honors friends. Our aim will always be to advance honors education in all its complexity with an unwavering commitment to the core values of our community.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Building a Pipeline for Transfer and Scholarship Through (Virtual) Honors Research Partnerships

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PERIMETER COLLEGE—GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

BACKGROUND

In 2016, Georgia State University (GSU), already the largest R1 university in the state, consolidated with Georgia Perimeter College, a six-campus, two-year college situated across Metro Atlanta, to become one of the largest universities in the country. Not surprisingly, the institution is still working through the challenges and changes of consolidating two large and diverse entities. One area of concern is trying to determine the best structure to serve seven campuses with very different needs and personalities, and many stakeholders contend that we are still struggling to find our identity. Of course, this consolidation has also produced some great opportunities, especially

for our two-year college students to engage in research and scholarship in new and exciting ways. That the GPC Honors Program, which was established in 1983, merged with the GSU Honors College to create a single honors operation serving seven campuses has presented even more opportunities for honors students.

In early 2020, the stage was already set for the Perimeter Honors College to undertake an aggressive research agenda for the academic year. The college dean had launched a strategic realignment, changing the leadership structure from one that was discipline- and campus-based to one that was more focused on strategic initiatives at the college, such as workforce development, international initiatives, and research. A newly minted Associate Dean of Research underscored the emphasis on research. We had modified our honors distinctions to include a recognition of research and scholarship (the Honors Research Scholar), effectively establishing the standard for our students that research and scholarship would be an expectation for full participation in honors. Criteria for earning this recognition includes earning twelve credit hours in honors; maintaining a 3.3 GPA; and either presenting at an academic conference, including honors conferences or our own undergraduate research conference (Georgia State Undergraduate Research Conference/GSURC), or publishing their original work in an undergraduate research journal, such as *URCA: The NCHC Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity*, which is online, or *Discovery: The Honors College Undergraduate Research Journal of Georgia State University*.

Although the sudden and unexpected shift to remote operations because of the global pandemic stunted some of our plans to highlight research, we remained steadfast, trusting that if anyone could continue operations in a virtual world, it would be the innovators engaged in research. Fortunately, we soon learned that almost everything we were initiating could be carried on virtually. In fact, the shift to virtual opened new opportunities for partnership between our six two-year campuses and our R1 university campus in downtown Atlanta, where we aim to transition as many honors students as possible to finish their bachelor's degree.

At the start of the 2020 academic year, I was approached by the president of the Barry Goldwater Foundation, who invited the Perimeter Honors College to participate in a new initiative they were undertaking with the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation to identify excellent candidates for the Goldwater scholarship from groups under-represented in STEM. We were already establishing a framework in research that included appointment of a new Research and Scholarship Coordinator in the honors college, a campus-based research showcase, and a new research partnership with an interdisciplinary bachelor's program. Because one of the goals of these structural changes was to build a solid pipeline of Goldwater candidates, we eagerly embraced this incredibly well-timed proposal.

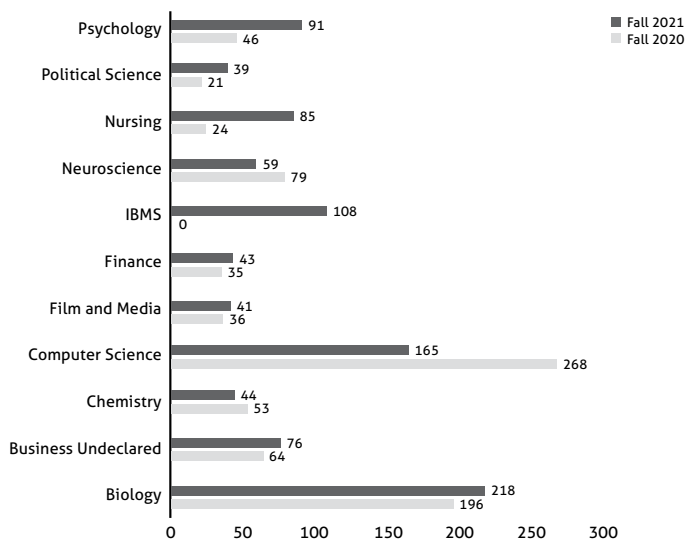
Realizing the vast opportunity for our two-year honors students that scholarship provides, we also made the decision to partner with the Student Opportunity Center (SOC), an organization founded by former honors students from Florida State University, to give students access to tens of thousands of research, conference, internship, and scholarship opportunities—some of which happen virtually. SOC allows students to do more than simply search the database for areas of interest (both discipline and geographical). They can “favorite” and apply for those opportunities through the portal—then come back to update their application when/if selected to participate—all allowing a tremendous amount of data to be provided to administrators of honors colleges.

I was hoping to use these engagement analytics to bring in some future funding for research as well as inform the ways we support students. We already knew that our top six pathways in honors at Perimeter are health sciences, business administration, computer science, biology, engineering, and psychology, illustrating the importance of our increasing focus on research and scholarship, but we were looking to SOC to provide even more data to guide our path forward and support our advocating for increasing the number of undergraduate research positions and research partnerships in future academic years.

The four-year campus—and the honors college—at Georgia State University, to which Perimeter College aims to transition the majority

of our honors students, was looking at this profile for incoming freshman in the fall of 2021:

Figure 1. Major and Year: Admit Offers



The enormous leap in Biomedical Sciences (IBMS) intended majors from fall 2020 to fall 2021 was astounding, thereby validating our decision to collaborate with that program for research with our two-year students. (This partnership is discussed further later in this chapter.)

Our approach to building the kind of pipeline we wanted to see in research, ultimately creating students more prepared to transfer and to qualify for scholarship opportunities, involved four primary strategies: increasing faculty development, scaffolding conference presentations, offering undergraduate research assistantships, and collaborating with the graduate STEM division at our four-year counterpart. With all of these opportunities, we had some wins and losses that will set the stage for what we hope will be an even stronger pipeline for selection and admission to top-tier schools and funding opportunities. Here, I will share the strategies we focused on, as well as some of those wins and losses, with the hope that they might help others pursuing similar goals.

In order for all of our initiatives to be effective, we had to secure the buy-in from our honors faculty, so that is where we began.

STRATEGY 1: DEVELOPING FACULTY

That a vast majority of two-year college students need financial support in order to pursue and complete their education beyond the associate's degree is no secret. Over the years, Perimeter College has found great success with helping our students win the nation's largest undergraduate transfer scholarship, the Jack Kent Cooke (JKC) Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship. Even during the heart of the pandemic (2020 and 2021), we still had two winners in each of those two years. And the number of Perimeter College students receiving a JKC award as of the 2023 announcement totals twenty-seven.

Unfortunately, the success of our student candidates for the JKC Scholarship has not even been approached when it comes to successful applicants for the prestigious Goldwater Scholarship. A fundamental difference between the JKC and Goldwater scholarships, as many in honors know, is that the Goldwater has a research project requirement. Perimeter College has had just two Goldwater recipients throughout the college's history. In past years, we would publicize the scholarship and application deadlines, but when we have identified interested STEM students, they rarely have engaged in a research project that would make their application competitive. That we typically have students for about 30 hours before they transfer elsewhere or transition to GSU's main Atlanta campus makes it incredibly challenging to identify and then groom them in time for the Goldwater cycle. While we recently identified an excellent candidate for the Goldwater scholarship, as happens quite often in two-year colleges, that candidate transferred early to a highly competitive four-year university. This outcome was wonderful for the student, and it was not in conflict with our greater goals for honors students continuing their education, but it did result in our falling short of the stated goal of solidifying our Goldwater pipeline of qualified and ultimately successful applicants.

That we were selected to participate in the Goldwater-Moore Foundation initiative to help colleges with a high percentage of under-represented minorities put forth great candidates for the Goldwater was fortuitous, especially since the honors college had created the new position of Research and Scholarship Coordinator. The resulting realization was that we needed more faculty teaching and assigning research in these 1000- and 2000-level courses, but even the good work that they

were doing with students to engage them in research and scholarship was not enough: faculty needed to be true partners in this enterprise. Faculty members needed to know much more about the available opportunities in research and scholarship, so we shifted some of our focus and energy into faculty awareness and faculty development. We started an honors faculty newsletter with a pedagogical corner and an update on research and scholarship, we built a repository in our learning management system to devote to honors faculty (providing information about opportunities and also professional development), and we created a summer faculty development workshop series. These initiatives created space and opportunity to educate our honors faculty about what is available for our students, what is at stake for not participating (loss of scholarship dollars, for example), and how they can make these great opportunities available to our students through some creative course redesign. This space for professional growth and communication has proven incredibly helpful. Not only have we received positive feedback from faculty, but we have seen engagement increase so significantly that it is difficult not to point to this communication stream as having an impact on our intended outcomes.

Determined to take advantage of the opportunity the Goldwater-Moore partnership had afforded us, we concentrated on the pipeline, which, after all, was one of our original goals. The first step was having campus honors coordinators and our new Research and Scholarship Coordinator present at the annual Faculty Development Day. We then held a two-hour workshop in April, hoping we could catch faculty when they were still energized by the success of their spring semester, before final grading preoccupied them and before they began planning for the upcoming fall semester. This workshop was called “Teaching Toward Research and Scholarship: Using Course Design to Encourage Student Scholarship and Conference Presentations.” We invited our Goldwater Scholarship liaison and the director of the undergraduate research conference at our four-year campus to speak on the panel since they could best instruct faculty on the end goal of such project design. We repeated this session in the summer as part of our summer faculty development series, which coincided with the period when faculty were gearing up to teach their fall classes.

We then partnered with our new honors librarian to create a workshop for faculty to encourage them to view the honors librarian as a teaching partner. We decided if we could create some online modules for universally taught research concepts, such as evaluating sources, navigating databases, and MLA/APA format, and create a repository for those on our Honors Faculty iCollege (LMS) page, we could relieve faculty of the time necessary to teach these basic concepts and free up some time to design more creative research projects, projects that would be a good fit for conference presentations or scholarship applications.

We offered three tracks of summer workshops (basic, intermediate, and advanced) and encouraged new honors faculty to attend all three. We scaffolded those sessions to make progressive learning possible. As part of the workshop series, the following sessions were offered: What is Honors?; Honors Pedagogy: Who We Are and How We Do It; Designing Amazing Honors Projects; Making Your Honors Librarian Your Teaching Partner; Honors in Action: A Faculty Panel; Teaching with Research and Scholarship in Mind; and NCHC Roundtable, in which we offered a digest version of some of the highlights of sessions at the 2021 NCHC conference. We awarded faculty a certificate for attending three or more workshops, and we had quite a good turnout. (About 25% of honors faculty attended each workshop.) In our faculty panel, we invited a group of active scholars at Perimeter who also teach honors courses and regularly produce presenters at the Annual Meeting of the Georgia Collegiate Honors Council (GCHC) to discuss their own course design. Faculty attendees at that session—who, by the way, were both honors and non-honors instructors—asked questions about these conferences and how they might assess the work of responding to a CFP, for instance.

Plans for the year after that included more advanced workshops, such as how to use Zotero to manage research projects, with the honors librarian. We plan to offer a workshop on the e-portfolio system Portfolium as a way to perhaps begin tracking student research projects as they are completed. All of these sessions have been and will continue to be conducted virtually in order to best reach our 125+ honors faculty across all six of our two-year campuses. They are all recorded and added to the faculty resource repository created in our Honors Faculty iCollege section.

STRATEGY 2: TEACHING THE CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

Getting faculty on board with the idea of assigning projects that would enhance opportunities for competitive scholarship and admission to select schools is key to increasing the number of students making conference presentations, but it is only feasible if honors leaders can overcome first-generation students' fears about entering this unknown academic realm. With that in mind, we held informative sessions for students on preparing for a research poster session and responding to conference CFPs, and we recorded those sessions for faculty to show in future classes. Additionally, we shared with students a fantastic poster presentation template that was created by our honors counterparts at our four-year campus.

All of these steps were done in preparation for our first Honors Research Showcase, the brainchild of one of our campus coordinators who had accompanied students to the GCHC conference and realized the value of prepping them the semester before with low-stakes presentation opportunities. Through our inaugural research showcase, we were able to recruit students from Perimeter to present at GCHC and GSURC, an undergraduate research conference that is hosted by the honors college at our Atlanta campus. Two Perimeter students won awards for their research on sustainability. That conference, held just four weeks after the COVID-19 lockdown, went on virtually without a hitch, paving the way for many other virtual activities in research and scholarship.

In preparation for our 2nd Annual Honors Research Showcase, we invited Perimeter students to the research-oriented workshops that were held for honors students at our Atlanta campus, including the following: Finding, Managing, Citing Scholarly Lit; Research Proposals and Abstracts; The Value of an Academic Conference; Building a Poster Presentation; and Crafting Oral Presentations. Beyond having access to these sessions, Perimeter students could attend without distance between campuses being an obstacle because they were being held virtually for the first time.

In the past two-to-three years, our honors-focused conference participation (Table 1) has steadily risen although admittedly still lower participation than we had five years ago:

Table 1. Conference Participation

Conference Participation	2019	2020	2021
Georgia Collegiate Honors Council (GCHC)	6 students 2 faculty	8 students 4 faculty	8 students 1 faculty
Southern Regional Honors Council (SRHC)	0 students 0 faculty	0 students 0 faculty	6 students 2 faculty
Georgia State Undergraduate Research Conference (GSURC)	0 students 0 faculty	2 students 5 faculty	4 students 9 faculty

We hope to increase participation by 30% each year thanks to some of our focused research initiatives. In spring 2022, we were on track to take fifteen students to GCHC, thanks to new faculty involvement in the fall 2021 research showcase, which expanded to two campuses and included twenty students. We elected, however, not to participate that year because of a resurgence in COVID-19 variant cases that made it difficult to justify the tight accommodations our budget would require of students. Because no virtual offerings were available, we decided not to participate at all. Instead, we emphasized participation in the Georgia State Undergraduate Research Conference (GSURC), not just hitting participation highs for Perimeter faculty and students, but having another award winner—this time for Honors British Literature II.

Additionally, we are now designing a student-centered workshop to be delivered at the start of fall semester to teach students how to turn a graded research paper or project for a class into a more advanced research project for the purposes of publication or conference presentation. We plan to invite former honors students to talk about their experiences. One such student, Mia-Simone Green, a psychology major, selected a topic (trauma porn) she had researched in my Honors English 1102 class and then presented at a conference. The course theme was digital composition and social media activism, and the culminating project was a mini conference on Digital Ethics. The success of that opportunity was paved by a course design that taught students to think like junior scholars.

The assignment was scaffolded in much the way the conference/publication process actually works. I drafted a CFP and taught the class how to respond to it (one graded writing assignment), required them to accept the offer to present in writing (another graded assignment), required them to plan for their presentation and communicate tech needs (with a completed form), put together a schedule of panelists on topics that had similar focus (so they could see how random this experience sometimes is, but how they still have to make the “session” work together), and invited other “scholars in the discipline” (English faculty, department chairs, high-profile individuals in honors and at the college) to add a little pressure to their presentation. We had a dryrun, and during that session, I encouraged professional dress, and we discussed refreshments. Because Green had this classroom conference experience and had grown attached to the research topic, she eagerly responded to the call for proposals for the state honors conference. Green continued to polish and update the research and traveled to the state honors conference to present “‘Trauma Porn’ and the Media’s History of Exploiting Racialized Pain Through Videos.”

That research project was so influential for this particular student that she continued to stay connected to it even when transferring to work on a BS in Psychology at our Atlanta campus. In fact, when Green saw that TEDx was coming to Georgia State University, she proposed a talk, and it was accepted. This third-year student presented alongside graduate students and seasoned professors: her performance was exemplary. It was a very proud moment for me, as her faculty mentor and honors advisor, as well as for our honors college, and I firmly believe it could only have occurred because we taught the research and conference concept. Once it was demystified, the world of scholarship opened up. Green later decided to pursue a PhD in Psychology and, I have no doubt, will be a contributing scholar in that discipline for many years to come.

Of course, the activities could have been done virtually (minus the live-audience filming of a TEDx talk). Modality aside, in teaching the act of scholarship to our first-year students, we are not only setting them up for successful transfer to the four-year institutions of their choice, we are sending forth students who are ready to hit the ground running at R1 institutions, engaging and producing and proving they belong there. This transformation might seem frivolous, but many

first-generation and community college transfer students suffer from the imposter phenomenon, so participation in these scholarly activities helps to combat those feelings.

With more faculty teaching the conference presentation, and with the honors college supporting skills training with students, we will certainly increase both the quantity and quality of our participation in honors and undergraduate research conferences in years to come. This increase can only be bolstered by faculty and student participation in our undergraduate research assistantship program.

STRATEGY 3: GROWING THE UNIVERSITY ASSISTANTSHIP PROGRAM (UAP)

Research has proven time and again that faculty-student interaction has a significant impact on retention, graduation, and self-efficacy and helps students to reflect positively on their academic experience. In “Understanding the Development of Honors Students’ Connections with Faculty,” Shannon R. Dean articulates the importance of faculty-student interactions, particularly outside of the classroom. She asserts that one of the most significant types of interactions occurs around academic matters, noting, specifically, that these interactions are “cultivated on multiple levels, including small class sizes, research opportunities, and co-curricular or out of classroom experiences” (108). Dean notes that the three primary motivations for students to seek relationships with faculty are research, career and academic guidance, and networking opportunities (115). With these factors in mind, we sought to create opportunities that would forge the kind of meaningful connections with faculty that our students are seeking.

The University Assistantship Program (UAP) at GSU is a program the provost supports and the honors college at our four-year campus coordinates. The UAP provides approximately 250 paid undergraduate research assistantships, paying honors students \$2,500 (part of which is funded by the provost and the other part is matched by departments) to work directly with faculty for 8-10 hours a week on research, scholarly, or creative projects. This program had not previously been extended to the two-year campuses, but in 2020, we secured approval to launch it at Perimeter College with two fully funded positions.

While research is something that virtually all students at the collegiate level can do—and should be exposed to—we decided to limit the UAP to honors students primarily because the in-depth work aligned most closely with honors pedagogy and with what honors faculty are called to do in their role. In “Connecting Honors for All: Reimagining the Two-Year Honors Program in the Age of Guided Pathways,” Charlotte Pressler points to the value of honors faculty who “build competence by offering their own expertise to students and presenting them with demanding and challenging opportunities to gain knowledge” (73). In that same article, Pressler references Marca V. C. Wolfensberger’s talk at the 2018 Honors International Faculty Institute, where she discussed the concept of “bounded freedom,” a situation faculty can create through mentorship-oriented activities that allow students to stretch their autonomy while also maintaining structure and guidance that keep students from being overwhelmed (qtd. in Pressler 73). This description captures the benefits of the UAP perfectly. UAP supports student involvement in faculty research activities, allowing them to experience what Wolfensberger values and Pressler calls the faculty members’ “expertise as scholar-teachers” as students “seek out material with depth and complexity” while they pursue the opportunity to dive into ancillary areas of research that can evolve into their own research projects (73). In the years since Perimeter College has participated in the UAP, we have had UAP students co-publish along with their faculty mentors as well as present their own related research at academic conferences.

In that first year, one student was paired with the Center for Community Engagement and assisted with a number of grant-funded public health projects, including a women’s health access project assessing what motivates refugee and immigrant women to seek preventive health services and, eventually, COVID vaccine hesitancy. She went on to win a collegewide dean’s award for outstanding research that year. A second student worked on a grant proposal in conjunction with NEH’s “We the People” program commemorating the coming semiquincentennial and related to voting rights. That project showcased intersections of “civil liberties, civic obligations, and civil rights,” with a particular focus on the history of the struggle for voting rights in Atlanta. The former project required some in-person work, but the latter consisted of supplemental research conducted almost entirely

virtually under the guidance of the faculty researcher. Some of this student's research was through governmental agencies to ascertain voting records, and some of it involved work the faculty member was doing as an expert witness testifying in voter suppression cases. All in all, the research the student conducted was scholarly but also had real-world implications. The student accomplished these tasks in an asynchronous manner that nevertheless met the deadlines set forth by the faculty researcher.

Because of these successful ventures during the first year of the University Assistantship Program and the growing interest among both students and faculty, we secured an increase from our dean's office to fund five UAP positions for the second year. As we began to advertise and recruit participants, that number quickly proved insufficient to accommodate the demand, so the honors college at Perimeter elected to fund four more positions. As a result, we had paid undergraduate research assistantships in the following nine project areas:

- The GSU Prison Education Program (GSUPEP) (where, incidentally, we were also piloting honors courses): Performing web-based marketing functions, such as website updates and social media marketing and promotion;
- The Study Abroad Office: Using data to help drive recruitment and logistics decisions for the coming years; supporting logistics of international travel; and marketing;
- The Office of Student Success: Analyzing anonymous student data regarding performance, retention, graduation, and transfer; parsing data and condensing it into infographics for data-rich presentations to stakeholders;
- The Department of Computer Science and Engineering: Using data and social media to disseminate information and build community in the department;
- History and Political Science: Researching and writing an NEH grant proposal;
- The Center for Community Engagement: Working with community health ambassadors on COVID research and health navigation (some work as part of a CDC grant);

- Life and Earth Sciences: Anthropogenic Noise Study determining the effect of environmental noise pollution on various songbird species in the Georgia Piedmont area;
- Life and Earth Sciences: Investigating Insect Pollinator Diversity in Georgia Native Plant Gardens;
- Life and Earth Sciences: Comparison of Habitat Characteristics and Nesting Activity in Artificial Nest Boxes.

The concentration of new positions in Life and Earth Sciences (LES) is apparent. This came as a result of our being actively engaged in academics and programming across disciplines. During the annual academic awards program in 2022, which the honors college organizes and hosts on behalf of the dean's office, I noticed several nominees had been a part of the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) program. This program, dedicated to underrepresented minorities and research in science—essentially a paid research mentorship program—helped us uncover a treasure trove of UAP potential. I held an emergency info session because the position request deadline was upon us, and almost immediately, we had four faculty members ready to commit and a chair who was eagerly building a pipeline for faculty advisors for the next academic year. We went from nine funded UAP positions in AY22 to 12 in AY23 and 15 in AY24. Many of those positions continue to be virtual, some by necessity because of the faculty-student matching we do. Because Perimeter has six-campuses, the honors college would need a miraculous alignment of the stars to identify an honors student interested in conducting a specific kind of research who also happened to attend classes at the campus where the faculty members' research is being conducted. Many of our students—as is true of many two-year college students—have transportation or childcare limitations; plus the whole metro Atlanta traffic situation makes traveling between campuses for extra work incredibly difficult. This reality necessitates creation of remote research assistantship opportunities. That our faculty carry a 5-4 teaching load as well as significant service responsibilities means they actually can benefit from having students working remotely and somewhat independently for some of those research hours. Of course, mentorship

from a distance definitely comes with some challenges, but it also fits nicely within the “bounded freedom” (qtd. in Pressler 73) model that Wolfensberger noted helps to establish the “self-regulation” (Pressler 73) that students must learn anyway in order to be productive adults post-college—as well as to pursue their own future research agendas.

While creating the kind of machine Georgia State benefits from in the area of undergraduate research can be quite an undertaking for other institutions to establish, many different entry points exist for initiating this kind of virtual research support. A good first step would be to contact department chairs and identify the faculty with an active research agenda and to see who among them are also teaching honors classes. These individuals are honors allies and already invested in the mission. It may prove useful to pull those individuals together in a brainstorming session to see how they could benefit from a student assistant and what kind of mentorship they may be able to provide. Many students would volunteer for these opportunities without requiring any compensation. And many faculty would be willing to mentor without any additional compensation. Just the simple act of telling them what kinds of activities students might engage in, such as data collection and analysis, data summary, infographics creation, and conducting background research, may be sufficient to sell the benefits to faculty. Promoting research as a key to scholarships, transfer opportunities, and graduate programs should go a long way in convincing students to engage in these activities without compensation. Once a successful model has been created and successfully marketed and operated, the honors program can present a proposal to the upper administration or development officers to help with funding future iterations.

STRATEGY 4: FORGING A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INSTITUTE OF BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES (IBMS)

Identifying faculty researchers in a multi-campus, metropolitan two-year college can be challenging, not because faculty are not doing the work, but because our faculty is so large and geographically distant. Until recently, GSU had no repository for tracking ongoing faculty research projects, but a recent survey administered by the Associate

Dean for Research has helped with efforts to identify the research that is being done.

While Perimeter College does not have any faculty-run research labs at any of our two-year campuses, the Alpharetta campus proudly boasts several state-of-the-art science labs, a fact that inspired the dean to dub that location the “science campus.” In fact, when a team of scientists from the Atlanta campus toured those labs three years ago, they were so impressed that they quickly expressed a desire to develop a partnership between the Institute of Biomedical Sciences (IBMS) at our four-year campus and the Alpharetta campus science department. This potential collaboration looked like an ideal opportunity for honors: the honors college is headquartered in the science building on the Alpharetta campus and in close proximity to science faculty and students. After meeting with the IBMS team several times, we put together a multiphase plan to include two-year honors STEM students in a variety of research-related activities with graduate students. Fortuitously, the director of IBMS with whom we had been working out the details of our partnership was named the VP of Research and Economic Development university-wide, thus increasing the likelihood that a partnership between honors two-year students and our R1 four-year campus will be expanded to other disciplines in the near future.

The IBMS collaboration was set to kick off during the fall of 2020, and since we were already planning for the first phase to be virtual, largely because of the distance between campuses, the pandemic had little to no impact on that implementation plan. Because our campuses are so distant from one another—the closest two being fifteen miles apart and the farthest being sixty-three miles apart—we planned this collaboration to include as much virtual interaction as possible. The first year or two of the collaboration would be limited to honors science students from the Alpharetta campus, with plans to eventually expand to one other campus with suitable labs. Fortunately for honors, the Clarkston campus houses updated labs as well as our second honors college office. Knowing the challenge of transporting these students from our suburban campus outside the perimeter to downtown Atlanta and back (fifty-four miles round trip), we designed the program to be virtual. That COVID made *everything* virtual only served to make our students and faculty more comfortable with the idea and with the necessary online platforms.

Our primary goals for this collaboration included:

- Increasing awareness of the offerings of the IBMS program for potential transfer;
- Providing Perimeter students opportunities to observe and participate in experiences such as lab work, journal clubs, and seminars that are common to scientists and researchers; and
- Encouraging honors students in general at Perimeter to consider graduate school.

The benefit to our honors science faculty was primarily that these opportunities would provide some support in creating honors dimensions, such as honors contracts, to biology and chemistry classes, which we had only just begun offering in the prior academic year, leaving those faculty time to focus on their teaching and expertise and not on crafting additional unique assignments and then grading them. These opportunities were not meant to replace all of the supplemental activities they would have their honors students do, but we hoped they would provide a potential layer of enrichment.

As part of the collaboration, the professor hosting the IBMS 8720 course (a graduate research seminar) invited our students to attend her students' seminar presentations for spring semester. The course met via WebEx one day per week for approximately ten weeks, with one graduate student per week giving a seminar presentation on an area of research in biomedical sciences. Sometimes those were chemistry-focused; at other times, they were biology-focused. Topics were announced about one week in advance of the presentations, which allowed our honors faculty time to choose whether that week's topic would be a good fit for the course they were teaching.

The ten sessions were approximately twenty-five minutes long and allowed for a Q&A period after. Graduate students in this course are practicing delivery of a seminar presentation to prepare for an eventual defense of their dissertation. They are asked to make their presentations relatively basic since the IBMS program is interdisciplinary in nature to such an extent that their classmates do not necessarily share a standard or base level of knowledge. This stipulation meant that our students

could see what scholars do while not being completely overwhelmed by academic content too far above their level.

Perimeter College honors faculty who were invited were given a variety of ways to participate. They could commit their class to attending one virtual session together (like a field trip); they could share the schedule with their students and require them to choose one or two and attend on their own (we provided an attendance record for them); they could require students to attend and ask a question; or they could ask students to attend and write a short reflection on the experience. These options could be graded or offered as extra credit. We wanted to encourage as much participation as possible, and because this was a pilot program, we were hoping to capture some data to inform future iterations and further develop the collaboration.

All four of the honors science faculty who had embedded honors students in their Alpharetta campus sections agreed to participate (approximately twenty students total). We designed a survey for our students to complete after they attended:

1. Name and major:
2. How many research seminars did you attend as part of your honors experience this semester?
3. How did you choose which session(s) to attend?
4. Describe your prior knowledge on the subject of the seminar: nothing at all, very little, moderate, quite a bit
5. Describe your knowledge on the subject of the seminar after attending the seminar: nothing at all, very little, moderate, quite a bit
6. How likely would you be to sign up for a research seminar course after having attended this session? not at all likely, somewhat likely, likely, very likely
7. Knowing a little more about research now, how likely would you be to pursue a research assistantship or research-based scholarship after attending this session? not at all likely, somewhat likely, likely, very likely
8. How likely are you to consider graduate school? not at all likely, somewhat likely, likely, very likely
9. How did the seminar(s) affect your view of research in general? What are some key takeaways from this experience?

Unfortunately, the professor of the graduate classes designed her own survey for participants to assess the presenter, and it turns out, Perimeter honors students were confused about which survey to complete and unanimously opted for the presenter feedback survey. By the time we realized this situation, it was too late to capture authentic data, so we elected to close the original survey and focus on anecdotal evidence—such as texts and emails sent from students to their professor—to assess how the collaboration was working. Although we have not yet been able to repeat the program, in future iterations of it, we will be sure to capture data from our own survey or combine the two surveys in some way.

One honors biology professor took the lead on the pilot, attending all of the sessions, crafting “cheat sheets” for all participating faculty to use to help their students better grasp the material in the article they would be reading prior to the presentation, and frequently sending feedback to me on how things were going for his students as well as himself. Here is one example: “Method update—my students text me questions privately, then we meet afterwards to discuss what was said. I was SHOCKED at how much they absorbed and were interested in! The parts they could follow, they latched onto HARD” (Dr. Jonathan Lochamy). In that professor’s final-takeaways email, he outlined how he incorporated the IBMS seminar into his introductory biology grading: “Attending 4 lectures, asking a question, filling out the survey and the after-action talk in my WebEx was worth 10% of Honors student grades. (It replaced a 10% lab report.) [...] I think it went well and held the students to a reasonable standard, even those that didn’t do the work.”

I could tell the experience energized him; he was always eager to talk about it and put in considerable volunteer work to help his students make the most of the experience. When I asked him about the one-page summaries and supplemental lessons he was crafting to prep students for the research seminar participation, he explained that he considered that work to be “professional development activities” and would be reporting it on his annual evaluation as such. “Genius!” I thought. And that is exactly how he says he will sell it to his colleagues in honors science on the Clarkston campus when we expand the initiative there as Scholarship of Teaching and Learning work in honors.

Although I would consider this first run a success, we do have some potential complications to consider: our Atlanta campus does not yet run an IBMS graduate research seminar in the fall. We will not have this layer of engagement for our honors science community again until spring semester. While this gap has already caused a momentum issue for us, we hoped the result could be parlayed into a more diverse range of offerings. We had also hoped the return to campus would open doors for more of the traditional collaboration opportunities we had originally sketched out, but those have not yet manifested either, most likely because of the logistical obstacles of campus distance and transportation. Instead, we will continue to focus on the development of virtual opportunities.

Nevertheless, with the energy generated by the participation in that first seminar, the Associate Director of Undergraduate Education in IBMS quickly crafted a new opportunity for us to work on together: the IBMS Ambassador Program. Here is a description of that program from the flyer he created:

This program seeks to pair PhD students with undergraduate honors students in a virtual mentor-mentee relationship. Mentors will guide 1–2 mentees through several virtual interactions aimed at expanding the mentee’s access to research and fostering their interest in biomedical science and the Biomedical Science and Enterprise bachelor’s program. Graduate students will gain excellent mentoring experience that can help to develop their curriculum vitae.

Targeted for participation were any PhD students in the IBMS graduate program who were interested in developing their mentorship skills and wanted to connect with highly motivated undergraduate students and honors science majors at the two-year campus.

As part of the program, mentors were required to guide mentees through several interactions, including:

- **Virtual journal club or lab meeting**—the mentee(s) were to virtually attend at least one journal club or lab meeting with their graduate student mentor. Mentors were asked to help the undergraduate with pre-meeting preparation if

needed (provide necessary reading materials, help them understand the content, etc.).

- **Virtual lab tour**—mentors were to take the mentees on a virtual laboratory tour (via Facetime or similar platform) to showcase the lab space, types of research being done, lab environment, etc. Lab tours were not meant to be exhaustive, but rather give mentees an idea of what a lab looks like and what kinds of research are being conducted there.
- **Seminar invitations**—mentors were expected to invite undergraduate students to attend virtual seminars that were relevant to the graduate student's (or their lab's) field of study, provided that those seminars are appropriate for undergraduate students to attend. Mentors were also asked to keep mentees apprised of IBMS seminars that they could attend.
- **Introduction to Biomedical Science and Enterprise (BSEN) program coordinators**—mentors worked to gauge mentee interest in the BSEN undergraduate program and facilitate an introduction between mentees who are interested in the BSEN program and either the IBMS undergraduate program coordinator or Associate Director of Undergraduate Education so that students could have their questions about the program answered.

While this program was launched very late in the semester, and much of the post-participation survey data noted the short duration of the program, the response rate for the call for participation was better than expected. Although we sent only one email to honors STEM majors and asked for a two-day turnaround, we had so many interested undergraduates that we were only able to pair about half of them with a mentor (nine interested students and three mentors volunteered across two labs), proving a desire for such mentorship programs exists.

That desire, combined with some post-participation feedback on the value of the mentorship, demonstrated a need to have a second iteration of this ambassadorship program in the coming academic year.

When asked what the program did well, mentee respondents cited exposure as the primary benefit. While this factor sounds quite basic, it is a good, fundamental outcome for a first iteration. Specifically, students said: “The underlying aim of the program, as I understand, is to introduce undergraduate students to biomedical research, and give post-graduate students the opportunity to mentor and build relationships with their mentees. This is excellent and I think it should be maintained.” And “I’m glad that IBMS invited me to have a peek into a research meeting.” When asked what we could improve on, we received some predictable responses from those mentees: more one-on-one time with mentors and longer duration.

The mentors gave feedback that also referenced timing, some being the fact that they had only about two weeks to interact with students once the mentor-mentee pairings were made and that much of the interaction came during final exams, so it was hit or miss whether mentees would or could respond to emails or attend events. Additionally, because of the remote-work situation the pandemic thrust upon everyone, students were temporarily located all over the world, so time zones impacted their ability to connect and participate in the seminars to which they had been invited.

Some of the greatest takeaways, which could be applied to any honors programs seeking to establish such a partnership, would be to partner with a department conducting research or a nearby university to which an institution’s two-year students often transfer. Such an arrangement can nurture a pathway to their university—or to a particular degree program. Because departments are always vying for students to become majors, a good place to start could be with the Director of Graduate Studies, either for the entire university or for a particular department. These well-connected individuals have a vested interest in building pipelines into their majors and into graduate school in general, so they may be motivated to help establish research opportunities and to identify mentors. Finding a champion, as we did in the IBMS department, will make implementation a much easier lift than trying to do it without allies.

LOOKING AHEAD

While we set out in these two programs—UAP and IBMS collaborations—to enrich our students’ academic experience, it turns out that these programs have the additional benefit of enriching honors faculty members’ experience, too. Not only do they have an opportunity to do new work in research and scholarship for their promotion and tenure process (not an insignificant feat for two-year faculty with a 5-4 teaching load), but they have new opportunities to mentor undergraduates doing research and receive support for conducting their own research. These opportunities are not as common in a two-year college environment, so it is a tremendous opportunity for everyone involved. In our multi-campus, expansive metro-Atlanta college, we have learned that virtual is key to serving our student population.

Citing the data from Allen and Seaman for fall of 2011 and for 2022, Melissa L. Johnson writes that just a decade before the pandemic, “more than 6.7 million students took at least one online class ...” (83). And despite the fact that even in 2002 (two decades ago), when, writes Johnson, “more than 90% of public institutions were offering online courses, if not fully online programs” (84), honors faculty and administrators have been extremely reticent to support the idea that honors pedagogy could be effectively enacted in an online environment. In fact, in Johnson’s study in 2011, she put out a call to NCHC member institutions to invite online honors faculty members to participate, and only five responded—a likely indicator of faculty awareness of the controversiality of the proposition. Her findings bolstered the point that engagement is critical to honors course success. At the onset of the pandemic, in late March of 2020, UNESCO noted: “Over 1.5 billion learners in 165 countries [were] affected by COVID-19 school closures.” The vast majority of those moved online, and two years later, many are still there or operating in an eternal hybridized modality (“UNESCO Rallies”). With the fears of in-person activities lessening and much of the world returning to “normal operations,” we can safely say that online is a permanent new modality in education, and it includes some degree of virtual. While most of the world returned to normal the summer of 2022 and nearly all in-person activities resumed, at our two-year institution, almost 80% of the enrollment was still online.

This enormous and unexpected shift proved we must continue to serve students with a wide range of virtual options and opportunities. It also means that honors must be agile and responsive.

The U.N. Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohamed noted the pandemic was “not a time to deepen inequalities.... It [was] a time to invest in education’s power to transform” (qtd. in “UNESCO Rallies”). I argue that these investments in education—including development of increased virtual opportunities for engagement, research, and scholarly work—must continue post-pandemic. After all, the highest purpose we serve as educators is to ensure that learning never stops. And we have learned a considerable amount in the past two academic years about the role of virtual experiences in shaping our students’ participation in research and scholarship as well as the role that engagement plays in transfer and funding. In the past two years, we renewed our longstanding partnership with Columbia College at Columbia University. We sent two honors students there in the fall of 2022, and we established a new transfer relationship with Yale University, where we sent both of our 2021 Jack Kent Cooke Scholars. The connections are not as strong as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by any means—a project our honors college lags behind on, to be sure—but they are representative of the doors we try to open for our students post-associate’s degree.

Our efforts toward development of faculty and students will continue to evolve. Our university-wide Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) is entitled “College-to-Career,” so many of the strategic initiatives across the college incorporate this focus. This past year, our honors college at Perimeter hosted several workshops themed around workforce development, largely resembling job talks, but what we did not cover was building a career in academia. Since so much of our practice and pedagogy in honors is built around scholarship, it seems an incredible oversight not to have done so, but we will remedy that in upcoming years. After all, many honors students pursue graduate degrees, and some know even before they graduate from their two-year college that they want to become a college professor (take Mia-Simone Green as a perfect example). We signed on to join the New Faculty Academy as a way to raise awareness about honors and to build a pipeline for future honors faculty, and we have incorporated honors into the Department Chairs Onboarding Academy. If chairs prioritize

research and scholarship in their respective departments, their faculty will follow.

We made some adjustments to our fiscal priorities for the coming academic year. While the Student Opportunity Center (SOC) is probably a fantastic resource for some institutions, it did not pan out for our students at Perimeter. Whether that is a result of the newness of the resource for our students (and therefore, a lack of patience with regard to the period of time it might take students to learn about and acclimate to it), the pandemic (which meant research opportunities would all be virtual, and there were not as many virtual opportunities in the database as I would have liked), or just a bad functional fit for our students (who require a bit more handholding toward research than any database/repository provides) remains to be seen. The investment of approximately \$10,000 per year, however, was steep enough for our very small budget to require us to revisit our return on investment, and we decided to walk away from SOC for the time being and invest those dollars in a growing university assistantship program instead.

While the pandemic did not negatively impact our inaugural year of the collaboration in any measurable way, including budget, it has certainly set the stage for development of future phases and will have lasting impact on honors online in general. The university received \$45 million in CARES Act funds and \$82 million in HEERF (Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund) dollars. Approximately half of those funds were distributed directly to students in need by the Office of Student Financial Services. While it is unclear what portion of those dollars were committed to supporting the transition of science lab work or other programming to a virtual environment, we do know that it costs anywhere from \$26,000-\$36,000 annually for the chemistry department alone to use Labflow to operate online chemistry labs. Those systems and platforms are now in place—a reality that will have lasting impact on online honors science classes, many of which are in demand by our honors students, particularly our dual enrollment honors students. Turning back to the work done with IBMS and the graduate research seminars, Lochamy, the professor who led that charge, was the first faculty member to teach science classes as part of the aforementioned Prison Education Program, and in the fall of 2022, he capitalized on those archived virtual seminar discussions to provide enrichment for our incarcerated honors biology students.

We are looking forward with enthusiasm to expanding our IBMS collaboration, but until that happens, we have begun to explore alternative research opportunities at the college, namely a new grant-funded C.O.R.E. program. It is a faculty-mentored research education program, which scaffolds research from how-to seminars in students' first year to conference presentations in their sophomore year. As a result of our C.O.R.E., IBMS, and UAP program collaborations, we have modified our criteria for earning the Honors Research Scholar designation to include participation in any faculty-mentored scholarly activity or research project that culminates in a publication or presentation. As for our progress in that area, since its inaugural year in 2020 when just one graduating student was eligible for the Honors Research Scholar distinction, we have since awarded eight more. The numbers look low, but this is not an accurate reflection of participation in research activities because this distinction comes with other requirements, such as GPA and completion of a specific number of hours in honors coursework. Many students who complete the research component, unfortunately, do not yet meet one of the other markers, so we still have work to do in other areas to increase the number of students earning this distinction. Nevertheless, publicizing the opportunity to earn the Honors Research Scholar recognition is increasing the demand for research opportunities, and that will motivate us to continue to identify new areas for our students to engage in research. Those looking to improve outcomes in the way of increased scholarly activity among students should consider identifying departments and faculty actively engaged in these activities who may be willing to take on a mentorship role with honors students. They often have a budget to support these relationships, but they need the connection to students.

In the short term, these opportunities around research and scholarship elevate our honors opportunities and enrich student experiences. In the longer term, they help us build the pipeline of research and scholarship that make our honors students eligible for competitive scholarship programs, including the Goldwater scholarship, and even better candidates for transfer to select schools. And if our honors students become graduate students or join the professoriate one day, they will have an easier time earning coveted positions in research because they will have been doing the work for years or decades. Before even

entering graduate school, they will be better equipped to balance their daily duties and a research agenda, something many of us struggle with in academia, and they will know the ins and outs of attending conferences and publishing. Ultimately, this advantage is priceless, and it is one we are proud to be establishing for our honors students at Perimeter College.

All things considered, academic years 2021–2023 proved to be banner years for the honors college at Perimeter in our research activities, and we are actually quite thrilled with the opportunities our honors students now have available to them; many more of them, despite their status or identity, ability level, transportation, or childcare situation, will now be participating actively in research and scholarship from a distance. Since suffering through a global pandemic, we have learned about what is possible in order to keep the world in motion. Many employers have permanently shuttered their offices, understanding that their workforce wants to be working remotely, but more importantly, they *can* work remotely. Because the shutdown did not really stop the earth from spinning—with everything from entertainment to church to work/school to dating happening in a virtual world—we now know what is possible and have been made flexible as a result. I recently had dinner with a preeminent cardiologist in metro Atlanta. We discussed one of Perimeter’s Jack Kent Cooke Scholars, Diana Ha, who won her award at the height of the pandemic in spring 2020 and who aspires to be a pediatric cardiologist. Ha has just graduated with her bachelor’s degree and is looking to take a gap year to focus on research and MCAT prep before, she hopes, starting medical school. She is looking to identify a research opportunity that will help her continue learning and also build her resume for medical school. It turns out, this particular cardiologist has an active research agenda and regularly works with undergraduates in biomedical sciences, many of whom do important work on this research remotely, studying case files and extracting key data points from them. Because Ha’s primary mode of academic work over the past two years has been virtual, she is supremely suited for this kind of opportunity, and it turns out, this contact could be life-changing for her.

Virtual opportunities are everywhere now, and honors programs would do well to embrace those in areas where in-person scholarship has in the past been preferred. Honors students are uniquely qualified

to engage in these virtual opportunities, not just because of their intelligence, but because they are motivated, driven, innovative, intellectually curious, high-achieving individuals. They are exactly the students who can look beyond limitations and find ways to get things done. They are hungry for these opportunities, and as their guides on this academic journey, we are called to feed this desire.

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CHAPTER SIX

Reaction to Intention: Developing Hybrid Honors Courses in the Wake of the Pandemic

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After the quick transition from face-to-face instruction to remote learning in March 2020, the increased role of online learning has raised many questions and concerns. Applying lessons learned throughout the global pandemic, this chapter considers the shift from the necessary but reactionary adjustment to a virtual learning environment toward an intentional use of online learning in honors courses. Specifically, this chapter draws on my own experience teaching an honors course entitled “Issues in Music History: Music and Gender” (hereafter Music and Gender). This course was developed in December of 2019 as a face-to-face class for non-major honors students with a focus on discussion, writing, and teamwork via a final project. In the quick adjustment to online learning, these elements—integral to the honors experience—had to be adapted. With the continuing concern

surrounding COVID-19 in the fall of 2020, I purposefully incorporated some of these adaptations into a new hybrid version of the course that combined both face-to-face and various modes of online learning.¹ Overall, the impact of the pandemic on higher education will be immense, and much remains to be learned about how to move forward. In tracking the lessons learned through this particular course, this chapter posits ways to incorporate different modes of virtual learning in order to create a flexible yet rigorous educational experience.

Online learning, of course, is neither new to the university setting nor the honors experience. Many universities have implemented rigorous and successful online honors programs or events.² At the same time, scholars and educators continue to debate the perceived merits as well as pitfalls related to the online learning environment. To this end, Arizona State University hosts the online conference REMOTE: The Connected Faculty Summit, which offers presentations and discussions on pedagogical strategies, issues, and successes related to online learning. In a 2015 short survey of studies related to online learning, Tuan Ngyugen analyzes various results from reports on online and hybrid learning. In regard to hybrid or blended learning, Ngyugen cites a methodological study in which researchers Zhao et al.

found that the ‘right’ mixture of human and technology, i.e., hybrid or blended learning, was particularly effective. Implications of this study are that courses that can combine the strengths of online learning and traditional learning are more effective than courses that use mainly one format and it is possible that as digital and online technologies improve and mature they will become more effective in helping students learn. (312)

The idea that a combination of the types of learning provides a pathway for student engagement and learning resonates with my own experience. Additionally, a study by Nicole Buzzetto-More “sought to examine student perceptions regarding the usage of YouTube videos to augment instruction in online and Web-assisted courses” (61). Through data collected via student surveys, this quantitative study looks at the perception and potential efficacy of YouTube videos in the classroom setting. While the study acknowledges its own limitations, the results suggest that the use of YouTube to augment instruction and increase

student engagement are worth exploring in additional investigations and in the classroom itself. Melissa L. Johnson's 2013 study involving honors education and the online environment similarly reveals the resistance of instructors as well as the potential for successfully meeting honors outcomes online. Studies such as these have a bearing on my pedagogical methods, especially in the unique environment created by the conditions of a global pandemic.

Related to Buzzetto-More's work, another consideration involves student responses to online learning. Many students thrive in a fully online learning environment, especially those used to balancing educational and occupational schedules. Traditional on-campus students, however, often express opposition to taking online classes. In fact, this volume's chapter by Kristy Spear and Pavlo D. Antonenko explores this very phenomenon. At the same time, honors students arguably have the intellectual curiosity and motivation to do especially well in various online learning environments. Asynchronous work, in particular, necessitates a level of self-motivation and taking responsibility for one's own learning. Building a sense of community then becomes the major hurdle to overcome in the virtual environment. Again, this volume explores different ways that programs can utilize the online environment to create honors communities. And students in the Gannon University Honors Program, like many others, regularly cite the development of relationships with each other and faculty as a strength of honors. At the same time, I believe that lessons learned from the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic address these concerns and others. The discussion that follows provides a potential blueprint for increasing hybrid learning opportunities in honors courses. While I use my own prior experience in online teaching plus a specific course as a model, the approach outlined can be adapted to many different course types and disciplines.

Prior to the shutdown that caused universities across the globe to move to online instruction, I was not only in the midst of teaching two face-to-face sections of honors courses but also teaching a non-honors general music appreciation online course. That online course, entitled "Music and Society: The Art of Listening," was developed in the spring of 2017 in order to provide a Liberal Studies fine arts option for Gannon University's fully online Registered Nurse/Bachelor of Nursing program. This online degree caters to many non-traditional students

and working nurses while providing the same course curriculum as an on-the-ground major.

Working in conjunction with a trained instructional designer, I utilized the Quality Matters (QM) rubric, which Gannon University has adopted as its standard for online course development. QM states that their online course design strategies are “based on the insights of teams of experienced online instructors and instructional designers and on the best practices standards” (Quality). QM includes varying assessment techniques, types of instructional materials, and student engagement practices that facilitate creating a robust online learning environment. While only one of many online learning standards, QM places Gannon’s approach within the larger context of online instruction in higher education.

A number of best practices stand out from my experience and commitment to rigorous and engaging online learning during the transition to remote learning that occurred in March 2020. Among the lessons learned from the QM standards were to vary the types of assignments and create specific strategies for student engagement. In discussion forums, for example, I expect students to create an initial post based on the instructional material as well as reply to at least two peers’ posts in order to simulate an in-person discussion. I often require students to pose their own questions or post links to songs or articles in order to combat the impulse to simply summarize in the original student post or to repeat material in the replies. In this way, student responses increase engagement with course material and allow students to synthesize the information and bounce ideas off of one another in a productive manner.

When the university moved to remote instruction, faculty were encouraged to take advantage of asynchronous learning in order to better accommodate the sudden upheaval in which many students and faculty found themselves. While my courses used scheduled synchronous Zoom meetings, either in small groups or with the entire class, these were limited since many students had unexpected responsibilities, were in different time zones, or faced other hindrances. Because of these challenges, I mapped out a new schedule that took advantage of the training and experience that I gained during the design and implementation of my online general core course, which not only had been offered a number of times in the past but was actually running

at the time of the shutdown. During this tumultuous time, I was also teaching two honors courses, one of which was Music and Gender.

ORIGINAL FACE-TO-FACE ISSUES IN MUSIC HISTORY: MUSIC AND GENDER COURSE FOR HONORS

The current model for courses offered in the honors program at Gannon University relies heavily on the use of honors-specific sections of preexisting courses. Therefore, I had originally created Music and Gender as a standard, 3-credit-hour fine arts course in the Liberal Studies core curriculum and taught it twice as a non-honors section before shifting the requirements to fulfill the additional honors objectives. Because Gannon does not offer a music major, each fine arts course must be accessible to students of all musical ability or backgrounds across the university. The course itself is topics-based, exploring the relationship historically between music and gender primarily in Europe and the United States. I structure the course around topical units that consider the role of gender in musical institutions and patronage as well as individual performance and representation. This structure provides a flexible framework—applicable to many disciplines—in which to consider any number of different topics and case studies, making the course ideal for different modes of teaching and learning.

When I adapted the non-honors section to the honors course, the Gannon University Honors Outcomes guided the course revision. These outcomes are as follows:

1. Our students will apply an understanding of multiple worldviews through course projects or collaboration with people from a variety of cultures.
2. Our students will demonstrate critical thinking through the integration of reputable, relevant sources into their oral and written arguments.
3. Our students will interact effectively in teams by demonstrating equal effort, thoughtful contributions, and respectful treatment of team members.

And further, the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) definition of honors education lays the foundation for the Gannon Honors Program. In particular, NCHC's focus on activities "measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning experiences typically found at institutions of higher education," along with a "learner-directed" environment, provides the foundation for my course (National). For example, I added a few scholarly readings for student-led discussions and introduced two different assignments designed to engage with the material more deeply and with "learner-directed experiences."

Therefore, the honors version of this course made specific, targeted changes in order to align with best practices and Gannon's particular approach, which maps directly to NCHC while recognizing that several students in the course may not have any prior knowledge of music. Gannon's honors model focuses on small class sizes and heightened discussion-based classes, especially in the humanities courses. Online discussion forums concluded each unit so that students could synthesize the material from the in-class lectures and discussions via student-centered learning. I also introduced a Performance Analysis paper, in which students apply concepts learned in class to a live or filmed performance of their choosing. This analysis paper requires a deeper engagement with a complete narrative work than is required in the non-honors section. And the final group project with a presentation, which also aligns with the Gannon Honors Outcomes, requires two written reflections on the collaborative experience at different stages in the project. All of these assignment types track with many national best practices in honors instruction and learning.

In spring 2020, the course began with students meeting in the classroom three times a week. At the beginning of a unit, I would facilitate an opening class discussion on the general topic, which was based on some combination of readings, viewings, and listening examples. I used lectures in order to introduce new material or unfamiliar case studies, specifically teaching the students how to engage with music in relation to the topic at hand; for example, I might introduce the role of music in European court systems or religious life, such as music in the convent. Additional classes included small group work based on scholarly articles that I assigned, class discussions on listening homework, and guided discussions on in-class viewing and analysis activities. For

example, a case study on opera illustrates this approach. This case study took two class periods. During the first class, I introduced students to the history of gender performance in opera, “pants” roles (i.e., women performing male characters on stage in European opera), and the life and career of composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. For the second class period on this topic, students were assigned the book chapter, “Sisterhood and Seduction II: Friendship and Class” from Kristi Brown-Montesano’s *Understanding the Women of Mozart’s Operas* on the role of women in Mozart’s opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786). This class began with a student-led article discussion before we collectively watched a segment of the opera during class. I then guided a conversation on gender representation based on the viewing in which students discussed the sound of the music, how different voice types (range and power) interpret the characters, the effect of costuming, and stage demeanor. In this way, carefully targeted lecture, reading, viewing, and in-class discussions allow students to explore gender in opera from different and sometimes surprising angles and through varying modes of learning.

At the point when the university moved to remote learning in March of 2020, students had completed one end-of-unit online discussion forum but had yet to submit their performance analysis papers or begin the final group project.

SWITCH TO REMOTE IN SPRING 2020

Like many professors around the world, I found that the quick transition to remote learning in the wake of a global pandemic stretched my organizational and pedagogical abilities. Fortunately, my experience in online teaching put me in good stead for finishing the semester. As mentioned earlier, I opted to limit the use of synchronous Zoom sessions out of necessity. My typical “Attendance and Participation” portion of the grade (with a hefty percentage for participation in an honors class) shifted to “Online Discussion and Assignments” for the remaining weeks of the semester. These asynchronous assignments varied from online discussion forums and reflections on case study materials to video annotations using the University of Minnesota’s VideoAnt software. Although I use individualized examples, the assignment types described in this section utilize broad strategies relevant beyond the realm of music history.

The student-led discussion forums were directly modeled on my existing online general music appreciation class but with more freedom in the form of asking open-ended questions or the ability to provide or engage with additional materials. For example, one of my non-honors discussion board prompts states: using examples from the book, briefly describe one way that gender has been represented in opera. On the other hand, the honors prompt on a similar topic reads: discuss gender performance and the issue of stage personas. Additionally, my honors discussion boards allow students to create their own threads and pose their own questions based on the material or topics at hand. Through the discussion boards, I provide structure while allowing for a learner-directed experience meant to emulate the in-person discussions in my honors classroom. Similar to my fully online general music course, students were required to make an initial post and respond to at least two additional students' posts. For these discussion boards, students would either read an article, listen to a complete album, or watch a curated selection of music videos provided via YouTube. Open-ended questions that I provided gave the students a starting point, but they developed these discussions through their use of supporting evidence, such as points from articles and songs or videos they chose to focus on in their posts.

In the reflection assignments, I would provide an array of materials, such as short lecture videos, assigned readings, assigned videos, interviews, or graphic material, to which each student would respond individually. One such assignment presents a representative example: a musical theater case study on the 2015 musical *Fun Home*. This piece was the final case study on a weeklong topic regarding American musical theater and gender representation. The reflection instructions can be found in Table 1.

This reflection provides context for the musical itself via the instructor-created PowerPoint presentation with narration and a television segment that interviews the real-life inspiration for the show's main character, Alison Bechdel, and the actresses who play her at different stages in her life. I also provided a YouTube video that explores the songwriting team's process for creating the musical, looking at how they tell the story through song. Finally, the students watch performances of songs from *Fun Home* in order to place the musical style

and performances within the context of their knowledge of musical theater history and relate this show to the course topic.

Table 1. *Fun Home* Assignment Instructions

In this reflection, you will engage with the posted materials on the musical *Fun Home*. In order to write your reflection on songwriting and gender in modern musicals, you must explore this show.

Below is a guide for dealing with the posted materials. *In order to fully understand this case study, engage with all of the materials in the order listed before writing your reflection:*

1. PowerPoint with Voiceover.
2. 2 YouTube videos about *Fun Home*.
3. A morning show segment that introduces the musical.
4. Songwriters Jeanine Tesori and Lisa Kron discussing their process.
5. Video examples of songs.

After engaging with all of the posted materials, reflect on songwriting and gender representation in modern American musical theater. You might consider these questions:

1. How does *Fun Home* connect with and/or depart from the historical relationship between musical theater and the LGBTQ+ community?
2. How does this show depict gender as it develops through a life and/or connects with sexuality?

The final assignment type used for remote instruction employed the VideoAnt software application. This allowed me to embed music videos from YouTube, provide an overview of the video or artist, and ask questions. I then linked them on Blackboard so the students could access the application alongside the other course materials and interact with the videos. Students could then watch the video and create their own annotations tied to specific moments within the video. All students could see not only my starting remarks or questions but those of their peers, allowing for a robust analysis of these videos designed to emulate in-class analysis. This software worked especially well for the analysis of music videos. Given the semiotic density of a music video, students could rewatch and reevaluate the meaning of

specific moments. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of VideoAnt results in the students being able to see what their peers observed, which may be different from their own experience; ultimately, they commented and learned from each other. Given that VideoAnt simply pulls YouTube clips and allows students to collectively comment on them, this software can easily be used for various classes.

In addition to the newly added asynchronous class replacement assignments, the two major project requirements remained: a performance analysis and a group project. At the time of the mandated closure of the university, the guidelines for the performance analysis had been disseminated to the students. Given that the assignment requires students to analyze music and gender performance in a narrative work, students could easily watch a film instead of attending a live performance. As such, the guidelines did not need to change. The group project, however, was more difficult to navigate without in-person meetings and with varying schedule constraints that students had during this time. Typically, the final project for the course would include designated work days culminating in an in-class group presentation. In order to combat the myriad difficulties brought on by the closure, students used Blackboard discussion forums as well as shared documents (e.g., Google Docs and Google Slides) in order to collaborate. And rather than giving real-time presentations, students created a self-contained slide presentation that would be shared with the rest of the class on Blackboard and generate an online discussion. One of the major hurdles involved some students' impulses to use large blocks of texts on the slides to relay the information. As such, my guidelines indicated that information on the slides should be clear and complete, but groups also needed to include notes in the bottom section or use the "Record Audio" function. Making the best of a trying situation, students created presentations that were both visually appealing and comprehensive.

The entire transition to remote learning could best be described as doing as well as could be expected. While I attempted to smooth the online conversion process as much as possible, many students still struggled for various reasons. Not only were scheduling and various life commitments often a challenge, but the stress of a global pandemic took its toll as well. Also, the reactionary nature of switching to online meant that not everything worked perfectly; the group project, for

example, would need some tweaking if kept fully online. I decided to move the group project back to an in-person presentation in the hybrid development of Music and Gender. As a performer as well as an educator teaching a music class, I believe in the live, embodied experience of presentation as a pedagogical tool. Remote or online teaching contains many positive qualities, but some live, in-person environments cannot be emulated. Nevertheless, a number of lessons were learned, and many of the assignments proved fruitful. Indeed, this type of reflection, along with additional considerations discussed in the next section, led to my decision to combine traditional in-person learning with online in the following academic year.

HYBRID DEVELOPMENT

What I have described in the preceding section consists of a reaction to the particular circumstances in which educators found themselves in the wake of the pandemic. While I was able to use my experience in online teaching, the transition was nevertheless quick and without purposeful intent to teach an honors course in that way. The 2020-2021 academic year, however, proved to be a different situation. While many larger institutions remained online because of continued concerns surrounding COVID-19, Gannon University made the commitment to return to in-person classes. Faculty and staff worked relentlessly throughout the summer to make returning as safe as possible. One of the key decisions the Gannon University administration made was allowing structured flexibility, wherein both students and faculty could apply for remote accommodations for a number of reasons.

To that end, I made the decision to turn my face-to-face honors course on music and gender into a hybrid for pedagogical reasons. The goal was to preserve certain types of small group and learner-directed experiences that physical distancing and masks made difficult at best. In light of the particular situation, my reasoning for using both in-person and online methods was that students would have a classroom environment that was safe and could engage with additional learning experiences while lessening contact. Although the ongoing pandemic obviously continued to play a role in my development of this honors hybrid course, I experienced a move from the necessity to react during the previous semester to the choice of specific intention.

As such, I spent the summer of 2020 considering potential delivery methods and then developing the syllabus for the hybrid version of Music and Gender. In a general education/liberal arts honors setting that deals with a sometimes intimidating specialized field like music, providing students with the tools to understand music they may have no experience with and allowing for learner-directed experiences in which students approach the material on their own terms can be a delicate balancing act. As such, my first task in developing the hybrid version of Music and Gender was identifying the types of lessons and learning experiences that would accomplish specialized teaching within a learner-directed environment. To that end, I created several class-day lessons that combined elements from the face-to-face version of the course and the online transition from March 2020: lectures, lecture-discussions, small group reading discussions, online discussion forums, and online reflection case studies. These varying lesson types offer potential design ideas for honors instructors.

By organizing these lesson plans in a particular progression, I created a learning environment that moved from my imparting specialized information to the students to their application of that information in manageable units throughout the semester. In this way, I guide students of all musical abilities and backgrounds to learn how to listen, contextualize, and understand music from a socio-historical viewpoint. Maintaining specific days devoted to traditional content lectures allowed me to introduce key concepts, vocabulary, and tools for analysis via topic areas or case studies. As in a typical face-to-face course, live lectures allow pauses for questions to guide the students toward the type of work expected in assignments and larger discussions. Additionally, I could easily offer the lectures either in-person or over Zoom in a COVID-impacted semester.

The lecture-discussions present a transitional type of class in which students enter the classroom prepared to discuss an assigned reading or album as well as engage with in-class examples. The days that included a hefty split between lecture and discussion were designed for in-person classes, but they were also flexible. The final type of synchronous class focuses on small group discussions in which the class would be broken up into two groups that met on alternate days. Periodic asynchronous discussion forums and reflection assignments acted as in-person class replacements throughout the semester.

These class types could then be combined in various ways in order to explore a topic from multiple angles and via different methods. For example, the opera case study described earlier could now harness both face-to-face and online learning styles. In the shift to hybrid learning, a standard in-person lecture class, homework, and a class replacement activity provide multiple modes of engaging with and learning the material. The first day consisted of the same opera lecture described earlier in this chapter. Students are then assigned the scholarly reading on Mozart's depiction of women in *Le Nozze di Figaro* as homework as well as a roughly twenty-minute excerpt of the opera to be watched on their own. For reconfigured class assignments, students must respond to the reading before watching and analyzing gender performance in the chosen excerpt. This example also illustrates how an instructor can provide the necessary context and tools for students to then apply themselves. In a single short topic, I emphasize this pedagogical continuum from my lectures to asynchronous work. In this way, the course emphasizes learner-directed experience without throwing students who are unprepared into the deep end.

While some of the online work needed to be created for a full semester of a hybrid course, I was also able to assess which of the asynchronous assignments from the previous semester would be useful in this version of the course. For instance, the *Fun Home* reflection described above worked well, and I imported it wholesale into the intentional hybrid course. Once again, however, I had the freedom to contextualize this show and the history of gender performance in American musical theater in lectures and discussions that occurred in person (or over Zoom, if necessary). With the asynchronous assignments varying from online discussion forums to journal-style reflections, the combination of in-person and online work was meant to cater to a number of learning styles in a student-centered honors setting.

The final major hybrid combination of in-person plus asynchronous online learning involved small group discussions. Periodically throughout the semester, I planned a weeklong small group lesson. The class was broken into two groups, which remained the same throughout the semester, and both groups would read different articles on related topics. While the classroom could accommodate all of the students, COVID-19 restrictions meant that students could not congregate in small groups. Therefore, each group would meet on alternate

days to discuss their reading, listen to or watch related examples, and develop a collaborative outline. The outlines then could become the basis for an online discussion board with the whole class. Rather than teach the other group about their reading, the task I would assign in a solely face-to-face class, the outline needed to stand alone and be understandable to those who had not read the article. Each group was required to respond to the outline of the article that they did not read but also had the freedom to answer questions or engage with peers responding to their reading. Students could pick up on similarities and differences between their two readings. This small group work with resulting outlines gave all students a solid background on a particular topic with each group having their own unique depth of knowledge. This type of small group work led to a highly creative, learner-directed environment and offered the added bonus of giving each group time to become comfortable with one another by the time of the final project. As such, a sense of community could be fostered through smaller cohorts within the larger class.

The final project combined the original requirements from the face-to-face class with some of the online elements from the previous semester of reactionary remote teaching. In order to provide a rigorous experience in teamwork while maintaining individual accountability, the group project for this course contains several components: two individual reflections on the process of teamwork, a group outline to be submitted only to the instructor, and a final in-class group presentation for the rest of the class. Additionally, I created a Blackboard discussion forum for each group so that students could home in on their topic before choosing to meet in person or over Zoom. With the new hybrid format, each group was required to create a shared document (e.g., using Google Docs or Microsoft) and provide me with the link with the understanding that two scheduled outline checks would occur during the process. The shared document requirement ensures that students can see everyone's work as it is added, promoting both accountability and a cohesive final presentation. Implementing two outline check due dates also creates an opportunity for me to give feedback at an early stage of the project and to see how the students' work is developing. The combination of online and real-time work offers flexibility without sacrificing the time and effort it takes to create a successful group presentation.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MOVING FORWARD

After a summer of revising the Music and Gender course, I implemented the hybrid design in the fall of 2020. Of course, this design increased flexibility during an academic year in an ongoing pandemic. Students were in and out of quarantine, and the year as a whole was difficult for everyone. The ability to shift between online, in-person, and synchronous Zoom lectures relieved some of the pressure. And at times when several students needed remote accommodations for various reasons, the use of periodic Zoom lectures afforded a more seamless, consistent experience for all of the students. In-person class discussions could still be a struggle with masks and distancing. Furthermore, the use of varying discussion methods meant that more students participated in general. Specifically, my experience indicated that both using in-person and online discussions caters to the comfort levels of different students. While some students thrive during in-class discussions, others prefer to use the Zoom chat function, and still others enjoy the discussion forum approach. Online discussion forums and designated small group days offered all students the opportunity to join the discussions, ultimately making them more comfortable with sharing their thoughts and analysis.

As mentioned previously, Gannon University's honors courses tend to focus on smaller class sizes and discussion-based learning experiences. Both before and during the pandemic, students often expressed their distaste for or fatigue with online learning. A hybrid approach, however, combines the positive aspects of both modes of learning and offers a particularly rich learning environment in an honors course. One of the struggles of asynchronous online courses is that students feel disconnected or have difficulties keeping up with the work completely on their own. A hybrid approach maintains real-time touchpoints, which allow for more personal connections plus schedule and due date reminders. Students can also ask questions in an in-person setting and have informal conversations with each other and the instructor before and after scheduled class dates. The inclusion of asynchronous assignments in a hybrid course also enhances the role of self-directed learning as well as opening up a student's schedule.

As one means of gauging students' experience with the hybrid format, I deployed an optional student survey on the hybrid delivery

format. Only seven students out of sixteen chose to complete the survey, but it provided a starting point for collecting data going into the subsequent spring semester. When asked to choose the best learning experiences (choosing all that apply), six students chose the in-class lectures and five chose the asynchronous assignments. Although only two found the Zoom lectures to be among the best, no one wanted them to go away completely. Additionally, the students indicated a desire for fewer small group days throughout the semester. Since the small groups alternated days, fewer small group days actually means more in-person class time. At the same time, small group weeks required heavy reading, which may account for student preferences. Because of this feedback, I made some minor adjustments in the course from the fall into the spring; namely, I targeted a few Zoom lectures and small group days that could be turned into a different class type. Thus, I used those two particular modes sparingly and only when the purpose was clear and focused.

In general, the deliberate change to a hybrid course offered a number of lessons. Although the COVID-19 pandemic continued to dictate certain circumstances, clearly a hybrid approach can provide a rigorous yet flexible honors learning environment in the years to come. I will likely remove Zoom lectures, for example, from the course. A combination of in-person and online learning, however, provides varying pedagogical methods from which to draw. Students also learn adaptability by engaging with course material and each other in a multitude of ways. Using the case study approach for asynchronous discussion forums or reflections also allows for the possibility of increased complexity in how students engage with the course material, going deeper than a lecture or class discussion may allow. As such, the struggles of pandemic teaching illustrate more pedagogical possibilities than pitfalls for a rich honors learning experience that includes virtual learning.

ENDNOTES

¹The hybrid version of *Issues in Music History: Music and Gender* was offered at Gannon University in both the fall and spring semesters of the 2020–2021 academic year.

²The articles in this collection attest to this situation. Many institutions such as Arizona State University provide a robust model for online learning in the United States.

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HONORS ONLINE

*Teaching, Learning, and
Building Community Virtually
in Honors Education*

PART II
Virtual Experiential
Learning and Conferencing

CHAPTER SEVEN

International Virtual Exchange During and Beyond the Pandemic

IAN MCINTOSH

INDIANA UNIVERSITY—PURDUE UNIVERSITY INDIANAPOLIS

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic may have put a temporary halt to the study abroad ambitions of Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) Honors College students in 2020 and 2021, but a positive dimension emerged from the lockdown. Working from our homes provided faculty and students with an unprecedented opportunity to explore the potential for virtual international exchanges in partnerships that would outlast the lockdown. I believe that a great movement in international education started in 2020, and in this chapter, I share details of an experience of virtual global exchange between IUPUI and the University of Rwanda in Central Africa's Great Lakes Region that uses the learning management software called CourseNetworking (CN). A CN license is not required to take advantage of the

CN's international networking features and is available free of charge to individual users across the globe. Given the outstanding success of the IUPUI-Rwanda exchange, our university's honors college plans to extend its offering of virtual exchange classes utilizing the CN to other international settings.

OVERVIEW

There has been considerable work related to international study in the world of honors education (Mulvaney and Klein; Klein and Mulvaney) and on the potential of virtual exchange to promote global learning (Commander et al.; Duke; Rubin and Guth). In this chapter, I describe a creative new approach to cooperative international education that links honors students with their peers around the globe.

In fall 2020, I co-taught a virtual exchange class for the IUPUI Honors College with Professor Michel Ndahimana, my colleague from the University of Rwanda. The class included twenty-three IUPUI honors students from multiple disciplines and twenty marketing students from the University of Rwanda. The students united, virtually, in a class focused on learning about each other and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The platform for this connection was a new technology called Course Networking or CN (thecn.com), which is a novel learning management system (LMS) developed at the IUPUI Cyberlab. Its many features, like badges, translation, video recording, and e-portfolio, were ideally suited to virtual exchange and are discussed in detail.

The first goal of this chapter is to describe the virtual class. The second is to demonstrate just how easy such exchanges are when using technology such as the CN, which is like Facebook for academia. This software, plus the use of What's App for free mobile calling, allowed students from both countries to get to know one another and explore course topics well beyond what can be delivered in a classroom setting. Finally, I will share information on the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and some of the impressive discoveries made by the students in their respective home countries.

I designed this course so others could replicate it. The U.N.'s Sustainability Agenda 2030 stresses that students need to become not just global citizens but also sustainability citizens by acquiring the

knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development, including a culture of peace and equality within and between nations. (See sdgs.un.org/2030agenda.) In terms of learning outcomes, the U.N. Agenda and the IUPUI dimensions of global learning guided our activities. In particular, students were required to

- Analyze their own beliefs, values, and communication styles in respect to those of another culture;
- Practice intercultural communication;
- Demonstrate understanding of the workings of other nations and cultures; and
- Apply learning from this virtual experience in their home settings.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The class emphasized two major dimensions. The first involved the students getting to know each other, with a strong emphasis on culture, identity, and current affairs. The students were paired with one or two others, but they also connected with other class members through the CN. Our lofty goal was to make the students feel like they were actually visiting Rwanda or the U.S.A. While living and learning in a global setting beyond one's comfort zone or general familiarity are the ideal of study abroad, the vast majority of IUPUI's students will not have the benefit of such an experience because of a range of factors. The CN, with its high-activity social media page, provides the opportunity for virtual travel for all, and it greatly assisted the students in at least partially reaching the ideal.

During the 'get to know you' phase of the class, the students shared amazing things about where they live and what makes their home special or unique. For Rwandan students, the modern-day miracle of a post-genocide Rwanda was a topic of great interest. Kigali is now the safest and cleanest capital city on the African continent. Students also made posts on famous tourist attractions like the gorillas in Volcano National Park, or on how Rwanda is using robots that walk and talk to monitor COVID-19 patients in the larger cities. The IUPUI students were astounded by these revelations.

Indiana students, by contrast, shared stories about the fraught U.S. political situation, and also about their favorite holidays, like Halloween and Christmas; their favorite restaurants and foods; and things that they would do together when their partner came for a real visit, like visiting the world-famous Indianapolis Children's Museum or the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which hosts nearly half a million visitors during the Indy 500 car race.

UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

While this cultural learning was happening, the students were also becoming familiar with the U.N.'s 2030 agenda for global transformation encapsulated by the "5 Ps" (People, Planet, Peace, Prosperity, and Partnership) and covering all interrelated topics including ending poverty and hunger, providing access to fresh water, and seeking justice and equality. Adopted by all U.N. member states in 2015, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are a call to action for all—rich and poor—to promote prosperity while protecting the needs of future generations. (See sdgs.un.org.) They replaced the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that focused on lifting developing countries out of poverty. (See un.org/millenniumgoals.) The SDGs also focus on transforming the unsustainable lifestyles of industrialized countries. While all the Rwandan students had previous knowledge of the SDGs, few of the U.S. students were aware of this global initiative, so there was some catching up to do.

Working in binational teams, the students asked how the U.S. and Rwanda were responding to this global call to action. This assignment required students to investigate the SDGs and to ask serious questions about the rate of progress, if any, as identified in the voluntary annual reports produced by both nations. Students were asked a second question at the start of the course: How can their specific disciplines or majors—whether business and marketing or the arts and sciences—be engaged in the struggle to achieve the SDGs? As the students worked through all seventeen goals, they quickly recognized just how interconnected they all were. In order to make a difference in the specific area of their expertise required the resolution of challenges in other seemingly unrelated areas.

Universities play a critical role in meeting the SDGs through teaching, interdisciplinary research, the creation of evidence-based knowledge, measuring and evaluation, and advocacy. We need to inculcate this idea of working together across national borders and the disciplines to meet the challenge, and there were some very lively discussions on our course website on the various goals, including SDG 5 on Gender Equality. This goal states that all men and women need to be treated equally and have the same rights and opportunities despite their biological differences. Rwanda is a world leader in gender equality. Over 60% of Rwandan government members are women. By contrast, just over 20% of the Indiana legislature are women, and the same is true for the U.S. Congress. As one IUPUI student wrote:

I have learned so much through this course. I never knew about the seventeen sustainable development goals prior to this course. It was very eye-opening learning about these and what each country has done to improve. I learned how Rwanda is doing better than the U.S. when it comes to SDG 5 on gender equality. Rwanda pays women during their maternal leave, which I found was really interesting because the US does not do that. For the final project, my group decided to choose SDG 5 on gender equality. I found a great template for us to use and we assigned each other a topic to talk about. We gave feedback on each other's information. We also exchanged thoughts about poster looks and ideas. We finally agreed on a color scheme. I inserted picture icons that went with all of our topics.

For IUPUI students, many were shocked to learn that Indiana has one of the U.S.'s worst rates of gender pay inequality, with a 37% difference in pay for similar jobs between men and women. Many American students assumed that Indiana must be on track with SDG 5, and this brought home the message that work on the sustainable development goals must begin at home.

ENCOURAGING STUDENT PARTICIPATION

The course was conducted entirely on the Facebook-like CN course page, and students were free to post and reflect at their leisure across

the time zones. There were weekly individual assignments and one major end-of-term project where, in small groups, the students created posters on the SDGs from the perspective of their majors and their home countries. In what manner could a marketing major contribute to the SDGs in their career? In what manner could a neuroscientist or an engineering or kinesiology major do the same?

Apart from the poster, all assessment came from individual postings on the dedicated CN site. Students were awarded a certain number of points for each post. The minimum passing grade was 250 points, and the CN kept track of participation. If a student was falling behind, then we could intervene. The Rwanda instructor and I also awarded the most active participants with incentive badges, such as the Best Participant badge, Great Post badge, or Critical Thinker badge. Badges are part of the CN, but in this instance, the CN technicians created these new badges for this class. At the end of the course, if students had accumulated the necessary points and satisfactorily completed the group poster assignment, they received a certificate of completion. IUPUI students also received course credit. The badges and certificates were automatically added to their CN e-Portfolios.

Communications between faculty and students and between students were mostly asynchronous, but students were also in direct communication with their international partners through free services like WhatsApp or FaceTime. We also had regular monthly Zoom meetings to provide updates and encouragement. In one meeting, we introduced Ali Jafari, the inventor of the CN, as well as the senior management from both universities. The goal, in this instance, was to explore the potential of expanding such virtual exchanges to other units within the University of Rwanda. Glowing student reports on their experiences in the online class were center stage. A small sample of student comments to each other drawn from the course site reveals just how deep an impact even virtual travel can have:

- Thank you for sharpening my academic skills and helping me become a better student. Not only have I learned a lot about the SDGs, I have also learned about Rwanda's beautiful country and their culture. Rwanda is full of amazing wildlife and gorgeous scenery. Their national parks are outstanding. I also got to know about Rwandan

culture through the posts on CN. I also learned about some of their history. Rwanda is promoting a green country.

- Rwanda's capital, Kigali, has a car free day every month where they kick the cars off the streets. This car free day is so fascinating and environment friendly, something America would never be able to do.
- This was a great experience for all of us even though it was online. This course was amazing and enjoyable. It was truly an eye opening experience. I have full intentions of visiting Rwanda one day.
- Thank you for this experience! I've enjoyed it, and I've enjoyed getting to know you all! I've learned so many different and interesting things, and I'm better for the experience!! I look forward to visiting Indiana!

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

We have all faced unprecedented challenges because of COVID-19. Even under the best of circumstances, organizing virtual exchange courses can be a trying experience. There are time zones to negotiate, technology and connectivity issues, language barriers, and cultural differences. I have taught virtual classes before in Macedonia, Iran, Russia, and the Gaza Strip, and I am quite familiar with potential roadblocks; however, the pandemic exacerbated our concerns. While IUPUI started the semester on time in a hybrid format—some classes were live and some were online—the University of Rwanda semester was delayed by several months.

Students who signed up for the class in Rwanda were working from home where internet connectivity was much weaker than on their campus. When at their university, the Rwandan students had the benefit of live peer encounters to keep them on track with their assignments. Working in isolation at home was often much more difficult. Given the delay at the start of their semester, Rwandan students were undertaking this class even before the university was officially open. Many excelled, however, especially with the added encouragement of the regular Zoom meetings and the Facebook or WhatsApp calls they had with their U.S. peers.

The major prerequisite for success for this class was definitely the close relationship between the co-teachers. Together, Professor Nhadimana and I tracked student progress very closely, and we remained flexible so that we could make last-minute changes to the syllabus to accommodate unanticipated issues that arose. We maintained our rapport through regularly scheduled emails and Zoom calls and by taking a keen interest in learning more about each other's work, home environments, and what makes each other tick.

CONCLUSION

The most challenging aspect of establishing this virtual exchange class was finding an international partner. IUPUI has a Memorandum of Intent with the University of Rwanda that spells out the many ways in which our universities can collaborate. In addition, all 30,000 students and faculty at IUPUI have access to the CN, as do all 25,000 students and faculty at the University of Rwanda, so there is no reason why many more students cannot undertake a similar global learning experience.

When considering the subject area and interests of the students, faculty members interested in starting a virtual exchange course should look at the lists of current university partners for their home institutions and then reach out to them through the international office. As I mentioned earlier, the CN license is not required to take advantage of the CN network features. For individual users, both faculty and students anywhere in the world, the CN is accessible and free or available with more advanced options for a low fee. Perhaps the CN can entice colleagues in the same field of specialization or professors who teach in general education or communication studies and are interested in forming international connections.

The biggest takeaway for me from this course was how much the students gained from the virtual experience. The feedback was uniformly of a high order, but more than that, there was an emerging sense of global consciousness and a feeling that we were all in this together. The words of one of the IUPUI participants sums up many of our feelings about the success of the class:

This Virtual Study Abroad opportunity between IUPUI and the University of Rwanda has been most insightful. During the course of this semester, the world battled a pandemic and despite the stressors of COVID-19, our two universities were able to successfully communicate. This experience challenged my expectations and previous misconceptions about Rwanda, and Africa at large. Not only did I learn about Rwanda, but I also learned about the U.S. I am not from Indianapolis, and my peers have taught me much about the city. Even though I have lived in Indiana most of my life, my experiences are different from other Hoosiers. The reality that I can be so different from my classmates and peers even though we are from the same culture begged questions about other cultures. If I am different from those who live near me, why should I expect all Rwandans to be the same? If stereotypes do not apply to me, why should I think that stereotypes would apply to my classmates in Rwanda? By participating in this class, I have learned about another culture and further engaged in intercultural communication, while at the same time taking a deep dive into the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and what it takes to make the world a better place for us all.

We face different challenges resulting from diverse historical circumstances, but we can learn from one another in negotiating the current world crisis and meet the goals set by the United Nations. As the end of the pandemic approaches, the IUPUI Honors College is now committed to continuing to offer its students the opportunity to engage in international virtual exchange courses in additional settings. The benefits of participation in terms of the aforementioned IUPUI dimensions of global learning are considerable, especially given the easy access to technologies like the CN. For those who are unable to undertake a physical journey overseas, the virtual experience can provide deep insight into other cultures and contribute significantly to one's understanding of the world at large.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

For Here or To Go? (Re)Packaging the Takeaway

RANDI POLK

EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Perhaps the biggest lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic is that a one-size-fits-all method of delivery does not work for everyone. Faculty members need choices, human contact, and the space to share ideas both new and old in ways that are inclusive and equitable. In this chapter, I intend to walk readers through my thought process for creating a virtual study abroad course and show how it was informed by lessons learned from the pandemic as well as current pedagogical trends. I will then discuss the implementation, including what worked and what did not go as planned. Finally, I will show how this course culminated in a student-led conference presentation and how this topic has shaped future thinking for Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) honors regarding global learning opportunities.

During experiences abroad students can interact with people and places in unique ways that offer a rich variety of learning. In

my own travels, I have learned about myself including strengths and shortcomings, how to communicate with others in a culturally competent way, and how to adhere to norms outside my own. Travel allows for a learning experience that cannot be replicated. We must consider, however, that not all students are able to study abroad; nevertheless, they deserve opportunities to learn and to become culturally competent in anticipation of future encounters and interactions with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Without such opportunities, students might be marginalized or put in positions where their credentials will be inferior. If students cannot travel abroad, they still deserve opportunities to learn about other cultures, people, and places from here.

THE CASE FOR A VIRTUAL STUDY ABROAD COURSE

During most of 2020, study abroad programs were halted because of the COVID-19 pandemic, adding another layer of loss felt by university students. The suspension of programs continued to impact travel during the winter session of 2020 and into 2021. At Eastern Kentucky University, administrators decided to extend the 2021 winter term to six weeks for students to catch up and feel they were making progress during this trying time. With a six-week term, we decided to pilot a virtual study abroad course that would provide an opportunity for learning to fill the gap left after having to cancel the study away program that generally takes place during winter term for our honors scholars. Once the decision had been made to move forward, the planning began. This planning period included an initial brainstorming session of ideas and questions that included the following:

1. What would our topic be?
2. What would students learn, and how could we make it meaningful?
3. How would we organize synchronous meetings?
4. What would the course design look like, and how would we assess learning?
5. How would we advertise the course and recruit students?

Since I would be teaching the course and my travel, research, and experience lie in the Francophone world, it was only natural for my instruction to lean toward French-speaking areas. We decided to offer a course on Francophone regions with a focus on mostly port cities or those places with access to major waterways. I decided to include a different region each week to show how widely spoken the French language is and to highlight the rich cultural diversity of the areas where French serves as one of the major languages of communication. Clearly, the ability to cover information about five different Francophone regions would not be possible during a winter term experience abroad, revealing one of the ways a virtual course can enhance the breadth of student learning. One of the major lessons we wanted students to learn from this course is how, despite geographical distance and stark differences in social norms, the French language allows for cross-cultural communication and serves as a vehicular language. In the syllabus, the course-specific description read as follows:

In this course, we will “visit” several French-speaking countries to discover how language unites people, but they still have very different customs, traditions, and forms of expression. One of the key points will be how port cities are unique and see much myth and movement.

The next step of deciding what students would learn required the review of learning outcomes from study abroad courses and experiences as well as some analysis of how virtual learning would necessitate changes to expectations. Typically, students can choose from various winter programs and study in the location of their choice. We would expect them to understand how to attain relevant travel documents and, once onsite, interact with locals in a variety of ways. Bearing these factors in mind, I crafted lessons that would require students to glean knowledge of these topics despite not actually getting a vaccination, travel visa, or ticket for travel. Another practical aspect of the course was to encourage students to investigate not only required travel documents and vaccinations, but also airfare, safety, hotel, and transportation costs. The first objective was to craft a list of student learning outcomes. This list became a compilation of aspects that students would learn before participating in a study

abroad course, including what travel documents would be required or if vaccinations were necessary. Students also needed to know some basics of the French language to understand appropriate greetings and navigate simple documents like menus, maps, and signs. They would be asked to use their imagination and creativity to insert themselves into authentic situations. This course was offered as a general education elective for a diversity requirement. In addition to the required general education goals and student learning outcomes, the course required several specific learning outcomes. I wanted students to see how useful the French language is while traveling or working and walk away with some key phrases that would make communication easier for them.

Some of the learning outcomes are not typical for study abroad courses, from identifying places on the map to a focus on reading and writing. Typically, a study abroad course has a stronger focus on place as text, and the location provides the corpus of learning. Conversely, in a virtual study abroad course, students might learn from readings, videos, or virtual interactions with individuals from the locations featured in the course. With a focus on Francophone areas, it is possible to highlight cultural and historical information and/or language acquisition. For this course, the goal was for students to realize the role of the French language as a bridge for communication in diverse areas and to understand and reproduce words and phrases for the purpose of appropriately greeting others. Learners also needed to recognize enough of the French language to navigate experiences that would be documented in a travel blog. The idea of movement was particularly important to show how people, goods, and services have traversed these regions. The migration of people over time and through different experiences has led to a common use of the French language for communication. Through movement from the slave trade, colonization, import/export, and other encounters, the French language itself has become a driving entity for cross-cultural communication.

Incorporating a plan for synchronous and asynchronous times for the course content and delivery was also a consideration. Since we were in winter term, students were dispersed and not likely to take a course that required too many synchronous meetings. Based on student feedback about this issue, we decided to have most of the work set up for asynchronous learning; we would meet as a group once per

week for one hour and a half. This time would allow us to host guest speakers for live discussions and provide opportunities for students to ask questions and share insights.

For the course design, I utilized backward design to identify how I would know if students had achieved the desired outcomes before preparing the materials and assessments. In their book *Understanding by Design*, Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe discuss this shift in design:

Rather than creating assessments near the end of a unit of study ... backward design calls for us to operationalize our goals or standards in terms of assessment evidence as we *begin* to plan a unit or course. It reminds us to begin with the question, What would we accept as evidence that students have attained the desired understandings and proficiencies—before proceeding to plan teaching and learning experiences? (2)

For Wiggins and McTighe, design should follow three steps:

1. Identify desired results.
2. Determine acceptable evidence.
3. Plan learning experiences and instruction. (qtd. in Bowen 2)

In addition, they offer templates, videos, and other helpful resources on the website for the Center for Teaching at Vanderbilt University.¹

Forming global citizens requires exposure to different cultures, ideas, and languages. In the plan to introduce students to these Francophone areas and create ways for them to engage, I decided on several key assignments. These included weekly travel blogs, responses to guest speakers, weekly cultural connections discussion, and a final project. The weekly travel blogs became a favorite assignment for the students to create and for me to read. They used different media like Instagram, Wix, Sway, and Google Sites to collect their travel memories. They were required to identify sites and monuments they would visit including hotels, restaurants, museums, and other points of interest. They showed new knowledge and creativity by inserting their pictures into the images they collected; they also provide reviews and some funny anecdotal moments. Students were encouraged to

anticipate problems during their travels and report those in the weekly travel blogs. They needed to imagine difficulties they might have communicating with locals because of linguistic or cultural differences. It might be that they attempt to eat dinner in a restaurant at 5:00 PM in a French city only to find restaurants closed. This very simple example revealed differences in the way time is viewed and might prompt a student to reflect on why dinner times vary in different countries or why businesses close at lunch time or for entire months in the summer. These seemingly insignificant differences engender reflections on the importance of personal time and self-worth that are based on the number of hours we work. It was important to present students with challenges about making connections not only between the different areas they visited but to their own culture as well. This type of critical reflection is a key learning outcome of study abroad, and I also tried to maintain it in this virtual setting.

To make the presentations from guest speakers more valuable, students were asked to prepare some questions for them and report on their learning and how it proved or negated the preconceived ideas they had going into the lesson. The weekly cultural connection questions were based on the lessons and served as a tool to challenge bias and opinions based on incomplete information or evidence. For the final project, students went beyond their virtual classroom learning to interview people they might know from different areas, use library databases for scholarly inquiry, and reflect on the topics of the course and how their ideas and opinions had changed. To render the final paper more visual and accessible, students compiled a *Pecha Kucha* that included images and commentary as evidence of their learning. For those unfamiliar with the term, a *Pecha Kucha* is a collection of 20 slides or images with 20 seconds of commentary. This method was designed to force a faster pace and relieve the “death by PowerPoint” syndrome. Students had to include information from at least two different areas or regions to make their comparisons and show the unique attributes of the diverse areas.

PREPARING THE LEARNING TOOLS AND MATERIALS

Based on the student learning outcomes that I had identified, I wanted students to know necessary details for traveling abroad,

including language that would help them navigate their experiences and recognize the vast cultural differences that exist among French speakers. The big ideas were outlined to provide an overview of the areas and content. Most of the content was organized with slides that included images, maps, and other media to reinforce some of the cultural topics we covered. For example, the overview of the course included images and symbols with significance in the Francophone world.

It was important to me for students to begin learning about the French-speaking world by examining their surroundings. Sitting in Richmond, Kentucky, we see several city names around us that conjure historical memory of France, such as Paris, Louisville, and Versailles, among others. In fact, one student wrote his travel blog for week one about Louisville. The French history had never been a topic of research for him, and he learned some new things about his hometown. During this first week, students also had a lesson on simple French vocabulary words and phrases, and they learned to use their knowledge of English to identify cognates and read signs in French. Students sometimes need a reminder that they have a whole body of knowledge to borrow from in learning new things. This observation is important because many students are told learning new languages is difficult, and they need help changing their attitude about learning something that has become stigmatized. It also allows students to see that language is inherently linked to culture, and packing their knowledge of both is important as they travel.

Because this course focused on selected Francophone areas around the globe, I wanted students to visualize the reach of the French language on a map and via Google Earth. While this strategy might sound basic, my experience suggests that students are not familiar with geography, and the extensive reach of the French language is lost if students do not recognize Francophone regions and their position on the map. For this reason, I used maps as graphic organizers for weekly content via Thinglink.² Thinglink is free for educators and offers basic features that easily link media to a picture. The map of France in Figure 1 served as the landing spot for the readings, videos, and other media in the lesson for week three of the course. Students interacted with the image by clicking on the numbers, letters, and icons.

Figure 1. Lessons on the Port Cities of France from Week Three



The exploration of some port cities in France allowed for rich discussions about what it means to be geographically situated on a major waterway and how that access impacts trade, immigration, and the transport of goods and services. While we all have notions of Paris as an epicenter for romance, fashion, and the essence of chic, an intentional focus on port cities allows for profound conversations about France. For example, students learned about fortified cities and their purpose and history during times of war, how the city of Bordeaux was a major hub for the transport of slaves, how Marseille has been a hot spot for immigration, and how Le Havre and Calais have served as points of entry for immigrants desperate to rejoin family in England. Students also learned about music inspired by port cities with great songwriters like George Brassens, some local agricultural products, and tourist attractions.

Inspired by some of the virtual classrooms that have grown in popularity since the onset of the pandemic, I also used Google Slides as organizers, for example, during week two's lesson on Quebec. By using the Quebec flag, students were prompted to consider the meaning of its colors and symbols and how it differs from the Canadian flag. It was also an opportunity to revisit the fleur-de-lis, which is also prominent in Louisville, Kentucky.

For this lesson, we looked at Quebec City and Montreal as the major cities in Francophone Canada. Students engaged with the content

for virtual city tours and museum visits, a short film excerpt from Dany Laffière,³ a song from Lynda Lemay,⁴ and an interview with a French native who has spent time in Canada but now lives and works in New England. We were also able to spend the synchronous time during this week to talk with individuals living in or around Montreal. The big topic turned out to be the COVID-19 response in Canada and how it differed from what is happening in the United States. We were also able to hear about the lumber industry, how study abroad works in Quebec, some differences the guest speakers identified between Quebec and the United States, and the differences between Quebec and France.

Other course materials such as the city tours allowed students to see what the architecture is like in these cities and how locals routinely spend time in their daily lives. The videos feature markets and other activities experienced by locals and tourists alike. The short film excerpt takes a meaningful look at migration and highlights the idea of movement that was central to this course. With a discussion on what home means, students were prompted to reflect on the psychological impact when we are living somewhere that is not home to us or our parents and where we might experience separation from close family members. This conversation also allowed students to see the connection between Quebec and Haiti, the birthplace of Dany Laffière. Lynda Lemay's song, "*Les maudits Français*," focuses on culinary and cultural differences between the French and Quebecers (*Québécois* in French) in a funny and sarcastic way that culminates in a sentimental reflection of what is great about Quebec and the connections shared by French speakers from different areas.

MAKING LEARNING TRANSPARENT

The options for content to include in this class or a similar one are plentiful, and choosing can be a difficult task. My choices were based on a desire to help students explore different aspects of culture from historical trauma and memory to contemporary topics related to linguistics, traditions, songs, and works of literature. In designing this course, I also wanted to be intentional and transparent about what we were learning, why it mattered, and how this experience was not the same as a study abroad experience onsite. I remained focused on the Transparency in Learning and Teaching model (TILT) to clearly outline

purpose, task, and criteria. The TILT model has been particularly useful for addressing the inequity in higher education. TILT is, in its basic form, an intentional use of explanation so that students understand why they are doing what they are doing. Not only do students feel compelled to perform work that matters, but TILT has also been viewed as a bridge to help underserved students reach success. Mary-Ann Winkelmes, founder of the TILT framework, has written about and presented countless projects that affirm the importance of transparency in learning and teaching, especially for creating equitable experiences for learners.⁵ In her co-authored article, “A Teaching Intervention that Increases Underserved College Students’ Success,” Winkelmes et al. point out how TILT reaped positive results and can foster a positive learning experience for all learners: “In its first year, the endeavor has identified a simple, replicable teaching intervention that demonstrably enhances students’ success, especially that of first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented college students in multiple ways at statistically significant levels, with a medium to large magnitude of effect” (Winkelmes et al. 31). By offering alternative ways to learn about countries and visit them virtually, students have access to information and knowledge that they might not otherwise encounter. Although the main purpose of the course was learning about other cultures, instructors must remain cognizant of student perceptions and biases and link lessons learned to appropriate skills. Students noted at times that they were unaware of how widely spoken the French language is, and explaining that cultural competence toward French speakers coming from all parts of the world helps students develop skills to communicate appropriately with diverse individuals based on the nuances and societal factors that help language evolve. In terms of task and criteria, all modules were created and shared with students through the learning management system at the beginning of the course. That way, students were able to organize their time around work and other commitments and know what assignments were and when they were due. I used a similar structure each week by providing a visual context through maps and other images. Assignments were consistent each week and included discussion board forums, travel blogs, and time interacting with the content. The clarity and continuity of the course setup led, I believe, to a transparent learning experience.

As part of the course, students prepared school supplies for a non-profit organization in Conakry, Guinea. When students saw photos and videos of those students and the appreciation they showed, they gained insight into the impact of societal, geographical, and historical events on social class and into the inequity that exists. This virtual study abroad course was instituted because of circumstance, but it is worth noting how it might be repeated to offer opportunities to underserved students. Study abroad is an area where students tend to be underserved. That is not to say they do not have access to programs, advising, and resources. Rather, they are often not able to participate in programs because of the financial obligation. As John Lipinski points out in “Virtual Study Abroad: A Case Study,” 90% of American universities offer study abroad programs, but only about 1% of students participate (103). This surprising fact reminds us that we need to offer opportunities for students to learn some of the things that a study abroad program teaches even if they cannot participate in one because of financial or time constraints.

The benefits of study abroad are vast and can help honors scholars further their critical thinking skills and propel them into a higher employability sector. While many frameworks and theories on assessing study abroad exist, Jaime Ortiz outlined one of the more inclusive ones: SLEPT, which stands for the Social, Legal, Economic, Political, and Technological traits of different countries. This concept was incorporated into assessment methods and discussed in a co-authored article with María Tajés. After considering these traits, I wanted to make the course as diverse as possible by showing how different countries vary despite having a common administrative language. In “Assessing Study Abroad Programs: Application of the “SLEPT” Framework Through Learning Communities,” María Tajés and Jaime Ortiz remind us how study abroad programs can play an important role in developing diversity literacy. They suggest that many administrators opt for the implementation of the “SLEPT” framework for its “complex, interdependent nature of the global tapestry of power relationships” (Tajés and Ortiz 20). Bearing these themes and criteria in mind, I attempted to add some of its features to the different areas where most appropriate, like the lack of technology in Haiti and West Africa, the dark memory of the slave trade, the aftermath of

colonization, migration by choice/force/desperation, and how popular culture and daily life are unique and still impacted by power dynamics. Treating all the relevant topics is impossible, but a course like this one can provide students with ideas upon which they can build their body of knowledge.

During week four of the class, as we were focusing on West Africa, we learned about challenges families face sending their children to school, shipping delays, and corruption. This discussion led to including a service learning component to the class, a feature that is often a part of study abroad programs. We gathered school supplies along with some face masks and hand sanitizing wipes to help children who did not have access to these products. The logistics of this project were quite complicated because of the nature of a virtual course and COVID-19 restrictions. For students who have grown up with privilege, seeing the need for basic supplies, how difficult it is to ship items to West Africa, and the delay between when they are shipped and when they are received can be eye-opening. Shipping goods is also an impetus to explore corruption and how the release of goods at ports can be based on bribes and other payments under the table, so to speak.

In week five, the study of the Caribbean revealed some interesting details about how countries are organized. Students are always surprised to learn that Guadeloupe and Martinique are departments of France with voting and citizenship privileges. An examination of lifestyle, food, and other cultural features of these two overseas departments allows for an interesting reflection on how geography and where people live so deeply impact daily life. As major takeaways for the course, this theme of diversity of people and place featured prominently and allowed students to see the reach of the French language for communication across multiple levels of diversity.

ASSESSING THE TAKEAWAY FOR STUDENTS AND THE INSTRUCTOR

Overall, teaching this course was a positive experience, but as with anything else, I have notes about changes I would make if we decided to offer this course in the future. I would like to have more synchronous time with the students for discussion and to add more guest speakers. This live contact with people is important for emulating an authentic

experience and allows for question-and-answer sessions so different interests among students can be explored. I would also like to see a more collaborative effort to implement a service project.

My goal with the service project was to collect school supplies for a non-profit agency in Conakry, Guinea; share some video time with the organizers and the children we would serve; and create reciprocal learning. With COVID-19, however, no gatherings with children were possible, and video meetings were not really practical. We did send fifty bags filled with masks, hand sanitizing wipes, pencils, markers, crayons, notebooks, and other supplies that were requested. We took a Zoom photo of the participants and sent it along with the supplies. The time for shipping was also much longer than it is under normal circumstances. In the end, the lack of connection to the children we were attempting to help created a void for the students in the course. The valuable part of a service project is the reciprocal learning, and that is an element I would hope to integrate more fully in a future iteration of the course.

I learned about some opportunities for online volunteering during and after the course that would be good additions: Dosomething.org, Pointsoflight.org, Volunteermatch.org, and Unv.org. Organizations like *Break Away* (alternativebreaks.org) might also offer resources for service learning. Additionally, I would make more use of virtual tours that are accessible (youvisit.com or completefrance.com) on the web or those that can be customized for a cost (toursbylocals.com) among others. This growing industry now offers live tours in abundance and represents another innovative way to share knowledge even during a pandemic.

CREATING SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING (SOTL) OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

Perhaps the most enjoyable part of this course was that it did not conclude after the six weeks of instruction. I was lucky to work with three of the students who took the course to prepare presentations for the Kentucky Honors Roundtable (KHR) and the Southern Regional Honors Council (SRHC). As Jon Blandford et al. note in Chapter 11 of this volume, transitioning conferences from in person to online takes considerable time and often logistical gymnastics. The possibility to

present online created a venue for this collaboration and allowed me to achieve a personal goal as well. In my work, I try to identify an area for improvement or innovation in my teaching, implement something new, and work it into a presentation or publication. By working through these steps, I not only learn new strategies, but I also force myself to reflect on that learning to implement new assignments, assessments, and content. In this way, I am modeling scholarship for my students and keeping them involved in the process.

FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION AND LESSONS LEARNED

This virtual study abroad course allowed students to learn collaboratively about diverse areas where French serves as the *lingua franca* and allows movement and communication globally. They were also exposed to historical trauma and disparity along with the rich societal mores and cultural expressions that make these areas unique. Ultimately, this course was a venue for collaborative learning and an introduction to areas and topics that can be further researched by interested students. This course was created to fill a gap for an experiential learning opportunity during winter term that was created by travel restrictions forced upon ECU because of COVID-19. With some adjustments, this course could be repeated to serve that purpose; however, more largely, the question arises of how useful a course like this is and how it could fit into our future offerings.

Given the information revealed by Lipinski and what we see in our own study abroad office, money remains a key factor preventing students from studying abroad. In fact, we sometimes see fewer students take winter or summer courses because they do not have enough financial aid. Therefore, as we consider offerings for programs during these sessions, we must include information on scholarships and financial aid for students who are restricted by their financial situation. Is it, then, reasonable to offer a version of virtual study abroad courses on a regular basis for students who are not able to travel abroad? This question applies to non-traditional and traditional students alike. Offering opportunities for all students, including the student who is working a full-time job, has childcare or caretaking responsibilities, is disabled, or is unable to fully participate in a study

abroad program for some other reason, is important. Creating new courses, experiences, and opportunities will undoubtedly help us to serve more students and continue our trajectory toward equity.

CONCLUSION

Virtual study abroad courses are just one of many opportunities that were offered in an online format at Eastern Kentucky University and in honors communities nationwide. We also shifted honors conferences and social events to synchronous and asynchronous Zoom sessions. As faculty work to decide what we will maintain from the virtual world we have been living in, it will be important to consider how we can blend elements from our traditional practices for student engagement with new delivery methods that allow for more inclusion in a way that is symbiotic. One of the biggest lessons from the pandemic is based on equity. For students who live in rural areas with unreliable internet connections or no access at all, the pandemic inserted panic and hardship into academic careers where honors students generally excel. Some students became caretakers for siblings, relatives, parents, or faced illness themselves. The added responsibility created a need for more resources and flexibility. We have been forever changed by COVID-19, and the flexibility that we have discovered should become a part of the new normal.

That much of the focus concerning the COVID-19 pandemic has been on loss is not a surprise, and we cannot lose sight of that, but some valuable lessons and realizations have also emerged from this challenging time. While many honors programs have resources that allow students to participate in a wide array of activities for academic and professional growth, we must recognize that students do not always have equitable access to opportunity. As we return to traditional settings, implementing different delivery methods for learning and social activities so that all students have access to the takeaways that we are serving will be critical.

ENDNOTES

¹Readers can find templates and examples of backward design at the teaching and learning website at Vanderbilt University: cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/understanding-by-design.

²thinklink.com. Instructors can set up free accounts or pay for more options. There are many tutorials and suggestions about how to use the site.

³The excerpt comes from *Films from a Poet's Imagination*, youtube.com/watch?v=1kG4aUXTQKY.

⁴This song, “*Les maudits Français*,” is featured on the album *Du coq à l'âme* (2000).

⁵A good place to start learning about the TILT model is at tilthighered.com.

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CHAPTER NINE

Re-Reading Local Spaces:
City as Text™ Goes Virtual

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INTRODUCTION

City as Text™ (CAT) has been an integral part of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) since 1976. From the signature experiential learning event at the NCHC annual conference to honors semesters and winterims for students, CAT pedagogy engages participants in a deep understanding of place through strategies of mapping, observing, listening, and reflecting (Machonis 2008). The topic of multiple NCHC monographs—*Shatter the Glassy Stare* (2008), *Place as Text* (2010), *Writing on Your Feet* (2014), and *Place, Self, Community* (2021)—City as Text has also been the focus of dozens of NCHC faculty institutes. Aimed at helping faculty learn how to incorporate CAT into a wide range of academic endeavors, including student orientations, service learning projects, study abroad curricula, and assignments in course syllabi, City as Text faculty institutes are site-specific. From Detroit and Barcelona, to Yellowstone and Death Valley, locations for CAT faculty institutes are carefully scouted and planned to promote participants' connection with the cities, towns, and landscapes they explore. Participants are invited to engage deeply in the places where CAT faculty institutes are held: they walk the streets or trails, ride public transit, talk with locals, and, sometimes, get happily lost or venture off the beaten path, all with the goal of moving beyond the position of visitor or tourist toward understanding what makes a place—city, national park, small town, or rural community—work.¹

When COVID-19 struck in spring 2020, two City as Text faculty institutes were set to launch—one in Charleston, South Carolina, the other in Portland, Maine. Such annual professional development offerings have been a mainstay of NCHC and a hallmark of the Place as Text Committee, which plans CAT programming each year. In lieu of these in-person experiences, members of the Place as Text Committee decided to offer the first virtual CAT faculty institute. *Reading the Local in the New Now: An NCHC City-as-Text™ Virtual Faculty Institute* launched via Zoom in July 2020 and occurred over three days. The facilitators and participants alike were new to many of the technologies and much of the work that would shape the pandemic academic year of 2020–2021. In true City as Text fashion, however, facilitators rallied to reimagine the central principles of CAT in a virtual space during a pandemic that limited participants' ability to move about freely or

engage with others in places they would explore. The 2020 inaugural CAT faculty institute was so successful that a second one—*Re-Reading Local Spaces*—was approved by the NCHC Board and ran in June 2021.

This chapter provides honors program faculty and directors with detailed strategies for running a CAT experience in a hybrid or virtual format. It documents specific ways the traditional CAT institute principles were adapted to a virtual space, including changes made to the institute format, destinations, collaborations, and assignments. A new emphasis on multimedia platforms, central to the virtual institute, are discussed. Finally, a summary of what the facilitators learned in the process of shifting a fundamentally in-person experience to online is shared.

ADAPTING CITY AS TEXT PRINCIPLES TO THE VIRTUAL SPACE

A typical in-person City as Text faculty institute runs for four days when located at a site within the U.S.; institutes that are completed internationally tend to last about six or seven days total. Participants arrive at the location where the workshop will be held by a specified day and time, engage in CAT assignments, and are introduced to key principles used to design CAT experiences. These include principles around institute format, destinations, collaborative work, assignments, and strategies. Each of these areas needed to be reimaged in the virtual City as Text institute. Some principles were easily shifted to the online space while others translated less smoothly. New elements, such as the integration of multimedia technologies, were added to the virtual institutes, which led facilitators to discover new avenues for innovation that were less apparent at previous in-person CAT faculty institutes.

In-Person CAT Institute Format: City as Text faculty institutes are professional development opportunities for honors faculty that, with variation and flexibility in place for institutes based on location, follow a predictable format. Day one opens with a welcome, after which participants are sent out to complete a Walkabout assignment. They return at a specified time and debrief as a group. An Initial Impressions writing assignment is due that evening to capture day one of the institute. On day two, participants meet in the morning for an overview of the

day and are then sent out on a longer exploration to a new area, perhaps one that takes significant time to reach. Participants return for an afternoon seminar that gives them the opportunity to dig deeper into their experience of the spaces they explored, to hear from groups that went to other destinations, and to begin to integrate some of the readings shared prior to the start of the institute. An Observation Essay is the assigned homework for day two. Day three is typically an all-day exploration of a third new destination. Depending on the location of the institute, this may involve groups traveling further afield to explore a new and contrasting location. At the Albuquerque Institute on day three, for instance, half the group traveled to Santa Fe by train while the other half drove to Acoma Pueblo by van. A Turning Point essay is the final written work due that night. Day four is devoted to sharing key moments from the Turning Point essays and workshopping ways participants can bring City as Text pedagogy back to their home campus.

Virtual CAT Institute Format: The Virtual CAT institute format follows the fundamental structure of in-person CAT institutes with some adjustments made to accommodate the fact that participants may be in different time zones, at home where there are distractions, and reluctant to be online for multiple hours. For example, virtual CAT institutes are shorter—those launched during the pandemic were only three days in length—and the amount of group time each day is limited to approximately three hours to counter the fatigue many experience from sitting for too long in front of a computer screen.

On day one, the whole group meets on Zoom for a welcome, just as they would at the start of an in-person institute. Also similar to in-person institutes, participants are sent out for their Walkabout directly after the welcome concludes. Unlike in-person institutes, however, during which participants explore areas identified by the facilitators, virtual CAT institute participants leave the opening group meeting and head out to complete the Walkabout in an area of their choosing. Some may decide to do their Walkabout on their own campus; others choose a park or parcel of public land nearby; some opt to walkabout in a neighboring town while others stay closer to home and investigate their neighborhood. While reorienting this assignment

for a variety of unknown locations, the facilitators were concerned that some participants living in rural areas may be too far from a town to return within the time limit; a separate set of instructions for “rural walkabouts” was included in the assignments to offer an alternative for these participants. Like an in-person institute, virtual institute participants return as a group to debrief. While the lack of common ground—both literal and figurative—makes the group debriefs more challenging in a virtual institute, the multimedia assignments, discussed later in the essay, bridge this gap.

Given the shortened daily meeting time of the virtual institute, day two asks participants to complete their exploration before the group gathers mid-day. This adjustment is a significant departure from the process followed on day two of in-person institutes in that the exploration is done prior to any group meeting, and each participant explores a destination of their choosing rather than being assigned one by the facilitators. As on day one, the virtual institute’s reliance on each participant selecting a destination and then exploring it on their own means that the afternoon whole group debrief needs to help participants share their individual experience while also seeking commonalities. Day two of the virtual CAT institute also previews the Turning Point essay, which is the culminating assignment of all CAT work and is due on day three. While an in-person institute will include a second exploration—usually taking the full day to complete—virtual institutes require participants to complete only one Exploration. An optional second exploration is provided and asks participants upon reflection to intentionally use a different lens. Finally, day three of the virtual institute aligns closely with day four of the in-person institute: a discussion of the Turning Point assignment followed by a workshop of participants’ ideas that can be brought back to their home campuses. The primary difference lies in the length of the workshop: in-person faculty institutes spend a full day in the workshop while virtual institutes spend between two and three hours. A day-by-day comparison of a sample in-person and virtual CAT highlights key differences in workshop format:

Day	Sample In-Person CAT Institute	Sample Virtual CAT Institute
Day 1	<p>2:00 PM (in hotel meeting room or other group space) Opening & City/Place as Text Experience: orientation, introductions, & Walkabout overview</p> <p>2:00–5:00 PM Small group Walkabout</p> <p>5:00 PM Welcome reception</p> <p>Assignment due Day 2 at 9:00 AM – Initial Impressions writing assignment</p>	<p>12:00–2:00 PM CDT (on Zoom) Opening & City/Place as Text Experience: orientation, introductions, & initial Walkabout overview</p> <p>12:30–2:00 PM Individual Walkabout</p> <p>2:00–3:00 PM (on Zoom) Discussion – Small group debrief of Walkabout [See instructions below]</p> <p>Assignment – Initial Impressions multimedia assignment</p> <p>Looking Ahead – Overview of “Local Exploration” City/Place as Text experience to be completed anytime before 1:00 PM CDT on Day 2</p>
Day 2	<p>9:00 AM – Whole group meeting to debrief Walkabout; review of the day’s Exploration assignments</p> <p>10:00 AM–3:00 PM Depart in assigned groups for destinations</p> <p>3:00–4:00 PM Whole group discussion of the day’s explorations and outings</p> <p>Assignment due Day 3 at 8:00 AM – Observation Essay</p>	<p>On your own anytime before 12:00 PM CDT City/Place as Text Experience: complete “Local Exploration” assignment</p> <p>12:00–2:45 PM (on Zoom) Discussion – Small group sharing of “Local Exploration” experience and group exercise share out – “Local Exploration” assignment</p> <p>2:45–3:00 PM (on Zoom) Looking Ahead – Overview “Turning Point” and preview Day 3 workshop</p> <p>City/Place as Text Experience – Optional local Exploration</p>
Day 3	<p>9:00 AM Small group departures for all-day excursions to neighborhoods</p>	<p>On your own anytime before 12:00 PM CDT Complete “Turning Point” assignment [See assignment description below]</p>

		12:00–12:45 PM (on Zoom) Share Out “Turning Point” assignment 12:45–2:15 PM (on Zoom) Workshop & Consultation – workshop a City/Place as Text Experience for the next academic year 2:15–3:00 PM (on Zoom) Debrief & Closing 3:00–3:30 PM (on Zoom) Optional Q&A and/or social time
Day 4	10:00 AM–4:30 PM Workshop 6:00 PM Group Dinner	Not applicable

In-Person CAT Destinations: In a traditional, in-person CAT faculty institute, destinations play a critical role in the design and implementation of participants’ experience. In advance of the institute opening, facilitators carefully scout destinations to which they will send participants. In addition, regardless of the institute location, facilitators intentionally select destinations that contrast. For instance, in the *Las Vegas/Death Valley Institute*, the Strip was selected as one destination while the Downtown section of the city was selected as another. These contrasting parts of the city—the newest and the oldest—provided participants with different experiences that helped create a complex map of the site. Similarly, the city of Las Vegas was deliberately paired with Death Valley National Park, making the contrasting sites a vehicle for conversations around similarities and differences between built and natural environments.

Other strategies used in designing CAT destinations include sending small groups of participants to different places. By sending groups to different locations, participants can learn from each other, be inspired to examine an aspect of the location they had not noticed during their own exploration, and begin to build a mental map of the entire area regardless of whether they are able to explore every part of

the city or place. For example, the Boston faculty institute focused on city squares and coastal ports. For one Exploration, participants were sent to different coastal towns available by train from the city of Boston. Each group was only able to explore one or two towns along the train route; however, during the whole group debrief, during which each team shared its observations, a broader overview of the area's coastal cities was garnered through the collective lens.

Traveling to destinations on foot or by public transportation when possible is a final principle of CAT destinations. While not possible in national parks, rural areas, and cities with limited public transportation, these preferred forms of travel keep participants that much closer to the spaces being explored. Walking by storefronts and residences provides an opportunity for closer observation and engagement not just with places but with the people who live, work, and play there. Riding the local bus or train offers a unique insight into who uses public transportation and for what purposes. As with all CAT experiences, the closer participants can be to local experience, the deeper the observations and reflections that unfold.

Virtual CAT Destinations: In contrast to an in-person CAT faculty institute, for which destinations are carefully scouted and chosen in advance of the institute opening, including, often, the documentation of bus and other travel routes, virtual CAT institutes leave the selection of destinations in the hands of the participants. For planning purposes, the participants were informed that they should think ahead about possible places to explore during the institute but were given no other information or instructions until the opening meeting when the Walkabout assignment was shared. This strategy allowed the essential CAT faculty institute format to remain in place—a quick opening followed by the Walkabout. Rather than being sent out to preassigned destinations, however, participants arrived at the welcome with a destination already selected, which they went out on their own to explore. During the pandemic, because of health and safety protocols that limited participants' movement, the initial walkabout was sometimes completed in participants' backyards, neighborhood streets and parks, and even a home office. Since participants joined from their homes across the country—in all kinds of urban, suburban and rural settings—a new

alternative Rural Assignment was included in each of the explorations as a possible destination.

The CAT principle of exploring contrasting sites could also be adhered to in the virtual institute even though destinations were selected by participants rather than by facilitators. At the end of the first day of the virtual institute, in a preview of day two, facilitators asked participants to think about a new site to explore before the whole group meeting on day two. Participants were encouraged to select a site that significantly contrasted to the Walkabout destination they completed on day one, such as a different street in their town, a rural or urban setting, or a downtown area in the next town over. This second exploration during the pandemic was done in the same yard, street, or even room as the initial Walkabout, thus making the element of a contrasting site less dramatic and more nuanced, the emphasis changed to using a different lens or sense, such as observing what the space sounds like.

Finally, during a virtual CAT Faculty Institute, the emphasis on traveling by foot or public transportation becomes a strong suggestion rather than a requirement. While facilitators carefully plan destinations and gather bus and train routes to support these explorations in person, the diverse locations of virtual institute participants makes this process impossible to require. Nonetheless, facilitators encouraged participants to walk or take public transportation when possible, thereby adhering to the spirit of the original CAT principle as much as they were able.

In-Person CAT Collaborations: During an in-person City as Text faculty institute, participants collaborate throughout the explorations. From the initial Walkabout assignment to longer explorations, participants are organized into small teams of 2-4 people. These teams are planned in advance by the facilitators to ensure that participants from the same institution are not in the same group, that participants in each group are from different academic disciplines, and that small groups are reorganized a few times throughout the institute. This intentional arrangement of small groups brings different perspectives to explorations, thereby deepening observation and understanding of the area explored.

Another key element of collaboration during a CAT faculty institute is to invite (even require) participants to talk with people they encounter during their explorations. This scenario may mean

asking the local coffee shop server if she is from the area or talking to others while waiting for the bus. Keeping groups small is directly related to the charge of talking with people during explorations: large groups move less seamlessly through spaces and can be intimidating to individuals with whom they might want to interact.

Two other key elements of CAT that involve collaborating with others include the initial avoidance of bringing in experts/expertise and having ample opportunities to engage in formal and informal conversations during which participants debrief their experiences. Rather than bringing in experts on the history or current status of the city or national park at the start of an institute, CAT invites participants first to create, and even co-create, their understanding of the place, which largely happens through private reflection and public discussion. Therefore, readings assigned in advance of an institute are deliberately general, providing a broad overview of the place, perhaps generating questions, without claiming to be an authority on the subject.

Other material cultural products may also be introduced to participants along with readings. (For example, participants in the New Orleans Master Class were given a Spotify playlist of music they could listen to in advance of the meeting.) When experts are consulted, they are brought in at the end of the institute as an additional lens rather than as an authority. Finally, since experts are generally avoided, it is important that CAT faculty institute participants are given multiple opportunities, both formal and informal, to share their perceptions and experiences from each assigned exploration with other participants and facilitators as they digest and synthesize what they are observing. This exchange can happen in scheduled daily seminars as well as in conversations over meals and in shared spaces at the institute hotel or another location.

Virtual CAT Collaborations: Unlike an in-person City as Text Faculty Institute, in which collaborating with other participants plays a key role throughout, a virtual institute has limitations around the form and frequency with which participants interact. The primary difference lies in the use of small groups of participants who are carefully organized, and reorganized, daily to explore assigned destinations. By definition, virtual CAT participants cannot meet in the hotel lobby and head out the door together to explore a neighborhood, cultural

institution, or street. While more than one participant from a single college or university may attend a virtual institute, even partnering those individuals does not align with the CAT strategy of working in interdisciplinary, discrete groups. Instead, explorations are done by the participant on their own or, possibly, with a local colleague. Where CAT-based group work can be mirrored is in the virtual small group discussions built into each day's debrief. Here, facilitators can intentionally create small groups of participants who are from different disciplines and institutions to share their experiences. As discussed in the outcomes section of this essay, when the shared work of developing a multimedia presentation invites these small groups to identify patterns and themes in their diverse experience, the CAT element of small group work is most effective in the virtual space.

Other CAT elements of collaborating—including talking to people, the avoidance of experts, and designing opportunities for formal and informal conversations—are easier to replicate virtually. The Walkabout and Exploration assignments ask participants to talk to people during their outings—asking questions, even directions, in order to deepen the connection to place through engaging with others. Readings assigned in advance of a virtual CAT institute will necessarily be general, as the diverse locations from which participants join the institute make it impossible to home in on site-specific material. As a result, the reliance on experts is less likely, although participants should be reminded, especially as they explore spaces familiar to them, to engage with a beginner's mind that allows them to see even their own backyard through a new lens. Finally, virtual CAT institutes lend themselves to formal and informal opportunities for discussion. The use of virtual meeting tools like Zoom create space for whole group and small group discussions through the use of breakout rooms. Shared documents can create an archive of notes from discussions, and links can make group multimedia projects available for view by all members of the Institute.

In-Person CAT Assignments: There is a three-assignment sequence in CAT faculty institutes: 1) The Walkabout and Initial Impressions Writing Assignment; 2) The Exploration and Observation Essay Assignment; and 3) The Extended Exploration and Turning Point Essay Assignment (Quay). Assignments are written in advance by facilitators to add site-specific details and prompts. Prompts are typically

inspired by the institute theme. For instance, assignments in the *Preservation, Progress, and Politics in Charleston, South Carolina* institute might encourage participants to pay attention to tensions around the history (preservation) and future (progress) of the city.

The Walkabout is completed on day one of the institute and is a relatively short exploration, completed in small groups, of an area close to the place where the institute welcome is held. Participants receive a written Walkabout assignment with general prompts that invite them to use their senses, to see places with a beginner's mind, and to talk to people. The Walkabout is relatively quick—an hour or two—followed by a whole group debrief. The Initial Impressions Assignment is a written reflection completed that afternoon or evening in which participants capture and record their preliminary thoughts on the space they explored that day.

The Exploration is the focus of day two of an in-person institute, which begins after a whole group meeting in the morning from which small teams depart to new destinations. Just as with the Walkabout assignment, participants are given a written copy of the Exploration assignment that includes site-specific details and questions. In addition, the Exploration assignment provides participants with definitions of the guiding City as Text™ Strategies of Mapping, Observing, Listening, Reflecting. A whole group debrief is held late in the day, after the Exploration assignment has been completed. Participants are then given the Observation Essay Assignment to write that evening. The Observation Essay is also a written reflection that asks participants to home in on a specific aspect of their Exploration. At the end of day two, new teams are assigned and the written assignment for day three, the Extended Exploration, is given out, which includes instructions for writing the culminating Turning Point Essay. On day three of an in-person CAT institute, small teams spend most if not all of the day on their Extended Exploration, usually heading to destinations further afield. The Turning Point Essay is due the morning of day four, which begins with a discussion of the Turning Point reflections followed by a daylong workshop of participants' ideas for bringing CAT to their home campus.

Virtual CAT Assignments: Both the assignments that send participants out to specific sites (the Walkabout and Exploration)

as well as the written reflections on those experiences (Initial Impressions, Observation, and Turning Point Essays) had to be reimagined for the virtual institutes. Given the shortened length of the virtual institute, only the Walkabout and Exploration Assignments were required, although an optional exploration aligned with the Extended Exploration was offered for those who wanted to complete an additional exploration on their own. In addition, participants would not necessarily be traveling to a new location and discovering it in small peer groups. Rather, many participants would be bound to their homes, neighborhoods, towns, or campuses, reading these familiar places alone, or perhaps with family members or a colleague in tow. As a result, the assignments had to be written to accommodate the lack of control facilitators had over where participants were located and what types of places they were able to explore. For example, CAT institutes are often held in accessible, walkable areas, often urban environments. One adjustment that was made to the Walkabout and Exploration assignments was to include prompts for those living in rural areas. The Alternative Rural Walkabout was designed as follows:

If you live in a rural area, you could drive to a nearby town, park, or trailhead and follow the directions of the walkabout outlined above. If you would prefer to explore your rural home or property, imagine yourself as a stranger and note your initial impressions. Describe the layout, buildings, landscape, landscaping, animal enclosures, gardens, the entrance to the property, nearby traffic. What sounds do you hear? Do you hear people speaking? If so, are you close enough to eavesdrop? If you stand at the head of the driveway and observe the surrounding area, what do you notice and does anyone, in fact, notice you?

Another change in assignments lay in a shift of the theme of the prompts. In-person institute assignments include prompts connected to the location. For instance, the *Detroit Renaissance: Challenges and Choices* institute prompts linked to the theme of that city's historical difficulties and attempts to overcome them. Virtual institutes lack a common place around which to build a theme, thus making the prompts more general. At the same time, the virtual institute assignment prompts were connected to the historical moment of the

pandemic, which impacted all participants regardless of location. As a result, the virtual institute themes—*Reading the Local in the New Now* and *Re-Reading Local Spaces*—shaped the prompts used in the assignments. For example, the Exploration Assignment asked participants to either revisit the same space as the first day or venture out into a new area—potentially one where they might send students. Wherever participants went they were asked to keep in mind that there have likely been changes over time, some rather recent. Participants who were familiar with an area they explored were asked to think about the changes it has undergone during the pandemic:

What is made visible now that may not have been seen this time last year? How does social distancing (or lack thereof) change the observations, interactions, and assumptions you have of who this space is for (or not for)? What ‘services’ do you see offered in this space? As you explore, be aware of the institute theme (the “new now”) as it will be part of our upcoming debriefs.

A final and perhaps most significant change made to the assignments during the virtual institutes was to expand the form of reflection beyond the traditional written essay. Given the virtual space the participants met together in, the shortened time frame of the institutes, and the need to share reflections and observations virtually, participants were asked to move beyond the written and explore various technologies to document and reflect on their experiences. An additional incentive for emphasizing technologies in the initial June 2020 CAT institute was that faculty around the world were facing a steep learning curve around using technology to deliver instruction in their courses during the pandemic. The institute seemed like an appropriate place to support faculty development not only around CAT but around technology tools that could be effectively used for student reflection. By testing multiple media forms themselves during the institute, faculty would be better prepared to curate technologies when teaching their students during the pandemic and beyond. For each exploration—the Walkabout and Exploration—participants were encouraged to capture their experience using audio, video, still photos, or other media forms. These were then used in the Initial Impressions, Observation, and Turning Point “essays,” which took many different

forms from PowerPoint to fully developed short videos that included voiceover, text, and images.

The Observation Essay was the reflection altered most significantly in the virtual format. Rather than a written reflection on a specific element of the Exploration Assignment, participants gathered on Zoom, were put into small breakout groups, and asked to share observations from their unique Explorations and then create a multimedia mashup that captured patterns and themes of the group. The goal of the assignment was threefold: to provide a way for participants to debrief about their Explorations while on Zoom, to try new collaborative technologies, and to encourage reflection through the group's identification of themes and patterns that were then represented visually, to their own group and to the whole group as well. Examples of the multimedia adaptations of the traditionally written reflections are described below:

Assignment	Multimedia Adaptation
Initial Impressions Essay	<p>Please keep in mind that your first multimedia assignment is due tomorrow afternoon. This should be a compendium of your impressions, questions, and thoughts from today's walkabout recorded on a technology platform. We encourage you to use this Institute as an opportunity to experiment with new technology you might use on your campus. The Institute is a supportive place to leave your comfort zones and explore! Feel free to reference the City as Text™ Strategies.</p> <p>+ Multimedia document, in particular the multimedia sections, as you complete this assignment.</p>
Observation Essay	<p>As we discuss our explorations, take note of themes and patterns that emerge. You will be given an hour to each share your Explorations and your takeaways from the new location you visited today, then create a "mashup" of everyone's experiences. This mashup may be a Google Slides or Jamboard, a PowerPoint, Prezi, or Padlet, a Wakelet, or other internet application of your choosing. You are encouraged to experiment and have fun while combining your Explorations themes. You will report back to the group and share this multimedia mashup with the whole group.</p>

Turning Point Essay	As you reflect on your Turning Point, you may also consider in what way has technology helped and/or hindered you in your exploration of the local? Participants have discussed using the following digital tools so far in the institute: Adobe Rush, Adobe Spark, Audacity, Canva, Google Jamboard, Google Site, Google Maps, iPad Paper app, Mentimeter, Miro, Padlet, Perfect Video, Sifter, Storymaps, and Wakelet.
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In-Person CAT Strategies: City as Text is based on specific strategies for engaging with places: Mapping, Observing, Listening, and Reflecting (Machonis). CAT asks students and faculty to attend to (i.e., see, hear, smell, taste, and touch) the world around them as they begin to understand that all aspects of perception involve interpretation. Both perception and interpretation are necessary for any attempt at analysis and are prerequisites for understanding. While the four CAT strategies are not introduced to institute participants until day two, when participants complete their Exploration Assignment, they are key to the exploration process.

Moreover, the Observation Writing Assignment asks participants to specifically consider these strategies as they reflect in writing on their experiences during the day’s exploration. The following definitions are given to in-person CAT faculty institute participants as part of their Exploration assignment:

City as Text™ Strategies: Mapping, Observing, Listening, Reflecting	
(1)	Mapping: You will want to be able to construct, during and after your explorations, the primary kinds of buildings, points of interest, centers of activity, and transportation routes (by foot, vehicle, or other means). You will want to look for patterns of housing, traffic flow, and social activity that may not be apparent on any traditional map. Where do people go, how do they get there, and what do they do when they get there?
(2)	Observing: You will want to look carefully for the unexpected as well as the expected, for the familiar as well as the new. You will want to notice details of architecture, landscaping, social gathering, clothing, possessions, decoration, signage, and advertising.
(3)	Listening: You will want to talk to as many people as you can and to find out from them what matters to them in their daily lives, what they need, what they

	<p>enjoy, what bothers them, and what they appreciate. Strike up conversations everywhere you go. Ask about such matters as how expensive it is to live there (dropping by a real estate agency could be enlightening), where to find a cheap meal (or a good one or an expensive one), what the local politics are (try to find a local newspaper), and what the history of the place is, what the population is like (age, race, class, profession), what people do to have a good time. In other words, imagine that you are moving to that location and try to find out everything you would need to learn to flourish there.</p>
(4)	<p>Reflecting: Throughout your explorations, keep in mind that the people you meet, the buildings in which they live and work, the forms of their recreation, their modes of transportation—everything that they are and do—are important components of the environment. They are part of an ecological niche. You want to discover their particular roles in this ecology: how they use it, contribute to it, damage or improve it, and change it. You want to discover not only how but why they do what they do. Do not settle for easy answers. Do not assume you know the answers without doing serious research. Like all good researchers, make sure you are conscious of your own biases and that you investigate them as thoroughly as you investigate the culture you are studying.</p>

Adapted from: Peter Machonis, editor. *Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education*.

Virtual CAT Strategies: During the virtual institute, before beginning the assignments, participants were given instructions on the strategies CAT emphasizes: mapping, observing, listening, and reflecting. In addition, participants were asked from the beginning how they could employ technology for multimedia documentation and presentation of their explorations. In other words, they were asked to capture their mapping, observing, listening, and reflecting in digital forms. Participants were also encouraged to contribute their own list of tools, to experiment with a new tool, and to take the opportunity the institute provided to find a tool that works best for them, their students, and their campus. For participants, this meant placing themselves in the role of students who are acquiring observational skills not just through the four CAT strategies but through the use of technologies as well. Suggestions for using multimedia tools were outlined next to the appropriate CAT strategy to support participants in this process.

Another shift made in the CAT strategies during the virtual institutes was in the incorporation of “Rural Considerations” for each strategy. As mentioned earlier, because participants zoomed in from diverse locations that could not be predicted, the Rural Alternative

Assignment was created to help participants living outside of cities or even small towns to engage with the Walkabout and Exploration Assignments. In reviewing the CAT strategies, we saw that mapping in farmland would look slightly different from mapping in a more built environment. The original CAT strategies, newly added rural considerations, and multimedia technologies prompts are listed below:

	City as Text™ Strategy	Rural Considerations	Multimedia Technologies
(1)	Mapping: You will want to be able to construct, during and after your explorations, the primary kinds of buildings, points of interest, centers of activity, and transportation routes (by foot, vehicle, or other means). You will want to look for patterns of housing, traffic flow, and social activity that may not be apparent on any traditional map. Where do people go, how do they get there, and what do they do when they get there?	Rural Mapping Considerations: How does the landscape impact the way the property is laid out/constructed? What is the flow of the property like—i.e., how does the property suggest use and movement? What is the tempo (fast or slow) of the property? What about the property suggests tempo?	Apply mapping technology: There are plenty of kinds of mapping software that you can use with your phone. Students could also work on one shared map using a Google map or Story Maps.
(2)	Observing: You will want to look carefully for the unexpected as well as the expected, for the familiar as well as the new. You will want to notice details of architecture, landscaping, social gathering, clothing, possessions, decoration, signage, and advertising.	Rural Observing Considerations: As you walk, single out something you want to think more about. What about your property have you not considered? Examine that in detail. If there are people present on the property, observe how their actions are impacted by these elements of flow and tempo? How do they interact with the property? If there are	Apply technology to document: Take photos. Perhaps create a collaborative space online where students can share observations—maybe that’s as easy as a hashtag on a preferred social media platform, or maybe it’s creating a shared space for students to return to throughout the semester on a site

		animals present on the property, observe how their actions are impacted by these elements of flow and tempo. How do they interact with the property?	such as Padlet. You can also continue using mapping technology or another technology that you have chosen to explore
(3)	<p>Listening: You will want to talk to as many people as you can and to find out from them what matters to them in their daily lives, what they need, what they enjoy, what bothers them, and what they appreciate. Strike up conversations everywhere you go. Ask about such matters as how expensive it is to live there (dropping by a real estate agency could be enlightening), where to find a cheap meal (or a good one or an expensive one), what the local politics are (try to find a local newspaper), and what the history of the place is, what the population is like (age, race, class, profession), what people do to have a good time. In other words, imagine that you are moving to that location and try to find out everything you would need to learn to flourish there.</p>	<p>Rural Listening Considerations: Listen to the landscape mindfully using all of your senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, movement, and muscle memory. Are there visual observations you haven't already considered? Perhaps find a place to sit quietly and close your eyes as you attend to each of these senses individually.</p> <p>What do you hear (animals, leaves rustling, mosquitos, traffic, machinery, voices, etc.)? Describe the quality of the sound. What do you smell (manure, exhaust, rain, berries, grass, etc.)? Go for a walk. What do you taste (fruit or vegetables growing, a scent so strong you can taste it, etc.)? Touch something and describe that sensation. Consider how the landscape directs your movement. Do you move differently in certain areas of the landscape than in others? When does muscle memory take over (scooping feed, weeding a garden, avoiding an obstacle, etc.)?</p>	<p>Apply technology to document: Take videos of sounds and conversations with strangers. Conduct brief interviews with your phone. But don't forget to eavesdrop! You can also continue using mapping technology or another technology that you have chosen to explore. You can combine videos and images into a single video quickly with Adobe Premiere Rush (desktop and phone apps available for free) or the movie program on your personal computer.</p>

(4)	<p>Reflecting: Throughout your explorations, keep in mind that the people you meet, the buildings in which they live and work, the forms of their recreation, their modes of transportation—everything that they are and do—are important components of the environment. They are part of an ecological niche. You want to discover their particular roles in this ecology: how they use it, contribute to it, damage or improve it, and change it. You want to discover not only how but why they do what they do. Do not settle for easy answers. Do not assume you know the answers without doing serious research. Like all good researchers, make sure you are conscious of your own biases and that you investigate them as thoroughly as you investigate the culture you are studying.</p>	<p>Rural Reflecting Considerations: Think about how you feel trying to view your home/property through the eyes of a stranger. From your observations, imagine what conclusions that stranger might make about the people who live on the property. How do you feel about those possible conclusions? Did you learn something about your home/property that surprised you? How might you interact differently with your property after completing this exploration exercise? Like all good researchers, make sure that you are conscious of your own biases, the lenses through which you are seeing and judging, and that you investigate them as thoroughly as you investigate the culture you are studying.</p>	<p>Apply technology: Turn a reflection into a visual or aural story by adding your collected documents to your writing with an Adobe Spark webpage.</p>
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Adapted from: Peter Machonis, editor. *Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education*.

LEARNING FROM VIRTUAL CITY AS TEXT FACULTY INSTITUTES

Other Textualities: Historically, CAT reflections—the Initial Impressions, Observation, and Turning Point essays—have been completed in the form of a written essay. With the integration of multimedia technologies as an additional strategy used during the virtual institutes, this traditional reflective form was expanded and served as a reminder that a text is by no means a written document only. Rather, a text can be anything that is communicable, traceable from thought to experience to outcome. The basic premise of CAT is to

explore and come to an understanding that locations can be “read” as text. This reading enables participants to do more than just textualize a specific site. Instead, through the explorations and reflections, the site becomes a network of readable loci that sets the participants on a path toward a new understanding. Given the theme and the virtual nature of the institute, it seemed appropriate to take on the task—as facilitators and participants—of deconstructing traditional notions of text.

Why multimedia? How is multimedia different from a traditional reflective written essay? Perhaps the answer resides in the concept of textuality itself. To read a place is to interpret that place. If participants and facilitators alike were truly experiencing a “new now,” and horizons were limited to the local, as they were because of the pandemic, then it made sense to approach traditional reflective practices from different perspectives. Hence, a need to rethink the reflective practices that would enable us to truly see the local anew. Therefore, the textual fabric would have to take on a different shape.

The decision to add multimedia technology for the daily assignments opened up new avenues of creativity. While the goal was not to replace or try to replicate the written essay with a purely visual form, what unfolded was a deepening understanding of what it means to be reflective using technologies that combine writing, images, video, and audio. Through the use of multimedia, participants were asked to infiltrate the presence of reflection as a means to not only understand their experiences of the institute, but to carry those experiences to new places of understanding. The fact that much of the technology was new to everyone created a sense of collaboration and cooperation to complete the work. Many participants enjoyed the challenge of trying out platforms they might introduce to students. Some discovered media platforms that lent themselves to CAT assignments, mapping, or collaborative working better than others. The CAT strategy of Mapping became especially visible in the reflective assignments because participants used all sorts of multimedia tools to create their own maps of areas they explored.

Like writing, multimedia is a re-presentation (the hyphen is important here) of thought and experience, but one that is multi-dimensional. Multimedia incorporates sounds and sights, along with silence, in ways that writing simply is unable to convey. Still, to be clear: the multimedia assignments are in no way intended to replace

writing as a means to represent the reflective process. Instead, these assignments are intended to enhance and offer up a different kind of critical and creative thinking to the reflective process and encourage us to reconceptualize the familiar or the ordinary as it is lived under extraordinary circumstances.

Access: Unlike in-person CAT faculty institutes that involve traveling, sometimes great distances, to the city or location where the institute will be held, the distance to travel in order to participate in the CAT virtual institutes shrank to the literal steps participants had to take to turn on a home computer and join a Zoom call. When the first virtual institute was being envisioned, we were concerned about who would enroll and how this approach would affect attendance. The virtual institute enrollments averaged 27 participants, making them among the largest CAT faculty institutes to date. Participants attended from all over the United States. With the institute occurring over Zoom, a number of concerns that typically keep people from attending the in-person institutes were eliminated. No travel expenses (airfare, meals, lodging) dramatically reduced the cost of attending. Participants did not have to leave their homes, families, and other responsibilities. The overhead of running the institute was near zero, which also kept the tuition reasonable, a critical factor during the pandemic when many honors programs had limited or no travel budgets. The virtual format eliminated that issue. Because some honors programs, even in the best of times, have limited resources, the low cost of the virtual institute may very well make CAT institutes accessible to a broader range of honors faculty, directors, and staff.

Considerations: Not surprisingly, the virtual institute encountered some challenges that need addressing in future planning. The engagement with technology did not always go smoothly or lend itself readily to a new understanding of place and text. Some participants felt frustrated by the use of new technology tools; other technology could bridge some gaps but may create other issues. Full participation required a reliable internet connection. Internet connections occasionally dropped during a meeting, and missing part of the discussion could prove frustrating as well as limiting. Relying on the help of others to dial back into the conversation was common.

While the virtual environment addressed some concerns about accessibility, it raised others. Physical limitations were lessened but more attention needed to be paid to such issues as closed-captioning of the presentations and discussions. In addition, the virtual environment might be more democratic in terms of opening opportunities for attending, but many found themselves distracted and pulled in multiple directions. By not leaving the everyday environment of work and home, quite a few attendees were pulled into meetings or had to juggle other assignments because they were at home. This situation challenged CAT's goal of engaging actively.

The virtual institute added new multimedia and technical platforms to bridge the gap of being alone during the Walkabout and Local Exploration and offered new tools to map observations and make connections. The application of new technologies created opportunities and challenges. Physical accessibility and the economic constraints of travel were replaced by access to free technologies, which after an initial free trial, had hefty price tags and sometimes required a credit card to sign-up. Internet bandwidth, along with the level of comfort different participants had learning new platforms without adequate technical training, also led to some unforeseen challenges. Moving forward with institutes that incorporate a virtual component or that are completely virtual will require additional conversation about how to strengthen these areas.

CONCLUSION

Although the pandemic forced people to physically distance, technology brought many of us back together. The two virtual NCHC City as Text faculty institutes reimaged a time-tested pedagogy in a flexible, hybrid, and distanced space. Participants developed their understanding of CAT strategies—Mapping, Observing, Listening, and Reflecting—while they designed ways to make CAT work regardless of context or setting. Traditional CAT institute principles were adapted to a virtual space, including changes to the institute format, destinations, collaborations, and assignments. In many instances, these foundational principles were transferrable to the virtual experience; in some cases, however, these principles had to be adapted. A new emphasis on multimedia platforms was central to the virtual institutes. Not

only did technology help uphold key principles of CAT pedagogy in innovative ways, they also provided participants with interdisciplinary experiences that documented their learning. Practically, groups had to decide how to synthesize their experiences, what technologies would be used, and how best to present their individual inquiries as a group. Such engagement provided participants with ideas for how to integrate technology into the CAT assignments they design for their own students. Despite the necessary adjustments of eliminating formatting and timing from the in-person institutes, the virtual institute delivered the key principles of City as Text pedagogy, making the pandemic pivot a space not just for exploration of local spaces but for innovation in a longstanding practice of honors programs.

ENDNOTES

¹It is worth noting, as Bernice Braid does in her Introduction to *Place, Self, Community* (2021), that the term “City as Text™” has a history that incorporates the broadest definition of “city” to include a variety of places and spaces:

Over four decades ago, City-as-Text morphed into City as Text™, which was trademarked in the 1980s to indicate that its origin was in the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), which should be acknowledged in publications. Students nicknamed courses and conference sessions CAT, an acronym still in use. When sites broadened beyond urban areas to include rural areas, villages, parks, forests, and jungles, the umbrella term shifted to Place as Text, which is now the official name of the NCHC committee working on the project. (x)

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CHAPTER TEN

Online Education, Honors, and the Engaged University: Modeling Experiential Learning for Fully Online Students at Fort Hays State University

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, Fort Hays State University (FHSU) has undertaken two major initiatives to broaden its opportunities to recruit, retain, and graduate students successfully because the demographics of its home region have presented challenges. First, beginning in the late 1990s, it established a nationally competitive set of fully online degree offerings through what is now known as FHSU Online. FHSU Online currently enrolls the majority of FHSU's U.S.-based students. Then, in the mid-2010s, FHSU invested in developing

a now-thriving honors college. Until recently, the honors college has focused exclusively on enriching the on-campus experience for students who make a commitment to academic and community engagement. During the last few years, the leaders of both FHSU Online and the FHSU Honors College have explored many ways to foster strong student engagement and have begun comparing the lessons they have learned and exploring the synergies that they believe can be achieved from working together. They plan to extend to FHSU Online students the opportunities for greater engagement through service and experiential learning that provide the core of the FHSU Honors College mission. This development will better attend to the needs of diverse cohorts of students and benefit both programs individually as well as the university as a whole. While this development of an FHSU Honors Online initiative is only in its pilot phase, students in the initial pilot cohort have already been able to extend and deepen their engagement with the university's academic and co-curricular programs, and with their communities, through this initiative.

This essay outlines the principles upon which the FHSU Honors Online initiative will be based and proposes ways of achieving successful honors outcomes in student-centered ways that are appropriate and meaningful to both on-campus and online cohorts. We propose a structure guided by a Community of Inquiry (COI) framework that respects and reflects the social, cognitive, and academic needs of diverse students as individuals and groups. This results in a concentric curricular model in which the student's academic major field provides a broad, encompassing space for inner fields of co-curricular experiential learning and service. Honors staff work with students to provide guidance and accountability that facilitate success. Concrete examples from our pilot phase experience of the structure and application of these principles are provided in subsequent sections of this article.

THE FHSU HONORS ONLINE VISION: ENGAGEMENT, SERVICE, AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The current honors college leadership interprets its institutional charge in a spirit of service and engagement through experiential learning. An honors degree from FHSU means that students have developed a meaningful portfolio of experiences that go beyond classroom

outcomes and expectations. Honors college students serve academic knowledge by developing research, scholarly, and creative skills across the disciplines; engage with the campus community as a whole; develop networks with broader local and regional communities; and work toward a broad, global perspective on lifelong learning and career development. Individual students develop their own path to service and engagement through experiential learning of many kinds, and the honors college provides support, accountability, and recognition.

The honors college and FHSU Online recognize the potential synergy in their missions, especially with respect to student engagement through service. The authors began the process of developing these synergies and implementing programs by exploring how the small number of other four-year universities, especially regional comprehensive universities like FHSU with both substantial online operations and successful honors colleges, have initiated online honors education. Two of the most prominent of these universities include Old Dominion University and Florida International University although neither appears to have elaborated ideas and procedures well enough to provide a clear model for best practices. Universities with vastly larger resources both on-campus and online, like Arizona State University, cannot be considered appropriate larger-scale models for FHSU, but they may in the future offer specific elements of online honors education that can be successfully applied.

The authors concur with the general conclusion of Nightingale's 2014 argument that no contradiction exists between honors education and online delivery—whether for students who are enrolled fully online or those who take a mix of in-person, hybrid, and online courses. They therefore seek to expand opportunities in honors education to FHSU's many fully online students in a way that both recognizes the uniqueness of fully online education and preserves and expands the service-oriented and experiential culture of honors. They further seek to do so in concert with FHSU's Office of the Director of Civic Learning and Engagement. This office is charged with developing community engagement as widely as possible and also with achieving and maintaining FHSU among the universities holding Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement (*The 2024 Elective Classification for Community Engagement*).

HISTORY, CULTURE, AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF ONLINE AND HONORS EDUCATION AT FHSU

Fort Hays State University, from the day of its founding as the Western Branch of the Kansas Normal School teachers college in 1902, has sought to find the most effective ways to reach rural, remote, and economically disadvantaged populations. This mission has always required a close focus on the needs of students, stakeholders, and the broader community. The regional profile of FHSU's part of the state is more profoundly rural than even that of Kansas as a whole. The institution is the only one of Kansas's seven four-year public universities west of Wichita, which is over 60% of the state's geographic area. FHSU therefore directly serves a region of about 200,000 square miles with approximately 500,000 people, averaging fewer than 3 people per square mile (*Kansas Counties by Population*). FHSU's home city, Hays, is the twentieth-largest city in Kansas, with an estimated 2021 population of 20,608. Only the major meatpacking cities of Dodge City and Garden City, have (slightly) larger populations within FHSU's traditional area of service. Most counties, cities, and towns in the region are also losing population at a steady rate (*Top 500 Cities in Kansas by Population*). The most significant ongoing demographic shift in the region is the rapid relative growth of the Hispanic population, which is largely in the meatpacking cities but also in smaller towns and rural counties (Hunt and Panas iii-iv). FHSU is embracing these transitions to build an integrated model of on-campus and online education that can equitably serve the needs of its transforming region with effective, high-value programs and also offer unique quality and value to national audiences.

Distance education began at FHSU in 1911 with correspondence courses offered primarily to teachers in one-room schoolhouses across Western Kansas. Many of these courses were free continuing education programs that served teachers as part of their state license renewal process. The Correspondence Department formed an important part of the institution for many decades, developing into the Department of Continuing Education and Instructional Technology. In the mid-1990s, FHSU administrators identified two challenges: a shrinking rural population that threatened the university's long-term viability because of diminishing demand for on-campus education and the need

for resources to improve the delivery of FHSU's pre-digital distance-learning programs, for which there was nonetheless still substantial demand. In 1997, FHSU transformed its Department of Continuing Education and Instructional Technology into the FHSU Virtual College, thus becoming a pioneer in offering fully fledged web-based degree programs to off-campus and non-resident students.

After more than twenty years of steady growth resulting in a total online enrollment of approximately 6,500 students, the FHSU Virtual College was renamed FHSU Online in 2020. A small number of central FHSU Online staff work together with departmental faculty and the staff of FHSU's Teaching Innovation and Learning Technologies (TILT) to develop infrastructure and curriculum that support effective, high-quality, high-value online learning. TILT reports to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, and the FHSU Online staff report to the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. This structure has paired the steady growth of online students with a nationally recognized, high-quality online learning experience. FHSU Online is one of only six national programs to achieve membership in the United States Distance Learning Association (USDLA). USDLA membership demonstrates that FHSU Online's programs meet stringent requirements for best practices in academic rigor, program delivery, and student engagement. Alongside the growth of FHSU Online, in the early 2000s FHSU also established two partner programs at universities in China where Chinese on-campus students can achieve an FHSU degree through study with FHSU-employed English-speaking faculty in business-oriented programs.

Like many honors initiatives, the FHSU Honors College began as an on-campus program meant to foster student recruitment, retention, success, and engagement; it also was designed so that well-prepared students from FHSU's traditional rural region could contribute in a rich way to campus life. In the honors college, these students could find opportunities and support for their academic, professional, and personal ambitions and goals commensurate to those available from larger universities, but they could do so at the institution they and their families knew and valued as a linchpin of their community and region. After a number of halting attempts to develop an honors program in the 1970s and 1990s, the honors college was established in 2014 with a charge to provide enriched opportunities and support for

on-campus students in all academic programs across the university. The program is structured congruently with National Collegiate Honors Council principles and best practices as applicable to a rural-serving state comprehensive university that strives to provide a high-quality experience to students and families. Since 2018 it has directly served between 90 and 100 students (approximately 2% of the on-campus population) with enriched curriculum; a housing community; scholarship support; academic and career development; and support for experiential goals in research, study abroad, nationally competitive scholarships, and other co-curricular initiatives leading to degrees with honors. Recent focus on developing deeper regional recruiting networks is also beginning to bear fruit, and the 2024 honors recruiting class is the largest ever by a substantial margin and the first to include several fully online students. The honors college director and administrative specialist, both full-time, work with a part-time student staff of three or four, and a group of volunteer student peer mentors to provide this support. The honors college reports to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost.

DELIVERING ON-CAMPUS HONORS EDUCATION FOCUSED ON SERVICE AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In order to focus the on-campus honors college student experience on service and engagement, the on-campus honors curriculum is designed with a maximum of flexibility. Students entering from high school take two honors-designated courses in the first year: a 1-credit expanded orientation seminar in the fall semester and an honors section of FHSU's General Education requirement course on Critical Thinking (offered in the Philosophy Department) in the spring semester. Students who transfer into FHSU, or who join the honors college after some semesters of enrollment, generally are expected to satisfy the Critical Thinking course requirement. The only other course required for completion of an honors degree is the honors capstone course, taken during one of the final two semesters before graduation.

The honors capstone course is developed as independent study for students to round off their education in a way that reflects on its relation to their career goals and preparedness and therefore to supplement

and strengthen, rather than redundantly recapitulate, work done in the increasing range of departmental capstone courses that seek to assess the skills-based outcomes of major degree programs. The capstone project is always both independently and experientially developed with input from the honors college director and other faculty. For some students it takes the form of a more traditional capstone paper in the major field. For other students the honors capstone can be a reflective writing project, creative project, or service project.

The remainder of the on-campus honors curriculum is made up of honors experiences built by individual students to engage their own interests, talents, academic goals, and professional plans. These honors experiences should average out to one per semester during the student's enrollment in the honors college, but extensive experiential work across semesters and summers, including, for example, participation in large and ongoing research collaboration, can count across multiple semesters as long as accountability is maintained through an honors contract for each semester or summer period. Honors experiences can be satisfied through any of the three following categories of engagement:

1. Honors-designated courses, most of which satisfy requirements in the General Education program. Students, depending on their previously earned college credit, are encouraged to take at least two such courses. Some take as many as seven.
2. Honors Experiences built around contracts that assure that faculty, students, and honors college staff understand each other's expectations. FHSU prefers—in ways discussed by Badenhausen—to understand contracts as a means to “foster a culture of thinking, growing, and inquiring” by generating greater experiential depth through collaboration, not simply as a form of curricular monitoring of individual students' outcomes (10-11). These can include:
 - a. Course conversions of non-honors courses to honors status;
 - b. Individualized research or creative activity in collaboration with faculty;

- c. Service projects with campus or community mentors.
3. Honors Experiences that do not require contracts because accountability is relatively simple for honors college staff to track. These “automatic” honors experiences include:
 - a. Internships;
 - b. Study abroad (not otherwise required in a major);
 - c. Conference or creative exhibit participation beyond the campus;
 - d. Nationally competitive scholarship applications;
 - e. Leadership roles in organizations beyond the campus level;
 - f. Official honors college employment in recruiting and student support;
 - g. Other experiential learning approved by the honors college staff.

Examples of the kinds of individualized experiential work done by students abound across many disciplines. In the natural sciences, a large portion of the research pursued by FHSU faculty includes undergraduate research collaborators, and many honors college students become actively involved in this research as early as the first semester of their first year. The honors college is highly successful in placing students into highly ranked MD, DO, PharmD, MSW, physical therapy, and occupational therapy programs—including since 2019 a 100% placement rate for students in their first year of application. Students have achieved full fellowships to nationally ranked PhD programs in fields including mathematics, physics, chemistry, medicinal chemistry, biochemistry, geosciences, paleontology, and organismal biology. The placement rate has been almost perfect. In 2021, Brynn Wooten, a student in biology and paleontology, also earned the first Goldwater Scholarship ever granted to a student in the history of FHSU. The strength of students’ experiential work in research methods and practices is the foundation of this success.

Students in business, applied technology, and agricultural fields largely seek their experiential enrichment through internships. In

FHSU's rural region, students are highly sought after and heavily recruited by local firms and government agencies in areas including banking, farm credit, deposit insurance, accounting, oil and gas, agricultural practice and technology, and manufacturing. These firms seek—and find—students passionate about helping their hometowns and regions develop and thrive. Northwest Kansas is also fortunate to have a large and generous foundation, the Dane G. Hansen Foundation, which focuses its efforts in the region on economic development, health, quality of life, and especially the arts. It provides generous scholarships to many honors college students and also to non-honors FHSU on-campus students, and it sponsors dozens of internships in local firms and industries throughout the year, many of them reserved for FHSU students but broadly open to many different majors.

FHSU also has nationally respected programs in health professions including nursing, social work, communication sciences and disorders, allied health, and psychology. While some of these social services fields allow students to experience formal internships, in cases where licensing requirements mean that direct practice as an intern is impossible, the honors college works with students individually to structure meaningful and accountable job shadowing experience that strengthens opportunities and networks for post-graduation employment.

FHSU's Department of Art and Design is another nationally recognized program that holds its students to extraordinarily high standards. The encouragement that the department gives to students to participate in co-curricular activities including juried exhibitions; community arts events; partnerships with local, regional, and national businesses; and the department's own annual honors show make it simple for the honors college to structure systematic ways for students to demonstrate a very high level of engagement and leadership.

Finally, in the fields of education and the humanities and social sciences, students participate in a wide range of research, community outreach, study abroad, internship, and academic conference activities that develop experiential depth. The FHSU Honors College also encourages students from all fields to step into leadership roles in student government, campus events, Greek life, honors college and university-wide recruiting, university development, and other areas of engagement to structure accountable, meaningful experiences. Through our annual assessment surveys, the FHSU Honors College

can demonstrate that students increasingly value these experiences because they understand their importance for career preparedness and strong self-advocacy.

EXTENDING HONORS EDUCATION TO FHSU ONLINE STUDENTS: PRINCIPLES, BEST PRACTICES, AND THE COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY FRAMEWORK

Online students at FHSU are a diverse group. In fall 2020, there were online students in 32 countries outside the U.S.; they ranged in age from 15 to 81 and majored in everything from a BBA in Accounting to a Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP). Of course, a few trends define this diversity. Among the 32 countries represented outside of the U.S., most have only one to three FHSU Online students. Thanks to connections in our Computer Science Department, Cambodia contains the most FHSU Online students outside the U.S. with 12 attending in fall 2020. Similarly, all but a smattering of FHSU Online students are between 20 and 50 years old, with those in their mid-20s to mid-30s making up a solid majority. Decisive trends guide the choice of majors among online students as well. Although these students have several hundred program concentrations from which to choose, a full 27% select those in the category of Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies, which offers many concentrations that do not require the full investment of credit required in a major. Elementary education and nursing each represent 12% of all majors, and psychology represents 11%. Online students majoring in other areas only represent single-digit percentages of all online students. Through extensive personal interaction with online students, the experience of the authors suggests that a sizable majority of all online students at FHSU are working professionals who are also continuing their education.

The rise of online education over the past decades has led to repeated calls for greater student engagement. To cite a notable example, scholars of teaching and learning have called for more than twenty years for the Community of Inquiry (COI) framework to more thoroughly apply to online course development (Castellanos-Reyes). The COI framework seeks to analyze educational processes into three central forms of presence: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. These distinctions are based on principles

going back to the work of Charles Sanders Pierce and John Dewey (Pardales and Girod; Shields). Johnson argues that the COI framework is particularly applicable to honors education and, furthermore, that it can guide successful exploration of online models of honors educational delivery (90). The authors of this article concur. We have sought to develop the proposed structure of FHSU Honors Online student experience to highlight overlapping aspects of the three layers of presence identified through the COI framework. Johnson's article contains a number of useful concrete suggestions that have motivated our ideas.

The FHSU Honors Online initiative further seeks to address other gaps in student engagement identified among FHSU's online and also on-campus students through the National Survey of Student Engagement and other institution-specific and honors college-based surveys and program assessments. The authors have discussed these ideas further with FHSU leaders including Dr. Andrew Feldstein, who guides the work of FHSU TILT. FHSU Honors Online offers another critical arena outside the classroom for active-space learning with peers, faculty, and staff (Milman). It seeks to develop opportunities for students "to project their personal characteristics into the community [of inquiry], thereby presenting themselves to other participants as 'real people'" (Garrison et al. 89). This makes the principles of the FHSU Honors Online initiative congruent with those noted by Slavin as a fundamental way we can "define honors culture": "taking intellectual risks" beyond the established material of their academic program, which the authors broaden to include experiential learning that goes beyond a departmental curriculum (15). Scott and Frana also provide support for the authors' reflections on service learning, extramural evaluation, and project-orientation (30). In short, experientially based online honors education meets the essential requirements stated by Anderson and Dron:

The need for . . . representation, for multiple perspectives, and for awareness that knowledge is socially validated demanded the capacity for distance education to be a social activity as well as the development of cohort, as opposed to individual study, organizational models of instruction. (85)

While progress is notable in the past decade, much work remains to be done in transitioning online education, including at FHSU, from top-down, teacher-and-textbook-fronted models to deeper models of learning and inquiry that are socially engaging, interactive, and experiential.

A range of FHSU departments and institutions are currently seeking to strengthen this social aspect of online education, and several now offer student-led “Circles of Support” to online students. Social Work and Psychology are leaders in this initiative. They are building work in these Circles into both academic and co-curricular forms of learning. The FHSU Virtual Student Senate (not yet renamed to reflect the new name of FHSU Online) is also growing substantially in vigor and institutional effectiveness. It has recently pursued several initiatives to help FHSU demonstrate that fully online students are crucial university stakeholders who deserve to have their sometimes unique—but equally important—academic needs reflected in university-wide policy.

Since the FHSU Honors Online initiative is in its pilot phase, we have only just begun to develop examples of successful experiential work by students. What we hope to instigate is online students linking their online education closely to interests they have in community engagement. In this way, we hope to develop a sense among online students that their education can also be broadly enriched with co-curricular elements similar to those found in the on-campus environment but commensurate with their own needs and life circumstances.

One of the earliest members of our honors online cohort, Chelsea Kiefer, is a non-traditional online student of history. From her home in North Carolina, however, she has become a pillar of the History Department’s research and outreach efforts. She participates regularly in the department’s podcast series. She has earned a prestigious internship with a regional archive in North Carolina. She has even traveled to Kansas at the department’s invitation to attend an academic conference in Wichita, where she presented her insights about her archival work. She has accomplished all of these things without ever setting foot on the FHSU campus itself. Another student in the initial cohort is developing research collaborations in the Psychology Department in pursuit of her goals for graduate study and eventual practice with veterans with post-traumatic conditions. Students are also pursuing

contracts or course conversion ideas, which can serve as the gateway to independent research or capstone projects. As the FHSU Honors Online initiative grows and demonstrates not only its viability but its place at the center of the honors college's mission, we plan to provide dedicated guidance to these students with an honors online advisor.

CONGRUENCE OF FULLY ONLINE AND IN-PERSON EDUCATION: APPROPRIATE LEVEL AND INSIGHTS GAINED FROM THE COVID-19 EXPERIENCE

Almost all students in higher education have now experienced online education in various forms—some well-developed, some ad hoc—as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thrust online unexpectedly, many on-campus students found student engagement lacking in their new online classrooms. As 2020–2021 FHSU student body president Brad Demers stated:

This move to online learning is not ideal. To many of us, attending classes online is difficult and less rewarding. Online students, however, deal with this every day. We as on-campus students now have a great opportunity to address the problems and shortfalls of online learning and advocate for ways to make it as enriching and engaging as classes on campus.

Just as the pandemic revealed vast shortcomings in public health services, the move to online education for students acculturated to the on-campus experience revealed similar shortcomings in experiences and expectations related to student engagement.

The authors identify these shortcomings perceived by on-campus students due to the enforced online and hybrid environment during the COVID-19 pandemic as having derived from discordant expectations related to the three presences of the COI framework. Research about such expectations and whether the three presences demonstrably suffered from the COVID-contingent transition to online learning varies widely. (Compare Ebersole and Tan for varying perspectives.) The authors' experience was that on-campus students forced into an online environment often felt, at least at the level of short-term qualitative perception, that their education had lost some quality, focus, and

communicative interactivity in all three COI aspects: social, cognitive, and teaching. The authors participated in an online experiential learning series aimed at addressing this perceived paucity of interactivity by developing student engagement in COVID-19 community outreach. The initiative was a shared project among the honors college, the Center for Entrepreneurship at the FHSU Robbins College of Business and Entrepreneurship, FHSU Online, and other campus stakeholders. Representatives from these areas included both the on-campus cohort working online and the FHSU Online cohort working in their normal modality during the pandemic. In sessions spread out over a few months, students successfully pursued various ideas generated by students and faculty about how best to reach others with proven strategies to develop community awareness and entrepreneurial ways of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic (Talkington).

Several insights from the COVID-19 experience can help address the disconnect between the experiences of fully online and on-campus students. Circumstances made clear the differentiation of what must vary in online and on-campus curricular and experiential approaches and what can be made successfully parallel when developing the FHSU Honors Online initiative. First, the three COI presences are a useful guide to the appropriate level of congruence between fully online and on-campus educational experience. Each modality has some similar and some divergent aspects in how the presences can be successfully grounded and maintained. Second, the synchronous hybrid-flex model in which students attended in person once per week and synchronously online on other days, adopted in many courses during academic year 2020–2021 to assure classroom distancing, can be adapted into a working model for incorporating fully online students into on-campus honors courses. This strategy assumes, of course, that they are able to participate in synchronous education given the other professional and personal commitments that often motivate them to choose fully online education over on-campus offerings. The FHSU Honors Online initiative seeks to be accessible to students with the full range of possible academic and personal motivations.

CONCENTRIC CURRICULAR MODEL FOR EXPANDING HONORS EDUCATION TO FULLY ONLINE DEGREE-SEEKING STUDENTS

FHSU manages its resources carefully, believing that broad access is best assured to both on-campus and online students by maintaining base tuition and fees as low as possible. The institution, therefore, does not have unencumbered resources available to build an FHSU Honors Online experience with dedicated staff. Current staff from both FHSU Online and the honors college will develop a recruiting and outreach strategy that builds on current efforts and that appeals to FHSU Online students who seek to enrich their learning process experientially. No specific growth target will be set, but once honors online student numbers reach approximately 20, the honors college hopes to secure dedicated resources to support individualized advising for honors online students.

Recruiting will begin at the level of the typical digital outreach to prospective students by FHSU Online and the honors college. Prospective FHSU Online students who express interest in honors education will be referred to honors college staff for further details about the experiential qualities of the FHSU Honors Online program. Similar to on-campus honors students, FHSU Honors Online students will be expected to seek a bachelor's degree in any field and to have a minimum of approximately 60 credits remaining in their academic major.

FHSU Honors Online students, however, may be part-time students; that option is not the case for on-campus honors college students. As resources become available and student numbers increase, a 1-credit "Welcome to Honors Online" course may be developed to help students establish expectations and accountability. This course would help students establish a baseline understanding of the experiential principles underlying FHSU honors education. Moreover, this experience will lower barriers and reduce anxieties when online students approach faculty, staff, and non-academic partners, and it will also help students understand the wide range of possible experiential learning opportunities. Students will individually approach their faculty to discuss ways in which they can demonstrate greater engagement and deepen their readiness to pursue a career. A special focus will also be placed on techniques for fostering successful collaboration at a distance.

When students join FHSU Honors Online, they will establish an “Honors Online Plan,” a document that will be updated each semester. This plan will parallel in many ways the experiential approach taken with on-campus students, allowing students to demonstrate and show accountability for experiences across time that go beyond the expectations of the online classroom. From interest already expressed in honors education by prospective FHSU Online students, the authors expect that online students, who are often older, will come to the program with established track records of service and community involvement. These track records can be built into substantial elements of the student’s Honors Online Plan leading up to a capstone experience parallel to the on-campus capstone.

The curricular model built around COI principles contains three concentric layers:

- A. The outer and most encompassing field, representing the teaching and cognitive COI presences, is represented by the student’s academic major program. Honors college staff will work with major advisors to help FHSU Honors Online students build experiential elements successfully into their online majors.
- B. The middle field, representing the cognitive COI presence, is made up of the experiential forms of academic and career-preparedness enrichment that are parallel to the honors experiences expected of on-campus honors college students. The Honors Online Plan provides for a longer-term focus to help students perceive value and maintain accountability, and in some cases an FHSU Honors Online contract will be built to set and manage stakeholder expectations. Common forms of experiential and co-curricular enrichment are expected to include:
 1. Internships and formal professional development;
 2. FHSU Online course conversions (through which students develop a contract with faculty leading their non-honors-designated courses to develop individualized honors content);

3. Undergraduate research
 - a. Faculty-student partnerships guided by honors contracts. The FHSU Psychology Department has pioneered undergraduate research with FHSU Online students and provides a successful model for this work.
 - b. Self-directed and community-based projects overseen by honors college staff.
- C. The inner field, representing the social and cognitive COI presences, is made up of forms of service learning and engagement that take place collaboratively. Each FHSU Honors Online student will be expected to demonstrate how their educational process serves the larger community. This expectation can take place in many ways, some more traditionally co-curricular, some through self-directed community engagement.
- D. Each FHSU Honors Online student's capstone project will develop out of these three fields/presences to link educational outcomes with career goals.

The administration of FHSU Honors Online will be coordinated by the FHSU Honors College with assistance from the FHSU Online staff and input from departmental advisors. In mid-2021, the initial web presence described the program on both the honors college and FHSU Online sites. As expected, we received a small number of applications, and these students served as pilot members of FHSU Honors Online in 2021-2022. The success of these students will provide the basis for expanding the program's marketing outreach.

Student services will provide an on-campus student mentor. As the program develops, the student mentor and honors college staff will meet occasionally by videoconference during the academic year with the pilot cohort of FHSU Honors Online students. Initially, the Honors College Academic Committee will assist in reviewing and developing new ideas for contract-based experiential learning among

FHSU Honors Online students. If a separate committee dedicated to the FHSU Honors Online cohort becomes desirable, one will be impaneled.

CONCLUSION: FHSU HONORS ONLINE AS AN INSTITUTIONAL NETWORKING, ENGAGEMENT, AND INNOVATION AGENT

The development of FHSU Honors Online furthers the institution's mission by bringing together its well-developed expertise and experience to serve an important and growing cohort of students in a new and innovative way. These plans build on existing strengths to offer new paths to engaged, service-oriented experiential learning for online students who can easily feel distant from such institutional goals. Honors education is a proven means to successful recruiting, retention, and engagement, and it can enrich FHSU Online's initiatives in all of these areas. And it can be done with a minimum of new resources.

FHSU's planning process and pilot project discussed in this essay have broader implications that highlight the need for careful, institutionally grounded needs assessment to develop online honors opportunities in ways congruent with broader student outcomes and strategic goals. Fully online students must be met where they are, and their needs and goals cannot be mapped straightforwardly onto the experiences and curricular structures developed for and oriented toward on-campus students. Most importantly, institutions must remember that experiential learning and its associated high-impact outcomes require, for fully online students, an even greater investment in the individual needs and goals of the student. One-size-fits-all programs will not be able to generate in fully online student populations the kinds of vigorous academic, campus, and community engagement that is the hallmark of successful on-campus honors opportunities. Well-crafted fully online programs will open honors education to new and important student populations. Their time has come.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

**Cultivating Delight, Crossing Divides,
and Solving Impossible Problems:
Lessons Learned from a Year
of Virtual Conferences**

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While the rapid transition from in-person classes to a fully online modality in response to COVID-19 presented a host of immediate challenges for everyone in higher education, honors programs, colleges, and organizations in particular faced an additional set of concerns. These challenges included, in the short term, how to create meaningful virtual alternatives to experiences such as conferences, symposia, and colloquia, and, in the long term, how to integrate lessons learned from these virtual experiments to enhance the academic experience of students in the future. Traditionally, in-person, discussion-driven networking events like regional and national conferences are at the very core of what sets honors apart; shifting them to online platforms seemed daunting. And yet, collaboratively and creatively, honors persevered, in the process discovering innovations, practices, and emphases with which we can reshape our sense of what is possible going forward. This chapter highlights some of the lessons learned from a year of virtual conferences by three different honors organizations, the Southern Regional Honors Council (SRHC), the Northeast Regional Honors Council (NRHC), and the Kentucky Honors Roundtable (KHR).

The faculty and administrators on the organizing committees for these three conferences all came from institutions that focus on in-person instead of online learning, especially for honors education. That inexperience, combined with our collective experience muddling our way through Zoom classes and meetings during the early stages of the pandemic, primed us to see the prospect of online conferencing in terms of deficiency, as an inevitably poor approximation of what we could deliver were we able to meet in person. More specifically, we had come to see the so-called pivot to online education as deficient in two key respects. First, there was our profound sense of isolation and disconnection from our colleagues and students, many of whom had become to us anonymous and distant participants in our classes and committees, isolated with cameras off and microphones muted. Second, and somewhat related, a lack of joy emanated from every meeting and every interaction being scheduled. As we moved further into the planning process, however, we challenged ourselves to see the online modality differently. What if instead of *pivoting* (a word we had all come to view with suspicion), we were able to *pirouette*, creatively

leveraging the shift to a virtual environment in order to address these same perceived deficiencies. How might we use online tools to bridge distances or to make connections that would be impossible in an in-person setting? How could we introduce spontaneity, surprise, and even delight into the more typically serious business of an academic conference?

KHR, which ordinarily convenes twice a year, held its last pre-pandemic conference in late February of 2020, right before everything changed. One hundred forty-one students and faculty from twelve different Kentucky honors programs and colleges gathered on the campus of the University of Louisville (U of L) for what, unbeknownst to them at the time, would be the largest in-person event most would attend for more than a year. Students at this last KHR enjoyed all of the opportunities of a typical conference: they mingled and networked at a dinner, shared creative work and research at oral and poster presentations, and saw a memorable U of L Theater production of John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* at the historic Belknap Playhouse, which was built in 1874.

SRHC was not as fortunate. Its spring 2020 conference, which would have been hosted in Birmingham, Alabama, from March 18-21, was abruptly canceled just a week before its scheduled beginning, leaving organizers little time to adapt. Students were given the opportunity to submit an electronic version of their presentations, but relatively few availed themselves of that opportunity, with only 39 out of the 337 presentations in the program migrating to the online format. Although web traffic on the SRHC website through that April suggests visitors viewed this content, it was essentially a static archive, with none of the synchronous, face-to-face interaction and feedback that are among the most valuable aspects of the conference experience for our students.

NRHC was also forced to cancel its in-person conference, which would have been hosted in Albany, New York, from April 2-5. Students were offered the opportunity to send their work to *Illuminate*, the undergraduate journal of NRHC, for publication on a 2020 Conference page.

Thirty-nine conference presentations were posted out of the 405 accepted proposals. (See illuminatenrhc.com/2020-conference-archive for an archive of these presentations.) Students who participated were

grateful for the opportunity, and all accepted presenters were informed that their presentation would be automatically accepted for the 2021 NRHC conference.

Planning for fully virtual 2021 versions of all three conferences began in earnest shortly thereafter.¹ Organizing committees from all groups were tasked not just with figuring out how to translate the components of an in-person conference into an online setting, but also with exploring the extent to which that online setting might facilitate innovations not possible within the parameters of a conventional academic conference. To what extent might virtual conferencing open up possibilities for reimagining the work of these organizations? How might the pandemic-induced upending of the status quo creatively disrupt our assumptions about what a conference can and should be?

With little experience among the organizing committees in planning or even attending online conferences, it was inevitable that many of our lessons learned would be technological in nature. And yet, in addition to the insights gained about the nuts and bolts of running conferences over Microsoft Teams (the platform we used for KHR) and Zoom (which we used for SRHC and NRHC), the organizing committees discovered ways in which they could go beyond simply relocating conventional conference content online by venturing into new and exciting conceptual territory. For KHR, that new territory was inspired by poet and author Ross Gay's pathbreaking collection of "essayettes," *The Book of Delights* (2019), the subject of the conference plenary we hosted in partnership with the University of Kentucky Lewis Honors College. While KHR's modest budget would normally not allow us to invite a speaker of Gay's stature, the online format and funding from the Lewis Honors College enabled us to share the opportunity to hear from one of the country's most celebrated contemporary poets with honors colleges and programs across the commonwealth. Given how unpleasant the past year had been for most of us as we struggled with the losses, disruptions, and anxieties from the pandemic, the timing could not have been more felicitous. In the spirit of Gay's observation that "the more you study delight, the more delight there is to study" (xii), we chose to make the cultivation of delight central to our spring conference. Delightfulness and, indeed, fun, may seem peripheral not just to the serious academic business of sharing and receiving feedback on research at conferences, but also more generally

to the lives of our honors students, who, as any honors administrator is aware, are often laser-focused on grades and achievement; are over-represented in service organizations, student leadership, internships, and other obligations; and are skeptical of invitations to slow down and attend to self-care and mental and emotional wellness. We considered: *What would it look like to center delight as a practice and ethos within honors, and to do so in a year of so much stress and anguish?*

As NRHC and SRHC considered their options, we became aware of a shared desire to cross divides—regional, in particular—in ways that might address the present moment of racial crisis while concurrently breaking down regional divisions that have a long history in the United States, including in the NCHC. For SRHC, centering the urgent calls for racial justice that followed the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor was important. With our location both in the Southern region and in the privileged institutional space of honors education, we had a dual responsibility, the organizing committee realized, to amplify these calls for justice and to scrutinize how our own operations are implicated in structural inequalities. How might honors education, instead of being another divide that separates us, facilitate the crossing of divides? And how might the online format of the virtual conference enable us to see and cross divides that we might not recognize or be able to bridge in a conventional year? Aiming for intentional cross-regional collaboration, the SRHC decided on a theme of “Crossing Divides” and invited the Northeast region to participate in a unique conference that maximized the virtual environment. Our goal was to create a starting point through which we might challenge the deep-seated structural divisions in honors, in academia, in the United States, and in the world. By gathering virtually for shared presentations and co-created conversation, we worked together to keep recently intensified regional, racial, religious, and global human divisions front and center. We planned sessions that would promote dialogue and shared stories as well as the opportunity for the proximity that Bryan Stevenson emphasizes is so important to mutual understanding and what philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, writer of the *New York Times* “Ethicist” column, has referred to as the “endless shared conversation” of friendship. In the end, we crossed divides by fostering proximity across regions that is normally not part of our smaller regional meetings (qtd. in Tippett).

For NRHC, the conference chair set the theme of “Infrequently Asked Questions: Finding Solutions to Impossible Problems.” While this theme certainly spoke to the endless questions surrounding the pandemic, it also invited proposers to tackle problems across disciplines, including systemic racism, climate change, partisanship, immigration, and more. With this emphasis in mind, the NRHC planning committee selected for the conference’s common read Cody McDevitt’s *Banished from Johnstown: Racist Backlash in Pennsylvania*, which tells the story of one of the worst civil rights injustices in Western Pennsylvania history. In 1923, in response to the fatal shooting of four policemen, the mayor of Johnstown ordered every African- American and Mexican immigrant who had lived in the city for less than seven years to leave. They were given less than a day to move or would face crippling fines or jail time and were forced out at gunpoint. An estimated two thousand people uprooted their lives in response to this racist edict. This book and its author, who spoke about his research at one of the conference sessions, addressed the problem of systemic racism. This problem is so deep-seated that it seems “impossible”; it is a problem requiring creative and interdisciplinary solutions. Additionally, a keynote speaker was secured, Christine Simiriglia, the founder and CEO of Pathways to Housing PA in Philadelphia. Since 2008, this organization has served and continues to serve approximately 550 chronically homeless people. Simiriglia’s organization is based in the host city for the 2022 NRHC conference, which was the organization’s first in-person conference since 2019; NRHC planned and implemented a service learning opportunity for conference attendees with Pathways to Housing to address the “impossible” problem of homelessness in the United States. These two marquee events, alongside what would be a few hundred student presentations, were the starting point for NRHC’s first virtual conference.

The two regional conferences, SRHC and NRHC, enjoyed a special collaboration. In order to facilitate the crossing of divides, the organizing committees worked together to identify crossover opportunities. The two conferences organized the collaboration and titled it “Asking Questions, Crossing Divides, Finding Solutions,” a nod to the themes of both conferences. NRHC was invited to SRHC’s Trivia Night and Keynote Roundtable Discussion. SRHC was invited to NRHC’s Playfair event and Author Talk. Feedback was overwhelmingly

positive from those who attended these events, and both NRHC and SRHC hope to continue crossover collaborations for the foreseeable future through virtual platforms and perhaps in-person ones.

Each organizing committee sensed that these virtual conferences would entail both additional planning and a great deal of uncertainty. And yet, we dedicated ourselves to the task of creating the best virtual conference experiences we could, hoping and trusting that we would get significant interest and response and that no major tech glitches would derail us. Finally, we also realized that our students would still be enhancing their communication skills and gaining further confidence to propel them forward in their academic endeavors and professional lives. With hopes that our efforts would produce delightful results by offering energetic opportunities for engagement and by utilizing the fluidity of the online platforms to cross divides in form and content, all three conferences forged ahead. (See Table 1 for data on each event’s CFP timeline, submissions, acceptances and total event registrations.)

Table 1. KHR, SRHC & NRHC 2021 At-A-Glance

ORG	CFP	Submissions/ Acceptances*	Registrations
KHR	January	51	125
SRHC	January–February	180	273
NRHC	August–November	240	424

*Note: All three events accepted 100% of submissions vetted by deans and directors at member institutions.

CULTIVATING DELIGHT AT THE KENTUCKY HONORS ROUNDTABLE

KHR is an association of honors programs and colleges from across the commonwealth of Kentucky. KHR hosts conferences that provide honors scholars with an opportunity to present scholarly and creative work and build community and professional networks.

KHR also serves as a venue for Kentucky's honors directors, deans, administrators, and faculty to share ideas about best practices. The eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic meant the cancellation of the fall 2020 session, but KHR moved online for the following spring. In a typical year, KHR attracts anywhere from 40 to 90 student presenters, plus observing student attendees and a full host of honors-affiliated faculty and administrators. For the spring 2021 virtual conference, KHR began accepting applications in January and ultimately drew 125 registrants, including 51 students from 8 different Kentucky institutions who gave oral presentations, led poster tour discussions, or shared creative work. All proposals were vetted prior to acceptance, and all submissions were accepted.

The online shift brought challenges and unique opportunities, including the ability to feature writer Ross Gay as a keynote speaker. With an already scheduled virtual visit from Gay to the Lewis Honors College at the University of Kentucky coinciding with dates for the spring gathering of the Kentucky Honors Roundtable, we negotiated an extended invitation to all KHR participants to attend this event. Featuring his irresistible, unassuming charm, Gay's opening keynote sharing excerpts of *The Book of Delight*, his best-selling collection of essays, set the tone for the first-ever virtual session of the Kentucky Honors Roundtable. His talk provided an antidote to the spiritual fatigue of a pandemic year as well as a refreshing reprieve from the laser-focused achievement preoccupations many of our honors students hold. When asked what delights them, honors students are likely to respond by describing an upcoming internship or ongoing undergraduate research project and are often consumed by their academic and professional pursuits. While those projects may bring genuine pleasure, they are not the kinds of experiences that Gay describes in his book.

Gay teaches his readers that seeing all of the parts of the world around them is a valuable exercise, even the parts that seem inconsequential in the moment. By shifting our focus to seemingly mundane details of daily life and celebrating the minor joys they bring, Gay models a practice of reflection and offers a sense of perspective that can promote creative adaptation and even a kind of delight in the face of adversity and struggle. Even his essays that discuss serious hardships and injustices radiate hope and resilience. For example, Gay

shared with our audience the precarious experience of transporting a delicate tomato plant through an airport, and with his engaging reading of his work, he took us on the journey with him, which he presented as a shared delight among his fellow travelers who exhibited surprise in discovering what he carried and who then rooted for the plant's safe passage. This narrative reminded his listeners that others root for them too, that we are to root for each other, and that the process of rooting for others, like the process of establishing roots, builds reciprocal sustaining connections. KHR's virtual format sustained the fruitful connections of Kentucky's honors community during the pandemic season, which was rife with cancellations and isolation.

Engaging with Gay's work challenged honors students to take a journey of their own as they inventory their own lives and see these little pieces of triumph, curiosity, empathy, humor, collective humanity, community, and belonging not in spite of, but in the midst of difficulty. Janet Ledesma defines resilience as "the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration and misfortune," and like Gay's tomato plant, we want our students to not only survive the journey but grow and thrive, to bounce back from life's bumps and storms (1). We know from our own work with the honors students in our programs and the research of other scholars that honors students suffer from high rates of stress, anxiety, perfectionism, and other mental health concerns that have been compounded by the conditions of a global pandemic (Owens and Giazzoni 39; Rice et al.). Consequently, KHR organizers wanted to create a deliberately delightful incarnation of KHR this year that would not be simply another stressor but a meaningful and uplifting experience for our students.

KHR President Jon Blandford enlisted students' help in planning the conference. Despite the constraints of protective pandemic regulations and Zoom fatigue, students from various Kentucky honors programs and colleges took up this invitation and collaborated with their peers from other campuses to create new ways to implement KHR traditions, such as the community-building social activity traditionally held the evening prior to the conference presentations. Past conferences featured events such as trivia contests and murder mysteries that allowed students from different institutions to get to know each other and connect before the next day's conference sessions. As an online alternative, students on the planning committee opted

for a TikTok Challenge (a video contest) and virtual escape rooms. These activities furthered relationships in their home honors programs and across institutions. The TikTok Challenge resulted in delightfully collaborative, innovative, and humorous clips that educated students, faculty, and staff about their KHR companions from other honors programs and colleges. The contest also generated enthusiasm for participation in the Kentucky Honors Roundtable among the honors student populations at each institution.

Western Kentucky University student Langley Williams created elaborate virtual escape rooms that allowed for simultaneous collaboration among participants who could view both the room and each other to click around a virtual room, analyze clues, solve puzzles, and compete with other groups to “escape” in the shortest period of time. The KHR hosts created breakout room rosters that deliberately mingled participants from multiple institutions into the virtual escape rooms to foster cross-institutional honors social networking and a sense of community among the members of KHR.

The escape rooms and the Tik Tok contest were not only great fun, they also modeled key tenets of honors pedagogy. By involving students in the conference development process and by kicking off the conference with participatory and collaborative activities, we encouraged the student participants of KHR to be active and agentic in their learning. We want honors students to see education as an adventure and not merely a series of course requirements they satisfy with high marks. Starting with pleasure, collaboration, fun, and reflection upon delight in an academic setting, whether it is a classroom or an honors conference, offers an instance of intellectual engagement that disrupts what many honors students have seen modeled, welcomed, or praised. Similarly, Gay’s self-presentation exhibits a lightheartedness, grace, and humility at odds with certain conventions of the serious academics that bifurcate brains from bodies and joy from education. “If the ultimate goal in contemporary honors programs and colleges,” Samuel Schuman reminds us in *If Honors Students Were People: Holistic Honors Education*, “is to help students learn to be, in every way, the best people they are capable of being, remembering that they are not disembodied intellects is necessary” (24). After hearing Gay’s work, contemplating his essays of delight, and listening to him discuss his process and his experiences, one gleans a message inherently holistic

and wholesome, a message that urges students to contemplate deeply the virtues of taking notice, slowing down, savoring social engagement, and creating and cultivating curiosity.

Other delights of a virtual conference resulted from its increased accessibility. The virtual conference format allowed the smaller institutions in KHR to overcome the financial and geographic burdens of conference attendance. Although students are never charged registration fees, more students were able to attend the virtual conference since hotel and transportation expenses were not required. Students also welcomed the variety of formats in which they could present material. The first student presentation was a musical performance, and the performer recorded and shared her music online after the session. Some students shared their research with viewers in digital versions of posters or oral presentations with slides and then responded to questions from those in their virtual rooms. Many students, particularly those new to conference presentations, remarked that presenting virtually reduced their anxieties. Hosting the 2021 KHR virtually also broadened the audience for student work significantly. Parents, other family members, staff, faculty, and friends could support participating students by watching their presentations from any location with sufficient internet access. “The virtual format this year,” Lewis Honors College student Tejaswini Sudakhar affirms, “was actually more convenient in that it allowed my friends to also watch my presentation, which they wouldn’t have been able to do in person. It also made it more accessible for more people to leave comments and ask questions, and it was validating to know that the other participants . . . were genuinely engaged with my presentation enough to be inquisitive about it!” Hosting online also allowed us to promote the conference and share links to sessions via social media. This may have had the effect of increasing student, faculty, and staff interest in participating in future gatherings. What is most delightful about this consortium is the collaboration and connections it offers. By offering a virtual conference, we extended the reach of this roundtable further than ever before.

CROSSING DIVIDES WITH SRHC

Crossing divides resonated with the organizers of SRHC and NRHC, but for different reasons. The history of enslavement and segregation

makes the Deep South an essential site to address the roots, ongoing processes, and persistent structures of racism in the United States. The SRHC has committed to taking a leadership role with our institutions to address and act on this particular American divide in its ongoing work. The divides between North and South persist in other ways, particularly through regional assumptions. Regional bias is in many ways the only remaining acceptable bias in this country: one is allowed to express the expectation, and to believe, that people in the Northeast are rude, Southerners are uneducated, and Northwesterners eat only granola bars. SRHC President Kathy Cooke served on the Board of the NRHC from 2011 to 2013 and was eager to reach out to old and new friends in the region. While still working in Connecticut, Cooke met a woman from Virginia with whom she discussed the challenges of being female administrators in higher education. But the woman from Virginia shared another challenge: her Southern accent. Even when she was in graduate school at an Ivy League institution, she found that students and faculty assumed, based on her twang, that she was less intellectually capable. This prejudice motivated Cooke's decision to move to Alabama, to challenge these assumptions through direct experience. The SRHC, NRHC, and KHR all have board members with a similar range of interpersonal experiences. We also are colleagues who have lived in and worked at a wide variety of institutions from all across the country, including Illinois, California, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Georgia, Kentucky, and Alabama, and at institutions ranging from small and midsize private universities and colleges to large and midsize regional public universities. We agreed that it would be useful to challenge regional divides while also focusing on racial divides past and present.

Crossing divides is a useful goal, but what does it mean in practice, and in particular at a virtual conference? Our plan was to design opportunities to meet others with different backgrounds, viewpoints, and regional points of origin through careful attention to the structures of the conference that put people and ideas in conversation with one another: the virtual space, the use of texts and presentations, and the catalysts for dialogue. Through juxtapositions and conversations among people with seemingly very different perspectives, we learn more while extending and developing our intellectual capacities. In practice, the crossover conference mediated opportunities to create

proximity through small groups and one-on-one opportunities. We did this primarily through a team-based “City as Quest” experience,² through crossover decompression chambers created by NRHC, and through unique “hosted conversation” sessions created by SRHC.

We also crossed divides through larger keynote events. On Tuesday, 6 April, from 7:00–8:00 p.m., SRHC crossed a geographic divide by joining the NRHC for the virtual talk they organized on “Questioning the Past” by the journalist Cody McDevitt, author of *Banished from Johnstown: Racist Backlash in Pennsylvania*. While this talk invited students from both conferences to reflect on the history of racism and injustice against people of color in our country and the enduring legacies of that history, it was important for us also to foreground the work that anti-racist activists, artists, advocates, and legislators are doing in the present. To that end, the SRHC invited NRHC participants to its Saturday keynote roundtable featuring Kentucky State Representative Attica Scott, poet and author Hannah Drake, Keturah Herron from the ACLU of Kentucky, and Bellarmine University student Kelzé Riley. These four Black women activists spoke powerfully about their experience doing the work of anti-racist advocacy and justice; in particular, they discussed their leadership roles during the protests that followed the police killing of Breonna Taylor. This conversation and their courageous example created an ideal crossover opportunity for students, faculty, and staff from states throughout the Southern Region, as well as honors community members from the Northern Region, to contemplate social change in our own communities. It also allowed us to center the voices and perspectives of Black women in particular, who for too long have been subject to the toxic combination of racism and sexism that scholar Moya Bailey has dubbed “misogynoir.”

SRHC opened submissions from January 15 to February 15 and received approximately 180 submissions from students and faculty at over 30 institutions. All submissions were vetted and then organized according to theme and disciplinary interconnections into oral presentations, poster tour sessions, creative works, faculty panels, and hosted conversations on a range of proposed topics of urgency as perceived by the SRHC membership. Including all presenters and some observers, 273 people registered for the SRHC virtual conference, and over a dozen faculty members generously volunteered to perform Zoom hosting and share session moderating duties.

POSING AND ANSWERING INFREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AT NRHC

Before imagining such a fruitful partnership with SRHC, NRHC dove deeply into planning its conference. The conference theme (“Infrequently Asked Questions: Finding Solutions to Impossible Problems”) was created by the NRHC President-Elect, Chris Brittain (Rutgers University—Camden). To say the least, the entire Executive Board of NRHC had many questions about how to successfully execute a virtual conference. The decision to be fully virtual was a scary but necessary one given the uncertainty of the pandemic. After years of planning successful in-person events, we wondered if we could do justice to a virtual event. We were also worried about virtual fatigue since our conference would not be held until April 2021, a year after everyone entered the virtual environment. Nevertheless, the planning continued.

The first decision was to set a timeline for the entire virtual conference. The call for proposals opened in late August 2020 with a deadline in late November 2020. Proposers could opt into pre-recorded presentations (poster projects for students and idea exchanges for faculty/staff) or live synchronous presentations (paper panel presentations, roundtable discussions, or art presentations—all for students). The 240 proposals received by the deadline underwent a review process; all proposals were accepted although some were accepted on the condition of transitioning to a pre-recorded presentation. All live presentations were slated to take place across April 10 and 11; however, a full program of conference events would span from March 30 to April 16. Throughout the fall, other conference features were developed: some would be synchronous; others would be asynchronous. One of the asynchronous features of the conference, also planned by Chris Brittain, was City as Quest. A play on the very well-known City as Text™ feature of many NCHC and regional honors conferences, City as Quest was designed to put students in teams to engage in virtual explorations. This conference feature was not limited to the borders of a single city but took students around the world. The challenge contained ten different puzzles, each of which led explorers to a virtual space within the worldwide web and tasked them with finding the answer to a question rooted in the history and geography of an area. SRHC shared this asynchronous activity with the conference participants, as did the Mid-East Honors

Association (MEHA). Ten teams with a full roster participated in the activity, and one team of four students from Frederick Community College solved all ten puzzles correctly. NRHC believes that launching subsequent versions of City as Quest may be an opportunity to continue to engage students in the region throughout the year instead of just at the annual conference.

The next decision was to set a conference registration rate. The rate was set at \$75 per registrant, and we wondered if we would entice enough registrants for the conference, given that honors budgets were even more diminished throughout the pandemic. After we accepted 240 proposals in mid-December 2020, we opened our registration system in January. We were extremely and pleasantly surprised that 424 unique individuals registered for the conference. This number was just 140 fewer registrants than we drew to our 2019 in-person conference in Baltimore, Maryland.

We were able to communicate effectively with our registrants because we used a vendor, YesEvents, to assist with both our CFP and registration systems. YesEvents created a virtual landing page for our conference with links to each of the unique events in our conference program. We coordinated with YesEvents to send frequent emails during the conference period (March 30–April 16) to advertise the various events. YesEvents was also extremely helpful in setting up all the Zoom meeting sessions through NRHC's purchased Zoom licenses. The assistance of YesEvents was well worth the cost to help us plan and execute these virtual logistics smoothly. All registrants had a unique ID to their own portal to access events. (Outsiders would not be able to join the live Zoom sessions during the conference period.) This barrier was helpful because it mitigated any worries of unwelcome virtual visitors.

The conference itself went as beautifully as it could have gone. It kicked off on March 30 with a live webinar meeting where NRHC streamed a prerecorded welcome address from NRHC President Irina Ellison (Mercy College) and President-Elect Chris Brittain. Also during this first week of events, our Faculty Representatives AnnMarie DelliPizzi (Dominican College) and Zachary Aidala (Bloomfield College) hosted a Big Picture on Diversity in Honors while the Student Representative, Taylor Bennett (Gannon University), hosted a Student Decompression Chamber.

Part of NRHC's efforts included securing sponsors for our conference to offset costs. One of these vendors, Playfair, provided a free event for our attendees. This was one of the "crossover" events with SRHC and made virtual networking exciting and enjoyable. Outside of the partnership with Playfair, NRHC secured sponsorships with an additional 14 organizations. We worked with all of our sponsors to create a package that will extend their sponsorship into our 2022 event in Philadelphia.

The main week of conference events also included dedicated events for faculty and students. For faculty/staff, we hosted a Beginning in Honors Workshop. Richard Badenhausen (Westminster University) and Lowell "Chris" Matthews (Southern New Hampshire University) moderated this event. Also for professionals, the Consultants' Corner was presented by Patrick Fazioli (Mercy College) and Linda Kobylarz (Post University); the topics here were on discussing best practices in honors capstone courses and honors budgeting.

Students were invited to a virtual talent showcase; however, the event was canceled because the number of contestants was low. Some students participated in SRHC's Trivia Night, with one of the NRHC participants racking up major points and ultimately finishing first. The biggest days for students at #NRHC2021 were April 10 and 11 when live presentations took place. The conference was divided into 5 sessions. Each session had panel presentations and roundtable discussions (between 8-10 Zoom rooms running per session). Meanwhile, dozens of pre-recorded presentations were already available to attendees through NRHC's Virtual Conference Lobby on its website. All student presentations (both asynchronous and synchronous) are now cataloged and archived on the NRHC website (nrhchonors.com/presentation-lobby). Feedback on the presentation days was very positive. Also, all presenters were sent a digital presentation certificate via email to acknowledge their contribution to #NRHC2021.

The conference wrapped up with a Virtual Awards Ceremony where we honored both students and faculty in our region for their contributions to honors. A few final events followed, including the NRHC Expo and Graduate Fair, an event with over 14 organizations and academic institutions, in which students moved between breakout rooms to meet with vendors. Finally, NRHC hosted its Student Caucus and Business Meeting.

Overall, NRHC was extremely pleased with the conference. The levels of engagement during live events were high, and the number of technical issues were minimal. Our post conference survey received 51 responses, with 82.4% student participation; 92.2% of respondents rated their experience as either a “4” or “5.” One respondent said, “After the conference being canceled last year, I finally had the opportunity to present the research that I’ve worked so hard on. Plus there were great speakers. . . . It was engaging and fun!” With such feedback, NRHC will consider incorporating virtual features in the future; the next “impossible” question is how to effectively launch a hybrid conference model. Of course, NRHC learned an important lesson: asking “impossible” questions leads to finding extraordinary, innovative, and feasible solutions.

POST-PANDEMIC REFLECTIONS

As we return to something approaching normalcy on our campuses, we are not simply reverting to business as usual prior to the pandemic. On the contrary, some aspects of virtual learning, meetings, and conferences are and should be here-to-stay enhancements that offer added value as well as providing broader forms of access and more inclusive and effective modes of communication. Specifically, the experience of planning and running these virtual conferences provided the opportunity to reflect on how best to integrate positive elements of virtual learning, meetings, and conferencing into honors education. Some questions to consider include: What elements add the greatest value to our students’ experience and development? What aspects of virtual conferencing add creativity and delight to honors education? How can we structure virtual interactions and presentations to help students best develop their communication skills? How can we continue to capitalize on the power of virtual conversation to cross divides and foster mutual understanding and respect? Can and should honors education at all levels (institutional, state, regional, and national) be using virtual conferencing to foster a greater sense of community and for networking?

With budgets at many of our institutions already strapped before the pandemic, and with ongoing concerns about returning to liquidity, we all recognize that travel, registration, and accommodation costs can be a serious barrier to fuller participation at our regional and national

conferences. Our experience this past year has demonstrated that even with the return of conference travel and in-person gatherings, virtual presentation opportunities and encounters may continue to be sought by many institutions that cannot necessarily send large numbers of students at high expense to multiple events each year. The inclusion of virtual elements as part of a hybrid conference design might therefore be a good idea for regionals like SRHC and NRHC, as well as state honors organizations such as KHR, to consider. Obviously, a balance must be struck since traditional conference viability itself depends on attracting a critical mass of participants, and something is naturally special and indispensably collegial about socializing in person in professional settings. We should be wary of losing aspects of the essential value of conferences if we open them up too much to a virtual experience. It is clear, however, that a niche for virtual conferences exists and that honors organizations need to clarify what that might look like moving forward. For instance, one option would be to stream keynote presentations and general sessions for remote viewing and to designate sessions as 100% virtual for posters, oral presentations, and recorded creative works. The hope would be that the virtual aspects alongside a basically full slate of traditional in-person events would appeal to students at institutions with financial resources as well as students who are interested in participating but attend institutions with financial limitations. This combination would obviously be something of a gamble, and it is relevant to note that as we moved out of full pandemic mode in the 2021–2022 academic year, NCHC chose not to go the route of hybrid conference design, presumably because the organization needed to prioritize attracting a certain minimum number of participants to travel the long distance to Orlando, Florida, in order to make the conference happen at all. But regional organizations, which can perhaps count on a reasonable in-person participant pool given the lesser distances and costs involved, might be better positioned to undertake a hybrid experiment in future years. This arrangement could produce value added in terms of increasing the number of students and institutions that can participate overall, and, importantly, it would serve the purpose of furthering student development in communication, networking, and technology skills.

Independent of the question of hybrid conference designs and their added educational and professional value, clearly aspects of virtual

technology can add fun and delight to the conference experience. In doing so, they can also help us to develop a sense of shared culture and shared experience. The potential to enhance conferences with online elements is limited only by imagination. To keep things as fresh and innovative as possible, student leaders ought to be consulted to help generate ideas for activities like school video promo competitions along the lines of the KHR TikTok challenge, to weigh in about what platforms to use, to establish a successful and engaging set of conference social pages (something more than announcing a Twitter hashtag), to upload short videos and images of their experiences, or to coordinate meetups in host cities.

Technology can and should be used intentionally and ever more effectively to cross divides of a social, political, economic, and cultural nature. We have seen quite vividly in the past few years how effectively technology can produce a global response to the need, as in the cases of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, for true justice and equality. Educators must follow through in terms of even deeper analysis and discussion of widespread issues of similar concern, such as indigenous affairs, resource extraction and the destruction of the environment, residential schools, the truth and reconciliation movement, environmental racism, and climate change inequality. Honors organizations must continue to take a leadership role in addressing issues concerning our local communities, our regions, our nation, and the globe in order to encourage and enable our students to become leaders in their own right in the future.

Finally, technology and virtual encounters offer opportunities to create a greater sense of community across the spectrum of honors. The pandemic, which forced us entirely into the virtual mode of interaction, also forced us to focus on communication more generally. Even in that extended moment of physical distancing, we were reminded of what we have in common, of our shared interests and experiences as an honors community. The NCHC, which has traditionally taken the leading role, might be called upon to form a committee to explore the ways in which a national conversation and national community can be further developed with the implementation of some regular virtual activities, whether as part of a hybrid conference or by other means. The authors of this chapter are grateful for the lessons we learned organizing KHR, SRHC, and NRHC, and we encourage anyone who wants to

collaborate to reach out to any of us. If we can increase collaboration and improve communication, we will no doubt discover new sources of delight, cross other divides, and further pose and perhaps even answer important yet infrequently asked questions.

ENDNOTES

¹KHR decided that summer to forego its usual fall meeting in order to focus on the spring. Leading up to the cancellation of its 2020 conference, NRHC was able to negotiate a rescheduling of its conference in Albany in April 2021. NRHC ensured that participants would be given a penalty-free cancellation, pending the situation with the pandemic, up to 1 January 2021. Because many member institutions reported virtual plans for the fall semester and uncertainty about their ability to travel in the spring, NRHC decided in the summer of 2020 to move its conference fully online to be able to plan the richest virtual conference experience possible and communicate this information to members as soon as possible. In the past, NRHC's peak attendance at an in-person event reached 602 attendees in 2015, with most conferences averaging between 480–550 attendees. NRHC did not know if a virtual conference would attract the same interest. SRHC, which at its peak has welcomed 720 registrants to its annual conference, took longer to announce its decision to shift online, in part because of the need to renegotiate contracts it signed with hotels for the conferences that would have been held in Birmingham and Charlotte the next two years. The initial rescheduling of the Birmingham conference to 2021 was necessary to avoid losing money on the 2020 cancellation.

²“City as Quest” was inspired by NCHC's City as Text™ experiential learning program. For a discussion of virtual City as Text experiences, see the chapter by Quay, Ellison, Heaphy, Ketcham, Lefton, and Martino in this collection.

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HONORS ONLINE

*Teaching, Learning, and
Building Community Virtually
in Honors Education*

PART III

**Creating Community In and Out
of the Virtual Classroom**

CHAPTER TWELVE

Building and Fostering Honors Communities: Lessons from Social Distancing

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INTRODUCTION

While scholars of online education have been developing ways to foster a sense of belonging in online spaces for years, many of us in honors were thrown into the deep end for the first time in March 2020. As a result, we are now able to see the potential of online practices in a way we could not previously. This chapter tells the story of how we came to see the value of virtual community made possible by digital technology as an invaluable complement to the in-person

work of a twenty-first-century honors program. Before the Work from Home (WFH) era, the Johnson County Community College Honors Program had an online presence that was limited to a few social media platforms. Similarly, at Hillsborough Community College, the honors program's online presence was limited to social media. No classes had ever been offered online in either program, and advising appointments via Skype or Zoom were rare—mainly performed with international students prior to their arrival in the U.S. For both of our programs, social distancing was a learning experience that enhanced our efforts to foster an honors community on our respective campuses.

As the pandemic unfolded, we found ourselves prioritizing our online presence as the only tool for creating community among honors students. For many students and staff, the internet turned into a life-line, one of the few places where a semblance of normalcy could still be found. As we strove to foster an honors community online, we realized that we now had to work for what we had always taken for granted. We found ourselves becoming even more intentional about our outreach to students, about our programming content, and about our social media use, and we discovered that regardless of students' intersected identities, age, marital status, or educational goals, their success was very much contingent on their feelings of belonging to a robust community of learners—even if that community was mostly online.

Our primary concern was for our students' well-being. Many of them had lost jobs or were suddenly compelled to take on jobs to support their struggling families; some found themselves in unwelcoming, even hostile living environments; all were struggling to preserve both their physical and mental health. With the help of our faculty and our students, we gradually pulled together regular online outreach, digital events, virtual programming, and several supportive online tools. Our desire was that honors become a "one-stop shop," fulfilling the needs of our students, including but not limited to help with enrollment, assistance filing for unemployment, resources for accessing other forms of financial support, help with academic course completion, and personal counseling services.

Now, in the aftermath of two long years of social distancing that forced us away from our respective campuses, we felt compelled to reflect on our experience. In many ways, the pandemic made visible what had previously gone unseen or was previously taken for granted.

It forced us to recognize the value of online learning as a pedagogical practice in its own right—one that, some would argue, is better suited to certain content than in-person learning. It made our students' inequality come into focus, and it helped us to see how important community and sociality are to learning. Students and faculty in honors have come to realize that an inclusive community, whether online or in person, supports and drives much of their success. Connections made with like-minded peers and colleagues, whether online or in person, provide a sense of belonging to all. The pandemic sharpened our awareness that we have a responsibility to preserve at least some, if not all, of the COVID-inspired emergency practices that led our students to success during this challenging time. A brief overview of literature on community building in higher education affirms the importance of intentionality when building and fostering community in our honors programs, not simply taking for granted this central pillar of honors education. While many researchers focus on the benefits of creating a strong classroom community (McCabe; Szumowski; Jordan), a number focus on the value of the honors community at large, building on the work of Samuel Schuman. Our chapter straddles these two interconnected spaces to affirm the centrality of sociality and belonging in honors.

SOCIALITY AND BELONGING

Programming both inside and outside the classroom is integral to building a sense of community in an honors program. To do so, honors administrators have long drawn from cutting-edge scholarship in higher education and collaborated with directors of centers of teaching and learning on their respective campuses. As such, a longitudinal study performed by Alexander W. Astin illustrates the value of student engagement in extracurricular communities for retention and completion. Community is the safety net allowing students to try new things and move beyond what is comfortable. Conversely, George D. Kuh tells us that community is a byproduct of engaged learning practices (15).

In *How Humans Learn*, Joshua R. Eyler situates the findings of such specialists as Astin and Kuh on student involvement and engaged learning in the larger backdrop of what remains constant in the learning process across ages, cultures, and other differences. Eyler

argues: “The brain may mature and develop, but the ways in which we learn remain largely the same” (*How* 9). He organizes his synthesis of years of research in fields spanning biology, anthropology, and higher education, to name only a few, under five categories describing how human beings learn: curiosity, sociality, emotion, authenticity, and failure. While curiosity and failure may not require immediate contact with other human beings, the three central pillars of how humans learn—sociality, emotion, and authenticity—are fundamentally social. If learning is so fundamentally social, how do we create learning environments that reproduce the necessary safety, comfort, and sense of belonging in an online context?

A college experience is commonly pictured as an array of social interactions between professors and students, groups of students, and students with other stakeholders, such as alumni or community organizations providing internships or service learning opportunities. Prior to COVID, a sense of belonging in honors was created through events and spaces such as orientations, honors study lounges, honors student organizations, leadership opportunities, service in the community, socials, and other programming that brings students, faculty, and staff together. Faith Gablenick’s “Leading and Learning in Community” emphasizes the centrality of community in honors education. She elaborates on what she calls the transformative campus and how transformation is linked to communities of leadership and communities of learning. “When we lead and learn in community,” Gablenick writes, “we discover our roles over time; we purposefully commit to shared values and goals; and we acknowledge a diversity of viewpoints, perspectives and backgrounds” (51). In honors, then, sociality is integral to learning because it deepens our ability to understand the material under scrutiny.

General characteristics of an honors community include similarities in teaching and learning goals, social norms and expectations, a commitment to civic engagement, even a sense of place and togetherness. As Stan van Ginkel et al. observe: “Honors communities fulfill three main functions: (1) they stimulate learning and development; (2) they enhance social and emotional wellbeing; and (3) they stimulate the organization of activities at the university ...” (205). The connections made through academic, social, and civic events allow the community to become the foundation for risk taking, creative thinking, problem solving, and leadership development.

Whether explicitly stated or not, sociality is central to much of the growth and learning that students do in college. That online experiences are no exception has only become increasingly obvious since March of 2020. Even proponents of in-person teaching like Eyler, who closed his chapter on sociality stating, “being in the same place matters a great deal for educational success as it allows for the full expression of our social nature as human beings” (*How* 107), now recognize the value of online education. In the online public keynote address, sponsored by Plymouth State University’s Open Learning and Teaching Collaborative, which Eyler gave on 30 April 2021, he urged his audience to learn from the virtual learning space of the WFH to improve student success moving forward by incorporating remote activities where they make sense and might even be more suitable than in-person activities (“On Grief”). We want to focus on two fundamental spaces where community building takes place in higher education and in honors most particularly and where a sense of belonging makes all the difference in students’ retention and completion: the classroom and extracurricular programming.

THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

Scholars of education from Maria Montessori or L. S. (Lev) Vygotsky to directors of teaching and learning offices affirm the importance of sociality in all learning, which, as Eyler observes, “happens in a social context because we are learning with and from one another. This is as true in college as it is in any other educational environment” (*How* 66). Humans learn in groups; this phenomenon is a byproduct of our evolution as much as it is fundamentally practical, and it has led to a number of pedagogies that place human contact and the collaboration of students at the center of learning. Engineering student contact in the classroom can happen in many ways. Honors students naturally engage before class starts because they know one another and share other classes together. They contribute to class discussion because they are more likely to have read the assigned material. Students appreciate engaging assignments that might also include field trips and other organized projects/programs that are key components to transformational learning and encourage interdependence.

Vygotsky, for instance, affirmed the need for students to work together to reach their full potential. While some learning happens individually, students will only reach their full potential with either the help of a teacher or in collaboration with peers. Vygotsky calls “the distance between the actual development level as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” the zone of proximal development (86). For such group learning to happen successfully, students need to feel that they belong to take risks, be vulnerable, and engage in collaborative and cooperative learning. A direct application of Vygotsky’s theory developed in his book *Mind in Society* was integrated in an honors classroom at the University of Southern Maine to great effect. As described by Kaitlin A. Briggs, the honors thesis workshop is the opportunity for students to read Vygotsky and apply his teachings directly: “Vygotsky’s chapter serves both as an example of a literature review and as a catalyst for undertaking the processes of intertextual scaffolding, but the direct application of his theory to students participating in a research community may be the most compelling reason to use it as a common reading in an honors thesis workshop” (65). Briggs concludes that the creation of a community in the honors thesis workshop led to improved work from all students in the class, thereby affirming Vygotsky’s teaching.

Because in-person instruction is still the default, online learning environments are often shaped by the fundamentals of in-person instruction, including community and belonging. Specialists of online education such as Kevin Kelly or Omid Fotuli are quick to emphasize the importance of community when asked about student success. While thoughtful pedagogical approaches are essential to our students’ learning in online classes, their success hinges on their sense of belonging, regardless of delivery method. Furthermore, such online pedagogical efforts should align with investments that ensure that all our students feel included, regardless of their diverse intersected identities. Keonya C. Booker’s research illustrates just that: the culture of the classroom emphasizes a sense of belonging. It is incumbent upon faculty members to create a sense of community in their classroom by being approachable, accessible, and authentic. In-person on-campus classrooms more readily provide for these key

components to community. The expectations for those key components to the online classroom community remain the same; however, the characteristics of delivery can make this more complicated and require intentional investment.

In *Advancing Online Teaching*, Kevin Kelly and Todd Zakrajsek incorporate lessons learned from in-person teaching experiences with a particular focus on the importance of the sense of belonging, especially when one is designing equitable and inclusive online learning environments. “Although technological factors, students’ study habits, and personal behaviors all affect students’ ability to complete an online course,” argue Kelly and Zakrajsek, “social and psychological factors, such as community and belonging, also play an important role in online student persistence” (113). Students’ physical and emotional needs must be taken care of before they can focus on learning; therefore, Kelly and Zakrajsek encourage instructors to list resources in their syllabi or online learning management platform to help address students’ need for food, shelter, mental-health support, or writing support. Beyond students’ basic needs, they suggest ways to engage students in discussion in online courses to affirm their sense of belonging to a specific community of learners. These and more suggestions can be found at the end of this article.

Alternatively, faculty who have been long-term proponents of engaged learning practices, such as Professor Eric Mazur from Harvard University, have realized that their pedagogy could do more than simply adapt to the new normal. Mazur embraced the transition to online learning and reinvented his class in ways that he is going to permanently adopt. In an interview with the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Mazur says, “When you teach online, every single student is sitting in the front row” (McMurtrie, 2021). Not only did the change to online learning enable him to interact with more students in his class, but he argues, staples of his class, like collaborative assignments, are in fact better suited for an online environment. The changes that Mazur implemented during the pandemic are here to stay because of the measured increase in student success in this newly created online format. Mazur’s experience is a model to emulate: he embraced Sean Michael Morris’s command to “teach through the screen, not to the screen” and to find ways to better serve our students using all the tools at our disposal, electronic and otherwise.

As we leave our homes to return to campus, adjusting to the demands of global pandemics that may ebb and flow, lessons learned from the Work from Home era will bring forth new ways to educate and serve our students. Although we will not, nor can we, return to what our former normal was, we should build on lessons learned and keep on learning. We must recognize that what makes students and faculty feel a part of the honors community is regular communication to “humanize the learning experience” and to initiate and encourage personal contact (McDougall 250), whether online or in person, and then keep doing it, intentionally.

EXTRACURRICULAR PROGRAMMING

Fostering sociality outside of the classroom has always been primarily done in person: whether through social gatherings or more academic ones, the co-curricular programming component of honors and other programs is designed to increase student engagement and foster students’ sense of belonging at their home institution. In the same way that the pandemic helped the world see social inequalities and systemic inequities for what they truly are, WFH helped us see that as inclusive in design as our programming may have been, we never captured all our students because some of them could seldom, if ever, attend, either because of their parental responsibilities, their employment schedule, or simply because of physical access. The physical location of such programs, for example, can sometimes be inaccessible to students with limited mobility or access to transportation. WFH, therefore, made us more aware of our students’ varying needs and created opportunities to invite speakers who would otherwise be too costly to bring to campus in person. These kinds of activities are not going away: we have learned new ways to make the world smaller and more inclusive.

Many students arrive at the post-secondary level of their education with the assumption that academics must be the most important focus for success. Such an assumption is most often held by students whose parents may not have completed a college degree or students who are forced to work long hours in order to afford attending college. What these students often ignore and miss out on are the benefits of engagement outside the classroom. Faculty and administrators serving in honors have a responsibility to make honor spaces more inclusive

and to ensure that students' engagement, which results in community building, is strong. Through the various means to be engaged in learning, students discover the reasons to invest in the honors community. Time and again, students share their awareness, especially in terms of the community, of deriving from honors only as much as they invest. Nancy A. Stanlick underscores this point: "Even the self-interested individualist recognizes that becoming a member of a community requires respecting the interests of the community lest the benefits gained by the individual from the community cease to be received" (78). Honors students might be like-minded in many ways, but they are as diverse a population as any found in higher education. Investment in this heterogeneous group produces valuable results.

The literature on student extracurricular programming in the online world is relatively sparse; however, the field of engaged learning practices has invested in online tools for some time and with promising results. In the field of international education, the SUNY-based Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) has encouraged the connection of U.S. classrooms with classrooms around the world in a few different fields. Ian McIntosh contributes a great illustration of such a project in this volume. Not only does such a pedagogy deepen the students' understanding of the material, but it enhances their learning in the process of connecting them to peers abroad to create a bicultural learning community. Peer collaborative project assignments across borders and group discussion emphasize exchanging ideas and understanding for a mutually beneficial learning experience, one promoting international cooperation even during a pandemic. In the field of service learning as well, an increasing number of reflections and resources are fully online, thereby creating flexibility and allowing more students to participate.

The imperative for honors programs, whether they are providing co-curricular programming or academic programming, online or in person, is to create a sense of community. When students feel a part of a group, they are more engaged in lectures and discussions, just as if they were in the classroom (McDougall). We all want to be a part of things, and in the classroom this feeling is especially important. With dynamic programming outside the classroom, community is built on an even stronger foundation. Identifying the diverse needs and interests of students is essential to providing the programming necessary to

build community. Our students in honors have a wide range of abilities and knowledge. They write, paint, play sports, sculpt, sing, play instruments, hike, camp, and explore. During COVID, those interests and abilities did not change, but how we addressed them did.

An honors community is ever evolving, with membership ebbing and flowing, especially at a two-year college. As new members replace old ones, the key is that those entering the community feel welcome, become active, and fully participate in the program. This transition can be accomplished through mandatory orientations, specific assignments for individual students or small groups, social events, workshops, peer ambassadors, and student organizations. The requirement, for example, to complete an honors leadership course during the first term can go a long way in supporting engagement and development within the community both in honors and at the institution.

Stanlick points to the necessity of effective programming in honors: "Complete membership in a community requires ... not only that a member be present within the community but that the individual performs actions that are consistent with membership in it" (77). Faculty and students should be brought together outside the classroom in unexpected ways. Classes in tai chi, film nights with faculty-led discussions, colloquia, common reads, field trips, and invited speakers are some examples. As van Ginkel et al. observe, "The interweaving of social and professional activities helps create a seamless learning environment where students' intellectual, social, and personal lives can come together" (201). Maureen Kelleher aptly explains: "Such events humanize both groups and help build informal networks that are important resources for students at critical junctures" (32). Astin elaborates, "Frequent interaction with faculty is more strongly related to satisfaction with college than any other type of involvement or, indeed, any other student or institutional characteristic" (525).

Creating community and fostering a sense of belonging in all honors students happen online and in person through varied curricular and co-curricular experiences. But one thing sustains community above all else, and that is celebrating it. Regardless of influences within or beyond our control, it is imperative that community be celebrated through whatever events identify and highlight the positive role community has on all our lives. Those important celebrations include medallion and commencement ceremonies, banquets, and awards.

Ceremonies should be filled with shared memories and storytelling not only for those we celebrate but for the friends and loved ones who want to feel they, too, have been a part of the story.

POST OR LONG COVID: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

WFH heightened our awareness of our students' realities, such as their basic needs and their mental health, and increased our empathy, forcing us to be more creative to ensure that students were cared for. During the pandemic, our work habits changed, our understanding of what life can and should be changed, and our students' expectations for a fulfilling college education changed as well. This new world calls for honors administrators and faculty to draw from the many lessons learned during WFH to create more inclusive spaces, programs, and classes. And this volume is rife with creative answers to the dire time we faced while working from home. Between TikTok challenges, virtual escape rooms, scavenger hunts, and video channels, many chapters in this book richly illustrate how innovative honors operations are always developing new ways to support students despite the oddest of circumstances.

Our two programs engage in this effort by integrating lessons learned from WFH in our programs' practices. What follows is a brief description of what we plan to carry forward to make our respective honors programs a better place to be and a better place to learn. Our main takeaway from this challenging period is that of all the honors pillars, the cultivation of our students' sense of belonging to a community is central and pervasive. We realized that the cultivation of the honors community is in everything we do: from the emails we send our students to the classes we teach and the programming we produce.

The list below outlines pandemic-inspired practices that will be retained at the Johnson County Community College Honors Program:

- Many honors courses will retain an online or hybrid option, especially sections of our required honors seminar (HON 100) and capstone course called the "Honors Forum" (HON 270). A hybrid synchronous summer section of HON 100 was added to the schedule in 2021 to accommodate students' needs. This four-week experimental course proved

promising and may lead the way to other short-term hybrid endeavors and perhaps even a fully online course. The synchronous component became key to preserving aspects of the honors classroom as we knew it and cultivating our new students' sense of belonging to the honors community.

- Remote programming has proven relatively successful: we learned that Zoom allows for games to be played (Pictionary, trivia, and most kinds of icebreakers); for healthy discussions to take place, including difficult conversations about racial inequities; and for keynote speeches to be delivered by authors, from both far and near, at a reduced cost. We also learned that remote programming enables students who would not otherwise attend do so remotely, thereby making our efforts more inclusive. Therefore, we will maintain some of our programming on Zoom or other online platforms to ensure that we serve all our students better.
- Remote advising/counseling allowed many more students to be supported without the hassle of coming to campus to get answers to their questions. It led to an increase in demand for advising appointments and an ease in developing rapport with students who otherwise may never have availed themselves of the opportunity to engage. With the ease of access afforded by online tools, we have expanded our outreach to students and maintained our availability online to supplement in-person meetings. Online availability and flexibility have increased students' demand for advising and, in turn, doubled our enrollment in honors courses.
- We increased our social media presence and will continue fostering this effort to communicate with our community in and out of the classroom and on and off campus. Hours when postings on social media elicit optimal responses do not fall within 8 AM to 5 PM business hours because these are the times when people are at work or school and not on social media. We will, therefore, regularly hire a team of honors ambassadors to maintain our social media presence at peak hours.

- Following faculty demand, we also plan to hold regular meetings of the honors faculty. These started in spring 2020 as a means of sharing remote teaching strategies and other tricks faculty developed to support students' learning during the pandemic. Such meetings gradually became more formal, with occasional assigned readings and topics responding to immediate needs and current events. Together, we discussed implicit bias and other issues related to our campus's effort to be more inclusive, diverse, and equitable. We also discussed mental health issues faced by our students and possible means to support them, including mindfulness practices to temper students' anxiety.
- We encouraged the leaders of our honors student organization to embrace their social function, and they did so with gusto, ensuring that for an hour every other week online fun and games would be provided to the honors community. Our student leaders will continue this practice, making sure that they use all the available technology to remain as inclusive as possible.
- We created a hybrid recognition ceremony for which we gathered statements from faculty about every one of our graduates and projected them as each student was recognized. We will maintain this practice to supplement the vision of students crossing the stage to shake hands and gather their honors medal at graduation. Such personalized recognition will also be shared with students as a keepsake.

The following list outlines pandemic-inspired practices that will be retained at Hillsborough Community College:

- While COVID forced the mandatory fall orientations to be online, we returned to in-person delivery of content promptly, keeping much of the content and timing of the orientation similar. COVID made the importance of contact with students self-evident, from interns making personal telephone calls to students to planning in-person campus tours and social gatherings for students. Regardless of the

modality, the personal touch proved to make a difference in students' lives and sense of belonging to the program.

- We will continue to provide programming in a hybrid model. Because we have students scattered throughout a very large county, student organization meetings, film nights, guest speakers, and college recruitment events will rotate on campuses and be simulcast to the other campuses, when appropriate.
- Travel is an important component to our community and one of our best marketing tools. We have to support conference attendance whenever possible. Because international travel comes with extra complications at times, we will continue with virtual reality international experiences in Humanities and other courses through the Study Abroad Association. Students have responded positively to that experience and, perhaps, will be more confident and excited about international travel after having virtually toured exotic places and applied it to their classroom experience right here at home.
- The option for students to meet with the staff remotely will continue. More and more students are visiting the honors office, but for some, meeting on the main campus can be a great inconvenience. Currently, we are giving all students the choice of remote or in-person meetings with staff. Students seem split on their preference of live or online.
- Recruitment will probably change the most post-COVID. We have found reaching out to high school students individually to be a far more productive means of recruitment than interacting with large groups. Additionally, reaching out through the U.S. Post Office to encourage applications has worked well. Instant decision days will continue in person on the various campuses as well as online and remotely through the high schools.
- We look forward to a live Medallion Ceremony at the end of the year. Throughout COVID we insisted on no recordings on all online programs to encourage attendance. Although

we had some requests to tape events, we found that those truly interested in attending did. When we celebrate the achievements of our students and the advances of our program, we look forward to doing that together, with family and friends present, as a community. We envision a full auditorium. Time will tell.

- By providing classes that were online live at HCC, students and faculty were better able to get to know one another and relate to each other than if the classes had been held asynchronously. Anecdotally, students are looking forward to the return to the campus classroom, but they were appreciative of the live experience throughout the 2020/2021 academic year. Providing synchronous online honors classes created attendance problems for students with family and work obligations, but overall, they were well received by students and faculty alike.
- Throughout our COVID-driven online experience, we held online panel discussions on social justice, virtual movie nights with faculty guidance, digital craft nights, Zoom-based faculty office hours and conversations, online book discussions, workshops for scholarships and transferring, and vision boarding. The honors program's required leadership/service learning course, a key component to the program, provided the county community with more than 3,500 service hours to more than two dozen organizations. All these activities proved that we could replicate many things we do live within an online environment that builds community, with perhaps even more inclusivity. We look forward to on-campus experiences, but we also know that students and faculty have come to expect even more access to online programming than ever before. Post-COVID-19, we will be ever cognizant of accessibility to our entire program throughout a large and heavily populated county.

CONCLUSION

Although none of us were prepared to live in social isolation, to teach online, or to reinvent our programming in March 2020, we did it, and we emerged stronger for it. We learned much about how we learn, what we need to be well and stay well, and what it means to succeed. We also realized that creating community for our students and ourselves as educators is not just a frivolous activity that only the privileged may engage in, but that it is essential for students, faculty, and staff from all backgrounds to have access to the community we call honors.

With this realization, we made community the central component of our respective programs and allowed it to feed our classroom pedagogy, our advising and counseling, our programming for students and faculty, and all of our communications, including informational bulletins, personal emails to students, and our mission statements. Giving students, staff, and faculty a sense of belonging was central to fostering resilience and success in a time of unprecedented duress. This notion remains true in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Given the necessity and the benefits of community in honors, nothing was more threatening than the restrictions of COVID-19. The importance of community has not changed; we are now simply more aware of it. To some, the sense of community might have become even more important than before. What we learned, through trial and error, was how to nourish community within our programs regardless of distance and the altered modality of delivery. What we learned, too, was that it could be done.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Before They Set Foot on Campus: Building a Virtual Summer Community for Incoming Honors Students

LAURA G. ELDRED WITH GILLIAN WENHOLD
AND JACQUELYN MCBRIDE
LEBANON VALLEY COLLEGE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

On 27 February 2020, the Lebanon Valley College (LVC) faculty voted to approve a new honors program, and those of us who had championed the proposal were poised to issue invitations immediately since it was already late in the admissions cycle. Letters exited our mailroom several days later, and I interviewed the first potential student on 10 March. We knew that our time was short to contact students and obtain commitments to the LVC Honors Program as part of their college decision process, but we moved as expeditiously and professionally as possible. We were also laying some foundations for

spring and summer events to introduce students to the college, to the honors program, and to its faculty, knowing that community development would be critical to our success.

The faculty serving on the committee that had developed the original honors proposal were thrilled by the faculty's endorsement and eager to begin recruiting students. We had ambitious goals: a program that served our institutional mission by admitting students who had distinguished themselves not just with academic achievements but by applying their learning in service and leadership experiences in their communities. We hoped to offer such students a supportive foundation, both academically and socially, that would enable them to thrive and to demonstrate the best of our college's values through deep academic learning that then moves beyond the traditional classroom into community action. LVC honors uses the U.N. Sustainable Development goals as a curricular framework addressing the main challenges facing the globe in the near future. The faculty building our new honors program also passionately believed in making honors accessible to first-generation and ALANA (African, Latinx, Asian, and Native American) students, who are traditionally underrepresented in honors but for whom these programs have impressive benefits. As Bowman and Culver note, honors programs impact students' first-year GPA, college satisfaction, and retention after the first year, particularly at less selective institutions and particularly for underrepresented groups. The honors program was offering an innovative curricular framework and ambitious and inclusive admissions goals.

On 12 March 2020, only two days after our first student interview, LVC moved all classes and meetings online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the initial burst of panic, urgent questions surfaced. How would our newly recruited students get to know the college? How could they get to know their faculty? How in the world could they get to know each other without choosing roommates and building that sense of themselves as a cohort that we believed would be critical to the program's success? After all, the idea that in-person education trumps virtual engagement is a constant background tune, at least at smaller colleges. Laura Marcus provides a vivid version of this trope in her article about the substantial loss incurred by moving online: "Screens just can't offer what students are seeking: the chance to live and learn with peers in close-knit educational communities." Of

course, faculty have heard versions of this before, specifically regarding the virtual environment's supposed failures to create community. The task seemed daunting: launching a brand-new program rooted in community creation during a pandemic meant that traditional modes of cohort building were not going to fly. That said, although our impetus was pandemic-specific, the lessons learned about the creation and value of virtual communities are not limited to one historical moment.

My time as the Director of the First-Year Experience at LVC had provided me with a framework that I knew could still guide us even in unprecedented circumstances. I knew that whether particular students are satisfied with their college choice largely comes down to two factors: they need to be challenged and supported. These two factors are even noted within the title of Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot's *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College*. I admit to being more worried about the support than the challenge, given the strangeness of fall 2020. Because definitions of success are individual and vary widely, student support, in my view, should help the students to believe that they can be successful at that school based on their own definition of that term. Students who believe that they have the skills and resources to be successful are much more likely to be so, and students who feel like they may not have the necessary skills are more likely to meet those lower expectations.¹ The second factor supporting student success is that students must perceive themselves as having a community: people, including both faculty and peers, who value, support, and engage with them both in and out of the classroom. This value placed on community is a primary driver of the Living-Learning Community (LLC) concept, which has now been supported by decades of research (Shapiro and Levine; Smith and MacGregor; Inkelas; Nelson; Kampfe et al). As Dotter and King explain in an earlier essay in this volume in which they draw on work from scholars like Kuh, Eyler, and Gablenick, community development is essential: sociality underpins much of what we define as community, such as a sense of belonging, personal and group well-being, and a sense of routine and normalcy. These lessons were particularly important for us as we sought to build a brand-new community without upper-class students or an institutional honors history to provide a foundation.

The goal then was clear: we needed to enable our prospective students to envision themselves as successful here and to facilitate the creation of community with faculty and peers in both academic and informal contexts, and we needed to be able to accomplish both of those goals within a completely virtual environment. Although we anticipated in March 2020 that things would be back to normal far earlier than they have been, LVC fairly quickly moved summer 2020 classes and meetings to online modalities, so it was clear that summer engagement meant virtual engagement.

We proceeded with a plan that was high-touch, relationship-driven, personalized, student-focused, and wholly online. Including a cycle of personalized marketing communications, one-on-one interviews, virtual meetings between students and various campus representatives, social media postings, and a “concierge service” for questions, the plan successfully connected students to the campus and to each other. This strategy was initially driven by the usual campus areas: admissions, marketing, and the honors director. Eventually, the students themselves, who fostered an online community very successfully once the foundations were set and introductions were made, drove the process. In a year in which many schools struggled with enrollment and summer melt because of COVID-19 uncertainties, our honors community persisted and grew through the summer as connections solidified into friendships. Given the difficulties of this year and the critical role that the students’ own initiatives played in our success, two student contributors are included in this essay, providing their own view of the factors that supported their enrollment and persistence in our honors program. In my own mind, and the mind of my student collaborators here, it was a surprisingly unqualified success.

THE INVITATION PROCESS

Regardless of the pandemic, establishing the honors program in late February meant that we were not lined up well with the college admissions cycle. We built our honors program as an LLC, at least for our first-year students, so we needed to fill our class with residential students who were willing to commit to living with the honors cohort, which meant we needed students who had not yet chosen their roommates. We were very short on time to build our class, and we needed

to do immediate outreach because we had too little time to depend on passive mechanisms like waiting for students to independently find our webpage and submit an application. This situation meant that I spent several weeks living in our admissions office, looking for students who combined academic achievement with a history of service or leadership activities as well as some evidence of broad academic interests beyond just their prospective major. I was thrilled to find a substantial number of amazing students who excelled in service and academic curiosity.

As I reviewed files, I took detailed notes on the extracurricular activities of the students I planned to invite as well as any other items that made their record stand out. I then used that information to personalize every invitation letter or email that went out. These personalized invitations are particularly powerful for students who may not see themselves as honors students, including ALANA and first-generation students. Certainly, this task entailed a great deal of work for me, but it was a critical part of our cohort-building strategy that also aligned with our goal to admit numbers of first-generation and ALANA students at a rate that at least matched and preferably exceeded the overall institutional percentages. We did successfully exceed institutional representation. Writing about the program at Stephen F. Austin State University, Baker Pattillo and Michael Tkacik have pointed toward the potential value of this kind of personalization. In the context of recruiting underserved students, Pattillo and Tkacik note that the director sends a “personal email” to students who are flagged by admissions, although it is not clear that the text of that email is tailored to the student’s background and interests (134). “Admissions representatives and recruiters,” Angela D. Mead argues, “should reach out to first-generation and low-income college students, who may not think that honors is for them, and encourage them to apply” (27). Mead also notes that these students may have “fears about fitting in or handling the academic expectations” (29). Although Mead also does not explicitly discuss a personalized invitation strategy, it does seem calculated to address students’ potential concerns about whether honors is for them. Every invitation that I sent outlined why I, as director, thought that the student would enrich the program. I took some time to elaborate on how impressive each student’s record was, through their service, leadership, and/or broad academic experiences. This strategy meant that the invitation letter presented students with

evidence that the college and our honors program would approach and respect each of them for their individual experiences, and it helped our prospective students feel seen and valued. It also seems likely that as organizations struggled to move online in March and April of 2020, a personalized outreach strategy may have felt like a balm within a coldly virtual landscape.

Students who responded were then invited to interview. Only one of those interviews ended up happening face-to-face, but the online version of the interview worked in the same way. We approached all interviews as opportunities to build relationships with the students and not as an opportunity to weed out any student from our pool. The decision to invite a student to interview was truly an affirmation of our intention to admit the student; the goal of the interview was relationship building, not decision making. All students who interviewed were offered a spot in the program at the conclusion of the interview. Furthermore, all interviews were framed as an opportunity for me, as the honors director, to learn more about the experiences and activities that I had already indicated in the invitation letter made them a good match for our program goals. Students were then able to enter the interview from a position of relative strength and confidence, with the director of the program supporting their candidacy and telling them that they had the background and experiences to flourish in and contribute to the honors program. The interview became an interaction about building students' confidence by helping them understand that the institution valued them and the honors program. I would also add that I truly loved getting to know each of the students better through the interview process, which then became the foundation of my relationship with them. The survey of our students conducted in January 2021, with 31 of 35 students responding, indicated the value they put on these different elements of the interview.

Interviews also allowed me to inform students that spots in the program were limited to a maximum of 36 students; to answer any questions that students might have about the program or its benefits; to clarify what they needed to do to secure their spot in honors; and to end with a hearty "congratulations" for their admission to the program and their impressive achievements. This process helped us to fill 35 of our 36 available slots for the year; we actually could have filled the last slot from a waitlist of female students, but because of the organization

of the LLC, we needed the 36th slot to be awarded to a male student, and we did have fewer male responses to invitations.²

Table 1. January 2021 Student Survey (31 Participants)

Question: In my honors interview with Dr. Eldred, I valued: [choose as many as apply]			
Option Number	Answer	Number Selecting this Option	Percentage
1	Information about classes and expectations in the honors program	28	90.03
2	Knowing that I had the background and experiences that made me a good honors candidate	29	93.55
3	The personal invitation to the honors program	27	87.10
4	Meeting and building a relationship with the honors director	30	96.77
5	The ability to ask questions about the program	29	93.55
6	Other	1	3.23
7	Is there any other information that would have been helpful in the interview?	0	0.00

Student Perspectives on the Invitation Process

From Jacquelyn McBride

When I finally heard about the honors program at Lebanon Valley College, I was still knee-deep in the process of accepting a school that combined academics, athletics, and service into the success of

their students. The honors program was a culmination of all of the things that I valued, so I made my decision to accept LVC and apply to the program before the spots were filled. Within a few days, Dr. Eldred reached out to me with a distinct list of qualities and attributes that I had that fit the program and asked me to schedule an interview with her. In all of my college interviews and email conversations, I had never once had an interviewer look so in-depth at my résumé and personalize the letter I was getting. When I got to the Zoom interview, I was beyond nervous, as I wanted so desperately to get into this program. Dr. Eldred quelled my fears, asking me perceptive questions that indicated that she wanted me there, not only for the accolades that she could see on paper, but also for the responses and thoughtfulness that I brought to the interview. I felt like more than just a number; I felt recognized and valued as a member of this community. The minute I was given the email of my acceptance into this program, I paid my deposit to the school. The support and visibility shown to me before being an official member of this college is something that makes the honors program, and the virtual community we created, so impactful to my college experience.

From Gillian Wenhold

Through my experiences with receiving letters of recognition and acceptance from institutions and groups, I can understand the muted excitement of getting those copy-and-pasted exclamations of "congratulations!" However, my recognition as a candidate for the Honors Program at Lebanon Valley College was shown with a personalized letter that instilled a sense of pride, want, and belonging from the beginning. As the process continued and I had a similarly personalized interview preceding my acceptance into the program, these senses were heightened. Not only was I being recognized as one-out-of-36 members in the program, but also as a person with potential: the potential to define and achieve success in the academic environment of my present and future. The warm and supportive energy that was present within the interview and in-between the lines of the letters helped create a sense of community even before meeting any of the other inductees. Community to me is about finding those people who want nothing less than the best for you and everyone else, and building a support system available to everyone regardless of the goals and ambitions they strive for. The knowledge that, even before stepping foot on campus as a student, there was

someone already devoted to providing any means necessary for our success and growth in potential blew me away. It filled me with bubbling anticipation and excitement for what is to come, and those feelings persisted throughout the summer and continued as the first academic year ended.

SUMMER ENGAGEMENT

Personalized invitations and confidence-building interviews successfully filled our class, but resting on our laurels was impossible. As a fledgling program, we needed to demonstrate strong outcomes to secure the longevity of honors at LVC. The college was also concerned about summer melt being a high risk in summer 2020 with so much uncertainty in both the financial and medical realms. Families needed to feel confident that the college and honors program were still a worthwhile investment. The students themselves had significant anxieties about beginning their college journey during a pandemic. Honors needed to serve as a bridge between high school and higher education for these students, and this bridge needed to support students' anticipation of success and their sense of belonging within the honors community. Programs and strategies over the summer focused on these elements. We offered a suite of online communications and activities to students, including social media postings, student surveys, targeted virtual events, and regular check-ins from the program director.

We used Facebook as our social media communications hub. I created an "LVC Honors 2020" Facebook group and added students as they interviewed with the program. Students were encouraged to introduce themselves to other students, including some pictures, and I responded to each post. I developed a list of questions related to helping students choose a roommate and then asked students to post their answers. This structure facilitated the building of relationships as students reached out to communicate one-on-one with prospective roommates. I also used Facebook surveys to obtain student feedback on areas of interest for virtual meetings, offering them options to learn more about residential life, extracurriculars at LVC, study abroad, internships and service, LVC classes, and "other," allowing them to add their own topics like athletics at the college.

This survey led to a sequence of virtual information and discussion sessions focused on the areas of most student interest, which were residential life, extracurriculars, and study abroad. For each area, a campus representative was invited to share information with the students; residential life was popular since students were able to meet their honors hall Resident Assistants. The extracurriculars meeting featured the director of student activities and the director of study abroad. Each meeting occurred on a Tuesday afternoon, lasted about an hour, and was recorded, and the recording was distributed to students afterward. Certainly, these meetings provided a method for distributing information, but their purpose was more than just that. Offering sessions on the areas about which students expressed interest allowed the program to demonstrate its student-centered and responsive approach while supporting student perceptions that the program attended to the needs of individuals. Based on a survey in January 2021, which included responses from 31 of our 35 students, 68% of students attended our session on extracurricular activities; 55% attended the event on study abroad; 48% attended the residential life discussion. Students who attended the events overwhelmingly found them either “extremely” or “somewhat” valuable.

Another feature of summer virtual engagement was my outreach as honors director. Approximately every three weeks, I reached out individually to every student in the cohort for an update on their summer and to see if they had any questions. They appreciated the contact and were highly responsive. Students sometimes replied with questions about honors courses or housing, but just as frequently they reached out with questions about financial aid, major requirements, or meal plan questions—all of which were outside my purview and knowledge. Regardless, I acted as a concierge for student questions and made sure that I facilitated students receiving the answers they needed. This meant I was regularly reaching out to other offices either seeking answers or asking them to contact the student in cases where the question was more complex. By serving as a one-stop resource for honors students who had onboarding questions, I further facilitated the students’ integration with the honors community. They recognized that in my role of honors director, I was a part of their support network and that I was going to facilitate their success on campus. Ninety-seven percent of students either strongly agreed or agreed that I reached

out to answer their questions; 100% either strongly agreed or agreed that their questions were answered. Ninety-four percent of students either strongly agreed or agreed that they felt like part of the honors community, and 84% of students strongly agreed or agreed that they felt like part of the community before they arrived on campus.

Table 2. Summer 2021 Student Survey

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Dr. Eldred reached out over the summer to see if I had any questions.	70.00% 21 students	26.67% 8 students	3.33% 1 student	0.00% 0 students	0.00% 0 students
	Total: 30 students				
My questions were answered over the summer.	64.52% 20 students	35.48% 11 students	0.00% 0 students	0.00% 0 students	0.00% 0 students
	Total: 31 students				
I can be successful at LVC.	70.97% 22 students	25.81% 8 students	3.23% 1 student	0.00% 0 students	0.00% 0 students
	Total: 31 students				
I feel like part of the community of the Honors Program at LVC.	70.97% 22 students	22.58% 7 students	6.45% 2 students	0.00% 0 students	0.00% 0 students
	Total: 31 students				
I felt like part of the Honors Program community at LVC even before I came to campus.	54.84% 17 students	29.03% 9 students	12.90% 4 students	3.23% 1 student	0.00% 0 students
	Total: 31 students				

Student Experiences with Summer Engagement

From Gillian Wenhold

As I was in the transition between high school and college, all the information that was unknown to me was daunting. There were new responsibilities and opportunities arising that were necessary to complete or pursue before my arrival on campus, and I was very lost. The discussion sessions that were held on various different topics related to LVC helped tremendously with navigating this intense “pre-college” period of time. I was able to learn more about the topics I was interested in and meet the people who exist to help us and are willing to do so. The meetings eased my mind about some of the things on my “worry list,” and I was able to focus on the social and financial aspects of my acceptance at LVC (which I also found help with through other meetings and forms of communication). They also created a familiarity between myself and the faculty involved, so I found it easier to reach out to them if I needed help with anything.

One of the ways I found myself reaching out was through the check-ins facilitated by Dr. Eldred. Although the questions I asked during the actual check-ins were minimal, they showed me—similarly with the personalized letter and interview—that there was someone available to help me with anything. I was always the type of person to be hesitant to reach out for help, especially if the person I am contacting is unfamiliar, so it was a huge relief to have someone I knew and was comfortable with that I could reach out with all of my questions about anything. Even if she did not know the answer to a question right away, Dr. Eldred would communicate with the other faculty on campus to get the answers we deserved. This strengthened my sense of community not just within the honors program but within LVC as a whole. I was learning more about my college, meeting amazing new people, and flourishing in the ever-growing feelings of belonging and excitement for what is to come.

From Jacquelyn McBride

The adjustment from high school to college is difficult; the transition during a global pandemic is a thousand times harder. Cancellations of the many college events that foster a sense of community for incoming students left me wondering how I was going to make friends in this new stage of life. These information

sessions allowed me to make friends and connections to the school well before I walked on campus. Knowing that I had more than just my advisors and peers on my side was a relief for me, as I had already been through enough uncertainties during my senior year of high school. People from housing, student affairs, volunteerism, and study abroad were rooting for me and were chomping at the bit to help me succeed at this institution. I have used these resources frequently this year, and I attribute it all to the honors program Zooms that Dr. Eldred set up.

Beyond just the informational Zoom check-ins, Dr. Eldred made sure to contact us individually to see if we had any questions for her. While I have never been a quiet person, thus frequently asking questions during the informational Zooms, Dr. Eldred made sure to allow us the opportunity to ask questions away from a wide audience. By giving me the option to talk to her in private, I was able to ask many questions that were personal to my transition from high school to college, giving me safety and privacy when trying to traverse this new environment called college.

BEYOND FACEBOOK: STUDENT-INITIATED SUMMER ENGAGEMENT

One thing that is important for honors administrators to realize is that students' digital tools and usage trends differ from our own. This gap will continue to exist although the tools themselves will change; administrators will likely not be using the same sites and applications that our first-year students use. In 2020, although I used Facebook in my role as an administrator, I did not understand or use Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, or other media popular with the students. Such a gap is one critical reason that students need to be involved in planning summer engagement and outreach strategies. In our case, our admitted students used the Facebook connection to exchange names and other information to make contact on other social media sites that were more generationally appropriate. One solution is to ask upper-class honors students to take the reins in facilitating interaction in modalities that administrators are not familiar with; in our case, the incoming students themselves did this work because they wanted to connect, and they wanted to connect through the modalities and technologies that were most comfortable for them. The January 2021 Survey (Table

1) indicated that 72% of our students participated in Zoom events organized and facilitated by other honors students. The survey also noted that 72% of students were interacting on Snapchat; these (very popular) interaction opportunities were spearheaded by our admitted students, like McBride and Wenhold.

From Jacquelyn McBride

I was terrified to make the transition to college, but Dr. Eldred gave us a great steppingstone to meeting other honors students: a Facebook group chat. While not exactly the most modern way to interact, it was pivotal in the creation of the honors community. We shared little snippets of our personalities in order to find roommates but quickly took to other social media platforms to create stronger bonds. Ranging from Snapchat to Instagram to Zoom to Discord, we found a great way to interact with one another even while having to remain apart. I wanted to have a large group Zoom together, so I took it upon myself to initiate and create a Kahoot game night, where we competed to guess fun facts about our peers. That initial Zoom inspired additional meetings, which consisted of laughing, playing games, and talking about our times during Corona. Without these Zoom calls, I do not think that I would have found a family at LVC so quickly; my honors peers have become more than just classmates, but a group of people who can make me smile, help alleviate my burdens, and give me a shoulder to cry on. Not a day would go by without me walking down the hall and stopping to say hello to my friends who became family. I am grateful for the ability to interact with others in the virtual world, especially during a deadly pandemic. The virtual community that was fostered during the summer made the move from my small hometown to Lebanon Valley one of the easiest things to happen that year.

From Gillian Wenhold

My first interactions with the other members of the honors program were through the "LVC Honors 2020" Facebook page, but the communication between all of us was not confined there. Other social media platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, and Zoom served as the homes for most of our conversations and activities. By using different platforms for communication, the outreach available to all the students increased because there was flexibility as well as a variety of options. For example, there were members

of the program who did not have a Snapchat account, so they could not be a part of that group chat. Rather than excluding them entirely, which would have severed them from the community, we used other forms of communication (i.e., Instagram or Facebook) to interact with those people and keep them involved. This involvement and interaction that we facilitated during the summer is one of the main reasons the creation of our community was so successful. The weekly Zoom meetups and frequent messaging in our group chats meant that we could learn more about each other, build close connections, and create a feeling of family that built the foundations for our virtual community. Through the communication that was facilitated during the summer and outside administrative hands, I was able to find my people: those that shared similar motivations and passions and that I would do anything to help and support through all our shared and individual endeavors.

COMING TO CAMPUS AND ADJUSTING TO FALL 2020

LVC's fall 2020 semester of classes began on August 24, but we had a phased move-in process that staggered student arrivals during the previous week. On August 18 and 19, I met with about half of our students on each date for a campus tour and Q&A session, which allowed me to connect in person with the honors students, to address any lingering or new questions, and to show students where their classes would be located when they began the following week. During fall of 2020, I also had the opportunity to interact regularly and deeply with all of our honors students because of my role as the instructor for their First-Year Experience companion course. LVC's First-Year Experience sequence is a 4-credit experience split between a 3-credit course that is themed (the honors student course introduced them to the U.N. Sustainable Development goals) and a 1-credit course focused on making a successful transition to college through the development of academic skills like time and task management as well as emotional regulation skills like stress management. As their 1-credit instructor, I saw the honors students weekly and also had a series of four one-on-one coaching meetings with each student in which I could check in about their social and academic progress and recommend support services like tutoring or counseling. In this course and in our meetings, I sought to normalize the use of campus support services and to counter the

perception that honors students should be above or beyond needing help. One of my key goals in my interactions with these students was to bolster their belief in their own success, and I used both in-person and virtual meetings, one-on-one and in groups, to reinforce this message in all modalities.

I emphasized many times that everyone struggles with something sometime and that campus support was part of the LVC package; using resources when one needs them is part of being a smart and successful student. I explicitly discussed and rejected the idea that academic struggles or emotional/social challenges meant that the students did not belong in the program. Honors students are certainly not the exception to increasingly high mental health challenges and needs on college campuses. Indeed, honors students may experience more anxiety about grades (Long and Lange, *ctd.* in Cognard-Black and Spisak 128). In order for honors students to believe in their own success, they—perhaps even more than other students—need to be encouraged to use support services, and honors administrators and faculty must emphasize to them that using those services is beneficial to honors students and never stigmatized. I am particularly proud that 96% of our students—as represented in our January 2021 survey—either strongly agreed or agreed that they can be successful at the college. That same 96% affirmed that their honors faculty support them. In my meetings, most of which occurred virtually, I regularly mentioned study pods and tutoring resources as well as counseling services, and I encouraged students to use those services before things reached crisis levels. I was heartened through the coaching sequence to see students increase their use of support services, and I hope that my messaging around normalizing the use of support meant that students felt supported making that choice. Regardless, as the 1-credit FYE instructor, I was able to spend many hours with each student, much of that time in one-on-one coaching sessions. Some of this time was in physical spaces and some of it in virtual spaces, but both arrangements built a strong foundation of support in which I was able to emphasize my belief in and support for their success. Institutionally, we found many anecdotes suggesting that offering conferences and office hours both in person and virtually, via services like Zoom, increased student attendance by lowering the barriers to engagement. Students no longer needed to leave their room or rush across campus for an appointment.

Another way that we sought to give students agency in creating the honors program itself was by establishing the Honors Program Student Council (HPSC), which was empowered to create its own goals, positions, and structure as well as a framework for elections. The HPSC has assisted with admissions events, created the design for an honors T-shirt, crafted the plan for student elections, and helped to plan virtual events. Many programs have a similar council, but the HPSC facilitated some of its own meetings online and solicited feedback on community-building activities that could occur online, so it was an important vector for communication and feedback that promoted student agency within our hybrid format for programming.

When LVC pivoted to online instruction one week before Thanksgiving because of rising COVID-19 cases on campus in 2020, the HPSC provided a clearinghouse for communication. Before students moved home, the HPSC initiated casual conversations with students about ideas for virtual programming over the long winter break; I then created a survey featuring those student ideas. As we did in the summer, we asked students for their preferences within a menu of possible activities, and we then instituted these community-building virtual activities based on student feedback: a Zoom gingerbread-house building contest event in December; weekly “Honors buddies” check-in topics in which students texted each other with updates; a secret Santa gift exchange for those who opted to participate; and a Zoom bingo night with our career services center. This series of programs was essential in maintaining community contact and coherence over a three-month break from mid-November (when fall classes moved online) to mid-February (when spring classes moved to in-person instruction). The essential features of these virtual activities were that students were consulted about their programming ideas, and students were surveyed about their preferred activities and the best times to schedule them. These features meant that the chosen activities developed both student community and student agency; their feedback was a critical part of selecting the programming offered during the winter break.

Were we successful? The answer is an unqualified yes. We had thirty-five honors students on our first day of fall 2020; we had thirty-five honors students on the first day of spring 2021; we had thirty-five honors students on our last day of spring 2021. The students also

indicate a high degree of program satisfaction, as our early spring 2020 survey of student perception of the program revealed. (Results of that survey have been included throughout this essay.) The challenge then becomes to recognize clearly the features of the plan for fall 2020 that directly led to this success and then duplicating those features for future years. A personalized approach to community building and student success, built on frequent interaction and strategic opportunities for students to exercise agency over their program, has the highest probability of success, and that remains true in an online environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the experiences above, we recommend that honors programs that need or want to develop a virtual community consider:

1. Personalizing communications so that students feel seen and valued in virtual contexts;
2. Giving students ownership of their community through asking them about the kinds of activities they want to engage in, the times that work best for their schedules, and then being responsive to their feedback;
3. Create virtual opportunities for focused one-on-one interactions and mentoring that bolster students' sense of belonging and anticipated success;
4. Provide a principal contact person (a "conciierge") who can find needed information, which reduces the impersonality of virtual communications;
5. Encourage students to take ownership of their community and develop relationships and interactions in other modalities.

MOVING FORWARD

During the admissions season for our 2021 class, much of our recruitment and onboarding processes were hybrid, with selected face-to-face elements like campus visits and select admissions presentations but with increased visibility and access for online engagement. We continued many successful strategies from the recruitment of our 2020 class. Many invitations were individualized although we also received unsolicited applications via the program website; we conducted one-on-one interviews via Zoom with applicants whom we wished to invite; and we now have created a Facebook group for students to get to know each other, share roommate information, and vote in polls about summer programming options. Many members of our 2020 class of honors students volunteered to mentor new students through Zoom meetings, emails, and phone calls. I also surveyed our 2020 class of honors students about summer engagement opportunities. For example, they held honors game nights using a Discord server to chat. I held interviews via Zoom to fill our 2021 incoming class, and I hosted virtual sessions on residential life and extracurriculars.

I look back over the early years of our program with some astonishment. In a period of so much uncertainty and such loss of community for many of us, this fledgling program not only found its footing but thrived by building students' belief in their own success and faith in the security of their community with virtual tools in the spring and summer and predominantly hybrid tools in fall and winter. Virtual community can work if it is founded in genuine, individualized interactions in which participants feel seen and recognized; if it is informed by the students' feedback and agency; and, perhaps most luckily for us, if it creates a springboard for students to take true ownership of their honors experience.

ENDNOTES

¹Claude Steele's work on stereotype threat underscores this principle. Barbara McKenna aptly describes his work: "when a person is experiencing stereotype threat a good portion of their cognitive resources can be taken up with addressing the threat rather than the task at hand, causing underperformance" (McKenna). Alternatively, having an experience of

success that then helps students build their belief in their own success can be transformative (McKenna).

²As noted by Scott et al. in “Demography of Honors,” honors programs trend female across all institution types across the U.S., with an average of 63% women (Table 3, 197).

³Honors students are at least as likely to have mental health concerns as general members of the student population, with potentially higher likelihood of mental instability (Cognard-Black and Spisak 140; Cuevas et al.; and Cross et al.). Kelleher’s “Mental Health Needs in the Honors Community” identifies common anxieties around plans for the future, family relationships, sleep, academic performance, and time management—areas that are also of concern for the broader student body (30).

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Building Virtual Community: The Power of Peer-Led Engagement

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It feels great to see that so many students are interested in being a part of a virtual community. The transition from an in-person experience to a virtual platform was big, and initially, students felt disconnected, but through the virtual events we have helped create a strong virtual community for our honors members to learn and grow together.

—Unnati Nayak (IUPUI Honors College Social Media Intern)

The role of learning communities and their positive impact on academic performance, feelings of belonging, retention, and engagement has been the focus of much research (Zhao and Kuh; Pike, Kuh, and McCormick; Rocconi). This research, however, has primarily focused on curricular space. Following the research by Nichols and

Chang, other honors scholars such as Kampfe, Chasek, and Falconer looked at engagement and retention in honors between lower- and upper-division students. Overall, they found that peer influence was the least important reason for students to remain in the honors program. They noted, however, that lower-division students identified the student community as an important factor influencing their decision to remain in honors (Kampfe, Chasek, and Falconer 226).

We contend that the student community is more important than ever in helping students become and remain connected. In *College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*, Terrell L. Strayhorn reviews the research on belonging, finding community, and the strong, positive connection to academic performance and retention (2-3). He builds on the findings of Joseph L. White and James H. Cones III who note the “important and powerful role” of peers “in facilitating sense of belonging” (2). Fostering community and a sense of belonging is more important and more challenging than ever before because of the increased demand for hybrid and virtual modalities in addition to traditional face-to-face formats. Our focus here is on building virtual community, where community is broadly defined. We are not limiting our definition to a learning community although some of our students do participate in an honors living-learning community, nor are we focusing on the classroom space. Our vantage point is on engagement with our entire student community outside the curricular space to make sure that first-year students feel welcome and that all students feel a sense of belonging and connection.

The Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) Honors College developed a multi-layered strategy to foster interpersonal connection and a sense of belonging among incoming students as well as continued opportunities for engagement among the entire community of scholars. Via social media posts and takeovers, peer mentor commitment, and virtual activities organized and led by students, along with more traditional face-to-face events, our new students developed connections, relationships, and a sense of identity as honors scholars. Our continuing students took on new leadership roles in the honors college, displaying their talents and contributing in ways they had not before in face-to-face formats. This chapter will share our strategies for building virtual community and its correlation

with our strong retention in honors at IUPUI and our students' sense of belonging and connection. We will start by sharing our efforts to enhance virtual community in fall 2020 and student survey responses to our efforts, followed by what we learned from the experience and plan to retain going forward.

OUR VIRTUAL TRANSITION

All honors college student organizations are charged with planning student events, often with assistance from their advisor and the honors college staff. What we realized, however, is that each student organization tends to work independently from the others and may rely a great deal on their advisor. Virtual organizing created the opportunity for student leaders to work together across organizations and for more students to take on leadership roles. To that end, we surveyed students early to ask what they wanted to participate in or lead. We said yes whenever possible and allowed students to create and organize their events, which led to several creative Zoom sessions on everything from virtual yoga to dance aerobics.

To foster collaboration, we reorganized our fall 2020 Open House so that each student organization had a place on the planned virtual program. Each organization presented its events for the semester and actively recruited members. While we normally hold an in-person Open House each fall with student organizations in attendance, creating a program with everyone sharing their plans with the entire student body in real time (or watching later) was a new feature. This shift allowed students to put together a communication plan that would be attractive to their peers and generate feedback on future ideas. We also turned the responsibility for this event over to our Honors College Student Council, a crucial decision as we realized later.

Social media was a salient part of our virtual strategy. Our student council president and other student leaders took it upon themselves to connect each organization on social media. As a result, when one student or organization posted an event or activity, others retweeted or shared the event to amplify exposure. Additionally, we hired a social media intern, an honors college student who was a student organization leader, to coordinate social media efforts beyond our student organizations. For example, the intern created opportunities

to feature students during specific times of the semester such as First-Generation Student Week, International Week, and other key moments during the academic calendar. She requested brief bios from students, and those who responded were highlighted, connecting additional voices to our virtual community. We enabled students to take over our social media account as well. Students took followers through their day and answered important questions such as how they planned an honors contract or what they liked about research or volunteer activities. The result was a web of interaction that bolstered the sense of community rather than one student or organization posting independently to limited followers.

PEER MENTOR COMMITMENT

[T]he peer mentors were more important than ever, especially for building community. . . . Connecting with incoming students was more than answering questions about college but was providing a space to build relationships when it was hard to make new friends.

—Michila Weddle (Three-Year Peer Mentor)

The Honors College Peer Mentor Program provides one-on-one mentoring for incoming students as well as social events that are open to everyone in the program. We can accommodate just over half of our incoming students annually with approximately forty returning students serving as mentors. In addition to the mentors, we have a council of seven peer mentor leaders who are the student voice of the program. The Leader Council developed approaches for this program to run on a virtual platform that we have continued to use since the return to campus.

Although many of our whole group social programs are in person, we have found that virtual activities also attract students. We have offered two different virtual social events. The first was an online movie trivia contest, with gift cards as prizes, that was created by one of the peer mentor leaders using Kahoot. The second was a virtual “meet and greet” event using Glimpse, a networking app. The app essentially replicates an in-person mixer by pairing students in breakout rooms to get to know one another. Glimpse includes features such as games, icebreaker questions, a social media sharing feature, and a virtual

photobooth. Students who took part in the Glimpse event provided brief reviews of their experiences: “Glimpse seemed like a really great way to just meet a bunch of people at one event, and it seemed like a fun way to get to know someone.” “I liked how it matched us and then supplied us with games and icebreaker[s].” Students were paired with another student for five minutes in each breakout room. The reviews indicated that five minutes was not long enough. The version of Glimpse that we used for this event was free although there were nominal fee versions available that could have added enhanced features to the event. Currently, Glimpse is moving away from its individual platform and will be teaming with Twine to create speed networking breakout rooms for Zoom. The partnership with Zoom could make our students more comfortable with using this program since they are quite familiar with using Zoom already.

Our mentors have also found creative ways to conduct their one-on-one meetings virtually with their mentees. The Peer Mentor Leader Council provided support for virtual mentoring by adding several resources to the Honors Peer Mentor Canvas site. Some of the resources came from the mentors themselves; we had polled the group of new mentors to ask about their ideas for virtual mentoring and compiled them in the Canvas site. We have found that some mentors and mentees prefer to meet over Zoom exclusively or use a combination of in-person and Zoom meetings. Mentors who meet over Zoom have introduced their mentees to other students in the program by having group mentoring sessions with other mentors and mentees. The virtual platform creates much more flexibility in meeting times, allowing for larger group meetings such as these. Mentors also play some popular online games with their mentees such as Gathertown, Backyard.co, and Among Us to build rapport. Ultimately, the opportunity for virtual mentoring has stretched the students’ perception of what can be done to create community. Virtual mentoring has allowed for more flexibility in meeting styles and locations and has pushed the mentors to develop new ways to bond with their mentees.

VIRTUAL SERVICE: ACADEMICS FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Academics for Civic Engagement (ACE) is our student-led community service organization. Historically, all events planned by ACE were

face-to-face and mostly held off campus in cooperation with community partners. The group typically planned 1-2 service projects per month that were held on the weekends. Going into the 2020–2021 academic year, ACE adjusted its approach to remain active as an organization by offering opportunities for more students to be involved. They conceptualized an innovative approach to service by doing it virtually. The student leaders researched organizations that offered the ability to volunteer online, such as the Smithsonian, and provided these resources to members. Service events were facilitated via Zoom. Participants logged into the event from their own device, signed in and out on a web-based shared document to track attendance, and completed virtual service during the set event time together. Participants could choose the online organization with which they would volunteer during that time period. Providing that choice allowed more students to contribute their time to an organization they cared about at each event; in contrast, an in-person volunteer event would designate only a single community partner, thus offering no options. Examples of their online service include transcribing historical documents, creating digital maps of unmapped areas, and translating documents to English from other languages. Each event had a leader who started and ended the event and facilitated opportunities for students to interact with each other by discussing the projects on which they were working. In this way, the participants still experienced the community-building benefits of an in-person service event while serving a variety of organizations from their own login location. In addition to the virtual events, they offered in-person events both in the fall and spring semesters doing river clean up and city landscaping projects.

Throughout the year, ACE took full advantage of the flexibility provided by the virtual setting, and they saw their member participation increase exponentially. Not only were they able to offer events more frequently and with a greater variety of days and times, but they could also increase the capacity of the virtual events compared to in-person events. Because virtual service events do not require coordinating with community partners to choose event dates, the event leaders were able to expand their virtual events to weekdays and evenings based on member requests. They also varied their event lengths to meet the needs of their membership. The virtual events provided participants with a variety of options so they could choose a

project that best fit their interests, thereby increasing engagement with the service itself in addition to engaging with their peers. Other virtual strategies ACE implemented included creating a digital newsletter and starting a social media account.

VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP: HONORS COLLEGE STUDENT COUNCIL

The Honors College Student Council (HCSC) began the 2020–2021 academic year with two goals: 1) to increase participation and community within HCSC itself and 2) to build relationships and community across all the honors college student organizations. Since in-person meetings would not allow all members to attend because two of the HCSC participants were international students living abroad, HCSC opted to move from bimonthly in-person meetings to shorter, weekly Zoom meetings. The weekly virtual meetings created a more consistent community for students to connect to without overstraining their schedules. HCSC also increased its communication using various messaging apps such as GroupMe.

To accomplish the goal of building community across all honors student organizations, HCSC transformed one of our honors college signature events, our fall semester Honors Open House. The open house is an opportunity for first-year students to familiarize themselves with the various honors student organizations and meet honors peers. The open house is typically organized by honors staff, but to transform it from a physical to a digital space would require a great deal of work and coordination. Here HCSC stepped in and led the way in terms of designing the layout and schedule, communicating with other student leaders, and organizing the new virtual open house. It was an incredible success with better participation than we have had in recent years.

In the spring, HCSC created what we hope will become another signature event, a virtual talent show, in collaboration with our Honors Arts & Culture Society. HCSC worked directly with other honors organizations to solicit student submissions of artwork or audio/video files and create a website to display them. Students submitted their talents via Canvas, our learning management system, and HCSC created a Google website to display the work. All students were able to vote on their favorites, and winners in each category received honors college merchandise. HCSC typically hosts a few events each academic

year, and the desire to promote community virtually prompted them to be even more creative than normal. They were proud that despite all the challenges of the year, they contributed in meaningful ways to the honors college community.

INCREASING ACCESS AND ENGAGEMENT: ALPHA LAMBDA DELTA/PHI ETA SIGMA

Alpha Lambda Delta/Phi Eta Sigma (ALD/PES) is the national first-year student honor society in which our campus chapter is a recognized leader. ALD/PES welcomes students who are members of the honors college and those who are not as long as they earn at least a 3.5 GPA during their first semester. Our campus chapter welcomes 350–450 new students each year, and in 2021, we had an increase in interest from incoming students compared to the previous year.

ALD/PES members engage in many in-person meetings as well as service and social events. Members gather together to carve and paint pumpkins for fun and shop for families in need during the holidays. They volunteer with Indy Parks by engaging in outdoor work during a Halloween event and a spring cleanup day. They also carried out one of their service themes—promoting literacy—by holding a book drive, volunteering for a local organization that provides free supplies to public school teachers, and helping sort books at a local school’s warehouse for distribution to its students. We have also given members a chance to try something new by making no-sew blankets for a local homeless shelter. ALD/PES provided the yarn and held a how-to session over Zoom. This activity was highly successful, and the feedback was quite positive.

Realizing that not all students are able to attend in-person events, the officers and chapter advisor provided access to virtual monthly meetings via Zoom; they included an interactive component that infused some energy into the sessions. For example, members shared something new they decided to try in the past few years. Examples included such things as volunteering for an animal rescue, learning to play a musical instrument, studying a new language, and taking a free online class about doing digital art. The students asked each other questions and gained some new ideas for how to make the most of their time and be productive. In another meeting, students shared

their hobbies and provided information about how to get involved in those hobbies. Once again, students had an opportunity to talk about themselves while offering new ideas to others. Chapter officers also facilitated group interaction just for fun by using breakout rooms for a team scavenger hunt. They also held a virtual Escape Room event during one of the meetings. In addition, each meeting includes a presentation by a staff or faculty member on a topic relevant to students, such as a presentation by our Counseling and Psychological Services office on dealing with stress through mindfulness. Although many students enjoy face-to-face interaction, a benefit of virtual meetings is the ability to reach a greater number of students because we can record all the meetings for later viewing by those students who could not attend. In addition to our Zoom meetings, officers created a GroupMe account to maintain frequent contact with each other.

ALD/PES has also increased its presence on Facebook and Instagram to keep members informed and involved and to spotlight students' accomplishments. Posts demonstrate that students are actively engaged, and they regularly feature the many achievements of students such as being recognized as one of IUPUI's Top 100 students, winning scholarships and awards, and presenting at virtual conferences. ALD/PES has also used social media as a substitute for an annual dance to raise funds for pediatric cancer research in honor of a former student who passed away from brain cancer. The students created a "Stay at Home, Slay at Home" fashion show contest showing off their best pandemic wear, and one member took orders and created digital art portraits for a small donation to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Finally, ALD/PES has taken advantage of the many new cost-friendly and convenient opportunities provided by the virtual environment that would not have been available as face-to-face activities because of inadequate funding or a time commitment away from campus. While sending large numbers of students to a conference is usually cost prohibitive because of the expense of transportation, lodging, food, and registration fees, ALD/PES has supported numerous free or low-cost virtual conference opportunities for a substantial number of students these past few years. While the organization can provide funding for two students to attend the Alpha Lambda Delta conference in person, fifteen students attended the virtual conference

in 2021. Additionally, four students collaborated on a presentation for the conference entitled “Be the Game Changer During the Pandemic.” Normally a handful of students attend the Phi Eta Sigma conference, but twenty-nine students were able to attend virtually in 2021. In addition, members presented at the free virtual Alpha Lambda Delta Leadership Summit and the low-cost Mid-East Honors Association virtual conference. All these great opportunities would not have been possible in an exclusively in-person format: this benefit is one of the advantages provided by the virtual environment. While in-person conferences offer many opportunities that virtual conferences do not, perhaps conference organizers will take note of the advantages and continue to provide a virtual option in some format to reach a larger audience and accommodate those members who lack the funding or the ability to take the time away from school. (See two essays on online conferences in this volume: Sara E. Quay et al., “Re-Reading Local Spaces: City as Text™ Goes Virtual” and Jon Blandford et al., “Cultivating Delight, Crossing Divides, and Solving Impossible Problems: Lessons Learned from a Year of Virtual Conferences.”)

SURVEY OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION, BELONGING, AND CONNECTION

We offered several virtual opportunities for students to interact with their honors peers, and we transferred the responsibility of leadership to our returning scholars. But did those efforts help students foster or deepen a sense of connection with our honors college community? Based on our survey data, the answer is yes. All honors college students were invited during the spring 2021 semester to participate in a survey on their virtual and face-to-face participation in honors college activities the previous semester. We had a 22% response rate: 220 of our 1,004 total students responded to the survey. Of those 220, 91 students who responded were also part of the 175 students in their first semester. Of the 829 returning scholars, 117 of them replied; another 12 students began the survey but did not finish it. (The complete survey can be found in Appendix A.)

Students were asked if they participated in virtual honors college events or activities and why. Thirty-three first-semester scholars

selected yes as did twenty-six returning scholars. The most popular reasons first-year scholars participated in virtual events included the following: “To meet my fellow honors college scholars,” “To learn more about my responsibilities as an honors scholar,” and “To connect with the honors college.” For returning scholars, the most cited reasons to participate in virtual events were as follows: “To develop relationships with my fellow honors scholars,” “To connect with the honors college,” and “To meet my fellow honors college scholars.” To meet others, develop relationships, and make connections dominated the reasons students gave for their participation.

We asked students to indicate their agreement with a series of statements on participation in honors college events and their feelings of connection using a seven-point Likert-scale, where one indicates strong disagreement and seven indicates strong agreement. (See Table 1.) We had strong overall agreement from first-year students with statements about participation in honors college events and feelings of importance and happiness about the decision to attend our university and join the honors college. The strongest overall agreement was with the following statement: “Participating in Honors College events made me feel like I am an important member of the Honors College community.” We were also happy to see strong agreement with the statement that participating in honors college events made students want to participate even more in the future.

The majority of first-year scholars indicated at least slight agreement with the statement that participating in honors college events made them more likely to enroll in the spring. While retention of our incoming class has been stable and strong (> 96%) in recent years, the pandemic made enrollment and retention a priority for many universities. The fall to spring retention rate of our 2020 incoming scholars was 96%, with retention of scholars who participated in our peer mentor program closer to 97%; retention of our continuing scholars fall to spring was 94.2%.

Feelings of connection and community were particularly strong among our returning students, with at least half selecting moderate or strong agreement with questions indicating their happiness in joining our campus and the honors college and feeling like they are an important member of our community. (See Table 2.)

Table 1. Spring 2021 Results for First-Year Scholars

First-Year Scholars	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Participating in Honors College events made me feel connected to the Honors College.	0.00%	7.41%	22.22%	3.70%	22.22%	29.63%	14.81%	4.89
Participating in Honors College events made me feel connected to my Honors College peers.	7.41%	14.81%	11.11%	14.81%	14.81%	18.52%	18.52%	4.44
Participating in Honors College events made me more likely to enroll in classes in the spring.	0.00%	7.41%	22.22%	3.70%	22.22%	29.63%	14.81%	4.67
Participating in Honors College events made me happy about my decision to attend IUPUI.	0.00%	3.70%	3.70%	22.22%	18.52%	25.93%	25.93%	5.37
Participating in the Honors College events made me happy about my decision to join the Honors College.	0.00%	3.70%	11.11%	7.41%	14.81%	33.33%	29.63%	5.52
Participating in Honors College events made me feel like I am an important member of the Honors College community.	7.69%	7.69%	7.69%	7.69%	19.23%	19.23%	30.77%	5.04
Participating in Honors College events made me want to participate even more in future semesters.	0.00%	15.38%	0.00%	11.54%	19.23%	26.92%	26.92%	5.23

Table 2. Spring 2021 Results for Returning Scholars

Returning Scholars	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Participating in Honors College events made me feel connected to the Honors College.	0.00%	0.00%	5.26%	15.79%	36.84%	21.05%	21.05%	5.36
Participating in Honors College events made me feel connected to my Honors College peers.	0.00%	0.00%	10.53%	15.79%	21.05%	26.32%	26.32%	5.42
Participating in Honors College events made me more likely to enroll in classes in the spring.	10.53%	10.53%	5.26%	42.11%	5.26%	5.26%	21.05%	4.21
Participating in Honors College events made me happy about my decision to attend IUPUI.	0.00%	5.26%	0.00%	31.58%	10.53%	10.53%	42.11%	5.47
Participating in the Honors College events made me happy about my decision to join the Honors College.	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	11.11%	27.78%	16.67%	44.44%	5.94
Participating in Honors College events made me feel like I am an important member of the Honors College community.	0.00%	5.56%	5.56%	16.67%	22.22%	27.78%	22.22%	5.33
Participating in Honors College events made me want to participate even more in future semesters.	0.00%	0.00%	5.26%	15.79%	21.05%	31.58%	26.32%	5.58

We asked students another series of questions on belonging that mirrored a campus-level survey of entering students using the same seven-point Likert-scale. On the campus survey, our incoming honors scholars indicated a slightly higher level of agreement with each statement than did our campus population on questions related to feelings of belonging on campus (Rauch). (See Table 3.)

We adjusted the language of the campus survey to ask about feelings of belonging in the IUPUI Honors College. (See Table 4.) Incoming scholars who participated in honors college events indicated comparable levels of agreement to the campus survey responses while returning scholars who took part in honors college events indicated much higher levels of agreement with statements on belonging.

Moreover, scholars who did not participate in any honors college events indicated much lower levels of agreement with statements on belonging. (See Table 5.)

Overall, we were pleased with the results of this survey, especially because students' sense of connection and belonging correlated with participating in honors college events in virtual and face-to-face formats. Importantly, these events were peer-led, adding support to the research of Strayhorn and others on the powerful role that peers play in fostering a sense of connection.

INSTITUTIONALIZING PEER-LED VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

We learned many important lessons that we plan to carry forward, not the least of which is the power of peers working together to shape a common experience for all. During the 2020–2021 academic year, our student leaders may have felt even more responsibility to create ways for their peers to engage. Student organizations met via Zoom more often than they would have met face-to-face; they offered both virtual and in-person activities and made use of alternative apps and platforms. All students were encouraged to lend their voice whenever possible, be it through social media takeovers, sharing their individual interests and talents, or just offering their input on what they and their peers might enjoy. Importantly, our experience illustrates the power of peers having these new virtual experiences together. Not only did students come away with a strong sense of connection and a new skill or information facilitated by their peers, but they had a unique common

Table 3. Spring 2021 Results for First-Year Scholars (Rauch)

Statements on Belonging	All Beginner Mean (N=1030)	Honors Beginner Mean (N=72)
The IUPUI campus community has made me feel welcome.	5.82	5.88
I see myself as part of the IUPUI community.	5.37	5.64
I feel that I fit right in on campus.	5.37	5.45
I feel a sense of belonging to IUPUI.	5.36	5.4
I feel that I am a member of the IUPUI Community.	5.22	5.3

Table 4. Belonging Survey Results for Incoming Students Participating in Honors Events

Statements on Belonging	Mean: Entering Students with participation	Mean: Returning Students with participation
The IUPUI Honors College community has made me feel welcome.	5.54	6.37
I see myself as part of the IUPUI Honors College community.	5.54	6.05
I feel that I fit right in in the IUPUI Honors College.	5.31	6.16
I feel a sense of belonging to IUPUI Honors College.	5.23	6.16
I feel that I am a member of the IUPUI Honors College community.	5.54	6.37

Table 5. Belonging Survey Results for Incoming Students Not Participating in Honors Events

Statements on Belonging	Mean: Entering Students no participation	Mean: Returning Students no participation
The IUPUI Honors College community has made me feel welcome.	5.18	4.96
I see myself as part of the IUPUI Honors College community.	5.12	4.59
I feel that I fit right in in the IUPUI Honors College.	5.04	4.76
I feel a sense of belonging to IUPUI Honors College.	4.94	4.37
I feel that I am a member of the IUPUI Honors College community.	5.04	4.54

experience, one that none had ever had before in a digital space. It will be something that connects them regardless of where their paths take them.

Our peer mentors compiled several resources for virtual mentoring that we housed in the Canvas site for the mentor program. We hope our students continue to use these resources because we now see that mentoring can be effective in a virtual environment. Virtual mentoring is now being promoted during mentor training as a more engaging way to allow mentors and mentees to start connecting over the summer rather than relying on email and text messaging only. During the semester, one of the challenges our students have historically faced with this program is finding the time within their busy schedules to meet. In the future when identifying mutual meeting times becomes difficult, meeting virtually will provide more options. Additionally, the pandemic motivated the mentors to find more ways to meet in

groups than they would in a normal year because they really wanted the mentees to find their community within the honors college. As honors college peer mentor leader Myra Hussain noted, “The group meetings helped both the mentors and the mentees build community and be heard.” Moving forward, we hope to see more group mentoring sessions planned in addition to one-on-one meetings since they were a great way for students to broaden their social network.

We also realized that there were instances when student organizations needed to do less. With traditional in-person events facing attendance challenges because of busy schedules and students experiencing Zoom fatigue from the abundance of online opportunities, the organization had to decide which events needed an online alternative and which to forgo. The Honors College Student Council realized, however, that when building an online community, there are no reasons to shy away from ambitious and complex projects. The students involved in HCSC thrived while coordinating events with multiple groups and individuals, all while never meeting face-to-face. Students rallied around the knowledge that what they created would have real impact on the honors college community.

The student leaders of ACE identified practices and strategies they plan to continue in the future. They learned the value of being flexible, creative, and willing to try new things. They expanded how our students define “service” and broadened their awareness of the various avenues that exist to serve the community. Because of increased participation during the past year, ACE plans to continue offering virtual events in the future while also expanding its in-person events. This adjustment will allow them to engage in service at a wider variety of days and times, opening opportunities to participate, which were not there before, to a greater number of students. They identified the need for digital communication to reach more members in the virtual spaces in which they are most active, and they will build on their newsletter and social media presence to engage with their members more frequently and to advertise events. Lastly, the student leaders realized that to offer more events, they need the members to take on more responsibility; thus they intend to increase member involvement with the selection and planning of service events. According to ACE president Molly Pederson, “We wanted to get feedback directly from students and hear what they thought worked and didn’t work.”

ACE will expand its elected leadership roles through the creation of committees that will assist with brainstorming and creating new events as well as building on the community partnerships they have already developed. This strategy will provide more opportunities for student leadership development that will support the longevity of the club and will also diversify the service events, both virtual and face-to-face, offered by the organization.

ALD/PES was initially skeptical about how successful they would be at keeping the chapter afloat in this all-new adventure into a virtual environment. Yet they managed to succeed at most endeavors, albeit sometimes through trial and error. In fact, our Alpha Lambda Delta chapter was recognized by the national organization's headquarters as one of the top chapters in the country for the nineteenth year in a row based upon a digital scrapbook members submitted at the end of the school year to document their accomplishments. For an organization with a strong focus on community service, chapter leaders had to be creative in developing ways to continue their mission. The leadership team had to produce new ideas for small in-person activities for those who wanted them, and leaders also found volunteer opportunities that could be completed virtually and on an individual basis. Regarding regular one-hour monthly meetings, chapter officers realized they had to provide time for interaction and an entertaining speaker to keep members engaged and interested in a virtual environment. They also recognized that they needed to be enthusiastic as they used social media to effectively market their plans. It was important for members to have fun, to share their experiences, and to provide feedback after their events.

Officers also discovered that it was more convenient for many members to meet via Zoom, resulting in increased attendance at some meetings. According to ALD/PES member Faith Prochaska, "It is helpful to have these types of online events to help students who live off campus get more easily involved." ALD/PES plans to continue offering a virtual option for many in-person meetings and events. The most important lesson we have learned is that the membership is more capable of adapting to challenging and changing situations when all work collectively to set goals and achieve them. The leadership team adjusted remarkably to virtual engagement and carried on with a plan for another award-winning year.

CONCLUSION

Beginning in March 2020, our virtual experiment created a situation in which our students stepped into leadership roles willingly to facilitate relationships and community with our incoming students and among returning students. Our experience corroborates the research on the importance of peer-led engagement opportunities; the leadership of our students was instrumental in our ability to continue our strong trajectory of retention in the honors college. Moreover, our students who took part in honors college events showed a keen sense of belonging and connection to our community. We learned many important lessons, not the least of which were flexibility and being courageous enough to try new things. We trusted our students, and they delivered tenfold.

ENDNOTE

¹ Skye Aitken served as a student research assistant on this essay. Student quotations included in this essay are from Aitken's news article "[IUPUI Honors College: Creating the Blueprint for a Virtual Community](#),"

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APPENDIX A

BUILDING VIRTUAL COMMUNITY: THE POWER OF PEER-LED ENGAGEMENT

Fall semester 2020 was my first semester as an Honors College scholar.

- Yes
- No

Did you participate in Honors College events last semester, either face-to-face or virtually?

- Yes
- No

What VIRTUAL Honors College events or activities have you participated in?
Select all that apply.

- Glimpse Meet and Greet Event with the Peer Mentor Program
- Peer Mentor Welcome Event
- Trivia Night with Peer Mentors
- Jazzercise
- Social Media Takeovers
- Honors Contract Workshop
- Honors College Open House and Student Organization Introductions
- Honors College Orientation and Advising Session
- Study Abroad Workshop
- Virtual Yoga
- Game Night
- Virtual Volunteering Events with Academics for Civic Engagement
- Virtual Museum Scavenger Hunt with Honors Arts and Culture Society
- Faculty Lecture on “Prejudice and Discrimination: Overcoming Biases” by Professor Medina
- Faculty Lecture on “Race and Health Inequality in the US: 2020 in Historical Perspective” by Professor Nelson
- Virtual Student Organization Meetings, please list: _____
- Other, please list: _____

Why did you choose to participate in these virtual events or activities?
Select all that apply.

- To learn about the Honors College
- To learn more about my responsibilities as an Honors Scholar
- To meet my fellow Honors College Scholars

- To see my Honors College friends
- To connect with the Honors College
- To develop relationships with my fellow Honors Scholars
- To have fun
- To win a prize
- For stress relief, to relax
- To try something new
- To earn volunteer hours
- To learn more about important topics related to racial justice
- Other, please list your reason: _____

What FACE-TO-FACE Honors College events or activities did you participate in last semester. *Select all that apply.*

- Mug decorating with the Peer Mentor Program
- Mask decorating with the Peer Mentor Program
- Yoga with the Peer Mentor Program
- Canvas painting with instruction from Herron Peer Mentor
- Canal walk with the Peer Mentor Program
- Outdoor Canvas Painting with the Arts and Culture Society
- Fall Festival at Newfields with Honors Arts and Culture Society
- Monon Trail clean up
- Pumpkin carving with the Honors RBLC
- Volunteering at Teacher's Treasures and Warren Township Schools
- Cultural Train Clean Up with Academics for Civic Engagement
- Other, please list other face-to-face Honors College events you participated in last semester: _____

Why did you choose to participate in these face-to-face Honors College events or activities? *Select all that apply.*

- To meet my fellow Honors Scholars
- To see my Honors College friends
- To connect with the Honors College
- To develop relationships with my fellow Honors Scholars
- To have fun
- For stress relief, to relax
- To win a prize
- To do something for my community
- To try something new
- To get out of my apartment/off the computer
- To earn volunteer hours
- Other, please write your other reasons here: _____

Indicate the extent of your agreement with each statement.

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Moderately Disagree; 3 = Slightly Disagree; 4 = Neither Disagree nor Agree; 5 = Slightly Agree; 6 = Moderately Agree; 7 = Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Participating in Honors College events made me feel connected to the Honors College.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participating in Honors College events made me feel connected to my Honors College peers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participating in Honors College events made me more likely to enroll in classes in the spring.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participating in Honors College events made me happy about my decision to attend IUPUI.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participating in Honors College events made me happy about my decision to join the Honors College.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participating in Honors College events made me feel like I am an important member of the Honors College community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participating in Honors College events made me want to participate even more in future semesters?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What events or activities do you hope the Honors College continues in future semesters? Why? _____

Did you lead or organize any Honors College events last semester?

- Yes
- No

Why did you choose to organize or lead Honors College events, either face-to-face or virtually? *Select all that apply.*

- To develop my leadership skills
- Because it is expected of my leadership role in one of the Honors College student organizations
- Because it is a way to express my creativity
- Because it would be fun
- Because it is important to give back to my community
- Because it helped me make connection with my Honors College peers
- Because I wanted to help my Honors peers connect with one another
- Because I enjoy working with others in this area
- Because I felt strongly about students being able to connect as much as possible during virtual learning
- For another reason, please list it here: _____

Indicate the extent of your agreement with each statement.

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Moderately Disagree; 3 = Slightly Disagree; 4 = Neither Disagree nor Agree; 5 = Slightly Agree; 6 = Moderately Agree; 7 = Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Leading Honors College events made me feel connected to the Honors College.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading Honors College events made me feel connected to my Honors College peers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading Honors College events made me more likely to enroll in classes in the spring.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading Honors College events made me happy about my decision to attend IUPUI.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading Honors College events made me feel like I am an important member of the Honors College community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading Honors College events made me want to get involved even more in the spring.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading Honors College events allowed me to grow my leadership skills.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Indicate the extent of your agreement with each statement.

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Moderately Disagree; 3 = Slightly Disagree; 4 = Neither Disagree nor Agree; 5 = Slightly Agree; 6 = Moderately Agree; 7 = Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The IUPUI Honors College community has made me feel welcome.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I see myself as part of the IUPUI Honors College community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I fit right in in the IUPUI Honors College.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I am a member of the IUPUI Honors College community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

HONORS ONLINE

*Teaching, Learning, and
Building Community Virtually
in Honors Education*

PART IV
Quick Takeaways

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Harnessing Flip in Both Hybrid and Fully Online Honors Courses to Build Community

MONICA VANDIEREN AND SYLVIA A. PAMBOUKIAN
ROBERT MORRIS UNIVERSITY

In addition to offering challenging coursework, many university honors programs attempt to create a sense of the university as a scholarly community or as a living-learning environment. The fall 2020 semester presented a challenge in creating this sense of community because many first-year students had never been to campus while upper-division students, faculty, and staff were working remotely. Because of this situation, the University Honors Program (UHP) at Robert Morris University (RMU) near Pittsburgh, PA, turned to Flip. Formerly Flipgrid, Flip was a free online video discussion board accessible by laptop, tablet, or smartphone. Although Flip migrated to Microsoft Teams in September 2024, other free online video-creation or video-posting boards, such as Padlet and ScreenPal, are currently

available. Michelle Bartlett describes the benefits of video discussion boards in creating a sense of a welcoming community:

Also, putting a face and voice to the instructor, helps students feel there is a captain of the ship[, and that perspective] can positively impact students' willingness to reach out for help, [increase their] view that the instructor is human[, and] may impact participants' perceptions during instructor evaluation.

Whether in socially distant semesters or regular online classes, video discussion boards may help students feel connected to classmates and to professors. Moreover, some students prefer video to print-based discussions (Stoszkowski; Clark, Strudler, and Grove 60). To encourage emotionally and socially significant student collaboration, the UHP at RMU developed a variety of Flip assignments and activities, including scavenger hunts, journals, and peer-advising, that were integrated into online and hybrid courses in order to create a sense of community for students from their first year through their senior year.

SCAVENGER HUNTS TO STUDY TIPS: FLIP IN A FIRST-YEAR STUDENT EXPERIENCE (FYSP) COURSE

The First-Year Student Experience (FYSP) is a one-credit course that connects new students to university resources while developing academic skills appropriate to college learning. As Matthew Chan observes, FYSP courses connect students at different stages of undergraduate life as well as students and faculty, leading to increased retention and graduation rates. In addition to the welcoming Flip video posted by the course professor, this course includes several Flip assignments that fulfill learning goals such as identifying campus resources, meeting new classmates, and interacting with faculty and staff.

The FYSP course begins with a Flip Scavenger Hunt in which students are placed in small groups of both on-ground and fully online students (fully online students were literally carried along via the phones of on-ground students). For fully online students, this event might be their only way to see the campus informally with their peers. Each group receives a map to a route of QR codes around campus. Each route has about twenty stops and forms a circle. At each stop, students

scan the QR code for a Flip topic that includes a video introducing them to a student, staff member, or faculty member, most of whom prompt some kind of response. The prompts range from typical icebreakers such as “Do you prefer popcorn or M&Ms?” to team-building tasks such as “Name one quirky thing everyone in your group has in common.” The group then leaves a Flip response of their own, which is then viewed by later groups visiting that same location. The pedagogical purpose of the exercise is to create a sense of community for new students and to familiarize students with resources such as the writing center and the library as well as other sites on campus. Students confirmed that these goals were met in their responses at one of the scavenger hunt stops: “[Orientation has] been great to meet new people, especially being online this semester,” “So far orientation has been a lot of information, but also fun,” and “Orientation has been very welcoming, and it has also been very helpful.”

While the Scavenger Hunt involved only FYSP students, a later Flip assignment introduced FYSP students to senior students in the UHP. In this assignment, FYSP students watch and respond to Flip videos posted by upper-division students offering advice on topics such as the honors thesis, study abroad experiences, and student enrichment awards. Students could post their response and any follow-up questions. The interaction mimicked the sort of informal conversations that usually take place in the lounge for honors students, sadly not open because of the pandemic. Later in the course, the FYSP students shared their own study tips with their classmates. As Clark, Strudler, and Grove affirm, “It is important that online instructors employ methods that will help reduce students’ feelings of isolation” (49). These Flip activities not only prepare students for university life, they link students to their same-year peers, both online and on-ground, and to more senior students who act as informal guides and mentors.

PEER SUPPORT IN A THESIS DEVELOPMENT COURSE

This senior-division course enrolls students preparing for their thesis semester in order to introduce appropriate research methods and to assist them in developing a thesis project. Students exit the course with a literature review and research plan ready to share with their thesis advisor, as well as an elevator pitch with which to describe their project

to potential job interviewers. In addition, students write weekly journal entries in order to reflect upon the challenges of the thesis development process. Even prior to the pandemic, one of the pedagogical challenges of this course was encouraging students who doubted their ability to initiate, persist in, and be successful in the thesis process. Journaling, according to Krista Fritson, is a successful strategy to improve student self-efficacy. Furthermore, journaling about the research process can also enhance the conceptualization and writing of the research thesis by encouraging students, writes Danielle Watson, to “document breakthroughs, acknowledge strengths and weaknesses in their conceptualization, develop strategies and counterstrategies for use, recognize possible areas to be clarified and create connections between practice, content and context” (17).

In previous years, the journal assignments were written and private, read only by instructors. This year, three journals were video recorded in Flip and shared with all the class members. The journals appeared later in the course—in weeks ten, thirteen, and fifteen of the fifteen-week semester. The first of the three video journals asked students to describe their thesis project in its most up-to-date form and then share tips with classmates who had been helpful to them in developing the project to this point. Alternately, students could ask for tips from their classmates to address particular challenges. The pedagogical goals were twofold: the first part of the journal familiarized classmates with each thesis topic in preparation for the workshopping assignment in which they read and commented on each other’s literature reviews, and the second part replaced the helpful chit-chat that occurs at the start or end of on-ground classes, where students informally discuss their progress or ask for advice. The second of the two video journals, Journal 13, asked students again to update their classmates on their thesis project. It then asked them to discuss one thing they had learned in the class that they planned to use in their thesis project. Again, the first part kept students up-to-date on their peers’ progress while the second part mimicked informal in-class interaction. Students seemed to enjoy hearing about their classmates’ progress since many feared that they were the only ones struggling with the literature review and research plan. Many reached out to classmates with helpful advice. The elevator pitch assignment allowed students to highlight their unique contribution to scholarship in a brief (30 seconds) but engaging description of

their thesis topic. The first draft was posted on Flip so classmates could offer kind and constructive criticism. Because they were already familiar with each other's topics from the earlier journals, students were able to point to interesting and innovative aspects of the topic the pitch may have overlooked. The final version was posted several weeks later for grading. While a synchronous workshop activity also involves peer interaction, these three assignments may be adapted to asynchronous courses. Since students viewed and responded to each other's videos, these assignments transformed from solitary endeavors to collaborative ones that shared research practices, experiences, successes, and failures (Mackenzie et al.). This process created a sense of community that is particularly beneficial for students beginning their thesis work because this project is an intimidating part of the honors program.

While faculty may be aware of the need to combat the loneliness of students new to campus, the isolation facing students embarking on thesis research is also significant. Building in peer interaction as part of the thesis process provides many benefits, including preparation for team-based working environments and for professional situations in academia. As David Boud and Alison Lee suggest, "In structured pedagogical events students can learn from their peers, learn to be peers of a particular (new) kind, acquire a greater degree of peer proximity to academics with whom they co-produce events and rehearse the peer relations of more formal public conferences and publication practices" (513). Although research seems an isolated endeavor, the research process, as Boud and Lee suggest, is marked by peer collaboration:

The peer is a defining figure in research practice. The institution of peer review, for example, is both indexical and productive of what comes to be accepted as good research among licensed members of scholarly communities. A discourse of peer learning which attends to the specificity of learning in relation to research allows us to attend to the complex dynamics of peer relations in the research environment itself, then to the relationships and the learning that obtain to developing these specific kinds of peer relationships. (510–511)

Flip offers opportunities for faculty to build in peer review and collaboration activities to support thesis development.

POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

While this course successfully used Flip to encourage peer interaction, several caveats are worth noting. The experience reflects only a single academic year in a pandemic situation. Students did not choose online learning and may have viewed it negatively. Depending on the size of the class and the frequency of posting, viewing Flip videos has the potential to become tedious, akin to so-called “Zoom fatigue” in terms of cognitive burden and eyestrain (Ramachandran). Even in ideal conditions, faculty should consider several factors when instituting video discussions. Not all text-based discussion topics, such as those requiring longer posts and/or citations to the literature, are suitable for short Flip videos (Bartlett). Also, some students may feel uncomfortable filming themselves and may be anxious about clothing, grooming, or background. One way of mitigating this issue is to allow students to use the “voice only” recording feature (Bartlett). In addition, the optional voting feature in Flip may cause students to compete for “likes” rather than focus on achieving the learning objectives (Stoszkowski). Finally, students may rely heavily on scripts when creating their videos, partly out of concern for being judged by their peers. This can be mitigated through “best practice” examples provided by the instructor (Stoszkowski).

Even with these drawbacks, there are opportunities for using Flip in several situations. In the courses described here, Flip was used for video discussions, Q&A postings, oral presentations, and informational sessions, but Flip may be adapted to multiple pedagogical circumstances such as personal reflection diaries, office hours, or other interactive events (Green and Green) and to formative (Jacques), summative (VanDieren), and performance (Dunbar) assessments. Given the emphasis in honors education on community building and on personal interaction with professors, Flip offers a way to adapt in-person activities to the online environment, whether in a fully online, hybrid, or on-ground course.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Lasting Lessons from COVID-19: A Story of Successful Community Building

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BENTLEY UNIVERSITY

To state that the landscape of higher education has changed is an understatement. Strategies and approaches have been altered radically since the spring of 2020. After all, college and universities understood that they needed, as Glen Llopolis observes, a “process of reinvention, whether we like it or not. [Because] post-COVID-19 will not look like pre-COVID-19” (Llopolis). Many of these new strategies will undoubtedly become permanent fixtures because their aim was to foster a sense of community in our honors program. It is precisely some of these activities that this article will detail.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

With an undergraduate population of approximately 4,000 students, Bentley University is a business-focused institution located in the

city of Waltham, MA, about twelve miles west of Boston. The honors program was founded in 1999 and has about 535 students. The Honors Leadership Team is composed of the Director, Assistant Director, Honors Advisor, and Chair of the Faculty Honors Council (FHC). The program has an office, shared with another center, where we offer our students study rooms and a lounge. We also have the First-Year Honors Defined Community, which is a living-learning community where roughly 50% of our honors first-year students enjoy an honors-specific residence hall. In addition to that, we have the Upper-Class Honors Defined Community, although it is much smaller. One of the trends observed in the honors program was a decline of students between the third and fourth year. Many of the students who opt out of the program highlight the lack of community as a reason to forgo the honors program distinction when they graduate.

THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT HONORS COUNCIL

In the fall of 2018, the honors program went through a self-study, and among the various findings was the need to revamp the Student Honors Council (SHC). One of the resulting changes was increasing the SHC from eight students to at least twenty-five. Additionally, an Executive Board was created—comprising the President, the Vice President, and the Vice President of External Relations—as were six different committees, each led by a Chair and including several ambassadors. Their work during the pandemic became extremely valuable as we began designing activities for the fall 2020 semester. As the summer was coming to an end, SHC and the Director met several times to discuss specific plans. Recognizing that building community in a virtual world would be even more important, as Madeline St. Amour asserts, given the circumstances imposed by the pandemic, we decided to focus on activities that could be accessible to every student. After we established the breakdown of on-campus, commuter, and fully remote students, the SHC assembled a list of activities, which are mentioned below, for both online and in-person students to promote a greater sense of community and build relationships.

As Bentley fully reopened its campus in 2021, the SHC has continued to play a pivotal role in the honors program. In effect, they meet twice a month to discuss strategies to foster community, provide

input about the curriculum and honors courses, schedule events on and off campus, and help the Office of Undergraduate Admissions (OUA) recruit students, especially with honors specific campus tours. That initiative was planned during the fall of 2019 and later became fully operational.

THE HYBRID STRATEGY

While fall in New England is a favorite season for many people, it can also bring unpredictable temperatures. Because of this unpredictability, the SHC opted to split its focus between outdoor and online activities. The former included games geared at returning a level of normalcy to campus, such as cornhole, ladder toss, and frisbee. The latter became an ongoing model throughout the year once the New England weather turned cold after October 2020. These events ranged from virtual games, like Kahoot, Jeopardy, and Bingo, to events geared at managing stress, such as online adult coloring books, Disney movie nights, and online conversations.

The ability to host Zoom events allowed for wider participation; the average was about 30 students per event and included some of our international students, who were forced to stay home during the pandemic. Two important considerations in this virtual world are the use of free platforms because some have a maximum number of participants and the use of prizes to entice students. Undoubtedly, the biggest event was our spring Bingo night, which attracted 85 students and featured two tickets for a Boston Red Sox game as the main prize.

An unanticipated benefit of a shift to virtual events was the flexibility to connect with alumni and arrange workshops relatively quickly. For example, in light of the increase of racial attacks against Asian citizens in the U.S., the Diversity Committee decided to host a workshop about issues of diversity in the workplace. Using our LinkedIn alumni group, the committee members were able to recruit three former honors students to talk about this critical issue. Even though the Diversity Committee only had three days to prepare and advertise it, nineteen students attended. The flexibility that Zoom provides remains critical now that campus life is fully open. In effect, students have adapted the hybrid modality to accomplish their goals. They have brought speakers to meetings, and mentoring has continued and thrived as students

choose whether to meet in person or virtually. Additionally, Zoom has given the SHC an opportunity to achieve nearly perfect attendance at their meetings. Finally, the SHC plans to create a virtual speaker series where alumni can discuss the benefits of their honors education in their current roles.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE USE OF RESOURCES

During our year of lockdowns and social distancing, social media proved to be vital in all facets of society, and higher education was no exception. Whereas in the past we would host two or three major field trips a year, the allocation of funds and supplies enabled us to create and hold several well-attended events that benefitted from active and intentional promotion through social media.

The Events Committee and the External Affairs Chairs of the SHC, which oversees our social media accounts including Facebook and Instagram, put together a list of social campaigns that were extremely successful. For example, they created the “IG Takeover,” where honors students who commented on a post would enter a drawing to take over the honors Instagram (IG) account for a day to share their personal story. They also launched a social media logo contest in which over 50 students submitted their self-designed logos. The winning design was featured on our IG account, and the winner also received a pair of AirPods. The group also organized a Disney Bracket event, which took place during the NCAA Basketball tournaments. Students chose their favorite movies and were entered into various raffles for hats, T-shirts, masks, and even a Polaroid camera.

Because of all these activities, the honors program IG account saw a significant increase in engagement and followers. Clearly these events were effective ways to connect students to each other and to the program as a whole. For example, during the fall of 2021, the recruitment committee created a story in IG to inform prospective students about life in the Honors Living Community. Based on the feedback we received, this feature proved to be an excellent recruitment tool for helping high school students learn about living on campus. In addition, the program uses social media not only to promote events but also to highlight important deadlines and dates, such as registration, application for housing, and advising sessions. Besides

the aforementioned events, we organized activities that helped our students navigate the uncertainty of their new life at college and manage the common and uncommon stress they faced throughout the year. We partnered with the Student Health, Counseling and Wellness Department to better equip students with techniques to manage their stress. Several students who participated in the workshop also received prizes such as coloring books, color pencils, and stress balls.

NAVIGATING INDIVIDUAL UNCERTAINTY

Students throughout the world have had to readjust to campus life after spending endless hours in front of their computers at home. Bentley students were not an exception. Partnering with key offices on campus, like Student Health, Counseling, and Wellness, to make campus living feel comfortable and safe is critical. For example, we have started working with the Office of New Student Programs and Services to have various sessions during orientation to introduce incoming students to campus life as an honors student. These sessions will allow us to develop a relationship with students before they even begin classes. Other honors students have struggled with developing job and career skills such as interviewing or creating resumes. A partnership with the Bentley Pulfiser Career Development Center created modules to address the transition to the workplace. Finally, we organize casual events where students can meet others, study together, and share their stories. The latter was proposed by the Student Honors Council in order to adapt from a virtual to an in-person modality.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

When the 2020–2021 school year ended, the Honors Leadership Team prepared the annual activity report, which is shared with the Provost Office. To the surprise of many, the attendance at events was higher than before the pandemic. It remains to be seen whether the success of these events was due to the specific circumstances of life during the pandemic or if the use of online platforms can continue to effectively engage students after a return to primarily in-person campus life. Needless to say, several key factors will remain part of the program. These include the effective use of social media to promote events, the

strategic use of resources to create buzz, and a hybrid approach to enhance event attendance.

The Bentley University Honors Program learned two lessons through the pandemic that will remain at our core: the first is the crucial role of the Student Honors Council. In effect, after the revamp of the SHC, honors students across the program have felt that their voices were being heard. Second, we need to continue to be innovative. Creating space for student leaders to experiment with new strategies, such as shifting from a handful of events to a series of smaller ones, can open up opportunities for long-lasting engagement and impact.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Peer Mentoring in a Pandemic: An Honors Experiment in Community Building

JENNIFER SCHLEGEL AND ALEXIS DUHADAWAY
KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY

I learned that a lot of other people are just as confused as I am, and [I learned] how to reach out for help regarding the honors program and college in general.

—Anonymous

This anonymous epigraph comes from a first-semester freshman's assessment of the fall 2020 Kutztown University honors peer mentor program. At first it might sound like an indictment of the peer mentor program, but reading it within the context of the pandemic turns the indictment into an exoneration, if not praise. As faculty, staff, and students adjusted to new modalities for classes, research, and community engagement, confusion became less disconcerting and more indicative of the new pandemic normal across higher education

in general and in our regional public university honors program in particular.

FLIPPING PEER MENTORSHIP AT A REGIONAL PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

We pivoted our peer mentorship program with minimal difficulty since we did not have a vibrant, successful, and established program. The purpose of the Kutztown University honors peer mentor program, which was developed by honors students, is to help students transition from high school or another institution to our university and honors program. It launches from our honors new student orientation and is intended to be a continuation of orientation to the university and the honors program. New students are grouped for the first semester by admissions category: freshman or transfer student and resident or commuter student. Students have the option of participating in a second semester of mentoring with a new peer mentor focused on student majors. Goals of the peer mentoring program include retention within the program and the institution, engagement of new students within the honors community, and the development of future mentors.

When the pandemic created a situation that necessitated initiative and required agency (Amar 4) across all domains of society and every aspect of higher education, we prioritized the physical and mental health and well-being of our students, and we recognized the increased significance of establishing social connections when so many had been disrupted. For a generation that has grown up with smart technology, flipping peer mentoring makes sense because it provides a context for the students' immediate development and assertion of agency in familiar modalities for social and academic connections. With fewer than 35% of students residing on campus during the 2020-2021 academic year, our honors new student orientation had face-to-face and virtual components, utilizing Instagram Live and Facebook Live as remote feeds for face-to-face events. Our peer mentors connected with students via GroupMe chats, Zoom meetings, and emails. In our assessment of the program, we were surprised to learn mentees overwhelmingly disliked connecting by GroupMe and favored Zoom followed by emails. We hypothesize the preference for Zoom is the students' ability to see each other. We also consider the students'

compartmentalization of honors with academic life, favoring academic communicative modalities for peer mentoring connections.

ASSESSING PEER MENTORING: COMMUNITY BELONGING AND RETENTION

Eighty-five freshmen began our honors program at the start of the fall 2020 semester. Following orientation, freshmen were encouraged, but not required, to participate in the semester-long peer mentor program. The participation rate was 58%. Toward the end of the semester, mentees completed surveys used to assess their knowledge of the honors program requirements, self-assess their progress, and identify honors resources. Mentees also provided feedback. All of the freshmen participants completed the survey. As a cohort, they were able to answer specific questions about program requirements with 75% accuracy. A positive outcome from the assessment is that 68% of the respondents referenced their peer mentor as a resource for information about the program and requirements. During a pandemic, knowing there is a community and someone in that community to approach for help reflects a “we’re all in this together” mentality. This mentality is evident in our students’ reflections of the peer mentoring program, including the following:

- “As honors students, we are not alone and shouldn’t have to believe we are. There are so many people out there trying to help us do the best we can.”
- “I have people who are here to support me and provide help when I need it.”
- “I learned that it’s okay to ask for help; there are many people who are happy to support me within the Honors Program.”
- “The feeling of community/feeling like I could reach out to the people around me.”
- “I took away a sense of belonging from this first semester of peer mentoring.”

Overall, mentees indicated that their mentors increased their sense of belonging in both the honors program (92%) and at the university

(80%). These data about belonging speak to the power and possibility of peer mentoring. Students are connecting with other students without the intimidation often associated with visiting a staff member or asking questions of someone with an authoritative title.

Alternatively, we do not know what connections were not made as the result of not being able to meet face-to-face on a regular basis. At the end of the academic year, the director assessed student progress and compared progress in honors with participation in the peer mentor program. Although other compounding factors of student success certainly exist, evidence suggests that participation in the honors peer mentorship program in fall 2020 had a positive impact on academic performance and fulfillment of honors requirements. Freshmen who participated in the fall 2020 mentor program performed better than those freshmen who did not participate in two significant program requirements: cumulative grade point average and participation in living/learning events. Ninety-two percent of the freshmen who completed the mentor program earned the required cumulative grade point average compared with 61% of freshmen who did not participate in the program. All of the freshmen who completed the mentor program attended a satisfactory number of living/learning events compared with 25% of freshmen who did not participate in the program.

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME AND APPLICATIONS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC

Our biggest challenge is finding the sweet spot leveraging the digital expertise of a generation that grew up with smart technology with the experiential impact of in-person engagement. If we find that sweet spot, then we should improve performance measures and the quality of student engagement. The hybrid model tips its hat to the reality of twenty-first century student life in terms of student populations with technological savvy, limited free time because of responsibilities beyond academics, and unprecedented levels of social anxiety. The hybrid model provides flexibility that may increase the accessibility and desirability of this voluntary program. This situation leads to our second challenge: how to intentionally develop the hybrid peer mentor model to best address deficits in diversity, equity, and inclusion within our honors program—from admissions to engagement to retention to completion.

We have identified three takeaway applications from this experience. First, we implemented the flipped hybrid model to better serve our transfer students and non-traditional students. The accessibility of the hybrid model works well for students who commute, have jobs and caregiving responsibilities, travel for the university or the military, or have other limitations on participating in traditional face-to-face activities, mentoring or otherwise.

Second, we incorporated hybridity in other areas of honors programming. This past year we provided living/learning opportunities students could participate in either remotely or face-to-face. For example, the director of our university's planetarium safely welcomed a limited number of students for an in-person presentation and show. The next week the director provided the same presentation remotely, making the event available to all of our students. We continue to pursue such options with varied success.

The third application has the most potential for developing mentoring beyond the peer group and within the broader community. Few groups of people experienced the devastating impact of the pandemic more than those who reside and work in nursing homes and continuing care retirement facilities. Residents and staff of these facilities experienced the traumas of death, illness, and social isolation to an exceptional degree. Beginning with the fall semester of 2021, our honors program began partnering with a local continuing care retirement community (CCRC) to connect lifelong learners who have knowledge to share from their professional experiences with honors students who have knowledge to share from their honors capstone experiences. The mutual exchange of knowledge, experiences, and curiosity is sparking relationships beyond the walls of the two institutions and provoking a different type of intergenerational mentorship. The modality for these presentations and discussions becomes an afterthought because the pandemic has increased the utility, efficacy, and quality of remote relationships at both institutions. We followed the pandemic protocols for the CCRC, and these protocols changed throughout the year. We were unable to participate in one scheduled program due to an outbreak of COVID-19 at the CCRC. We did utilize a hybrid model for a presentation that included a remote demonstration of our university's scanning electron microscope. Residents warmly welcomed the students and contributed questions

and feedback the students found useful. Some of the residents had graduated from our university, and some were retired from fields the students were entering, especially education. The residents found the topics and content interesting, and the students found the opportunity rewarding. The power of human connection during a global pandemic was palpable.

ONWARD

Honors faculty, staff, and students developed novel pandemic skills and solutions that will inform how they engage with the world around them for years to come. Betsy Greenleaf Yarrison suggests ways to modify honors educational practices:

To properly reach twenty-first century students, who spend most of their waking hours in digital environments, we need to give serious attention to introducing mixed modalities into one-dimensional delivery paradigms, and we need to prepare students for a global work environment that will be heavily computer-mediated. (189)

Peer mentoring is ripe for mixed modalities, without sacrificing community building, and perhaps enhancing it. Our honors students' positive assessment of the flipped peer mentor program may be a glimpse into a global work environment transformed by the widespread adoption of communicative technologies. This plays to the strengths and preferences of many of our twenty-first-century students and prepares them for life beyond honors, the university, and the pandemic. While change was necessitated by the pandemic, implementation and impact will live beyond it.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Connecting Honors Students in a Virtual Environment: Activities for Engagement

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With a mix of students returning online and staying at home during COVID-19, the Community College of Beaver County (CCBC) Honors Program in Monaca, PA, had to adapt our model of extracurricular activities to accommodate students who felt comfortable coming on campus as well as balancing virtual events for those who did not. We emphasized creativity with our honors extracurricular offerings to produce a healthy balance of connecting students both online and in person. Below are examples of semester-long activities that we provided to students and how the activities helped to build interpersonal relationships among the honors students. Even though student life has mostly returned to an in-person format, the virtual environment for learning and connecting is not going away, and these

activities will provide a model for building engagement and community on other campuses.

VIRTUAL SUMMER KICK-OFF WITH LIVE UNBOXING

To welcome our incoming class of freshman honors students, we hosted a live unboxing event that was a virtual event where students logged into a virtual meeting and together opened a box of swag that we physically mailed to them. The intention of the virtual event was to welcome the new students to the college community as well as give them information about the honors program. In advance of the virtual event, we mailed each student a box filled with CCBC swag along with their official welcome letter into the program. The box had a note on the outside that asked the students not to open the box until the intended date of the Summer Kick-Off event and provided a link to join the event online. We felt that it was important for the students to receive a box filled with physical items to simulate the real-life experience that they would have had if the event could be hosted on campus. Since unboxing videos were popular on social media, this event was well received by students and shared on their social media platforms. During the live event, students interacted with each other as well as the college President, Provost, Honors Faculty Director, and Director of Student Life and Athletics. The virtual experience for this event allowed students and campus administrators to attend without having to think about travel restrictions, which we feel increased the attendance.

HONORS PROGRAM SUMMER ORIENTATION

We followed up the summer unboxing event with a virtual honors orientation where first-year students had a mini online orientation and then were joined online by our second-year honors students. During the second half of the orientation, we dove deeper into how the academic year would be structured in the uncertain COVID-19 environment. New and returning students officially met each other at this event, which helped them build connections that they would strengthen during the academic year.

AM I HAPPY? MENTAL HEALTH CHECK-IN WORKSHOP

With our student's mental health in mind, we wanted to start the year off strong with a virtual extracurricular activity that would have students check in on their mental health while offering ways for them to improve and boost their overall happiness. In this workshop, we talked about the different types of happiness, our own definitions of happiness, and the components that create happiness. Students participated in several activities including rating their mood on a "mood elevator" and creating their ideal "best month ever." When identifying their "best month ever," they indicated things they are grateful for, things they want to improve on, things that will make them happier, emotions they want to experience, and ways to help others. Students then shared their "best months" with each other. We hoped that starting the academic year with these positive intentions would set students up for success for the remainder of the academic year.

VIRTUAL TRANSFER WORKSHOP: CONNECTING STUDENTS WITH FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

In late fall, we hosted a virtual transfer workshop for our honors students that included tips and factors to consider when picking their next educational institution after they graduate with a two-year associate's degree. We wanted to go beyond the basics of transfer information and offer more of an insider's perspective to really connect the students with some of our local four-year universities. The Director of Student Life and Athletics reached out to admissions counselors at five universities and asked them what they are looking for in transferring students. Questions ranged from student records and transfer scholarship information to more detailed topics that included: "Is having an associate's degree more attractive when transferring?" "Are there any hidden secrets of the application process?" "Are certain parts of the transfer application more important than others?" We also showed students where to look for authentic information on what the student experience is like at other institutions and offered advice on how to prepare for interviews and meetings with transfer counselors.

END-OF-FIRST-SEMESTER VIRTUAL CELEBRATION

Instead of an in-person holiday party, we hosted a virtual celebration where students could take some time to appreciate everything that they accomplished in the COVID-19 environment. Students used this opportunity to socialize and share their experiences on how they got involved in the CCBC campus community in unconventional ways and how their classes went.

NETWORKING 101 WORKSHOP

A question students often ask is how to properly network and make connections, specifically in the online environment. Our goal for this workshop was to give students information that will help them use digital technologies, like social media and email communication, to learn how to build professional relationships to advance their careers. Students learned the subtleties of networking online, how to make a lasting first impression, the power of body language when on virtual calls, and how to address handshakes during COVID-19 and in the post-COVID-19 environment. Students found this workshop useful, especially our tips on how they should be using specific social media platforms to gain the connections they are seeking.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Our honors students are required to participate in a specific number of volunteer activities on campus and in the community. When we made the pivot to online education at the end of the 2020-2021 academic year, we also made a pivot in how we required students to complete their volunteer hours. We offered them several online service opportunities, including the U.N.'s Freerice website-based application, which supports the World Food Programme disaster and conflict relief programs, and Be My Eyes, a free mobile app with a goal to make the world more accessible for blind and low-vision people. When students could return to campus in the fall, we provided several opportunities on campus, including serving as peer tutors in our Academic Support Center and assisting other departments on campus. In the spring, the campus partnered with a local health care provider to administer

COVID-19 vaccines to the community on campus, and this activity enabled students to connect with members of the community.

The CCBC Honors Program strived to put students first through embracing new ways of experiencing extracurricular activities and building interpersonal relationships through technology. We focused on checking in to see how our students were doing both academically and mentally during the pandemic, provided online opportunities for volunteering when in person was not an option, and tailored some of our traditional, in-person programming to include aspects related to digital technologies. All these activities can be replicated and modified at other institutions to engage students in an online setting since the digital learning environment is becoming our new normal. And, as we start to move away from a completely digital environment to incorporating more in-person events, we recognize the importance of always considering how to engage with students who feel more comfortable online by trying to have some way for virtual students to connect with those in person, such as recording and posting important information online or hosting breakout rooms where in-person and online students can connect with each other.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Transcending Distance: Connecting During Imposed Seclusion

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PERIMETER COLLEGE—GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In 2016, Georgia State University (GSU), an R1 university situated in downtown Atlanta, was consolidated with Georgia Perimeter College, which had six campuses (including a robust online campus) located around metropolitan Atlanta. Perimeter College became the two-year access college of GSU. The Perimeter Honors Program became part of the GSU Honors College, and the university embarked on new initiatives to unite the two honors communities. As part of the revision of GSU's strategic plan and its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, the honors college recently surveyed its faculty and students at all seven campuses. The results were somewhat mixed, especially for our online campus: we discovered some problems with the sense of community in honors as well as some real opportunities to address them. While some people might take the timing of the revelation that people were feeling siloed in their respective campuses at Perimeter to

be disastrous (after all, during a global pandemic, most of us felt more isolated than ever), we took it to be largely advantageous.

Although Perimeter College offers an extensive array of online honors courses, and has for many years, our online community has not been well served. For instance, in my five years working with honors prior to the pandemic, we had never organized a single event just for our online honors students. The pandemic-inspired movement to remote teaching and learning actually proved to be a godsend in terms of our rethinking the nature of honors community by offering a new perspective that allowed us to envision all kinds of opportunities ahead. We engaged this challenge head on; in the process, we created some successful cross-campus community-building opportunities, including musical events like the ones discussed below that involved honors faculty, in an effort to provide students an opportunity to develop relationships with faculty members and other students outside of the classroom.

One initiative we launched to combat the malaise and isolation from the pandemic was a spring speaker series. The honors college has always been very good about hosting guest speakers with a wide range of expertise, from published authors giving readings to journalists and historians discussing their research. But some of our events have struggled to attract a sufficient number of students, which can be problematic since we rely on student activity fee funding to support these events. We typically have to document attendance and occasionally come up short. Hosting these scholars and writers virtually produced three great benefits: the events were cost effective because we did not incur expenses for food, lodging, and travel; we were able to secure speakers from all over the country because we did not have logistical issues and time constraints as obstacles to scheduling events; and we were able to maximize participation, albeit virtual, across all of our campuses.

We hosted or co-hosted speakers such as Natasha Trethewey, who read from and discussed her new book *Memorial Drive*; Will Anderson, an alumnus of the honors college who now works for the Georgia Bureau of Investigations (GBI) and conducts autopsies; Dr. Carrie Reed, who conducts research for the Centers for Disease

Control (CDC) on the flu virus and vaccine; Paul Lombardo, an expert on forced sterilization, who discussed the human rights violations happening in Georgia's ICE detention centers; and students from The Hague University of Applied Sciences, who discussed Dutch socio-political positions. Our spring speaker series culminated in an event with Dr. Bernard Lafayette, a Civil Rights icon who marched alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and has devoted his life to educating people on non-violent methods to bring about change. Hearing his tales of time spent in jails—early on as an inmate and later as an educator of non-violence—fascinated our social justice-minded students, but it was the retelling of Dr. Martin Luther King's final days and the final words Lafayette heard King speak that left us all feeling inspired to continue the hard work toward change that is much needed and long overdue.

In these varied sessions, we were absolutely thrilled with the turnout. In our first installment of the spring speaker series, we hosted a session entitled "Morbid Curiosity: Life as a Death Investigation Specialist," and even on a Friday afternoon, we had about 50 participants. Our session on Human Rights Violations in ICE Detention Centers during International Education Week attracted another large crowd and generated a fascinating and engaging discussion among both faculty and students.

Beyond the workshops and speakers, we hosted several virtual music events aimed at building community and just enjoying each other's company outside the classroom. In the fall, we held an event for students called SINGO. The game is like BINGO but instead of calling numbers, very short clips of popular music are played by a DJ, and those players who can correctly identify the song mark off that square on their SINGO board. When they get five in a row, they win! Our event was held the night before Halloween because we assumed students would not be doing much socially that Friday night because of the shelter-in-place orders, and the musical selections were themed around Halloween across four decades (one decade for each round of the game).



*A Singo Halloween!



A Nightmare on My Street	Season of the Witch	The Addams Family Theme	I'm Your Boogie Man	The Munsters Theme
Black Magic Woman	Highway to Hell	Black Widow	Zombie	Thunderstruck
Li'l Red Riding Hood	Devil's Child	She Wolf	Superstition	Wooly Bully
(Don't Fear) The Reaper	Ghost Town	The Time Warp	(Ghost) Riders in the Sky	Abacadabra
Twilight Zone	Sledge-hammer	Enter Sandman	The X Files Theme	The Devil Went Down to Georgia

Li'l Red Riding Hood	Surfin' Dead	Ghostbusters	Bad Moon Rising	Hells Bells
Werewolves Of London	Le Freak	Monster's Holiday	Black Magic Woman	Halloween Theme
Twilight Zone	The Addams Family Theme	Black Magic	The Devil Went Down to Georgia	They're Coming to Take Me Away
Feed My Frankenstein	House Of The Rising Sun	Abacadabra	Devil Inside	Gypsy Woman
Ding Dong the Witch is Dead	The Purple People Eater	Running With The Devil	Calling All the Monsters	I'm Your Boogie Man

playsingo.com

We held another event called “Acoustic Jam with Dr. Bagley,” which our honors coordinator/historian/eternal gigger dubbed “Like MTV Unplugged with a History Twist.” It was a live music performance themed around social movements, so the playlist was devoted to activist music of the 1960s and beyond. This event was by far my favorite social event of the fall semester, but we did have some technical snafus with hosting the event live on social media. While we learned from these problems, they still prevented us from having the turnout we wanted. Thus, we decided to repeat the event in the spring. Because it was properly promoted the second time, we had much better attendance. The key to success in the online world, we quickly learned, is adaptability.

Because that event was so enjoyable for the faculty and staff who attended, we decided to put on an acoustic social hour just for the honors faculty and staff and the members of the Honors Council. We held it on Zoom, which would allow for chat (by text and voice) without requiring anyone to sign up for or connect on social media. Although we have held honors faculty retreats before, we had never done anything social together because of the logistical nightmare of gathering people from six campuses spread across a large metropolitan area. The event was a first. The crowd was still relatively small; we intentionally scheduled it during final grading, thinking it might provide some respite, but that timing might actually have made it easier to skip or justify skipping it. Nevertheless, the faculty who attended enjoyed it. During the event faculty made special requests and even joined in to sing some songs by Bob Dylan. In a season where we were celebrating birthdays and Christmas and even weddings on virtual platforms, that we would have a virtual faculty mixer seems completely natural. In this way, the rotten situation afforded us a tremendous opportunity to expand our reach in the honors community at Perimeter College: that initiative will remain a priority. Once our online community is more firmly established, and when we return to a normal face-to-face life, I suspect our faculty might even be more likely to travel through Atlanta traffic to another campus in order to socialize with their honors colleagues because we worked to bring them together during a period of great isolation.

Although the world endured many losses because of the COVID-19 virus, including missing the hustle and bustle of seeing and

socializing with our students in person on campus, I am pleased with the way the honors college at Perimeter turned this challenging time into an opportunity to focus on and build the community our students and faculty have told us they want. The key is applying the lessons and experiences from the duration of the pandemic to future honors programming. In a move toward geographical inclusivity, we will continue sponsoring programming that serves our online honors community. For example, we have developed our first online honors book club. In the past, honors had cosponsored offsite live interviews with Pulitzer Prize-winning playwrights that were beamed to the multi-cast classrooms on all the campuses, but we are now regularly hosting our face-to-face guest speakers in our campuses' multicast classrooms, where they can be simulcast to a similarly equipped room on each of our brick-and-mortar campuses. Our developing expertise with virtual events certainly informed one of our preeminent programs, our honors-sponsored International Education Week (IEW) Signature Event. We collaborated with The Hague University to host the first ever IEW Signature Event for our online campus: Dutch-American Culture Dialogues. That relationship opened opportunities for both virtual exchanges and continued collaboration during an international travel and study abroad summer course entitled "Honors at The Hague."

We are now adept at archiving virtual events, and our practice is to seek permission from all our speakers to record and archive their presentations. Our plan is to track views of these recorded sessions so we can include that impact in our requests for student activity fee funding. Moreover, we now know we can bring people together meaningfully in shared virtual experiences that will continue in the future to serve and enrich our online honors community.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Navigating Without Knowing

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an educational disruption in 2020 that had a ripple effect on classrooms across the country. The shift from in-person class to the adoption of online learning continues to impact institutions of higher education and, more importantly, the way in which faculty teach and the way students interact and learn. In an accelerated timeframe, faculty reimagined and redesigned their face-to-face course material for delivery online, providing ample opportunities for lessons to be learned and applied post-pandemic. The challenge for many faculty will be learning how to create courses using virtual online platforms that are conducive to building community while still engaging students in learning. Additional aspects peripheral

to content include ensuring that access to material is equitable and that it supports all students including our most vulnerable populations dealing with housing challenges and food insecurity (Hess).

This chapter examines the process and outcomes of how honors college faculty at a southeastern university shifted their introductory freshmen seminar from a traditional face-to-face format to an online one. These shifts included using technological resources, innovative pedagogy, and social media to foster a sense of community within the honors college. The chapter provides several examples grounded in Chickering and Gamson's "seven principles of good practice," which readers can utilize to improve teaching and learning. An overview of the course design using Canvas as the learning management system along with pedagogical examples grounded in the nationally recognized Quality Matters standards of teaching and learning will demonstrate innovative use of software tools that promote student engagement while facilitating learning outcomes. Additionally, examples of social media tools will highlight how faculty can develop community among students while fostering group interaction to complete course content.

SETTING THE STAGE

The impact of the pandemic was far-reaching, and to address curricular challenges, an interdisciplinary team of faculty documented how they transitioned their face-to-face, 5-credit-hour, year-long, required course for 200 incoming honors freshmen to an online platform. The context behind the traditional delivery of the course was that, during the fall semester, each faculty member teaches one section of students. During the fall term, the course contains the foundation for human-centered design, business and mission model Canvas is taught, and wicked problems are selected to be solved by teams of students. A "wicked" problem, according to Rittel and Webber, is an issue that is difficult to solve and usually involves a social or cultural component. The spring semester includes the same student teams continuing to solve wicked problems, but all 200 students attend class in a large auditorium where they pitch their solutions weekly. Student teams are required to meet outside of class to work on solutions while in-class time is designed for instruction, pitch, and relentlessly direct

feedback. To keep pace with one another's instruction, the faculty provide student instruction Tuesday evenings for two hours followed by a 90-minute debrief the following day to address successes, challenges, and pivots. The primary goal was to achieve a high level of social and cognitive presence among the students, which is a component of Garrison et al.'s community of inquiry model. The community of inquiry model includes teaching, social, and cognitive presence, and each element includes the extent to which faculty and students are able to construct meaningful learning through communication, reflections, and discourse in a critical community of inquiry (Garrison et al. 89). Additional outcomes embedded in the course included a focus on students developing leadership capacity and teamwork skills.

WICKED PROBLEM

As fate would have it, the pandemic proved to be the faculty team's wicked problem of how to transition an intensive experiential learning, hands-on course to the online format. Interestingly enough, the answer lay within the very process the faculty team teaches the students. Using human-centered design and Lean LaunchPad as the framework, the faculty team began designing the course. Brown states: "Human-centered design is about cultivating deep empathy with the people you're designing with; generating ideas; building a bunch of prototypes; sharing what you've made together; and eventually, putting your innovative new solution out in the world" (1). To address the wicked problem, the faculty team started the process by incorporating observation and customer discovery so that they could understand what students needed to be successful in an online delivery format. The team began by incorporating discussion forum questions, reviewing student reflection posts, and conducting smaller virtual team meetings. Students' input and suggestions were compiled and addressed during the faculty team's debrief meetings. During the meetings the faculty brainstormed ways in which to design course assignments and activities. The materials were created and posted using a variety of digital tool platforms. The process was iterative and included collecting input from students, ideation, prototyping, and testing the design of the materials week after week.

Throughout the process, it was clear that some of the materials created gaps in student engagement. Employing Chickering and

Gamson's "seven principles of good practice" include 1) encouraging student-faculty contact, 2) encouraging cooperation among students, 3) encouraging active learning, 4) providing prompt feedback, 5) emphasizing time on task, 6) communicating high expectations, and 7) respecting diverse ways of knowing. The instructional team utilized the principles to gauge the methods for delivery and engagement as they apply to student learning. In addition, research has shown that inequities exist around diversity, accessibility, and inclusion. In a report by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "Black and Hispanic students had more difficulty fitting the courses in with family/work responsibilities, knowing where to go to receive help, and finding a quiet place to do their work" (Darby 17). These difficulties, coupled with access to the internet, accounted for additional challenges that students faced with the sudden transition to online course delivery.

To further address these inequities, the faculty employed the Quality Matters Standards. Quality Matters (QM) began with a group of colleagues at MarylandOnline, Inc. (MOL), who wanted to ensure a scalable process for providing quality online courses ("Quality"). Quality Matters goes beyond the focus of content: it assists the instructor in designing the course from a student's perspective. For example, standard one promotes inclusiveness through introductions and a course welcome message while standard eight ensures that designers address accessibility and useability (QM Standards). Additionally, the QM rubrics were utilized to frame the course design to include QM's best practices of align, engage, and connect. The faculty team began the first phase by assuring the course objectives were aligned to the assignments, materials, and technology. In the second phase, the assignments, content, and technology were evaluated to determine if they fostered interaction and engagement. Faculty addressed whether the course included enough flexibility in the materials, technological tools, and timeline to account for students' individual needs. With the third phase, the materials were evaluated based on the learning outcomes and course modules offered through the learning management system Canvas, which completed the cycle to ensure the course materials created were designed for student success and achievement. By employing the QM Standards, the instructional faculty were able to create a well-designed course that would increase student interaction and overall engagement in the content.

EXAMPLES

One of the more successful strategies that the faculty team incorporated was the development of an open line of communication with students. To help students foster feelings of social presence and community within the online classroom, student-to-student and student-to-instructor interactions are essential (Bickle et al.; Zhan and Mei; Short et al.). The students had become familiar with receiving an announcement each Wednesday following the faculty team debrief. When the sudden transition to online learning took place, the announcement was utilized to communicate the continuity of the instruction plan. The statement included the following: “As of this communication, *we value your level of dedication* to this course and believe that you possess the requisite skills necessary to design your team’s direction. This opportunity calls for you to apply human-centered design thinking and creative problem solving.” The plan outlined new course outcomes, requirements, mode of communication, and activities to promote engagement. Because the plan empowered the students, a level of trust developed within the course community.

In addition, the continuity of instruction plan included the use of social media as a strategy to engage students. Research shows that an asynchronous course increases feelings of isolation and emphasizes the importance of integrating a variety of technologies that increase socialization and community-building activities within an online course (Bickle et al.). An example of the strategy included the following statement and directions:

We have created an Instagram # that we would like you to use when sharing posts that are relevant to our Class, Semester, Team, Projects, Coronavirus, Honors College, and Community.

#ecuhhrs3k20

We will be monitoring the hashtag and look forward to seeing you all in action during this unprecedented time. Look for lots of comments from your peers and instructors. *Have fun with it.*

The activity proved beneficial because it met students where they were. It provided an outlet for students to share what they were feeling and dealing with throughout the pandemic. That instructors consider different contextual variables that affect the design and implementation of instruction as it relates to the individual needs of students is essential (Shin and Cheon). It also allowed the faculty to give the students a glimpse of who they were outside of the classroom. For example, in honor of COVID-19 only having 15 genes, one faculty member posted daily thoughts on Instagram using only 15 words (Figure 1). It was something everyone looked forward to reading throughout the pandemic. Whereas many students would post video clips, some random, others developed a consistent theme and following. For instance, one student posted golf ball putting challenges that he did throughout his home. It was through these small gestures that students engaged the larger community. The students posted multiple videos that ranged from how they created building designs using Minecraft software to showing their study routines, or more importantly what they did during their breaks in study time. These videos provided opportunities for both faculty and students to share in the sadness and laugh at the insanity of what was taking place.

Figure 1. Student and faculty Instagram posts



Additional examples that increased feelings of belonging and helped to deter the realities of isolation were sending students personalized postcards. Some faculty sent their own artwork, whereas others sent pictures of local areas to let students know that even from a distance, faculty thought about their well-being. One student was so elated at having received the card that she posted a video clip on

Instagram singing about how it made her feel. These examples and numerous other stories evolved from the faculty team navigating without knowing. The process formed a distanced community that created memories that will be shared for decades.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The global pandemic provided faculty the opportunity to navigate the course redesign without knowing the full impact it would have on student learning and engagement. Because faculty approached the problem using human-centered design, the course redesign became an iterative process of prototyping and testing to determine what strategies were most successful. A primary goal was to achieve a high level of cognitive and social presence among students. The faculty's ability to measure student success (Frisby et al.) was through their perceptions of their own learning, which was captured through a qualitative study to examine the holistic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on first-year honors college students. The most notable finding was that the pandemic drastically affected every aspect of students' lives, and many struggled to cope with these changes, which had personal and professional ramifications (Das et al.). Based on the findings, the following recommendations may help increase student cognitive and social presence, thus affecting student achievement.

1. Develop Continuity Plans of Instruction

In 2005 following Hurricane Katrina and Rita, the "Sloan Semester" was developed to meet the needs of thousands of students who did not have access to an education (Lorenzo 5). Similarly, COVID-19 prompted faculty to develop a continuity plan of instruction, which ensured course expectations and outcomes were clearly defined to support student learning and achievement.

2. Foster Communication and Interaction

Emerging technologies offer new options for fostering communication and interaction, which is essential to developing a community of learners in an online environment. Chickering and Ehrmann offer seven principles

for implementing new technologies; most paramount is fostering positive student-faculty relationships. The additional strategies include:

- Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students.
- Use active learning techniques.
- Give prompt feedback.
- Emphasize time on task.
- Communicate high expectations.
- Respect diverse talents and ways of learning. (Chickering and Ehrmann 144)

3. **Co-Construct Learning**

Much like traditional face-to-face instruction, affording students the ability to lead and co-construct learning experiences is integral to fostering students' sense of competence (Pino-James 1). Research has shown that when learning is meaningful, students are more likely to engage (Fredricks et al. 60). Connecting content to student interests and providing opportunities for students to share their experiences will ensure learning is meaningful. Students should be encouraged to suggest the use of technological tools that are essential in their everyday lives. In response, faculty should model the use of the tools to demonstrate how they value students' input.

4. **Provide for Autonomy and Individualized Support**

Characteristics most sought after in today's workforce include "creativity, spontaneity, deep understanding, critical thinking and the development of multiple forms of collective intelligence" (Hargreaves 86). Cultivating an online environment that supports learner autonomy and individualized paths creates conditions where students can attain these skillsets. Tremblay posits that an online course should include opportunities for students to

- "know oneself as a learner."
- be "reflective" and have the capacity of learning through action.

- build capacity to “adapt” to the situation and the context.
- and “learn from others.” (Tremblay, qtd. in Eneau and Develotte 5)

To this end, the future of teaching post-pandemic is not just about transitioning courses to an online format but seizing it as an occasion to rethink how to create opportunities for learners to collaboratively design solutions (Akyol and Garrison) and to construct meaning through their online interactions. Faculty can utilize the lessons discussed in this chapter in a variety of ways to promote student learning and engagement; however, faculty will need to consider how the “seven principles of good practice,” such as how to encourage student-faculty contact in an online environment, would impact engagement. Likewise, employing Quality Matters rubrics such as “learning activities and learner interaction” to promote collaboration, reduce students’ feelings of isolation, or increase “learner support” to meet the needs of diverse learners could impact student achievement (“Quality”). The implications of the lessons learned will have far-reaching consequences for faculty and students alike by establishing a sense of belongingness. Our hope is that post-pandemic the examples provided in this chapter will ignite conversations among faculty on ways to meet the ever-changing needs of our student population.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Creating Virtual Honors Spaces with Discord and WebEx

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FINGER LAKES COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CE ROSENOW

LANE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

At two-year colleges, residential living options are limited or non-existent. Students often manage jobs and families, and these obligations typically limit the amount of time they spend at school. Spaces such as an honors lounge, meeting area, or workroom offer places for students to connect with each other outside of the classroom during their time on campus. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, honors programs had to devise virtual spaces that still met students' needs. Both Lane Community College (LCC) in Eugene, Oregon, and Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC) in Canandaigua, New York, selected a different technology to address this situation. LCC uses Discord while FLCC uses WebEx, and the

examples below demonstrate that each platform offers a means for creating virtual honors spaces. These spaces, while valuable during the pandemic, are also useful for commuter or low-residency campuses even when face-to-face classes are available. Students are able to participate in events and be an engaged part of the honors community regardless of their geographical location or inability to come to campus. Furthermore, these innovative ways of reaching students in the disparate places where they already are allow us to build community in a variety of different ways regardless of the nature of the availability and accessibility of the physical spaces around us.

DISCORD (CE ROSENOW, LCC)

In September 2020, I set up a Discord server to create a virtual honors space and augment the information I posted on the honors and Phi Theta Kappa blogs. Based on the positive response, I will be using the server in tandem with the blogs and our physical honors lounge. Discord is a video call application designed for group chats. Groups set up a server to create a virtual space for members with a shared interest in particular topics. The server is divided into text channels and video channels for different communication options. Discord successfully allows us to share information quickly and efficiently through a technology many of the students already use in their personal lives, and it helps us create and maintain a sense of community. Our server supports the needs of two different honors groups: Lane Honors Program and Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society (PTK).

The organization of our honors server is simple. The honors program and PTK each have text and video channels, and we have Welcome, News and Announcements, and Honors Student Lounge channels that contain information and conversations for members of both groups. Students know exactly which channels to visit for the information or discussion they are seeking.

Honors Ambassadors and PTK officers hold weekly office hours on the Honors Student Lounge channel while simultaneously tracking activity in the channels for their respective groups. When students drop in to ask a question or share information, they often encounter student leaders already in the virtual space. These leaders also post information on the relevant channels to keep everyone in our virtual

community up to date. Additionally, students message each other, the Honors Faculty Coordinator, and the PTK advisors privately through Discord. A few of the student leaders have increased authority on the server. They monitor the channels and make sure that content is appropriate. If someone posts in the wrong place, these leaders are able to move the post to the appropriate channel. These responsibilities build leadership skills, and the students can always ask me if they have a question about how to respond to a particular post. Finally, we hold our PTK chapter meetings on the PTK voice channel. Students can opt to have their cameras and microphones on or off. The agenda is posted on the server, the PTK officers lead the meetings, and we have socializing and guest speakers just as we would at an on-campus meeting.

More than one hundred students, some of whom live out of the area, have joined our server and taken advantage of its accessibility. The server is active twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Although office hours are held Monday through Friday, it is not uncommon for someone to post late at night or on weekends and receive a reply from another student. Students stay connected with their honors community in ways they might not otherwise be able to with only an on-campus lounge space and meetings.

WEBEX (TRISTA M. MERRILL, FLCC)

Finger Lakes Community College is a small two-year college nestled in Western New York. Because of our size and the fact that we are an open access college, we want to make honors available to as many students as possible. This accessibility means we have a fluid community of students: some students are fully invested in honors for their entire two years or longer, others drift in and out, and still others drift away and never return. This fluidity can make creating a community a challenge even during the best of times. When COVID-19 hit and we all went virtual, I felt compelled to devise ways to keep students connected to one another and to honors as a whole. I used social media, a blog, and WebEx to accomplish these goals.

One way I have been working on reaching students where they are is through social media. Facebook, Twitter, and a blog are things I used before the pandemic. I have continued to use them by sharing a link with all students currently enrolled in an honors class, as well

as students who have taken an honors class in the past and are still enrolled at FLCC. What I landed on during the quarantine and our all-virtual learning environment was a WebEx talk series featuring someone who is an expert in some area that seemed like it would interest students. Much like Discord, WebEx provides a platform for creating a virtual community through options such as online meetings, video conferencing, and screen sharing. Our talks on WebEx covered a variety of topics. One took place on National Pronouns Day and consisted of a nonbinary librarian who talked about linguistics, history, and their own experiences. Other topics focused on coming out in our current world, the physics of Spider-Man, marginalized genders in gaming, and comparative religion. We also had talks on mindfulness, inclusive heathenry, Earth Day, getting published, and the gaming industry as a career choice. For each talk, we sent invitations to all of our honors students as well as any students who might have a vested interest in the topic. The WebEx events gave students a place to get together and have a conversation on a topic of interest from the comfort of their own homes. Ultimately, attendance was lower than I would have liked, but I was told that it was higher than attendance at Student Corp events that were more recreational in nature. Part of the attendance issue was, I think, that people are worn down and tired. I do plan to continue offering this series both as an in-person event and one where students can tune in remotely.

Making connections with other people suddenly became one of the most important things we could be doing during days of isolation and quarantine. Now that the landscape has changed, we are realizing that each connection we make provides the opportunity for us to reflect on who we are and how we fit into our worlds. All of the events shared here can earn honors points, which is the method by which students can graduate from FLCC with Honors Studies Scholar Status. More importantly, however, they can give students the opportunity to feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves and that they are not alone. I am constantly reminded of a student who, when asked what honors meant to her, simply said, "Home." Our students ARE home right now, whether they want to be or not, so how can we make that an even warmer place for them? One answer is by creating this virtual space for our community.

CONCLUSION

Although Discord and WebEx are different platforms that lend themselves to different types of events, they are both useful for creating virtual honors spaces. They can easily be used in addition to other ways of reaching students, such as blogs and social media. Through these virtual spaces, students have an opportunity to gain information, hear guest speakers, and, most importantly, feel connected to their honors community.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Tightrope Walk of Academic Creativity: Eliciting Growth in Online Honors Courses

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NORTH CENTRAL TEXAS COLLEGE

When allowed the space and freedom to create, students will give more than they typically do in educational settings. One way to tap into this type of growth is to give them permission to take a risk, to be creative and expressive, and to practice making what they never thought they could make. The corollary is that faculty are obligated to design a curriculum that is also taking creative risks. The issue then becomes how to design projects that ignite the fire and fearlessness of true creativity while meeting academic standards. To that end, this essay reflects upon and explicates the inception, implementation, and publication of the experimental assignment, “A Quibbler,” from a course entitled “Forms of Literature: Influences of and on Harry Potter” (ENGL 2341) at North Central Texas College in Gainesville, Texas.¹

Although this course was designed and completed before the COVID-19 pandemic, it was the first online class that I had ever created in solitude from the foundation to the rafters. For a little over a year, I conducted research on best practices in the online realm. I digitally sat in colleagues' online courses and sought ways to challenge students to collaborate creatively while learning apart from one another. In two semester's time, everything that I learned from this course was forcibly put into practice when the traditional system of education temporarily ceased to exist. Through this experience, I was able to test the boundaries of publication before we were all cast into the digital universe to learn and teach and survive alongside our students.

The assignment mentioned above refers to the legitimate, online publication of the magazine. When the goal is challenging students to create fearlessly, it helps if the audience is more than just the teacher and a few peers. That aspect alone increases involvement and seriousness from the students' perspective from the very beginning because the work matters beyond the 0–100 grade that they are going to receive. The opportunity to share themselves with the outside world and to connect with others via the art of publication, even when learning online, is an integral aspect of this type of challenge.

From the moment I started thinking about quibbles to the second I pressed publish, this project provided evidence that involving every member of our temporary academic families in assignments that challenge traditional expectations is an effective way to awaken students to the fact that they can do more than memorize, repeat, then promptly forget information. The chance to invent and assign projects that require more than a well-formatted essay may seem unrealistic in a course that has rigid standards and outcomes. It is true that freedom in a course like *Forms of Literature* exists, but that brings its own map of tricky terrain to tread. With the support and guidance of my department chair, I advocated for and encouraged our Instructional Council to add *Forms of Literature* (ENGL 2341) to our course offerings the spring semester of 2017. One section was offered as an eight-week online course in our honors program the following fall. As it was originally designed, this course was an optional opportunity for students who would embark on a short-term study abroad program to Scotland and England. Anyone could sign up, however, and the course was not

a required aspect of the study abroad adventure. Since then, a course on environmental literature tied to an ecological trip to Costa Rica has been created with equally challenging projects. Another course was designed around Japanese literature amid the pandemic. We published our own poetry together as our course ended, which was just before the trip to Japan was officially canceled. All of that said, the application of curriculum that excites and challenges traditional honors students can be accomplished in any discipline.

The structure of the original Harry Potter course was simple. The course was broken into three major units. We studied Rowling as a person and writer, the literature that inspired her, and the literature that was created in response to her work. Each of the three units had overarching projects. Each week brought new challenges that encouraged students to willingly move a little further into the delightful discomfort that true learning brings. For example, during the second unit on the literature that influenced Rowling's work, we looked at an excerpt of Jane Austen's *Emma*. Students had to live with the text and read for stylistic elements, Austen's voice, and situations that felt similar to those they had already read. We then had discussions and posted the stolen elements we found in the *Harry Potter* books. The only option was to be slightly wrong on our way to right because there was no guide or worksheet available for this type of analytical and personal work. When we read for connections rather than trying to find answers that others have deemed correct, we bring our whole selves into literary analysis.

To address issues of engagement that come with fully online courses, small fail-safes were set up. We met weekly using our LMS's video conferencing software, had a course GroupMe for quick questions, and experienced one another's work all semester by reading and commenting on everything large and small. Trust was built with each interaction, which inevitably led us to be more comfortable when sharing our original work. We used these steps to build momentum and confidence for the final project, the publishing of our collaborative work as a digital magazine.

I began to conceptualize the final project in the first Forms of Literature course when I looked up the word "quibble." When used as a verb, it loosely means "to argue." As a noun it represents a small issue that might seem trivial to some. The commonality between the two concepts is truth. So often students are told what to believe instead

of being given the tools to respectfully question everything. Seeking tentative truths is the secret sauce of great assignments, online or in person. It does not matter if it is a philosophical truth or scientific truth or historical truth or mathematical truth. For fun to be had by all, it simply must be personal and accepted as temporary. From there, I began to search for characters in the books who were boldly themselves but stood outside of predictability. Enter Luna and Xenophilus Lovegood and the fictitious magazine *The Quibbler*. Lovegood's magazine was filled with tentative truths and explored topics that would challenge us to produce something that we had never been asked to create in a classroom. Our magazine would have to feel legitimate even though the pieces within would be on a range of unpredictable and, at times, fantastic subjects.

As it goes with most great challenges, the first step was to ask questions. They had to be questions that would inspire the students to research potential answers that were not already living inside their minds. Regarding topics, the questions needed to be tied to both an aspect of the Potterverse and our own understanding of reality. That connection could be loose, but through style, tone, topic, or truth, the final piece had to feel applicable. What if love potions were abused like legal narcotics? How are mental health issues dealt with in the world of Harry Potter? Is there ever truth in celebrity gossip columns? These are just a few of the questions that started students down various research paths.

From there, we drafted individually. The students knew from the beginning that this work would eventually lead to publication. Because of that, a sense of online community would be necessary, unlike that in any of our previous assignments. Small groups were set up in our LMS, as well as the whole-class GroupMe group, so that constant support was available for each student at varying levels. A randomly selected group leader would facilitate progress updates and check-ins within the LMS groups. I was also a member of every group, which allowed me to send messages, assign discussions, post announcements, and share files with each group. As I mentioned, the course was online and only eight weeks, so every element was expedited. The students were challenged to meet once or twice a week to create a sense of accountability. When finished, the students shared their rough drafts with their small groups and provided specific feedback.

Because the work varied greatly, each student got to experience everything from informative pieces on wand care mimicking real-world advice on how to maintain various types of wood to menus from wizarding restaurants. The students had to provide their groupmates with references that backed up their creative choices and justified the validity of the piece.

Once the students revised their work, they submitted their drafts to me so I could put them into a single Google document. I did so alphabetically since collaboration on the entire magazine had not yet occurred. At this point, I gave comments on each individual piece and required another round of revisions. The students were also assigned a new student submission to read and comment on from outside their small groups. Each student was then required to make suggestions on formatting and organization for the manuscript as a whole.

While this round of revisions was occurring, several students stepped up to work on the cover design for the piece. Once all necessary changes were made, a self-elected editorial group made final revisions to make sure the publication was ready to exist beyond the safety of our classroom. Once I got the green light from the students, I uploaded our magazine to Issuu.com for the world to see.

Through academically creative assignments where more traditional skills are taught with alternative methods, we can encourage students to want to learn and grow instead of demanding it. The first day that “A Quibbler” was assigned, students reached out to say that they were not creative enough or they were too “left-brained” to work on a project that would be published. The hesitation was real because this process is not what they are used to completing for a grade. In this situation, professors can be vulnerable as they work alongside their students to produce something new. An experimental project allows all the participants the chance to make something lasting that they will care about, which is unlike so much of what students create while in school.

Real benefits emerge when instructors tether assignments to publication. Students see that their work has effects beyond the classroom and that what they are interested in can be academic and interesting. Most importantly, an equitable opportunity presents itself when we open up our courses by adding work that supports various student strengths beyond those that are typically held as supreme in the academic world. The lived experiences of students become evidence, and

their passions determine their research. Pairing these elements with the flexibility and challenges that online education offers non-traditional students becomes less of a calculated risk and more of an invaluable moment of change in any student's academic career.

Hope for connection and a cycle of honest invention exists when we consider the capabilities of online education. It is true that this first assignment was completed before we were tasked with the challenges that the pandemic-stricken world presented us. The lessons learned served me during the synchronous courses that 2020 brought and still do today no matter the format. Additionally, whether we are at a two-year or four-year institution, we can provide our students with the chance to practice the complex joy of publication and explore the marketable, cultural, and personal rewards that students ultimately learn through creative engagement.

Of course, anyone can upload anything with a free account on Issuu.com. Instructors can also create a free space on Wordpress.com for entire blogs filled with information and art. Faculty who are experts at social media platforms can readily produce a journal, but for those who are intimidated by technology, printing hard copies of a journal remains an option.

Producing a journal and promoting community take effort and time, but the benefits are worth it. The relationship between students and their learning does not have to be as predictable and tenuous as it currently is. Instructors and administrators and program directors and advisors and counselors at the collegiate level can gently nudge students to embrace the tentative truth that they can create something meaningful while learning in person or online and share it with others. If students practice that enough, maybe it will become a habit. Then we can rest well knowing that a new force of individuals will emerge from our schools ready to make tangible differences in their lives and the lives of everyone they encounter.

ENDNOTE

¹ For other discussions of Harry Potter in an honors context, see Guzy and Yager.

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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.

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Direct all proposals, manuscripts, and inquiries about submitting a proposal to the General Editor of the NCHC Monograph Series:

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Honors College
Perimeter College
Georgia State University
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Advising for Today's Honors Students edited by Erin E. Edgington (2023, 244pp). A useful handbook for both new and experienced advisors, this volume brings together 11 essays on the theory and practice of academic advising within the unique context of honors education. Incorporating qualitative and quantitative data on advising efforts in honors programs and colleges across a variety of institutional settings, these essays offer practical advice and inspiration for honors advisors, faculty, and administrators.

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 Honors: 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.

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 Annmarie 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 Online: Teaching, Learning, and Building Community Virtually in Honors Education edited by Victoria M. Bryan and Cat Stanfield (2024, 378pp). Combining longer, research-based chapters with shorter, application-based chapters, the contributors to this volume present a comprehensive overview, including an international perspective, of online teaching and learning in honors programs and colleges in the twenty-first century.

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.

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.

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.

NCHC MONOGRAPHS AND JOURNALS

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.

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.

UReCA: 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 nchc-ureca.com.

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from *Honors Online*—

These twenty-two chapters demonstrate that virtual education has taken place in honors programs and colleges for quite some time, and this work exists outside of the context of COVID-19. Quite different from the emergency remote teaching and learning we all did during 2020 and into 2021, high-quality online course and program design requires understanding content delivery, communication, assessment, and interpersonal connection specific to virtual spaces. The perspectives offered in this collection are intended to inspire honors professors and administrators to embrace the value of online learning and programming for the benefit of their students and the ability to bring quality honors education to a broader array of students seeking the challenge and connection that honors education provides.

We do not do the work of online teaching simply because we are a community of learners determined to support each other. We must also do this work because honors is and always has been intent upon healing some of what is broken about higher education, causing good trouble in the college classroom, and figuring out how to meet our students where they are and help them along the road to where they want to go. Online learning will be a part of that journey in various ways depending on individual student needs and preferences, changes to public health practices in the wake of the pandemic, and a world of work awaiting our students after graduation that may very well be drastically different from what we have known in the past. Our hope is that these chapters offer some guidance and support on the road to doing this work well.

—*Victoria M. Bryan & Cat Stanfield*