

Creating Knowledge

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LIU's honors programs were founded during a decade that gave rise to honors programs nationally. The LIU Post Honors Program was one of the first in 1963 after the University of Michigan LSA Honors Program in 1957 and the Echols Scholars Program at the University of Virginia in 1960; the LIU Brooklyn University Honors Program followed in 1965. The establishment of honors colleges at LIU Post and LIU Brooklyn for the 2015–2016 academic year provides an ideal opportunity to reflect on more than five decades of honors education at the university and to examine the value of honors.

A discussion of honors education naturally calls to mind academically exceptional students, a vibrant intellectual community, and distinguished learning environments like Winnick House, the former home of Marjorie Merriwether Post, heiress and founder of the General Foods Corporation, where LIU Post's honors college is housed. The essence of honors education

goes beyond historic buildings, however, and even beyond the academically elite students who populate honors colleges and programs. Former Swarthmore College president Frank Aydelotte envisioned honors education as “a more individualized educational experience . . . focused on the creation of knowledge more than its mere reproduction” (Carnicom 49).

The honors programs at LIU Post and LIU Brooklyn have inspired students in the creation of knowledge for more than half a century, led by thoughtful and passionate educators like LIU Post honors director Joan Digby, author of *Peterson's Honors Programs and Colleges* and a past president of the National Collegiate Honors Council, and LIU Brooklyn honors director James Clarke, a philosopher and National Endowment for the Humanities grant recipient. Digby, Clarke, and their predecessors have established models for honors education that have contributed to the National Collegiate Honors Council at the national level, and their rich ideas have also guided many of our best directions at the university. LIU's commitment to engaged learning applies the principles of honors to the whole university by enabling students to further create knowledge through their own experience, and LIU's honors colleges set a strong example in this effort to change the paradigm of what a university is.

Joan Digby originated the concept of Partners in the Parks, for instance, which has grown into a hallmark program for the National Collegiate Honors Council, creating transformative experiences for honors students through immersion in our national parks. These students find the meaning of Thoreau's *Walking* in the woods of Maine's Acadia National Park, conduct geology research at Parashant National Monument, and use their experiences in the parks as inspiration for studies in their own chosen academic disciplines. Partners in the Parks also provides a replicable model of an intensive learning experience that develops students' ability to work in a collaborative environment, and the growth and successful adaptation of Partners in the Parks “demonstrates the way that colleges and universities can use NCHC resources to inspire new educational opportunities on their campuses” (Digby and Nolan 23).

Partners in the Parks also offers development opportunities for the professors who lead the seminars as the inter-institutional team-teaching experience facilitates an exchange of ideas about how to approach course material and structure learning opportunities in a way that engages students. Digby experienced this value during a 2010 Partners in the Parks program, observing that

“the synergy and cross-fertilization that arise from such collaboration can reenergize teachers and inspire students” (Digby and Nolan 31).

LIU Brooklyn’s contribution to the larger honors community is City as Text™ (CAT), a brainchild of former honors director and National Collegiate Honors Council past president Bernice Braid. CAT has been a staple of the NCHC’s national conferences, Honors Semesters, and Faculty Institutes since 1976. The technique of organizing readings and class sessions around site-specific explorations is a natural fit at LIU Brooklyn, where students benefit from a rich cultural landscape that offers numerous starting points for academic exploration, and the principles of City as Text™ have served as the foundation for many of LIU Brooklyn’s advanced honors seminars. A water-themed seminar saw honors students exploring the Hudson and East Rivers with the help of the non-profit Riverkeeper organization, while a seminar on the literature of Coney Island included not only a discussion with author Kevin Baker about his 1999 novel *Dreamland* but also an exploration of the area where the eponymous amusement park once stood.

LIU’s honors colleges have left their mark on honors education through the contribution of signature NCHC programs, but the core principles of honors education allow honors colleges and programs to lead and inspire a university every day through the work of students and professors. The LIU Post Honors College has exemplified this leadership in a commitment to fostering undergraduate research, most notably through the yearlong tutorial and thesis that serve as the capstone honors experience at LIU Post. The thesis can be traditional, library-based research in the humanities or laboratory experiments in the sciences, but it can also include curriculum designs for K–12 education, original films, theatrical productions, concerts, or corporate advertising campaigns. The echoes of this research can be seen in engaged learning opportunities across both LIU campuses, from the venture-focused education of LIU’s student-run businesses to the achievements in service learning that have placed LIU Post and LIU Brooklyn on the Presidential Honor Roll for Service.

The LIU Brooklyn Honors College enriches the entire university through the bonds it fosters among the faculty. Honors at LIU Brooklyn begins with the Freshman Sequence, a yearlong cluster of literature, history, and philosophy courses that are integrated by theme and content. Joram Warmund, chair of the LIU Brooklyn Department of History, has remarked that “Honors is as great a learning experience for the faculty as it is for the students.” The lessons

that faculty members draw from the honors experience in turn enhance the academic experiences of students throughout the university.

Honors education has traditionally enriched the lives of its students through study abroad experiences, and LIU Brooklyn has made these transformative experiences available to students through its spring-break Honors Travel Seminars. The weeklong, credit-bearing travel seminars are ideally suited to students who are unable to accommodate semester-length study abroad programs in their curricula and have allowed LIU students—including many who had never traveled outside the United States—to explore Dublin, Paris, Rome, Venice, Madrid, Barcelona, and Seville.

The mission of a university is education, and education that comes through the creation of knowledge is where the life of a university is found. The honors colleges at LIU have a five-decade legacy of immersing students in that life, having a significant impact on the larger university community and the NCHC as well. The model that honors education provides for enriching the student experience is central to our institutional aspirations, and the distinction with which honors at LIU has exemplified and added to that model continues to inspire as we look toward the future.

REFERENCES

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