Spring 2018

What Makes a Curriculum Significant? Tracing the Taxonomy of Significant Learning in Jesuit Honors Programs

Robert J. Pampel
Saint Louis University, robert.pampel@slu.edu

Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council 19:1 (Spring/Summer 2018).

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Saint Louis University

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, I have sat in the opening sessions of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) conference and felt equal parts concern and conviction. In 2015 and 2016, opening speakers enumerated the challenges and opportunities that confront honors educators in a rapidly changing higher education landscape. I sympathized with their concerns in an institutional and cultural context marked by what Schwehn called the "Weberian ethos" of education—an instrumental, and less charitable, attitude toward academic inquiry. Yet, even as I acknowledged the veracity of their arguments, I was buoyed by belief in the Jesuit mission that animates my institution, particularly its emphases on social justice and care for the whole person. When NCHC leadership revealed the "just" honors theme for the 2017 conference, I felt affirmed in my optimism about the future of honors education.

This optimism occasioned my inquiry here on the curricular design and academic practices of Jesuit honors programs. As a way of tying this curricular review to recent trends in pedagogy and the wider literature on the science of teaching and learning, I used Dee Fink's significant learning taxonomy as a heuristic device to examine eight honors programs at Jesuit institutions. Fink, whose work has gained widespread appeal in teaching circles over the last fifteen years, promotes dynamic and student-centered pedagogy that leads to substantive and enduring learning outcomes. Many of the tenets Fink emphasizes in his model reflect honors pedagogy as defined by the NCHC and various educators and administrators within the honors community. One might thus expect honors programs to reflect significant learning principles in their curricula.

Jesuit honors programs, however, are marked not only by their adherence to principles of honors education but also by what the Honors Consortium of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) calls "essential characteristics of a Jesuit Honors Program." These characteristics include integrative learning, reflection and discernment, and commitment to social justice in the spirit of the "intellectual apostolate" (Honors Consortium, n.d.). Recent work by Kraus, Wildes and Yavneh Klos, and Yavneh Klos et al. makes important connections between these Jesuit ideals and the larger honors community, where reflective learning and service to society often thrive in non-Jesuit contexts. I follow their lead here by suggesting a Jesuit-inspired curricular paradigm but one that is ultimately applicable to all programs interested in promoting a just curricular model for the twenty-first century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dee Fink's 2013 significant learning taxonomy provides a framework for designing high-impact, student-centered learning experiences. Inspired by Benjamin Bloom' 1956 taxonomy of educational objectives, a hierarchical model that stresses lower- and higher-order cognitive operations, Fink advances a "relational and even interactive" model for learning (37). The significant learning taxonomy comprises six cognitive and affective dimensions that, Fink believes, colleges must promote: foundational knowledge, application, integration, the human dimension, caring, and learning how to learn (39–40). Fink believes that properly designed learning experiences shed strict adherence to content coverage in favor of student-centered approaches that emphasize all dimensions simultaneously (38). He argues that such experiences, when properly planned and executed, enhance students' lives

by imbuing them with a "more thoughtful philosophy on life," improve their social interactions with others, cultivate a more thoughtful and informed sense of citizenship, and prepare them adequately for a complex and ever-changing world (8–9). Ultimately, he suggests that significant learning "requires that there be some kind of lasting change that is important in terms of the learner's life" (34).

Although Fink's nomenclature and conceptual framework bear his distinctive imprint, many of the principles he espouses reflect concepts like active learning and student-centered instructional design, both of which have gained widespread currency in teaching circles over the last few decades. In his revised and updated text on significant learning, Fink enumerates the influences on his work, including learner-centered design (Barr and Tagg), backwards design (Wiggins and McTigh), and the science of teaching and learning (Ambrose et al.).

University honors programs provide a rich context in which to trace the principles of Fink's taxonomy. The NCHC suggests that "honors experiences include a distinctive learner-directed environment and philosophy, provide opportunities that are appropriately tailored to fit the institution's culture and mission, and frequently occur within a close community of students and faculty" (National Collegiate Honors Council Board of Directors). The NCHC also recommends experiences that are "measurably broader, deeper, or more complex" than non-honors alternatives in higher education (*About NCHC*). This definition's broadness is intentional. Honors educators often invoke the analogy of a laboratory to describe a system that is constantly adapting to new challenges and opportunities based on the innate curiosity and diverse interests of students and teachers (National Collegiate Honors Council, *Basic Characteristics*; Wolfensberger).

The similarity between honors education and Fink's taxonomy, e.g., student-centered pedagogy and a focus on complex or higher-order inquiry, suggests that an honors program provides a framework to extend Fink's model beyond the classroom level. I began from this foundational idea as a means of imagining new directions for honors curricula and pedagogy in the twenty-first century. Given the preoccupation with the "future of honors education" at the 2015 and 2016 national conferences in Chicago and Seattle and in recent publications (Scott & Frana), these lines of inquiry add to an already vibrant discussion.

Beyond a general analysis of significant learning in an honors setting, I am particularly interested in the distinctive pedagogy and curricular design of

honors programs at Jesuit institutions. Jesuit education, like Fink's taxonomy, shares many characteristics with honors pedagogy. Mitchell, for example, identifies broad-based, humanistic learning as essential to a Jesuit education. The Jesuit General Congregation echoes this sentiment and suggests that Jesuits "attempt to discover, shape, renew, or promote human wisdom, while at the same time respecting the integrity of disciplined scholarship" (133). These descriptions are reminiscent of honors curricula, which often emphasize core areas of knowledge and discipline-specific knowledge (Gabelnick).

The Jesuit General Congregation similarly promotes "interdisciplinary work" that can foster "new perspectives and new areas for research, teaching, and university extension services" in service of "justice and freedom" (136). Mitchell's definition of a Jesuit education also stresses that it is "person-centered" and focused on each student's development (112). Bennett and Dreyer extend this person-centered notion and promote the virtue of hospitality at Jesuit universities. "Hospitality," they write, is a form of "openness—welcoming, receiving from, and sharing with the other" that "ought to be conspicuous" in an educational institution (117). In these statements on the value of community, openness, and reciprocity, one sees connections to the NCHC's Board of Directors emphasis on a "close community of students and faculty."

Thus, a substantive connection exists between Jesuit educational principles and honors education. What is less clear, however, is how an honors program at a Jesuit institution might support or complicate the pursuit of significant learning experiences. Specifically, it is worth considering whether the transformative elements of Jesuit curricula and pedagogy, especially their call to action in the spirit of social justice, separate an honors program formed in this tradition from Fink's model. Additionally, we might wonder how this call to altruism extends our understanding of honors education to encompass how we study, research, behave, and live honorably, i.e., honestly, responsibly, and equitably.

Many of these principles, of course, have been adopted more broadly in higher education. The call for "special courses, seminars, colloquia, experiential learning opportunities, undergraduate research opportunities, or other independent-study options" (National Collegiate Honors Council, *Basic Characteristics*), for instance, aligns with many of the high-impact learning experiences articulated by Kuh. Similarly, the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) promotes personal and social responsibility in higher education through their widely embraced VALUE rubrics

(Rhodes). Therefore, this study on curricular-level applications of these ideas has implications beyond a narrow Jesuit framework.

With these ideas in mind, I offer a response to various scholars within the honors community regarding the dearth of empirical research on honors education (Hébert & McBee; Long; Jones). By examining honors programs through the lens of Fink's significant learning taxonomy, I hope to advance the cause of research on honors education, particularly as it concerns curricular development and assessment.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to use Fink's taxonomy of significant learning as a lens through which to examine the curricular structure and academic practices of honors programs at Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States. I was especially interested in principles of Jesuit education in this analysis to determine if honors programs crafted in this mold accommodated or challenged Fink's model in meaningful ways.

Two research questions guided this study:

1. In what ways do university honors programs exhibit characteristics of Fink's taxonomy of significant learning in terms of their curricular structure and academic practices?

2. What distinctive demands outside of Fink's taxonomy of significant learning, if any, does a program's Jesuit mission introduce in terms of curricular structure and academic practices?

METHODS

Research Design

In this study, I used a multisite case study to examine the curricular structure and academic practices of Jesuit honors programs in various institutional contexts. The goal of case study research is to produce "a rich, 'thick' description of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam 43). To achieve this descriptive depth, I employed two primary forms of data collection: analysis of curricular and programmatic documents and interviews with program directors. The combination of document analysis and interviews provided a more nuanced lens through which to observe the operation of Jesuit honors programs than could be achieved with a single data source.

Participants

There are 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, 27 of which feature an honors program of some kind. I chose a purposive sample of eight cases that exhibited "maximum variation" (Creswell 156–57). My goal was to differentiate in terms of Carnegie classification (e.g., doctoral universities with highest/higher research activity, master's colleges and universities, baccalaureate colleges), undergraduate population size, and net price point. These variables were determined using data from the Institute of Educational Sciences National Center for Education Statistics and the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.

Aside from their institutional context, I used additional program-level qualifiers to determine eligibility. Eligible honors programs had to be exclusive in some way, e.g., driven by invitation, competitive application, or another form of criteria-based selection that limits the number of participants in the program. Programs also had to exhibit an extra-departmental curricular model. Many colleges and universities offer departmental honors programs that require rigorous intellectual inquiry within a particular field. I was not interested in studying these specialty programs; instead, this study focused on honors programs that feature cross-disciplinary, integrative learning experiences and welcome students from all academic majors.

Complete parity among the various qualities was impossible to achieve. However, the distribution is roughly proportional to the overall population of Jesuit institutions, e.g., Carnegie classification type, geographic diversity, and net price point variance. The programs selected for the study are listed below (complete information is available in the Appendix):

- Boston College
- Fordham University (Rose Hill)
- Gonzaga University
- Loyola Marymount University
- Loyola University Chicago
- Loyola University New Orleans
- Saint Louis University
- Spring Hill College

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this study began with resources acquired from Jesuit honors program websites. I examined documents related to program design

and requirements and created an initial set of codes to describe curricular philosophy, influences of the Jesuit mission, and other ideas that were "responsive to [the] research questions" for this study (Merriam 176). This initial coding process followed Creswell's philosophy of "lean coding," or the designation of a few main categories that guide subsequent data analysis (184).

After initial document analysis, I conducted telephone interviews with directors for each selected program according to a semi-structured interview protocol. Prior to conducting interviews, I received approval from the Saint Louis University Institutional Review Board (IRB #28219) to conduct interviews with human subjects. I then secured consent from all participants to publish results in which their institutions would be named. The goals of the structured interview questions were to determine program history, to confirm requirements for program completion, to understand any pedagogical or curricular philosophies that informed the program's organization, and to identify the extent to which the Jesuit mission of the institution influenced the program's structure or curriculum. In addition, I asked specific questions based on the earlier review of curriculum documents. Therefore, while interviews were guided by a common set of questions, each interview differed based on context. These interactions were recorded and later transcribed. The final transcripts of interviews were then coded to identify major themes for each program. The codes and themes identified as part of document analysis were compared to those found in the interview transcripts with the goal of "saturation," or "the point at which you realize no new information, insights, or understandings are forthcoming" (Merriam 183).

RESULTS

Response to Research Questions

After analyzing all available data and organizing emergent themes, I returned to the guiding research questions for this study. The responses to the research questions are presented in order below. Although interview and document analysis yielded compelling results for each program, I have chosen to present the aggregate results without individually identifiable references in order to depict the state of Jesuit honors education more broadly.

1. In what ways do university honors programs exhibit characteristics of Fink's taxonomy of significant learning in terms of their curricular structure and academic practices?

Fink's taxonomy of significant learning stresses learner-centered pedagogical approaches that promote application of foundational knowledge and integrative thinking. At the outset of this study, I theorized that this taxonomy shared much in common with the style of teaching and learning that occurs in honors programs. A thorough review of the eight programs selected for this study confirmed this relationship.

Although Fink deliberately rejects a hierarchical organization for his taxonomy, the analysis below begins with what is often considered the basis of the learning experience, foundational knowledge. By foundational knowledge, Fink means the "basic understanding that is necessary for other kinds of learning" (34). Foundational courses (or course sequences) are a common feature of most of the programs selected for this study. Whether in the form of first-year seminars, colloquia, or retreats, these experiences tend to focus on exposure to humanistic texts as a basis for future work in the program. Other programs include rigorous composition requirements to introduce students to the conventions of collegiate writing. In some cases, the foundational coursework or set of experiences constitutes the sole honors-only, specialized experience a student might have, underscoring the importance these honors programs placed on a foundational experience for students. Overall, directors noted in the interviews an interest in introducing students to the nomenclature, processes, and skills necessary to succeed in a curriculum that demands close reading, thoughtful observation, and rigorous research experiences.

First-year seminars are a common practice at colleges and universities around the country (whether in honors programs or as part of a standard core curriculum), but one distinguishing quality in the examples above is the way that the courses encourage students how to learn for future success in the program, not to master any particular skill or knowledge content area. The curricula tend to collapse two significant learning categories, foundational knowledge and learning how to learn, which is consistent with Fink's contention that significant learning experiences promote growth along all dimensions of the taxonomy simultaneously (38).

At other points in their curricula, programs explicitly stress the goal of learning how to learn in the form of critical self-reflection exercises in the Jesuit tradition and colloquia on research and grant writing. The goal here is to teach students how to participate in the academic culture of the program and more broadly of the institution. Several directors, for example, noted that their course sequences aim to introduce students to a process of intellectual inquiry, sometimes with an explicit emphasis on social justice, to prepare them for ongoing scholarship in the program.

Fink also elevates the importance of both integration and application as part of a significant learning experience. Integration requires students to perform a more sophisticated intellectual task by making connections between ideas, learning experiences, or contexts (Fink 36). As students apply and integrate their knowledge, they may perceive the "personal and social implications of what they've learned," which can result in a more robust self-image or a better understanding of others (Fink 36).

Most programs selected for this study require a senior research project of some kind for honors students to complete the curriculum. These culminating research projects represent a highly integrative task as students are required to synthesize their disciplinary knowledge into an original project or to approach a highly technical topic from a humanistic or interdisciplinary angle. Programs are also integrative in the sense that they often weave in certain themes, e.g., social justice and Western philosophy, over time as a part of multiple courses.

The honors programs selected for this study include various curricular components that advance the goal of application. Most often, students are required to make connections between their own educational ventures and other contexts. For example, students might be encouraged to apply insights from their humanities-based foundational courses to questions of scientific importance, e.g., through a course on "Philosophy of Technology" or a "Science and Society" course.

Other programs emphasize application of course material in a spirit of social justice. One program offers a social justice seminar that requires students to synthesize their personal passions, intellectual training, and research acumen in response to social justice issues in their community. Another program aims to expand students' "social consciousness" and then direct them toward community-engaged research and advocacy projects in surrounding communities.

In these latter examples, the ways that honors programs encourage application of knowledge or of intellectual passion call to mind Fink's human dimension of learning. Fink contends that significant learning experiences result in a more robust self-image or a better understanding of others (36). Particularly in these community-engaged activities, honors programs encourage growth within the "human dimension" of learning. Other programs attend to the human dimension by introducing global themes or activities into their curriculum, e.g., area studies courses and international partnerships.

The final dimension of Fink's taxonomy, caring, is evident when students' "feelings, interests, or values" change because of a learning experience (36).

This dimension might also be described as the intellectual curiosity or affinity a student has for learning. All programs have selection criteria that guarantee them students of high intellectual caliber from the moment they arrive. From this perspective, a certain measure of "caring" might predate their enrollment. Nevertheless, several of the programs provide experiences and structures that encourage growth along this "caring" dimension. All program directors described the important roles that faculty play in students' intellectual formation: they serve as sponsors for research, supervise capstone projects, or simply teach courses with greater depth and in more intimate settings.

In summary, the honors programs selected for this study exhibit characteristics of Fink's taxonomy in interesting and varied ways. They often do so by exemplifying Fink's central thesis that elements of the taxonomy can be pursued simultaneously, e.g., foundational knowledge and learning how to learn or application and the human dimension.

2. What distinctive demands outside of Fink's taxonomy of significant learning, if any, does a program's Jesuit mission introduce in terms of curricular structure and academic practices?

Based on the response to the first research question, Fink's taxonomy serves as a useful lens through which to examine the curricular structure and academic practices of honors programs. However, the research also revealed ways that Jesuit honors programs challenge and extend Fink's work.

One of Fink's six elements of the significant learning taxonomy is the "human dimension," which he describes prosaically in terms of a student's widened worldview and increased capacity to interact with others. He says, "when students learn something important about themselves or others, it enables them to function more effectively" (36). Fink's human dimension is a worthy learning goal, but it stops short of identifying how students act upon this newfound knowledge of self and others.

In several of the programs selected for this study, the curricula encourage students to "learn something important . . . about others," to borrow from Fink (36). To be sure, several of the programs feature curricula that are heavily steeped in the Western intellectual tradition, which can contribute to a limited understanding about the diversity of knowledge in the world. However, these courses are often complemented by other courses that broaden students' worldview, such as area studies courses about different regions of the world, social justice seminars, or conversation partnerships that place students in sustained dialogue with English as a second language (ESL) learners.

The curricula are often designed such that they are likely to increase students' awareness of other cultural beliefs and practices.

In the Jesuit honors programs selected for this study, the curricula often extend the requirement beyond mere awareness. Students also carry out service projects for marginalized populations and conduct scholarship in response to social justice issues in their communities. The emphasis in these scenarios is not merely on awareness of "others" or even on developing one's capacity to act on their behalf. Instead, these programs require students to engage directly and to serve others in their community. They promote knowledge not only for students' advancement but also for the advancement of the poor and disadvantaged. To the extent they are successful, they also promote "a learning experience [that] changes the degree to which students care about something," to borrow again from Fink and his definition of the caring dimension of learning (36). In this way, the programs emulate Fr. Peter-Hanz S. Kolvenbach's call to "go beyond a disincarnate spiritualism or a secular social activism, so as to renew the educational apostolate in word and in action at the service of the church in a world of unbelief and injustice" (151).

The other primary way that the programs selected for this study challenge Fink's model is similarly related to the human dimension. Although these programs tend to emphasize service to others, they also promote the value of personal appropriation or discernment—that is, an honest assessment of one's abilities in relation to intellectual/spiritual inquiry and the needs of the world. Fink does account for self-knowledge in his human dimension, describing how a significant learning experience "gives students a new understanding of themselves (self-image), a new vision of what they want to become (self-ideal), or greater confidence that they can do something important to them" (36). Honors programs at the institutions selected for this study deliberately promote self-knowledge. Courses on professional development and vocational discernment, colloquia on research interests and post-baccalaureate fellowships, mentor programs that guide students to value-added professional opportunities and original research, and upper-level seminars on moral responsibility are a few of the ways the programs develop students' self-knowledge.

The key difference in these programs is the level of intentionality with which Jesuit honors programs in this study guide students toward knowledge of self. The acquisition of knowledge is, itself, the aim of many of the courses mentioned above. To be fair, Fink's "learning how to learn" dimension accounts for metacognition and the ways in which students can be "better

student[s]" or more "self-directed learner[s]" (36). However, this explanation is more instrumental and focused on intellectual or cognitive development. What is notable about the programs selected for this study is the way they promote self-understanding as an end in itself. Once again, they collapse the significant learning taxonomy by conflating one's personal sense of self with the "learning how to learn" dimension.

The extension of the human dimension and learning-to-learn dimensions found in Jesuit honors curricula fuse together elements of Fink's taxonomy. In both cases, the Jesuit identity of the program vitally informs the curricular design, suggesting that Fink's model might be enriched in important ways in Jesuit honors programs.

DISCUSSION

Based on analysis of the findings relative to the research questions above, I offer two interpretations below. The first relates to the capacity for honors programs to infuse their curricular design with Fink's largely course-level design principles, and the second considers the potential for Jesuit-inspired ideals of reflection, discernment, and social justice to enrich and differentiate a program's curriculum and academic practices.

A Significant Curriculum

Fink's significant learning taxonomy provides "a language and set of concepts" for the design of learner-centered, transformative educational experiences (67). His work, however, is primarily on the thoughtful and deliberate design of individual courses. Lattuca and Stark view individual courses as the structural building blocks of a curriculum. It stands to reason that courses designed according to a significant learning taxonomy interact to form a more robust curriculum, yet I am aware of only one study (Kolar, Sabatini, & Muraleetharan) that applies Fink's model explicitly to a curriculum design context. The honors programs selected for this study demonstrate the possibilities of creating a significant curriculum in this vein.

Foundational knowledge is one of six dimensions to Fink's taxonomy, but he does not intend for it to be subordinate to the others. The foundational courses in several honors programs exhibit this spirit. Instead of focusing on base-level knowledge acquisition, they tend to promote modes of inquiry that prepare students for other courses in the curriculum. In some cases, they foster knowledge of and experience with humanities scholarship or research

methods more broadly. In others, the foundational courses build writing skills that lay the groundwork for future success in the program. The important feature here is that the foundational knowledge fostered in the program is about learning how to engage in the kind of intellectual inquiry expected of an honors student. In other words, foundational knowledge and learning how to learn (two of Fink's six dimensions of the taxonomy) operate in tandem.

Application and integration also feature prominently in the honors curricula analyzed in this study. In foundational courses, for instance, honors students apply knowledge about social justice to their service work in the community; they use their newly honed writing skills to examine questions from various disciplinary standpoints; and they begin to develop original research questions by drawing on colloquia that teach foundational research methods. As they progress in the curricula, students often build toward a culminating research project that, in several cases, features an interdisciplinary component. This task of synthesizing one's accumulated knowledge, surveying the existing state of scholarship on a given topic, and generating new knowledge are all indicative of an integrative effort encouraged by a program's curricular design.

These research projects typically proceed under the guidance of faculty members, who participate in the honors experience either by choice or via formal programmatic structures. Honors directors reported that, because of the intellectual caliber of students made possible by selective admissions criteria, faculty members can engage more deeply with subject matter and potentially pique students' interest beyond a general level through, for instance, specialized courses and writing-intensive assignments. The curricular and extracurricular mentor relationships are indicative of Fink's caring dimension, which refers to how learning experiences change a student's "feelings, interests, or values" (36). Honors programs promote this kind of growth or transformation through close contact with faculty who take a personal interest in students' well-being and intellectual growth.

As they promote deeper engagement with material, programs often widen students' understanding of themselves and others. That is, they promote a sense of care about the human dimension of learning, another of Fink's six dimensions of learning. Students participate in highly reflective seminars and colloquia that require them to consider their own interests and talents, often beginning in the first year and repeating in an iterative fashion throughout the curriculum as students gain more context for the choices they will make beyond graduation. In addition, programs tend to include coursework on social justice issues and global themes that acquaint students with cultures

and lifestyles unlike their own. Moreover, they often place students in direct contact with these populations or at least compel them to consider seriously their ability and responsibility to act on their behalf. In this way, the programs build toward a richer understanding of the human condition, one that reflects the transformative element of Fink's caring dimension.

Perhaps the most important element of programs examined for this study is curricular coherence. Whether the program features a rich exploration of the Western intellectual tradition, includes a series of more advanced colloquia, or highlights different areas of students' personal and professional growth, several of the programs provide a logical, sequential pathway to completion of the honors program. In general, students do not merely complete an aleatory set of courses as part of an exhaustive list of requirements; instead, they proceed through a series of thoughtfully designed and clearly integrated in-class and out-of-class experiences.

Not all the programs selected for this study perfectly exhibit an integrated curricular design; some excel in one dimension more than others, e.g., strong in promoting application of foundational knowledge but weak in the human dimension of learning, but examined collectively, they draw on the best practices that Fink elucidates in his study, providing a rich educational experience that unfolds over the course of a student's undergraduate career.

A Jesuit-Inspired Influence

The second main insight gleaned from this study is the distinctive influence of an institution's Jesuit mission on the curricular structure and academic practices of the honors program. To be sure, the Jesuit mission exerts only a nominal influence on some programs, affecting the humanistic tenor of the core curriculum or the composition of the participating students. For other programs, however, the Jesuit influence is explicit and intentional, leading to a compelling extension of Fink's taxonomy.

The Jesuit mission is especially pronounced in programs that emphasize sustained service to campus and community partners. In these programs, students have opportunities within the curriculum not only to learn about underrepresented or underserved communities but also to work alongside them in a spirit of social justice. In these cases, the focus is not merely on creating awareness of others but rather on creating care for and solidarity with these populations. In this way, an explicit Jesuit focus on social justice and action can enrich a student's experience by combining three elements of Fink's taxonomy: the human dimension, application, and caring.

Other programs excel by requiring students to reflect critically about their individual calling(s) in the world. Courses on professional development and vocational discernment, colloquia on developing research interests, mentor programs exclusively for honors students, and upper-level seminars on moral responsibility are a few of the ways that this reflective component gets put into practice. These programs do not take for granted that students will address these issues of personal passion or calling on their own time. They treat the acquisition of self-knowledge as an end in itself and thus promote students' personal growth alongside their intellectual development. The intentional focus on discernment reflects principles found in the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius's guide for close communion with God, who would "lead men and women to decisions about how they would live their lives, employ their talents, and direct their resources" (Gray 65).

The ways programs enacted Jesuit principles, e.g., reflective seminars and a focus on social justice, are not exclusive to Jesuit institutions. Many of these practices have been widely embraced in other faith-based and secular institutions, thus suggesting how the results of this study might be extrapolated to fit other contexts. In addition, Jesuit institutions have their blemishes with respect to social justice, as recent revelations about Georgetown University's history of slavery reveals (Swarns). Nevertheless, Jesuit institutions are well positioned by virtue of their history—or are at least potentially more mature in their dedication to social justice concerns than their secular counterparts—to address issues of personal discernment and social justice. They can, therefore, serve as a model for other institutions interested in similar outcomes.

LIMITATIONS

As in any qualitative research, this study exhibits various limitations that affect the reliability of the conclusions. These limitations include the scope of the participants, the means of data collection, and the changing nature of honors curricula and leadership within the selected programs.

The participants in this study were recruited from the twenty-eight member institutions of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU). Although I attempted to execute a "maximum variation" sampling strategy that differentiated institutions across various dimensions (Creswell 156–57), not all directors of targeted institutions agreed to participate because of time constraints or a perception that they lacked adequate information to contribute to the study. The resulting eight institutions, while mostly varied, do not

exhibit the full range of possible curricula and academic practices that might have been evident with a full review of the honors programs at all twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities. Then again, such a large sample would have been inappropriate for the purposes of a qualitative study that relies on "a rich, 'thick' description of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam 43). In addition, because of the specialized nature of my interest in Jesuit honors programs, the insights gained might only be applicable to a small population of honors programs overall.

Another limitation was the method by which data were collected for the study. I examined publicly available documents related to program structure as well as documents that directors were willing to share. To the extent these documents were unavailable or incomplete, the research represents only a partial view of the program in question.

Another limitation of this study is the dynamic and shifting nature of honors program curricula and leadership. During the study, one program was undergoing a complete curriculum overhaul, and two others were in the midst of changing leadership. Such changes to leadership influence the reliability of the data and the ongoing relevance of the conclusions drawn from interviews with these directors since new leadership could easily take programs in new curricular directions.

Finally, although this study revealed interesting data about the curricular design of various honors programs, it did not address the lived experience of students in the program or the postgraduate outcomes associated with a so-called significant curriculum. The general impression given by directors of programs selected for this study was that graduates enjoyed a variety of post-graduate opportunities in the form of graduate/professional school acceptances to top-tier schools, employment opportunities with reputable companies, or placement with prestigious fellowship or service organizations. Program directors also had a sense that their honors students were among the most active leaders within their campus communities and that these students possessed a broader, more inclusive worldview by the time they completed their education. Some of these impressions were supported by additional data furnished by participants such as exit surveys for recently graduated students, but most feedback was anecdotal in nature. A few honors directors lamented the lack of data about the effect of the honors experience, noting that more assessment needed to be done. In so doing, they added their voices to a chorus of honors stakeholders who perceive a dearth of empirical research on honors education (Hébert & McBee; Long; Jones).

IMPLICATIONS

The six dimensions of Fink's significant learning were evident to varying degrees in the programs selected for this study, suggesting a compelling overlap between Fink's ideas and the language often used to describe the honors experience. Although I limited my analysis to Jesuit honors programs, I contend results can easily extend to all honors programs that share a commitment to just curricular models and academic practices.

This overlap has implications for institutions that seek to create or revise an honors strategy. Honors administrators might turn to Fink's model for inspiration regarding sequencing courses, building coherent themes across four years of study, and incorporating measures that produce collegial relationships among students and faculty. The programs in this study demonstrated the value of foundational experiences that inculcate modes of inquiry for future coursework, the importance of fostering a broad understanding of the human condition through service learning courses and area studies requirements, and the benefit of extracurricular community-building events that place students in close contact with faculty members and with one another.

The conclusions of this study also have implications for existing programs that seek new or different means of assessing student learning in their programs. The National Collegiate Honors Council's *Basic Characteristics* document espouses many of the same active-learning, community-oriented, and academically enriched principles found in Fink's discourse. By examining an honors program through the lens of the taxonomy, we can gain new insights that demonstrate the value or, perhaps, the shortcomings of the curricular and extracurricular experiences promoted by a program.

In addition to this qualitative strategy, programs might also consider the need for more outcomes assessment. In the coming years, the NCHC will create a consortium with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to examine more closely the effects of honors education. As the NCHC's Research Committee devises questions for its NSSE consortium, attention to the curricular elements enumerated above could be helpful. Lanier suggests that honors programs in a contemporary context are marked not by careful, incremental change, but rather by quantum jumps in resources. Such funding increases might be hastened by attention to graduate outcomes that demonstrate the added value of an honors experience. Partnerships with well-established survey instruments like the NSSE will assist in this effort.

CONCLUSION

Frank Aydellote pioneered honors education at Swarthmore College in the 1920s as a challenge to conventional pedagogy at the time (Rinn; Wolfensberger). As honors education in the United States nears its centennial moment, stakeholders within this community need to emulate his innovative spirit by examining their practices with an eye toward improving student experiences and postgraduate outcomes. This study represents a critical analysis of one segment of the honors community. I suggest that Jesuit institutions enact the honors mission in distinctive ways that align well with Fink's significant learning taxonomy but also extend its boundaries in terms of personal discernment and service to others. These practices are not the exclusive purview of Jesuit colleges and universities, as many institutions similarly promote these high-impact practices of critical self-reflection and civic engagement. The insights from this study can sustain a broader movement toward these laudable aims through significant curricula that fulfill the NCHC's vision to promote justice among students and within the communities they serve.

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The author may be contacted at

robert.pampel@slu.edu.

APPENDIX

List of Jesuit Institutions Selected for Study

Name	Location	Students	Carnegie Classification	Net Price
Boston College*	Chestnut Hill, MA	9796	Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity	$26,284
Fordham University	Bronx, NY	8855	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	$35,912
Gonzaga University	Spokane, WA	5062	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	$32,111
Loyola Marymount University	Los Angeles, CA	6259	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	$40,226
Loyola University Chicago	Chicago, IL	11079	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	$32,108
Loyola University New Orleans	New Orleans, LA	2691	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs	$26,601
Saint Louis University	Saint Louis, MO	12401	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity	$33,910
Spring Hill College	Mobile, AL	1352	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus	$20,376

Data were compiled using data from the Institute of Educational Sciences National Center for Education Statistics (2016) and the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research (2015). According to the Institute of Educational Sciences National Center for Education Statistics (2016), the "average net price is generated by subtracting the average amount of federal, state/local government, or institutional grant or scholarship aid from the total cost of attendance."

*The unit of analysis for Boston College was the Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program (GPSP) at Boston College. Although Boston College has an Arts and Sciences Honors Program that provides an integrated approach to core subjects (Boston College Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, 2016), it is exclusive to members of the College of Arts and Sciences. It does not, therefore, exhibit the extra-departmental qualities preferred for this study. The GPSP, on the other hand, welcomes students from all majors and is designed to help highly talented students discern their intellectual gifts and to work toward the common good in their society (Gabelli Presidential Scholars Program, 2017). All GPSP members (roughly 15 per class) complete a culminating capstone in their degree program, and many belong to the honors program of their home school or college. For all other programs, the interdisciplinary honors program was used for study.