

Developing Honors Faculty through Faculty Development Programs

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Abstract: Despite its crucial role in student success, there is scant research on how honors faculty develop teaching expertise and pedagogical authority. This essay considers the ways in which faculty development programs assist instructors by enhancing the critical skills necessary for positive student outcomes and successful honors programs. While honors scholars continue to advocate for institutional support toward faculty development, this essay provides further rationale and a specific example.

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Honors faculty play a crucial role in student learning (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Roberts & Salmon, 2008), and honors students have also identified their relationships with faculty as a major benefit of participation in an honors program (Dean, 2019). High-quality teaching has been positively associated with student retention (Gyrko et al., 2016) and persistence to graduation (Kezar & Maxey, 2015; Gyrko et al., 2016). Research has also shown higher levels of cognitive development among honors students because of their interactions with faculty (Seifert et al., 2007). Despite these positive outcomes, little research exists on how faculty develop the pedagogical skills for teaching and learning in honors and whether faculty receive any specialized training or professional development for teaching honors courses (Miller et al., 2021). With increased calls for accountability among higher

education institutions, Smith (2019) notes mounting external pressure to build accountability measures in honors program.

Honors programs and colleges are widely available at American higher education institutions. In the most recent available survey conducted by NCHC, Scott and Smith (2016) identified 1,503 institutions with an honors program or college, which accounts for 59% of the total identified institutions in their study. Despite the prevalence of honors education, a theoretical framework supporting honors pedagogical practices has not emerged (Chancey, Butts, & Mercier, 2017). In her lead essay for the *JNCHC* Forum on “Creating and Celebrating Honors Faculty,” Elkes (2023) maintains that our field needs to “understand how honors faculty live and ultimately thrive within the parameters of the larger institutions of higher education,” which includes expanding how exactly honors faculty are defined. As a rationale for honors faculty development (FD) programs, one program at a Florida state college can demonstrate how such programs assist faculty in developing effective practices in teaching and learning honors.

HONORS FACULTY

The honors literature is replete with suggestions and strategies for identifying and recruiting faculty to teach in honors programs and colleges. Honors faculty are often selected because of their ability to communicate their deep knowledge of their subject matter with enthusiasm and passion (Schuman, 2005), and a common trait among honors faculty is high expectations for their students (Guzy, 2008). Dailey (2016) concludes that faculty who place a high emphasis on improving their teaching practice make ideal honors instructors, and the experience level of a teacher does not necessarily result in greater teaching quality, but Mariz (2016) suggests that the effects of honors teaching on faculty have been seldom explored.

Edgington and Frost (2023) outline three practices essential to the recruitment of faculty to teach in honors. First is a “need to have steady and reliable access to faculty best suited to teaching in honors” (p. 232). Second, honors directors and deans need to be given autonomy in the honors courses to which they are assigned. Finally, FD programs should be afforded to all members of the campus community (Edgington & Frost, 2023).

HONORS FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

Research on strategies for teaching honors students, however, has been limited (Achterberg, 2005; Cosgrove, 2004; Long & Lange, 2002; Rinn, 2007; Rinn & Plucker, 2004; Robinson, 1997; Scager et al., 2012; Shushok, 2002). Few empirical studies pertaining to honors pedagogy have been conducted (Achterberg, 2005; Holman & Banning, 2012; Rinn & Plucker, 2004). In perhaps the most comprehensive study of honors pedagogy to date, Wolfensberger (2012) identified three common themes about which honors faculty often agree with respect to their honors instruction: creating community, enhancing academic competence, and offering freedom.

The purpose of FD is to provide opportunities to enhance existing skills, implement new strategies, or effect self-change (Kozeracki, 2005; Wallin, 2007). Boyer (1990) asserts that faculty need not only to remain current in their fields with respect to research but also to conduct scholarship related to better facilitating student learning. Altany (2012) further asserts that professional development is the missing leg to the traditional three-legged stool of academic life (teaching, research, service) and is integral to quality teaching. According to Altany, professional development emphasizes

1. continuous professional growth;
2. understanding instructional concepts and processes;
3. reflection and exposure to new ideas;
4. motivation;
5. strengthening intellectual, social, and affective aspects of academic life; and
6. opportunities for faculty to learn about students, themselves, and their profession. (Altany, 2012)

To better create an “honors faculty,” we might consider how FD programs can connect our faculty across disciplines given the value of interdisciplinarity in honors education and how we can share innovative pedagogical practices applicable across traditional academic disciplines.

Teaching strategies and learning outcomes can be positively attributed to FD of pedagogical skills (Stefaniak, 2018), but most faculty in higher education have not received pedagogical training; they enter the professoriate with only the academic credentials appropriate to their discipline (Fink, 2013; Lewis, 1996; Murray, 2002). Consequently, these faculty tend to rely

on the instructional strategies they experienced in their own learning process, which are often ineffective (Fink, 2013; Robinson & Hope, 2013). Phuong et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review aimed at investigating the current scope of the literature pertaining to FD and found changes in faculty members' knowledge, skills, and behaviors were the most common outcomes.

A doctoral dissertation by Borst (2018) analyzed how faculty perceive their experiences teaching in an honors program. The emergent themes from the study included "a desire to help all students, an interest in working with diverse student populations, previous adjunct teaching experience, a desire to try new things, and concern over doing too much" (p. 104). The faculty in the study indicated a sense of pride in being recommended to teach in the program, a responsibility for student success, and a challenge that made them better teachers. Furthermore, the faculty indicated that the honors program allowed them to engage in opportunities to develop and teach new courses that helped them escape a sense of "tedium" in their roles (Borst, 2018). The implications of Borst's study can assist honors administrators in establishing FD programs that not only attract the best faculty at our institutions but also encourage the teaching and learning practices we espouse and value in our field.

Despite limited research on quality, design, and effects of honors FD (van Veen, Zwart, & Meirink, 2012), Berge and van der Vaart (2018) introduced one model of honors FD established in 2011 at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. Developed with the Center of Excellence in Teaching, the program includes providing faculty with opportunities for dialogue, exposure to pedagogical innovations, resources for honors literature, and the requirement to practice an honors intervention in their courses. Findings from their program found general alignment with the findings of Wolfensberger (2012) that enhancing academic competence, offering freedom, and creating community were also relevant to honors FD (Berge & van der Vaart, 2018). Furthermore, Cox (2018) recommends the development of faculty learning communities as avenues for promoting the scholarship of teaching and learning in honors programs.

Development of pedagogical skills in honors education is especially important as the field emphasizes "in-class and extracurricular activities that are measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning experiences typically found at institutions of higher education" (NCHC, 2013). Wolfensberger (2012) indicates that honors faculty employ more student-centered teaching strategies. However, despite widespread self-reports by faculty on using student-centered learning approaches, teaching

observations have shown little evidence to support its actual use (Phuong et al., 2020). The role of faculty is critical to the honors student experience, so there is a need for understanding FD interventions and the effectiveness of honors teachers on honors learning (Wolfensberger, 2012).

Dean and Jendzurski (2012) have found that teaching effectiveness improved because of developing recognition of honors faculty. By providing faculty with honors FD opportunities, honors deans and directors can not only better assist faculty in meeting program expectations for teaching and learning but may also be able to provide recognition to attract faculty to teach in these programs. Despite the intrinsic benefits of teaching in honors, extrinsic motivators may also encourage faculty to engage in these opportunities. Where appropriate, higher education institutions may provide certification, professional development credit, release time, or stipends for faculty who engage in these FD programs.

THE FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE AT JACKSONVILLE DISTINGUISHED HONORS FACULTY CERTIFICATE

Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) is a state college within the Florida College System. While the institution grants 13 bachelor's degrees, its primary enrollment resides in its 2021 general education Associate in Arts degree program, with 46.3% of its annual enrollment (FSCJ, 2022). The FSCJ Distinguished Honors Faculty Certificate was established in 2017 to provide faculty teaching in the general education program with dedicated training for teaching and learning in the FSCJ Honors Program. Offered to all faculty in coordination with the Florida State College at Jacksonville Academy for Teaching and Learning, the program consists of ten hours of professional development for obtaining honors faculty status within the FSCJ Honors Program. The program comprises four required courses and one elective course.

The first course requirement is Introduction to the FSCJ Honors Program. This course provides faculty and staff with the foundations of honors education in the U.S. and a general overview of the FSCJ Honors Program. In this course, faculty are introduced to the NCHC definition of honors education, our program learning outcomes, the honors curriculum, characteristics of honors students, admission and graduation requirements, and program benefits for students. Faculty outcomes for the course include the ability to broadly define honors education; provide a brief overview of the FSCJ Honors Program; describe characteristics of honors students; understand the

admission and graduation requirements for the honors program; and highlight program resources available to students

The second required course, *Teaching and Learning in Honors*, provides faculty with the pedagogical framework REALS (Appendix A), which includes research, enrichment activities, academic rigor, leadership development, and service-learning. Developed by the FSCJ Honors Steering Committee, this framework helps faculty consider strategies for implementing honors practices into their general education courses. While all honors courses at FSCJ are academically rigorous, we require our faculty to implement at least one other practice from the REALS framework into their honors courses. Faculty are also introduced to literature on the characteristics and habits of effective honors faculty and the available NCHC publications and resources for developing honors teaching expertise. Upon their completion of this course, the learning outcomes for faculty include the ability to understand approaches to undergraduate honors education; discuss best practices in honors teaching and learning; recognize the REALS Framework; understand the FSCJ Honors Program learning outcomes; describe characteristics and habits of honors faculty; and identify resources for honors faculty in developing honors learning experiences.

The third required course for faculty, *Student Mentoring that Works*, emphasizes the value of one-on-one relationships with students and helps underscore the importance of faculty mentorship for undergraduate research. Faculty gain fresh perspectives and new ideas about student mentoring that is intended to inspire them to use their own experience to help students learn and practice life skills that can serve them well throughout their lives.

Elective courses provide faculty with the opportunity to select specific pedagogical strategies they may wish to implement in their specific courses. Options include courses on integrating service-learning, andragogy and metacognition, constructivist learning, and cooperative learning. These courses range from two to three hours of professional development toward the ten-hour certification program.

Finally, the capstone experience is designed to be a demonstration challenging FSCJ faculty to communicate and share their mastery of newly developed best practices in honors education. Faculty members complete a syllabus assignment in which they develop an honors course rationale and provide justification for how their honors teaching practices will be implemented in their discipline-based courses. Upon completion of this capstone experience, faculty will be able to describe the honors “distinction with difference”; demonstrate effective practices in honors teaching and learning; and

design honors syllabus activities and assignments related to course outcomes, learning objectives, and the REALS Framework. Appendix B shares an example of the course rationale and implementation of practices.

Completion of the program results in faculty earning a digital badge and ten hours toward the FSCJ One Percent Initiative, which allows all full-time faculty and staff to receive a one percent salary increase once every three years for completion of 120 hours of college-sponsored professional development. Additionally, faculty are then credentialed to teach honors courses at FSCJ.

CONCLUSION

Faculty are pivotal to the teaching and learning experience of students in honors programs and colleges. Faculty are content experts in their respective disciplines, and community college faculty represent an important connection for assisting students with academic preparation for successful transfer. The pedagogical practices they choose for their instruction in honors courses have positive outcomes for students and institutions alike. Despite the research to support the use of such practices, we understand too little about how honors faculty develop such powerful mechanisms for improving student learning. FD programs can improve this understanding by demonstrating how instructional practices influence student learning outcomes. FD programs help underscore the value of an honors program to an institution through assessment initiatives that compare FD outcomes with student outcomes while simultaneously providing honors administrators with more autonomy in selecting faculty for their honors courses. Assessment of such programs can also expand the literature about honors pedagogy and fill a gap in our current understanding of how we define honors faculty.

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APPENDIX A

FSCJ Honors Program REALS Framework

Research	FSCJ Honors courses may incorporate research activities or projects that are appropriate to the discipline. These research activities should delve more deeply into themes, topics, or questions than regular freshmen or sophomore courses require. If possible, these research projects can yield presentation-worthy work (oral presentations or posters) that may be considered for conference participation.
Enrichment Activities	FSCJ Honors courses may incorporate a range of enrichment activities such as trips to museums or archives, nature field trips, reflective writing assignments, and the creation of artistic pieces, to name a few. Enrichment activities will vary by discipline but “hands on” assignments are always a welcome addition to Honors courses.
Academic Rigor	All FSCJ Honors courses must include academic rigor that is appropriate to the discipline. This is a foundational aspect of a good Honors Program. As content specialists, faculty teaching each course will determine the academic rigor appropriate for their discipline and course.
Leadership	FSCJ Honors course may allow students leadership opportunities, if appropriate, to the class format and discipline. For example, students may be asked to take the lead during a presentation, to facilitate group discussions, or to help determine a topic for discussion after engaging in preparatory activities.
Service Learning	FSCJ Honors recognizes academic service-learning as one of the five pillars that comprises a comprehensive collegiate Honors program. Students are provided opportunities to engage in service-learning and the support to lead service-learning projects that enrich the classroom, the campus and the larger community. The major emphasis is placed on the reflection of service-learning engagement experiences aligned with course and program outcomes, whereby service opportunities are offered for credit. Service-learning experiences are often a single project or a series of collaborative projects that address real-world problems through which students also acquire practical skills and work experience that can lead to community advocacy and engaged citizenship and/or career exploration.

APPENDIX B

FSCJ Sample Honors Course Rationale and REALS Framework Practices

The following is shared with permission from Dr. Scott Matthews, Professor of History, Florida State College at Jacksonville, who developed these components for an American history honors course at FSCJ.

Course Rationale Statement

This course will involve a scholarly examination of women's roles and experiences within the larger context of the economic, political, social and cultural developments characteristic of the United States from Reconstruction to the present. Students will determine the ways that transitions in American society that began during Reconstruction and extended to present times impacted the construction of gender and, thereby, reshaped the definition of womanhood. Likewise, they will analyze the consequences of the transformation of womanhood and women's roles in society beyond the scope of their domestic responsibilities as wives and mothers that was a consequence of the suffrage movement of the late 19th century and the succeeding waves of feminism during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

To accomplish this feat, students will actively engage in "doing the work of a historian." Throughout the semester they will analyze both primary and secondary sources, engage in oral and written discussions, and produce writing assignments and movie reviews that incorporate both types of source materials. Their honor's projects (10–15-page research essay and 10 minute oral presentation) will provide the opportunity to effectively argue their own conclusions, and engaging in the larger scholarly discourse on womanhood and the construction of gender roles and identity that is an important aspect of the broader construction of national identity within the context of the ethnic and class diversity that is an elemental feature of American society.

In addition, this course is distinguished from non-honors AMH 2020 courses by the level of academic rigor characteristic of the required assignments, the higher-level thinking skills (analyze, evaluate, create) which the students will employ. Course assignments that require mastery of the content information and the ability to interpret a variety of source materials that include journals and diary entries, newspapers, visual images (works of art, photographs, etc.), journal articles, popular literature, and film will provide ample opportunity sharpen their analytical reading and writing skills. Finally, the successful completion of the honors project (essay and presentation) in which the students will select a topic that corresponds to the timeframe and focus of the course, apply the research and writing skills acquired by way of course assignments, and produce a sample of high-quality academic research further distinguishes this course from the non-honors course offerings.

To satisfy history course learning outcomes and to ensure that students will acquire a thorough knowledge of the content information characteristic of a standard AMH 2020 course, students are required to complete weekly readings from the assigned textbook. In addition to the readings, the instructor will facilitate discussions that reinforce information from the textbook. Finally, students will complete weekly courseware and writing assignments which are designed to assess their mastery of the course material.

REALS Framework Practices

This honors course adheres to the following FSCJ REALS Framework Practices:

RESEARCH:

Be able to identify a research problem, design a research agenda, and/or complete a research project appropriate to the course discipline.

- In this course, students will identify an original research problem, design a research agenda, and complete a research project. The research paper will be at least 10 pages long, and must be based on at least 8 sources. Students will present their research to the class and must use a visual aid (e.g., PowerPoint or Prezi) to aid their oral presentation.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES:

Demonstrate a deeper and more complex understanding of the major concepts, issues, and problems in the discipline and produce assigned deliverables (e.g., essays, research papers, oral presentations, panel presentations, artwork, original science experiments, lab reports, etc.) to demonstrate that understanding.

- In this course, students will create visual “golden lines” to help them better understand the assigned primary and secondary sources, engage more deeply with the material, and help lead discussion.
- In this course, students will journal their research project experience.

ACADEMIC RIGOR:

Demonstrate the ability to think, read, write, and discuss critically about the major concepts, theories, issues, problems, and controversies in the discipline.

- In this course, the classroom will be flipped. Class time will be primarily spent on discussion of primary and secondary sources and delving deeper into selected topics. Students are expected to keep up with textbook readings outside of the classroom.
- In this course, students will read a historical monograph and write a book review to simulate the historian’s experience.
- In this course, students will engage with primary and secondary sources as they research their project.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

Be able to take responsibility for personal behavior, communicate effectively in a group setting, promote collaboration and consensus, behave civilly while engaging with controversial material, demonstrate empathy, and value others’ perspectives.

- In this course, students will take the lead in discussing assigned primary and secondary sources.
- In this course, students will collaborate in small groups to answer questions and present to the class.

SERVICE-LEARNING:

Demonstrate service-based leadership, practice civic responsibility, gain global and cultural awareness, understand power and power dynamics, recognize the privileges inherent in various social identities, and embrace diversity and inclusion.

- In this course, students will volunteer for a minimum of 5 hours at the Jacksonville Historical Society to better understand the need and importance of archiving the past.
- In this course, students will have to write a reflection paper about their experience at the Jacksonville Historical society and how their service impacted their understanding of the historical profession and the way that historians organize the past.