

**BEGINNING IN HONORS**  
**A Handbook**

by

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# BEGINNING IN HONORS

## Preface to the Fourth Edition

*Directing an honors program is commonly an entry into the odd, often misunderstood, and slightly mysterious world of academic administration. The majority of new honors directors come directly from the ranks of the faculty where, frequently, their excellence as teachers and scholars suggested to senior administrators a good fit for honors leadership. In point of fact, this is a reasonable and accurate prognostication: good honors administrators need a base of experience in the real daily world of academe, the classroom, the laboratory, the library. They need the respect and stature that fine faculty members, and only fine faculty members, win from students and colleagues. On the other hand, actually very few skills transfer between professing and managing (with the possible exception of learning how to limp by with little money). Great teachers often make splendid honors directors, but commonly the transition can be startling. Being an honors director is, for many, an early step into other administrative positions. For others, it becomes a long-term vocation. And for some, it is a satisfying assignment for a while, followed by a grateful and graceful return to the faculty. Many a future dean began her career directing an honors program, and at the same time, honors administration has also taught some that their calling is to teaching, not administration. Both are good outcomes.*

*This publication is a part of the effort that the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), the national organization of honors programs, administrators, teachers and students in honors, makes to ease the transition for new honors administrators and to help institutions begin new honors programs or revamp existing ones.*

*This fourth edition of *Beginning in Honors* comes nearly two decades after initial publication. During those years, its author has aged from productive mid-career status to curmudgeonhood, and dotage seems just around the corner. During that time, too, American higher education has changed remarkably also (albeit in more positive ways), and honors along with it. At the time of the first edition of this little pamphlet, honors colleges were a rarity, even in major flagship university settings and “service learning” was a phrase that would have meant little to most academics. Since the 1980’s, undergraduate research has grown from a rarity to a commonplace; internationalization has moved from frosting to cake; and diversity, in curriculum and in population, has lost its status as an option (happily). Accordingly, this edition of the handbook is thoroughly revised, in countless ways both large and small. If not a new publication, everything in it has been considered anew, and from a twenty-first century vantage point. So,*

*for example, rather than offering a handful of sample honors programs as part of this handbook, I simply include information in “Appendix C” about Peterson’s Smart Choices: Honors Programs & Colleges, which is the official guide to NCHC member institutions; at the time of initial publication, this valuable resource/reference did not exist.*

*At the same time, as noted in the “preface” to the prior edition, I want to be clear and to be firm about what seem to me less mutable values essential to the honors enterprise: considerate human interactions, faith in the worth of the search for truth, a deep-seated conviction that academic excellence is worth pursuing and unflinching honesty in our work as teachers and learners.*

*It is gratifying to think that the Beginning in Honors handbook has served a useful purpose for several generations of honors leaders and encouraging to think that this revised version may continue that worthwhile function in the future. The understanding undergirding this publication and uniting all of us in honors, be we beginning, continuing or ending, is that this is work worth doing. Honors is an emblem of what is best about American higher education, and that means that it is profoundly valuable not just to us and our students, nor even just to our institutions of higher learning, but to our nation and to the world.*

Samuel Schuman  
Morris, MN 2006

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

Honors in Context . . . . .	7
Departmental and General Honors . . . . .	12
This Handbook . . . . .	14

## RECRUITING: STUDENTS AND FACULTY

Recruiting Students Externally . . . . .	19
Student Diversity . . . . .	24
Recruiting Students Internally . . . . .	25
Recruiting Faculty . . . . .	27
Honors Instructors and Evaluation . . . . .	29

## CURRICULUM

Types of Honors Courses . . . . .	33
Content of Honors Courses . . . . .	36
NCHC Honors Semesters . . . . .	37
Honors and the Broader Curriculum . . . . .	38

## BUDGET

Creating a Budget . . . . .	39
Budget Administration . . . . .	41
Faculty Payment . . . . .	42
Honors Scholarships . . . . .	44
Miscellaneous Expenses . . . . .	45

FACILITIES

Honors Office Space..... 47  
Honors Residence Halls..... 49

ADMINISTRIVIA

Honors Administrators..... 52  
Administrative Relations..... 56  
Honors Councils..... 58  
Organizations – National, Regional, State..... 60  
Advising Honors Students..... 62

APPENDIX A

Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program..... 65

APPENDIX B

Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College..... 69

APPENDIX C

NCHC Publications, Monographs, and Resources..... 71

THE AUTHOR

Samuel Schuman..... Back Cover

## INTRODUCTION

### Honors in Context

*Collegiate honors programs consist of enhanced educational opportunities for superior students.*

This sentence, while true as far as it goes, needs some annotation before it will serve as a helpful definition and not just an epigram.

Let's begin at the end: what is this creature called the "superior student?" The National Collegiate Honors Council (hereafter "NCHC") began midway through the Twentieth Century as an association of institutions with programs that overtly cultivated "the superior student." Indeed, its predecessor organization was called the "Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student," and published a journal, *The Superior Student*, the predecessor of today's *Honors in Practice*.

Clearly, the most constricting and least helpful definition of an honors student would be one that attempted to describe a universal, trans-institutional set of quantifiable measures: e.g., a superior student is one with an entering cumulative SAT score of 1200 (or 1250 or 1000 or an ACT of 26 or whatever). In point of fact, even in measurable terms, one institution's superior student may be another's average pupil. At least one successful honors program at a small, sectarian liberal arts college defines an honors student as one with 950 or higher cumulative SAT scores. Another college, also small and sectarian, draws its line at 1300. What seems important is the relative nature of academic superiority. It appears from the experiences of scores of institutions, of all types, sizes and shapes, that almost every campus has a group of some five to ten percent (roughly) of the student population who are its highest achieving students and who benefit significantly from Honors work. What matters is where those students are positioned in relationship to other students at that particular institution, not so much where they rank nationally.

Secondly, we must be certain we do not limit our definition of "superior" to high test scores of entering students. It is a fact commonly demonstrated that sometimes the very best students, by faculty and peer assessment, are not the top SAT or ACT test-takers. There is a correlation between aptitude tests and academic performance; that correlation is so far from perfect that it must always give us pause. Some students are superior because their imaginations are more fertile and complex than their peers; some honors programs cultivate

## Beginning in Honors

such students. Other students excel because they work much harder and more persistently than their peers, regardless of innate talent. Some students excel in articulate and engaged classroom discussions; some are nearly illiterate verbally but brilliant in science or mathematics; some show superiority in leadership, inspiring confidence, effectively tackling important campus tasks.

The point is that not every honors program should try to serve every sort of superior student, but that each program should articulate the excellences it seeks to cultivate; that the program should be shaped by its student population (and vice versa); and that internal standards of superiority are much more important than any universal measure.

Continuing to parse our epigrammatic definition, what, then, are “enhanced educational opportunities?” Certainly, many honors programs understand this notion to embrace more than classroom work although virtually all do include the classroom in a central way. Thus, for example, taking a group of honors students to see a Shakespeare play performed is an “enhanced educational opportunity;” so is a fire-side chat with a professor or campus visitor; so, sometimes, is the opportunity to live with students of similar academic commitment and abilities. Sometimes honors work is like other academic work, but harder (reading Faulkner, say, instead of Hemingway, or reading Freud instead of a textbook about psychoanalysis, or more challenging lab exercises in a Chemistry course). And sometimes honors work is not like other academic work, but of a different kind (e.g., an interdisciplinary course that includes reading Hemingway in conjunction with a text dealing with the history of the Spanish Civil War and studying the early paintings of Picasso or a Biology course reading Darwin while studying evolution).

Some honors students seek to accelerate their collegiate careers and graduate in less than the traditional four years after high school completion, or to enhance their baccalaureate experiences by pursuing multiple majors. Sometimes honors students want both, a shorter time in college and a double or triple major as well. These desires can represent a challenge for honors programs and an incentive. Some students may avoid an honors program because it might hold them back from early graduation. For others, however, honors can offer ways to shortcut some institutional requirements. Too, honors, with its frequent emphasis on interdisciplinary work, can actually enhance the possibilities for students to complete more than one major (e.g., counting one course as fulfilling requirements in two departments). Although it is only an opinion, I personally hold that honors programs



are probably not usually wise to encourage early graduation. I fear that often students are too eager to get on with life and fail to note how fully and richly they are in fact currently living as undergraduates. To me, honors serves a higher purpose when it helps make clear how rewarding the undergraduate years can be, rather than helping students sail through them more rapidly.

It is worth observing that some honors programs define their enriching educational opportunities even more broadly than I have been suggesting, thus opening the inviting possibility of honors playing an active role in raising the intellectual and cultural caliber of the entire campus, not solely of a selected group of students. These honors programs offer open lectures or sponsor all-campus discussions and similar cross-institutional enrichment opportunities. These seem both appropriate and admirable activities for honors programs, but rarely are such all-campus events the primary focus of an honors program. Thus, the initial definition of “enhanced programs” can stand: it is sufficiently broad and vague to avoid any threat of constricting, but it is perhaps also narrow enough to be useful.

A third phrase, “collegiate honors programs” also requires elaboration. In the pages that follow, I alternate “college” and “university” in some reasonable balance, but unless the context makes it clear that I am differentiating these two types of institutions, (e.g., “many large university honors programs have many more staff than those at small colleges”), the reader should understand both terms to be meant as generic. So, a “collegiate” honors program includes one at a major land-grant university, not just a small college. A similar frugal standard in word use dictates that I speak of “honors directors” even when I might be speaking of honors “deans” or even “chairs” of honors committees. By “honors director” I mean that individual who has the paramount responsibility for managing honors at an institution, regardless of that individual’s actual title, the “chief honors administrator.” Finally, I will also generally speak of “honors programs,” rather than routinely resort to the awkward locution “honors programs and colleges.” Differences exist between honors programs and honors colleges, as there are between honors directors and honors deans, and these will receive some attention below. Where the context does not make it clear that such a contrast is at play, it should be assumed that “honors programs” refers to the collection of honors offerings at an institution, whatever actual title is given to them.

The phrases “superior student,” “enhanced educational opportunities,” and “collegiate honors programs” are suggestive of a range of

## Beginning in Honors

possibilities more than a strict or exact point of delineation. In turn, such a range of definitional possibilities suggests that honors programs are creatures more relative than absolute. This principle is so important that it is worth repeating in a negative form as an honors axiom: “There is no universal model for honors programs.” Each program should be designed to coordinate with the remainder of the curricular and extracurricular offerings, and the institutional culture, of a particular postsecondary place. There is no worse mistake than for Guilford College’s honors program to copy the highly successful model in place at the University of Maine, or vice versa, nor for the University of Minnesota to imitate Grinnell College or the University of New Mexico or anywhere else.

Honors programs have included just about every permutation of the educational process—most legitimate, some whacky, a few both—it is possible to imagine. This puts the institution that is considering the initiation of a new program in an enviable position, in that it can, should, and must tailor the design of that new program to harmonize smoothly with the remainder of the curriculum.

Thus, to pick an extreme example, let’s imagine an institution that in a burst of libertarian zeal in the late ‘60’s abandoned all graduation requirements and has yet to restore any. Perhaps such an institution would be wise to devise an honors program based upon a prescribed, traditional model: for example, a program having as its core a series of chronologically ordered seminars focusing upon the great works of the Western or the global intellectual traditions. Or, take the opposite extreme: a university with a highly prescriptive and traditional set of graduation requirements. That institution is possibly ripe for an honors program featuring freewheeling curricular experimentation, a large component of student-initiated independent work, and subject matters a bit off the beaten track of academe.

The model being described here might be called “reactionary” (or to coin an awkward neologism that avoids political implications, “reactionistic”). That is, it suggests that a successful way to meld honors into the larger curriculum and culture is by reaction or contrast.

Another model, which perhaps produces less curricular breadth but possibly greater institutional depth, would posit honors programs that build upon existing institutional patterns and strengths. If the college has a classical emphasis, the honors program can be even more pristine and profound in its classicism; if the university is already relatively less structured and traditional, the honors program can be even more free-wheeling and experimental.

## Samuel Schuman

Since most institutions actually fall between these extremes, most devise honors programs that are neither rigidly prescriptive nor wildly experimental. The point, though, is that such choices should depend directly upon the shape of the remainder of the school's educational program and its unique desires and needs. An honors program is one of the most inviting ways to balance a curriculum, to fill programmatic gaps, or to satisfy pedagogical tastes that run counter to the prevailing institutional style.

An honors program is part of a complex educational structure to which it must mold itself with creativity and sensitivity; it cannot be a freestanding enterprise.

To say that each honors program is unique and institution-specific, of course, is not to say that no guidelines or standards for honors obtain. Just as each American college or university is unlike any other, but all submit to widely recognized standards for accreditation, so the NCHC, as the national organization of honors colleges and programs has defined a set of "basic characteristics for a fully developed honors program," and a similar checklist for a "fully developed honors college." Framed with appropriate caution, these two statements offer a new program, college, director, or dean some basic parameters that the honors community has valued over time. No institution will be exactly defined by, nor wholly fulfill, all these guidelines, but they are a useful and thoughtful template. [Both documents are attached to this *Handbook* as "Appendix A" and "Appendix B."]

### Departmental and General Honors

I should note the distinction between general and departmental honors offerings and programs and between these and graduation from an honors college. Departmental honors are arrangements whereby a student can earn honors in the major department, exclusive of any college-wide requirements or program: for example, by having a high graduating grade point average and/or writing a senior thesis. Sometimes, but rarely, departmental honors are under the aegis of an institution-wide honors program or committee. Sometimes a departmental honors board of some sort oversees it. Obviously, a general honors program is one with college-wide or university-wide features, open to students from a multitude of departments, and under an institutional rather than departmental aegis.

In a few small colleges and in many large institutions, both types of honors programs exist together. A student can achieve both general honors and departmental honors. In more institutions, one or the other program prevails. In some large universities, different colleges have different multi-departmental honors programs, e.g., a college of liberal arts honors program. In other schools only some departments have independent honors programs, either in combination with an institutional program or as the only collegiate honors option.

Just to confuse the issue of honors a bit more, many institutions award grade point honors, usually denoted by the Latin “cum laude” designations, to students achieving a certain G.P.A. at graduation. Some colleges feature all three species of graduation honors.

Finally, some institutions with honors colleges will award the degree not with some sort of honors, but from the honors college. Thus, for example, a student could be awarded a BS degree in Chemistry from the Honors College of Hypothetical University.

Although keeping these things straight via some reasonable distinction in nomenclature, especially at commencement time, is probably worthwhile, the endeavor will likely prove futile.

It is finally necessary to note that, whatever the specific nature of an honors program, it is vital that it do what it does as well as possible: it is not just rhetoric to argue that what it is that makes honors programs honorable is at least partly an intolerance of mediocrity and a rejection of the validity of the lowest common denominator in higher education. The business of honors must be to cultivate academic excellence: excellent teaching, excellent learning, and all the subsidiary excellences (curriculum design, extracurricular programming, and advising) that contribute to them. The unique and defining feature of honors is its

## Samuel Schuman

hopeless and glorious vision of doing collegiate education as well as it can be done. The quest is hopeless because all of us, including honors students, teachers, and administrators, inhabit the sublunary world of human imperfection: we can probably never do anything as well as it can possibly be done. This vision is glorious, however, because it can give our entire educational enterprise a direction and a goal to inspire our professional lives, energize our working, and sustain not just those of us in honors, but the colleges and universities within which we live.

## Beginning in Honors

### **This Handbook**

This *Handbook* has been created to meet specific needs and fill particular voids. It evolved from a publication prepared for the NCHC through its Small College Honors Committee in 1988. The first edition of the *Beginning in Honors Handbook* appeared in 1989, its third revised edition in 1995. This fourth edition has been substantially altered and updated.

The intended audience includes:

- Colleges and universities in the process of beginning honors programs or colleges, or considering doing so.
- Newly appointed directors/deans of honors, or chairs of honors committees, task forces, councils, and the like.
- Institutions or individuals considering major alterations in existing honors offerings.
- Current heads of existing honors programs seeking some new ideas or solutions to persistent problems, or at least reassurance that those problems are not unique.

This pamphlet should also prove of use and interest to faculty members weighing issues of honors curricula or other instructional issues, and to administrators overseeing honors programs – Vice Presidents, Deans, Provosts, and the like.

The *Beginning in Honors Handbook* has been developed, and to no small extent has grown out of, a series of successful workshops that have been conducted as a pre-conference session of the annual national fall NCHC meeting since 1984. The workshops, also entitled Beginning in Honors<sup>®</sup>, have provided pragmatic nuts-and-bolts assistance to neophyte honors institutions and individuals. They have been directed at various times by myself, Dr. Anne Ponder, and Dr. Ted Estess. Several thousand individuals, representing hundreds of colleges and universities nationwide have participated in the Beginning in Honors<sup>®</sup> workshops. Additionally, the success of this venture has led to several similar efforts at the regional and statewide level and to countless consultancies on the part of the workshop leaders. Participation in the annual NCHC meeting and in the Beginning in Honors<sup>®</sup> workshop is highly recommended for new directors and/or programs.

The range of institutions studied in the process of preparing this publication is enormous: public and private colleges and universities; institutions with a strong continuing religious tradition, those with only vestiges of a sectarian foundation, and purely secular schools; single-sex

and coed colleges; schools of high prestige and others of little national reputation; very selective institutions and ones with open admissions policies; two-year, baccalaureate, and graduate-degree-granting schools, and colleges from all regions of the nation. Two-year institutions include technological institutions, private AA degree-granting schools, and public community colleges. Another type of honors program considered is that within a branch or college of a larger institution, e.g., “the College of Liberal Arts honors program at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.”

Given this staggering diversity, are there any common features of honors programs that can give unity (and additional justification) to a handbook such as this? Indeed, there are, at least if we do not insist upon excessive precision of definition. In this context, I should note once again the “characteristics of fully developed” honors programs and colleges appended, and simultaneously reaffirm the steadfast refusal of the NCHC and the honors movement in general to accredit or certify the legitimacy of particular programs. Both reason and practice have suggested that this approach of clear guidance and equally clear institutional autonomy has proven wise and appropriate.

That said, here is a skeletal list of features, at least some of which characterize most honors programs. Few programs include them all, but even fewer include none:

- Smaller classes than the norm at the institution.
- More emphasis upon participatory classroom styles (i.e., discussion rather than lecture). In science courses, this might consist of smaller, more independent and more challenging laboratory sections.
- More work than in comparable classes within the curriculum.
- More difficult work than in comparable classes within the curriculum.
- More highly qualified students (by some standard or other).
- More stimulating faculty than the norm.
- A greater emphasis upon primary source material; a corresponding lesser emphasis upon secondary texts.
- A greater emphasis in the sciences on primary student lab discovery, rather than rote exercises.
- Team or group teaching.
- An interdisciplinary theme or approach.
- An element of independent study.

## Beginning in Honors

Important differences exist between honors programs, both within broad categories and between them. For example, honors programs at small colleges are commonly not small versions of honors programs at large universities although this idea is occasionally assumed by both parties. Many large universities have as a major goal (sometimes, virtually a solitary aim) to reproduce within the vast university structure the conditions already existing in small colleges generally: small discussion-oriented classes, close teacher-student relationships, informal social contact among students with strong academic interests, and occasional cross-departmental exchanges. Since many of these conditions exist much of the time at most small colleges, they do not need to worry about creating them specifically in honors programs. Here, by way of illustration, is a short, and almost random, sample of the ways some programs at large universities market themselves: “For the 300 students who join each fall, the Honors College offers all the advantages of a small college without sacrificing the wealth of resources and rich diversity of a large university...” (from a large urban university in Texas); “offering a peerless academic experience unifying the benefits of a small liberal arts college with the opportunities of a comprehensive university” (from a land-grant university in the southeast); “the advantages of a small liberal arts college as well as the University’s rich resources” (a state university in the Pacific northwest).

Sometimes honors programs at smaller institutions emulate some of the virtues of large universities. An emphasis on research, for example, including funding for research expenses and even equipment, is frequently a characteristic of small college honors programs, and sometimes it is only in the honors program that such an emphasis exists. Sometimes small college honors programs offer rather esoteric, specialized courses, of the type far more commonly found at the graduate level in major universities. A quick glance at self-descriptions of small college honors programs in *Peterson’s Guide to Honors Programs & Colleges* reveals a plethora of expressions such as “reach their highest potential as a scholar,” “independent scholarship,” “outstanding preparation for graduate education,” “special opportunities for research and subsidies,” and “in-depth research.”

Often a major function of honors programs at two-year institutions is to expose students to material and to pedagogies that would normally be found in the junior and senior years of a four-year school. Obviously, this exposure is a given at baccalaureate and graduate-level colleges and universities. Many four-year honors programs, on the other hand, make an especial effort to include experiential learning



within the honors model, whereas it is often the case that community colleges cater to a student populace that is already quite rich in real-world experience. The point is not that any one model is superior to another, but that the nature of each institution having or wishing to have an honors program will define “honors” for its own specific needs and desiderata, and for those of its class of institution.

To grasp some of the rich texture and range of honors programs at contemporary American colleges and universities, the reader should scan *Peterson's Guide to Honors Programs & Honors Colleges* (further bibliographic and ordering information is found in Appendix C).

Honors education offers unique opportunities, special strengths, and particular problems and challenges. In the pages that follow, I have attempted to locate and address both the opportunities and the problems. The goal is to suggest possibilities, not to be narrowly prescriptive: the guiding principle is that no single appropriate or successful model can be transferred from one institution to another. Indeed, one of the strengths of honors programs is that they are as diverse as the colleges that house them. Honors programs represent a powerful opportunity for our institutions to fill curricular and extracurricular gaps, to move in new and experimental directions, and to enrich their educational programs. Each honors program is intimately related to the entire fabric of the institution that houses it, often both reflecting the predominant ethos of that institution and offering simultaneously a kind of educational counterculture within it. Honors, thus, provides an important opportunity for balance and choice. This is an especially inviting trait to all our institutions since few of us, large or small, public or private, two-year, four-year, or graduate, feel sufficiently funded and empowered to explore alternative educational models and intriguing new directions to our hearts' desires.

The sections that follow focus on areas of concern to those working with honors at all colleges and universities: recruitment, curriculum, budget, facilities, and administration. In each area, I have tried to state some general operating principles, to note specific issues that can lead to difficulties, and to suggest proven solutions and strategies. One cannot, of course, say everything there is to say, but an honest effort has been made to present a full range of comment about an important variety of topics.

I am in debt to the many honors directors who have made contributions to this project in its several iterations over many years. These include Ann Raia, Bob Rogers, Earl Brown, Bob Roemer, Phyllis Betts, Ada Long, Rick Wicks, Don VanderWalle, Dick Cummings, Faith

## Beginning in Honors

Gabelnick, Anne Ponder, and Skip Godow. Some of these generous colleagues have left honors, some have left academe, some are no longer living; my gratitude to them all is abiding. George Mariz has kindly and carefully reviewed the text of this revision and improved it. While I have made a sincere effort to be inclusive and fair in the subjects and principles upon which I focus here, there is no doubt that this publication remains finally the work of a single individual with both a deep affection for and strong opinions about honors. I apologize, honestly but without too much vigor, for the latter. The former has been returned, many times over, by the friends I have made among honors students, faculty and administrators over the past three decades, and the blessing of having been some part of such an exciting and valuable academic enterprise. It has been an honor.

## **RECRUITING: STUDENTS AND FACULTY**

If a good honors program is not exactly Mark Hopkins at one end of a log and a student at the other, it is still probably about as close to that ideal of education as is possible. More than anything else, honors education is the bringing together of outstanding students and outstanding teachers. Accordingly, the issue of recruitment, of finding those outstanding pupils and professors and convincing them to join the honors program, is one of quintessential importance.

### **Recruiting Students Externally**

Locating and attracting appropriate students for honors work can consume as much time as anyone is prepared to give it: it is a bottomless pit. Since most honors directors do not have excessive time, any more than they have extra money, they must conceive strategically their efforts to recruit students with an eye to maximum effectiveness with limited expenditures of effort and hours.

A very few highly developed honors colleges within larger universities have created what amounts to an independent, or more commonly, semi-independent, admissions office: they recruit students directly, and prospective students apply to the university through application to the honors college, as others might apply through the college of arts and sciences or the college of biological sciences or the school of nursing. Collegiate admissions have become an increasingly complex and costly enterprise in recent decades, and so the honors college that is truly independent needs to think about the entire range of recruitment needs: personnel, publications, a communications plan, external and internal visits, application processing, financial aid, and the like. Clearly, this undertaking is massive. Its advantage, of course, is that it truly puts the honors college on the same footing within the university as all the other colleges that do independent undergraduate recruiting. Perhaps the most common model for such fully developed colleges is that in which students are recruited university-wide by an undergraduate admissions office, but specify in the application process a collegiate destination, and successful admission requires a positive decision in both venues. In such a situation, it is prudent, albeit less efficient in the short run, to have a small admissions committee within the honors college, rather than asking the dean or director, or any one individual, to make the decision alone.

## Beginning in Honors

Much more frequently, honors programs are not freestanding collegiate units, but have a direct link to institutional or collegiate admissions offices. This connection should be cultivated, but with a trace of wariness. Admissions offices and honors programs engage in similar but not exactly the same endeavors. Some admission programs eagerly bring to campus more above-average students than honors programs seek to admit, for example. Admissions folk tend to think in terms of quantity; honors folk, quality. Despite this slightly different emphasis, the honors program must work in a coordinated fashion with the college admissions office to attract a pool of highly qualified applicants. The degree of this cooperation can range from casual to intimate. Most admission officers are delighted to discover the cooperation of the honors program in the student recruitment effort: they welcome any help they can get. They will usually accept eagerly any honors materials and/or offers of such aid as speaking with students and families visiting campus, joining the activities of special recruiting days, or writing and possibly even paying for portions of admission brochures.

In some cases, honors personnel may travel to do direct recruiting of prospective high-quality students. While at first blush this may not seem an especially productive use of time, the activity can be informative and important, and it can bring some additional honors students to campus. Certainly honors directors and faculty and, especially, students should be prepared to offer their informed aid to occasional recruiting expeditions such as college nights or area alumni recruiting programs. Experienced student recruiters know that the most trusted and most effective recruiting agents are students who are already known by prospective applicants. If honors students who come from a high school or a region are available to help on visits to that locale, they can be wonderfully winning spokespersons for the institution and for the honors program.

More commonly, the honors program will see prospective students when they visit the campus, rather than going out to meet them. On such occasions, either informal or carefully structured, being well prepared is important. Know a bit about the students, their hometown or high school, their academic interests, and be ready to ask and answer specific questions. Frequently exceptionally strong students wish to visit a class or meet with a teacher in their area of interest, and the honors program can often make such arrangements. Honors seminars are often an especially good place for an institution to show off exciting interactive teaching and learning.

Of course, many honors-quality prospective students may encounter only a traveling admissions recruiter. Therefore, the honors program must provide these folks with full information, including printed material and, if at all possible, personal briefings concerning the honors program. Larger institutions, with correspondingly big admissions staffs, may identify a particular individual or some sub-group of the admissions staff to work with the honors program or even to become special honors recruiters. Some students who graduate from honors programs remain at their baccalaureate institutions for a few years as admissions workers, providing an insider opportunity. In any case, everyone in the Admissions Office should be reasonably well informed about honors: at the minimum that there is a program, what it consists of, how students get into it, and whom to ask for further information.

Some honors programs have an Honors Interview Day or some such occasion when prospective honors students come to campus as a group and meet with program personnel, current honors students, and selected faculty members. Sometimes such a program is linked to competition for scholarships or even entrance into the honors program itself. These events can be valuable recruitment opportunities if they are well planned and attractive. Highly qualified high school students are the objects of a sometimes frighteningly competitive recruitment process today, and a too casual or shoddy honors interview can quickly alienate a strong prospect. Many of the students a program seeks to recruit will also be at the top of other institutions' prospect lists. It is a sad but undeniable fact that the task will likely be more a matter of the college or university selling itself to the students than the students marketing themselves. Some possible activities include arranging for the prospective students to visit a lively seminar, to talk with an especially engaging teacher, or to meet current honors students, especially those from the same hometown or high school. Information about the honors program – an accurate brochure and/or a low-key talk – should be reliable, clear, and attractive. Prospective college students and their parents have become wary consumers, so directors should beware the hard sell, the overly gaudy, or the flamboyantly commercial approaches. Presentations should emphasize strengths while avoiding the pretense that the program is perfect.

Most honors enterprises have a brochure of some sort, used primarily as a recruitment piece. These need not be spectacular, although some are, but they should be attractive. Recruitment publications should probably not be confused with internal handbooks, spelling out the details of honors program requirements and options, by nature

## Beginning in Honors

rather dry reading. Brochures should delineate clearly what the honors program is, who participates in it, and what concrete rewards (scholarships, graduation honors, jobs, or early registration) accrue to it. It is perhaps wise to make the point in such a brochure, and elsewhere, that not all honors students are budding Shakespeares or potential Einsteins: sometimes very good high school students fear and avoid honor programs because they suspect they will be outclassed by other participants. Noting in an honors program publication what an honors program is not is also a good idea: it is not simply an honors society for students with high grades, for example. “Honors” means quite different things at the high school and college levels, and some quite sophisticated students may have serious misperceptions of what honors programs offer them.

Meeting with students and publicity materials are important recruitment devices. Many honors programs, though, rely primarily upon correspondence as a primary means of reaching and attracting entering students. Initial contact with prospective honors students may be by electronic or postal letter. Often, all follow-up communication, until arrival on campus to begin the first year, is by mail or e-mail. Writing electronic or paper letters that are clear and inviting is obviously important. Perhaps less obvious, but possibly even more important, is developing a straightforward and effective schedule and protocol for sending those letters. *What* students receive *which* letters, and *when*, needs to be worked out carefully. Here, admissions offices can be of enormous aid since strategic program design is their bread and butter. Once the protocol is designed, write it down or put it into a computer calendar program. Correspondence should be monitored with an eye toward two potential problems: first, there may be a need to adjust the initial schedule of mailings or to change the content of letters; even brilliant letters will not serve in perpetuity. Second, if some other office, such as admissions, is entrusted with the task of actually preparing and sending the mailings, directors should verify at each annual cycle that this task is being done in a timely manner. Assuming that everything is working smoothly is unwise.

Sometimes a brief handwritten note or quick e-mail can humanize and personalize a form message. Even a few words on a letter or on an electronic message can personalize the communication. If there is some appropriate hook or *entrée*, and perhaps even if there is not, a few words from a director, associate, admissions recruiter, or student can help. Does someone know this student? Has someone met her or him on a high school visit or college night? Is another student from the

## Samuel Schuman

same high school currently enrolled in the honors program? Directors should exploit any such link, no matter how tenuous.

### **Student Diversity**

If an honors program offers itself as the institution's best, it needs to pay careful attention to the racial, ethnic, class, and geographic demographics of its student body and its faculty and staff. Today's colleges and universities, at their best, offer students opportunities to learn, informally as well as officially, with others from a wide variety of backgrounds. A persuasive case can be made that honors programs should be more diverse and should have more students of color, more international students, show a greater geographical mix, and attract students with a wider variety of personal styles and preferences than the institutions that house them. This demographic has, in fact, sometimes been the case. At other times, unfortunately, honors programs have had difficulty sustaining diversity in their student population.

What can honors do to recruit a diverse group of students? It can overtly proclaim its desire and intention to do so. It can make sure that prospective students will see a range of people of different backgrounds, students, faculty and staff, when they visit the honors program or view its publications. It can occasionally offer courses that focus upon and will strongly appeal to multi-ethnic constituencies: women's literature, Afro-Caribbean culture, Chinese history, the biology of sickle-cell disease, GLBT sociology, or an American Indian language. Honors can make a focused effort to recruit students from regions and high schools with large proportions of under-represented students: the very best students from an inner-city, mostly African-American high school have the potential to be outstanding members of any honors program. Honors can sponsor special programs, such as speakers, art exhibits or performances, that demonstrate an awareness of, and serious interest in, the widest range of peoples.



## Recruiting Students Internally

Honors programs often continue to recruit students internally beyond the entering semester: some, in fact, do not begin at all in the first term of the freshman year. A full-scale recruitment program for currently attending students probably involves at least two different components: some sort of fairly mechanical scan of student records to spot high achievers who are not yet members of the honors program, and a solicitation of nominations from faculty members. Sometimes this second approach is an excellent means of securing students for the honors program who do not conform exactly to the standard quantitative measures of high academic potential, but who may become valued honors students because of, for example, unusual creativity or exceptional curiosity. Once a listing of potential honors students amongst currently enrolled students is generated, by whatever means, invitations should be issued. Usually, an interview of some sort is arranged with a faculty honors committee or the honors director.

Internal and external recruitment of honors students can be a somewhat tricky business. Some honors directors report that they themselves, as well as some of the faculty members who work in their programs, are not always wholly pleased by the quality of their honors student body. A not-uncommon complaint is that honors students are not as responsive in class as desired, that they tend not to be intellectual risk-takers nor especially zealous discussion participants. It is easy to forget that many, perhaps most, honors programs choose students at least partially on the basis of standardized measurements, which tend to reward not-particularly-aggressive learners and quiet, well-mannered classroom behaviors. Good high school class rank and high SAT/ACT scores do not promise original intellects and assertive learners although they certainly do not preclude them, either. The honors recruiter should be alert for the occasional oddball, the nonconformist, even the student with a record of some academic troublemaking in high school: students with 1550 SAT scores and straight “D’s” in their senior year of high school can make very interesting honors students indeed. Such individuals are often well served by honors work that can court their strengths and help them to overcome their weaknesses. They may otherwise be left to sink or swim, just as in high school, and they may well sink.

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## Beginning in Honors

A number of “perks” heighten the appeal of honors programs and aid in attracting desired students. Honors scholarships, obviously, are perhaps the most conspicuous and remain one of the most successful. While some institutions have committed large amounts of money to honors scholarships, others have used such awards symbolically, in the hopes that students will be attracted as much by glory as by big bucks. The budgetary strategies of honors scholarships are considered in the following section.

Other enticements can also be alluring. At some institutions honors students receive special priority treatment in the course registration process. At others, certain graduation requirements are waived or altered for them. Special honors residential options (discussed at greater length below) are in many cases a desirable feature. Some students and families are attracted by impressive data regarding the success, in graduate and professional schools and in careers, of graduates of the honors program: it pays to collect and to publicize such data. Indeed, in the current climate of heightened emphasis on quantitative institutional assessment, such data may be required. Even if it is not, it will be very useful at reaccreditation time.

One hopes the strongest attraction of a collegiate honors program remains its most essential one: the attraction of an unusually rewarding learning experience, with a challenging curriculum, amiable and bright student colleagues, and outstanding professors.

## Recruiting Faculty

Once the students have been wooed and won by the promise of those brilliant classes, how are the outstanding professors, in turn, to be recruited? Interestingly, many of the same issues that surface in the area of student recruitment also are relevant in the search for fine honors faculty.

Most honors instructors will come to the program on a part-time, temporary basis from a home in an academic department. Those relatively few, highly developed honors colleges that have faculty slots of their own will find themselves, as with student enrollment, emulating university or college faculty recruitment procedures in their entirety or partially. This would include creating and charging a search committee, creating a position description, advertising the position, screening and interviewing applicants, making the offer, and arranging final contractual accords. Writing a position description and advertisement for a faculty member to work exclusively in honors is an interesting proposition. Obviously, the post needs to appeal to individuals who might be strong candidates for other, more discipline-based, jobs. At the same time, the idiosyncratic requirements of honors instruction should be articulated clearly – e.g., teaching from an interdisciplinary perspective, team teaching, skills in seminar pedagogy, or whatever similar classroom requirements the particular program emphasizes. New honors colleges recruiting faculty for the first time might be well advised to seek some help from more established colleagues, perhaps through the useful NCHC listserv, prior to launching such a search. Another important and potentially helpful resource is the college/university personnel or human resources office. At the very least, this office can guide the neophyte through the maze of legal requirements of the advertising and interviewing process, regulatory issues that are all too often more honored in the breach than in the observance in collegiate searches. Sometimes the first faculty hired wholly within an honors program or college are part-time, non-tenure-track appointments, sometimes spousal hires. The quality of instruction provided by such individuals can be very high. Over time, however, if the honors college is to have an equivalent status to other collegiate units within the university, it needs to be hiring faculty on the same contractual basis as those units, if it is to hire them at all. That means evolving towards full-time, tenurable positions. Negotiating a timetable for that evolution when the college is first hiring its own faculty rather than leaving this issue undiscussed or implicit is wise.

## Beginning in Honors

For faculty members in the more common mode of employing part-time recruits from other departments within the institution, the honors director's full panoply of persuasive skills is going to be needed. Honors programs want and need the very best faculty; department chairs tend to be reluctant to lose the services of such academic stars. If the honors program is compensating the department of origin for the work of the instructor, offering generous compensation will help. Sometimes, too, it can be helpful to suggest to department chairs the option of hiring, for a short-term stint, a part-timer, to replace a regular faculty member teaching honors, with some special skills or expertise not usually otherwise residing in the department; an English Department might think about a one-term hire of a specialist in Anglo-Caribbean or Anglo-African literature, or a small Physics Department could add an expert in string theory. Student recommendations of potential honors instructors are often a valuable source of potential faculty recruits, and telling professors that the students want them to teach in honors is almost always a powerful and winning incentive.

## Honors Instructors and Evaluation

As with students, the most obvious faculty members may not always make the best honors instructors. It pays to be as overt and specific as possible about the qualities being sought in honors instruction. For example, the most popular lecturer on campus may not do well with seven aggressive and active learners in a seminar setting (then again, she may!). The most articulate teacher may not always be the best listener. Sometimes professors with fairly low campus reputations turn out to be exceptional honors instructors: often honors students can overlook trivial failings; they can thrive on rigor or delight in idiosyncrasy. Indeed, professorial quirks that irritate or amuse less serious students sometimes are the most beloved characteristics of honors teachers.

In any event, it is probably almost always better for the honors program to pick the instructors it seeks to enlist, and actively pursue them, than to be the passive recipients of independent departmental personnel largesse. It is not unheard of, although it should be, for departments to attempt to dump some of their weakest, least popular teachers into non-departmental teaching assignments such as honors when regular classes fail to attract sufficient students. Needless to say, such impulses must be nipped well before budding.

Again, as was the case with students, some honors programs have been able to offer faculty members teaching honors courses certain rewards. These include financial incentives such as the faculty development options cited below in the budget section. They might include improved instructional conditions: easier access to films and guest speakers, or perhaps an attractive seminar room (with coffee!) in which to hold classes. Directors should cultivate a campus atmosphere in which instruction in the honors program is seen as a reward and an honor for the faculty. Faculty personnel committees, tenure review boards, and deans can and should be notified of the selection of honors faculty and of the good work individuals have done in and with the program. It is always important, too, not to give the appearance of developing some sort of elite and closed cadre of honors instruction. New instructors should regularly be urged to consider joining the program; rotation, rather than permanence, should be the staffing rule.

It is important for honors instructors and honors instruction to be evaluated as honors. Some honors programs use regular institutional instructional class evaluation formats, others devise special honors course evaluations, and some use both. Instructors should be prepared

## Beginning in Honors

for the fact that honors students tend to grade their professors according to a more rigorous standard than do non-honors students. Depending upon the customs of specific institutions, having the honors director sit in on at least a few classes being taught by a neophyte honors instructor is usually highly desirable. This is an opportunity not just for evaluation, but for development as well, and most outstanding teachers, but not all, will welcome such a visit. To institutionalize such a program of class visitations and make it universal will lessen the suspicion that they only follow some sort of problem or complaint.

Conferring with some frequency, formally and informally, with those teaching in the honors program certainly makes sense. Directors should ask, a few weeks into the term, how classes seem to be developing. A formal conference at the conclusion of the course is often a helpful occasion. The honors director can share perceptions of the instructor's work, and the instructor can offer useful information on the program: the course structure, the students, and the administration.

When possible, having the chief honors administrator also be an honors teacher is highly desirable. This strategy lends credibility to that individual with faculty colleagues and students alike that is virtually impossible to achieve in other ways. For the same sorts of reasons, it is perhaps even more desirable for the honors administrator also to be, at least sometimes, a non-honors teacher: to maintain an instructional link to an academic department and to do some visible work wholly divorced from honors. Some individuals can teach constantly in and outside of the honors program they administer; some can rotate and do both occasionally but not at the same time; some will only rarely be able to work in the classroom. Whatever pattern is possible, the essential fact remains that in the collegiate community, the surest, and often the only path to full academic legitimacy and respect is successful work as a teacher and scholar. The faculty member the honors administrator must be most eager to recruit may be herself or himself.

Arguably, the second most important faculty member to be recruited is the professor who is a person of color or a member of some other traditionally underrepresented group. Just as student diversity remains an important value for honors, so too is faculty and staff heterogeneity. Honors administrators who have the luxury of hiring their own full-time faculty should go out of their way to seek qualified non-traditional applicants. Those who recruit their teachers from within the pre-existing ranks of their institution should do the same. That task may actually be easier for the latter administrators than the former. Having a diverse faculty will help recruit a diverse student population, and vice

## Samuel Schuman

versa. One good way to improve the odds of recruiting minority faculty members is to make sure that the honors curriculum is welcoming to course work that reflects particular interests of many, although certainly not all, such teachers. Courses in African-American literature, Chinese history or language, and the like will help bring traditionally scarce students from traditionally underrepresented groups into honors: offering such courses will also be a boost to recruiting a similarly rich panoply of faculty to teach honors.

Finally, the paramount attraction for honors faculty is the same as for students: the enriched educational opportunities afforded by honors. Most professors are hungry for eager and bright students, for smaller classes, and for the opportunity to devise interesting and challenging syllabi. The honors program should be where this action is to be found, and consequently, attracting teachers to it should be like attracting bears to honey.

## Beginning in Honors



## CURRICULUM

The single most important feature of any honors program is its people: the students who learn there and the faculty who teach them. Next would have to come the substance of what they teach and learn together: the curriculum.

### Types of Honors Courses

The curricular arrangements that have been employed in collegiate honors programs are nearly limitless. That infinite variety, however, turns out to be, in virtually all cases, some choice or combination of four basic course types:

1. *Honors sections of regular courses.* This option is especially popular in institutions with fairly prescribed general education curricula, and hence several multi-sectioned courses (e.g., freshman English, introductory biology, beginning calculus, and the like.). Honors sections usually cover most of the same material as the regular course for which they substitute, but may involve different and/or extra reading or writing assignments, altered pedagogy, more difficult material, higher expectations, and/or smaller sections. This sort of course is attractive in situations in which especially bright or well-prepared students may find themselves undertaking coursework that might be repetitious and unchallenging to them.
2. *Enriched options within regular courses.* This curricular model differs from honors sections in that honors students and non-honors students are enrolled or embedded in the same sections of the same courses, but honors students are expected to complete some extra project or assignment. Often this involves doing an additional or much more in-depth paper. Sometimes it involves separate discussion groups. Needless to say, this pathway is one of the easiest to follow since it tends to involve absolutely no instructional costs: usually the instructors of such sections can be asked to undertake the slight burden of assigning and grading the extra work, gratis.
3. *Special Honors Courses.* Perhaps the most popular curriculum option for most honors programs is the distinctive honors course. Often such courses are interdisciplinary, although not always. Sometimes, but not always, they are team-taught, sometimes by teams of more than a pair of instructors. Frequently these honors courses are conducted on some variant of the graduate seminar model, where the

## Beginning in Honors

goal is much high-level, well-prepared give and take among students and professors. This sort of course is in some ways the most inviting curricular choice, but it is also one of the most expensive and by far the most time-consuming for the honors administrator. That is especially the case when the course is perpetually reinvented and the instruction perpetually re-brokered. An honors director generating one team-taught, one-time-only honors course per semester, or even per year, will quickly discover that as soon as one course is established, it is past time to begin work on the next. Particularly at smaller schools, the amount of negotiation necessary to put such a course together can be intimidating. For the part-time honors director, especially, special honors courses can be a high-risk, high-gain venture. At larger schools, the burden of generating special honors courses is somewhat lighter for at least two reasons. First, the more ample the curriculum of the institution as a whole, the smaller a sacrifice it will probably seem to create one additional special course. An academic department with fifty faculty members is probably going to find it easier to spring one of them to teach or team teach a special honors course than is a department of five. (Knowing this may not make the actual negotiations with a reluctant department chair one whit easier.) Of course, this general rule is subject to considerable variation. Well-to-do smaller colleges may, in fact, have more flexibility with staffing than some quite large schools working on a tight budget or with rigorous controls on faculty assignment and workload. Secondly, the more administrative time the director of the honors program is assigned, obviously the more time there is to broker such courses. Thus large programs with full-time administrators may realistically contemplate a perpetual calendar of special honors courses, both new and recurring. The point is that while special honors courses are attractive and are often the first curricular option new honors programs turn to, the institution with sharp constraints or limited honors resources should recognize that these courses are costly. They consume much administrative energy and faculty commitment and, hence, should be approached with a bit of caution. Clearly, once successful courses are brokered, it is desirable to offer them more than once, perhaps two or three iterations, with a reasonable break between offerings.

4. *Honors Projects.* A final project or thesis is probably the most pervasive characteristic of honors curricula. Usually, this work is done on a more or less independent, tutorial basis. The vast majority of honors projects are done in the senior year although some institutions

permit students to begin in their fifth or sixth semester. In many situations some sort of quasi-doctoral final exercise, such as an oral exam, outside readers, public presentation, or some combination thereof, culminates the honors project. Sometimes the honors project is required to be part of a student's major; sometimes it is not. In some cases, in fact, cross-disciplinary projects are encouraged or mandated. Formal requirements for honors projects also vary wildly: some are quite flexible and informal, permitting creative or even experiential work, while others are rather strictly modeled after graduate thesis production.

Obviously combinations and variations of these four curricular types will be found. Some institutions have directed study options that do not lead to a project or thesis; some have arranged classes with very few students – three or four sometimes – per instructor; some have student-led seminars.

Few small or two-year college honors programs offer all four types of honors courses. Many offer only one. Probably the majority combines two or three elements: special honors courses and a thesis, say. The larger the honors program, logically, the greater the chance that several or all these types of curricular options will be available. Many major university honors colleges offer all four options, sometimes with additional combinations and variations. Obviously, decisions regarding the type of honors work and how much to offer should depend upon a hardheaded assessment of institutional ability to populate courses, both with students and teachers. An institution with relatively few professors, large classes, high teaching loads, and little fiscal flexibility will find creating an extra honors course every term, especially a team-taught seminar-style offering, exceptionally difficult. An institution with an all-college senior thesis might not want to invent an honors version of that requirement.

### Content of Honors Courses

So far, I have been discussing the form of honors courses, not their content. The subject matter of honors curricula seems an especially institutionally specific area. In some cases, honors courses focus upon rigorously classical masterpiece reading lists, sometimes, although not always, of a Eurocentric nature. In some institutions an honors course may offer the only place a student who is not a classics major might encounter Homer or Sophocles. In other collegiate settings, honors courses thrive at the cutting edge of curricular experimentation. Finding honors seminars on topics such as “Mythology in Modern Literature: A Feminist Approach” or “Mathematics and Poetry: Understanding Symbol Systems” is certainly not uncommon. Several institutions have moved towards including highly experiential honors courses, many based on the successful NCHC “City as Text”<sup>®</sup> offerings. Others are making service learning a significant element in the honors curriculum, with students embarking on community-service projects and using those projects as the basis for classroom discussions and writing assignments.

All these options seem legitimate and valid although the purely Western masterpieces course seems increasingly anachronistic. Probably most institutions will not span the entire range of curricular possibilities although many will open the door for more than one. What is clear is that the question of appropriate subject matter for honors courses should be one for serious and thoughtful explicit consideration. Students, faculty, and administration should share an understanding and sympathy for whatever curricular stance is adopted. It can be very disruptive if an institution chooses to pursue experimental honors courses or entire curricula, only to have a vociferous faculty member or group of faculty members demand to know why honors students are reading anything but the very best works of the Western cultural tradition. Of course, having honors courses condemned as hopelessly old-fashioned and unimaginatively traditional or even racist can be equally unsettling. At least a partial contraceptive measure to head off both sorts of criticism is to encourage full and thoughtful discussion, campus wide or in curriculum committee venues, of the curricular direction of the honors program. That discussion can then help guide and define a clear, well-understood, and carefully articulated honors curricular philosophy. Continuing discussion and periodic review will also help to disarm critics and to incorporate developing concepts of appropriate curricula.

## **NCHC Honors Semesters**

One attractive set of honors courses available to all honors students attending NCHC member institutions are the NCHC Honors Semester offerings. Scheduled periodically, generally about one per year, these programs have ranged in locale from major urban sites to wilderness areas. They are cosponsored by the NCHC and a specific institution. Students spend the academic term on site, taking a set of place-specific courses with fellow honors students from around the nation. NCHC Honors Semesters are, in effect, off-campus semesters for honors students. Some have been international (Rome, Morocco, Greece) and others domestic (The Grand Canyon, Washington, D.C., the Maine coast, New York City). Honors administrators should inform themselves about these programs and make information about them available to their honors students. It is worthwhile, in fact, to specifically encourage appropriate students to consider enrolling in an Honors Semester. NCHC Honors Semesters seem a particularly inviting option for students to spend a term in a setting that dramatically contrasts with their home campus: students from an urban university in the Northeast spending a semester in the desert Southwest, and the like.

Increasingly, honors programs are advertising their overseas offerings to students at other institutions via the NCHC listserv. These are worth a careful look.

### **Honors and the Broader Curriculum**

Clarifying the manner in which honors courses, of whatever form or content, fit into the institutional curriculum as a whole is important: do honors courses meet core graduation requirements? Can they count towards a major? Clearly honors courses that do not seem to students to be moving them forward towards graduation are going to find it difficult to attract enrollees, no matter how intriguing the subject matter intrinsically. How will honors courses be designated on the term schedule, on student transcripts, and even on diplomas? These are not especially difficult questions, but they are best answered before they cause problems, not after.

Many colleges and universities have felt themselves to be curricularly pinched in recent years. Pressures to increase cost efficiency and to respond to demands for vocational relevance often create an atmosphere that is not conducive to curricular boldness and initiative. An increased vigilance, from both the political right and the left, to guard against courses that might indoctrinate students into some particular partisan stance has similarly constrained curricular experimentation. Honors programs have an especially important role to play in restoring room for movement and contemplation in such an environment. Honors courses can open curricular doors otherwise barred and can suggest directions that might otherwise be ruled out as costly or risky. To have such an opportunity before us is a gift.

## BUDGET

All honors programs, regardless of their size or the comparative grandeur or modesty of their ambitions, need fiscal resources to operate effectively. Oftentimes, leading an honors program is the first major managerial assignment for faculty members, and many, in such a neophyte role, feel acutely the lack of experience in generating, allocating, and overseeing a departmental budget. Virtually all honors directors, new and old, would agree that they never have enough money to do all they feel should be done. There is, alas, no quick fix for chronic impoverishment. Here are, however, a few tips for mitigating it or for enhancing the return from meager funds.

### Creating a Budget

One important suggestion has to do with the budget-making process itself. Whether an honors budget runs to five or even six figures annually, or if it is more like three (or two!), securing an independent annual budget allocation is almost always better than relying on a source of funds that is, each year, dependent upon the largesse of some other office. Too often, honors programs derive their money from the Dean's, Provost's, or Vice President's annual budget, from some general Arts and Sciences fund, from the President's discretionary purse, or some such. These arrangements, while often generous and wholehearted, almost inevitably lead to problems sooner or later. In today's rather stressful administrative climate, Deans, Presidents, Academic Vice Presidents, and similar officers come and go rather rapidly. It is undesirable for honors programs to flourish or wither on an equally short schedule. Perhaps more importantly, discretionary funds tend to be the first cut in moments of real, threatened, or imagined exigency. The honors program that depends upon annual renewal of administrative funding is likely to be viewed as frosting on the fiscal cake: the program with a budget of its own has a slice, no matter how small, of the pastry itself. [Note: I make these observations about administrative budget management, which may seem callous, from the position of one who has been serving as a chief academic officer or a campus chancellor since 1981.]

At many schools, any program or department with a separate budget account or number will be solicited in some manner on an annual basis concerning funding renewal. This solicitation will enable the enterprising director or honors committee to make a strong case for

## Beginning in Honors

expanded funding when programs and results justify increased dollars. Of course, at moments of budget cutting, the honors program with a discrete budget will be asked to share the pain.

Rather than seeking primary funding from the office of the Dean or Vice President, the honors director should make that individual an advocate in the budgetary councils of the college or university. This tactic will also make it possible to go to senior administrators for one-time, discretionary funding for special projects, events, and the like, which are above and beyond the usual funded annual costs.



## **Budget Administration**

Once an honors program establishes an independent budget, the director should administer it scrupulously. Wasting money has never been a good idea, but in today's tight academic marketplace, that general ethical maxim becomes a functional imperative. If funds remain available towards the end of the budget year, they should probably be expended rather than returned, but only on conspicuously worthwhile projects, such as taking the sophomore honors seminar to a Shakespearean drama or publishing the outstanding papers of an honors section of freshman calculus or English. Contrary to popular mythology, most responsible administrators do not look with favor upon frivolous efforts to expend at the last moment every single penny of an annual budget to justify continuation or enlargement of that budget in the next fiscal year.

One of the best ways to stretch a tight honors budget is to share expenses with other campus organizations. Often an honors program with a limited budget for, say, outside speakers, can join with two or three other similarly limited departments to come up with a significant amount for a special event or two. Likely cosponsors of such events include an academic department or several, an administrator's discretionary funds, and perhaps another general program, such as Interdisciplinary Studies, Women's Studies, Black Studies, the campus office of international programs, or the college-wide general studies program. Joint sponsorship is often more than an opportunity to pool money: it is a chance to build important links on campus and to increase honors program visibility for what is often a surprisingly low cost.

## Beginning in Honors

### Faculty Payment

Other significant budgetary issues face the honors administrator. One of the chief among these is the issue of paying honors faculty. As discussed in the previous section, in many cases, faculty members teach honors courses as a part of their normal teaching load; there is no particular material benefit and no penalty for doing so. Occasionally, faculty members actually teach in honors courses, especially team-taught courses, as an unpaid overload. Obviously, this situation should be avoided like the plague: many high-caliber faculty members will refuse, probably rightly, to undertake demanding additional work for no additional compensation beyond the sheer joy of teaching a stimulating course. Even more pernicious, if faculty members are asked to undertake honors instruction as an extra, they may treat the assignment as one of secondary importance, which is exactly the opposite of the attitude we wish to cultivate.

At some colleges and universities, the honors program budget is responsible for actually paying a fraction of the faculty member's salary corresponding to a portion of that individual's load devoted to honors instruction. Thus, if a faculty member had a salary of \$100,000 per year and a normal annual load of five courses, the honors budget would be expected to contribute \$20,000 in exchange for one honors course. This arrangement is, obviously, an expensive option for an honors instructional budget. It is also, though, a route offering great discretionary freedom for the honors director or program when it comes to selecting and recruiting instructors; in effect, the honors program is granted sufficient funds to hire its own fractional faculty and then is free to negotiate independently to do so.

Even more costly, and affording even more discretion, are the still rather rare honors programs (almost all of which are honors colleges) that hire their own full-time faculty. These individuals are usually supplemented by fractional allocations of other faculty. For an honors program to have the resources to recruit and hire from scratch a few full-time faculty is a significant boost. To continue our illustrative example, an honors program budget might include \$100,000 to hire a faculty member to teach five honors courses (The budget would, of course, have to include fringe benefits, office expenses, etc.)

In other cases, probably the most common, honors program budgets include funds to compensate departments for professorial time devoted to honors instruction, usually through the hiring of replacement part-time instructors. In this case, to follow our illustration, a faculty member being paid \$100,000 for a full-time load would continue to

draw her salary, but the honors budget would compensate her home department, say \$5,000-10,000 to hire a part-time instructor for one course therein. This system requires a smaller honors budget, obviously. The drawback is asking academic departments to replace some of their most excellent, full-time, tenured or tenure-track professors with part-time teachers in order to free the full-time faculty to teach an occasional course in honors. Some faculty members and some department chairs are unconvinced that this arrangement is advantageous. (Some means of modifying this impression are noted above in the discussion of faculty recruitment.) Certainly, if the honors program budget is used to secure part-time replacements for full-time teachers, every effort should be made to keep the level of funding at a sufficiently high rate to attract top-quality part-time instructors. Since these oft-exploited individuals usually work for starvation wages anyway, the difference between affording a handsome part-time salary and a niggardly one is usually miniscule.

A not-very-attractive variant of this budgetary model is the honors program itself hiring part-time instructors to teach honors courses. Fiscally, this is more or less identical to hiring part-time replacements for full-time honors teachers. Instructionally and reputationally, it is probably risky.

One very attractive option, and its attraction is increased because it is inexpensive, is to utilize some portion of the honors budget as a bonus for honors instructors. If faculty members teach in the honors program as a regular part of their normal class load and are paid for doing so as part of their regular salary, it is possible for the honors program to recognize the special challenges and preparation required for first-class honors instruction by awarding some slight extra funds to each honors section teacher. This amenity might be in the form of a pure salary increment, or it might be in an attractive form as supplemental faculty development funds: an enhancement of the year's travel allocation; supplemental book purchase funding; money to be applied to research or equipment needs; or some similar worthy enterprise. This system offers the attraction of making honors teaching a bit more materially rewarding than normal instructional duties, and thus, obviously, facilitating the recruiting process. It is also often, like other good faculty development funding, a good investment in improving the quality of instruction in the courses taught by the faculty members receiving the enhanced funding.

### **Honors Scholarships**

The issue of honors scholarships discussed earlier also has significant financial implications. Most institutions have some institutional money available for scholarships for academically gifted students. Sometimes this money is dispensed, wholly or in part, through the honors program. This has advantages and disadvantages. Perhaps the chief advantage is that it reinforces the position of the honors program as an important institutional resource for attracting outstanding students. It clarifies the centrality of the role of the honors program in the recruitment and retention of such students, and it gives to the honors program an important voice in the mechanisms of attraction and selection of such students. Among the disadvantages of linking academic scholarships to the honors program are these: sometimes such a system results in students taking honors classes not because they are attracted to them, but because they must in order to retain their scholarships. Since such a feeling of compulsion runs counter to creating a thriving learning environment, this is not a positive development. Secondly, the whole area of student financial aid has been hit by enormous cost increases in recent years that will almost certainly continue to escalate sharply. Thus, the awarding of honors scholarships can threaten the disproportionate expenditure of limited funds. If scholarships are to keep pace with tuition increases, this budget line must increase dramatically each year, usually between five and ten percent per year at most institutions in the past few years. In a sense, the honors program that plays a major role in the awarding and dispensation of scholarships out of its own budget should expect to be playing in the financial big leagues of the institution. Some directors, deans, and/or committees have chosen not to burden themselves with this additional responsibility; others have found that the benefits outweigh the costs. In either case, a close and productive friendly relationship with the departments of Admissions and Financial Aid is vital.

## Miscellaneous Expenses

In addition to instructional and scholarship expenses, honors budgets can be used to pay for a host of small items and activities. Indeed, most honors program budgets at most small institutions consist wholly of these sorts of expenditures. Although less dramatic, such budgetary items can often make a major difference in student and faculty perceptions of the honors program: they should not be taken lightly. Even a few hundred dollars spent judiciously can win important recognition for honors. A dinner to which honors students bring their favorite professors; a trip to a major cultural event in a large metropolitan area; a modest research grant enabling a struggling honors senior to complete a project; or the opportunity for a teacher of an honors class to recruit a special guest lecturer or rent an extra movie or take the class out for pizza a few times a term: none of these costs an inordinate amount of money or requires excessive time or energy to organize. Any of them, or a host of similar enhancements, can go a surprisingly long way towards making the honors program and honors work seem truly special.

One particularly important budgetary category is travel. Attending state, regional, and national meetings of honors organizations can be extremely valuable for the director of the honors program. While the nearby meetings at the state and regional level are usually not expensive, the national conferences of the NCHC will cost most travelers at least several hundred dollars for registration and lodging. In addition to the director's travel opportunities, supporting the travel for faculty members and students to attend meetings of NCHC and its affiliates can be extremely rewarding. Frequently students will return from a state, regional, or national honors meeting with dramatically heightened enthusiasm and appreciation for the honors offerings at their home institutions. The honors program can also benefit from funding individuals or small groups of students and/or faculty to attend other appropriate academic professional meetings.

Having an honors program budget and spending it on such activities can be the difference between a thriving program, well regarded by students, faculty, and administration, and one that merely hangs on from year to year. We academics are not conspicuously clever with money, but budgetary issues turn out to be unavoidable for virtually all honors administrators. Careful and successful budget making and wise, well-thought-out spending may be among the top priorities in organizing and operating an honors program.

## Beginning in Honors

## FACILITIES

At some major universities honors colleges are literally colleges in the physical sense: they have their own offices, classroom space, and residential, study, and extracurricular spaces designated wholly for their use. Small honors programs, in contrast, are much more likely to make do with a file cabinet and a closet. Where honors space is available, whether it is palatial or Spartan, there are several attractive ways to utilize it.

### Honors Office Space

Having an honors office certainly helps, especially if clerical assistance for the program, even part-time student or professional secretarial aid, is available. Honors programs generate records, need to store syllabi, and maintain lists of prospective students. While saving such information in computer memory can cut down dramatically on the square footage required, it remains the case that honors programs produce and usually depend upon a great deal of paper. Paper stacks up, telephone calls arrive, meetings need to be held. All these functions can take place without a specific designated honors locale, but a special honors office makes them much easier. If it is possible to equip such an office for meetings and interviews, that too will be of measurable assistance. The computer, printer, file cabinet, storage space, and paper-clips have to be somewhere.

Providing some sort of gathering place or lounge adjacent to an office space is a real boost for an honors program. This can be a good area for small, informal discussions. A bulletin board in such a lounge can be helpful for announcing special events, program deadlines, and course offerings for the next semester. A bookshelf holding honors theses can be an impressive addition to such a lounge. Depending upon available space and requirements, sometimes an honors office, lounge, or suite contains a coffee machine or modest kitchen facility. It may also include a quiet nook or corner for undisturbed study. Wireless Internet access facilitates the latter use greatly.

One inexpensive and highly valuable, visible public relations gambit is to open an honors study area, seminar room, or lounge for all-campus use during pre-exam and exam periods. Some institutions have opened their facilities in this manner on a 24-hour schedule for several days each semester or quarter. Since good study space tends to be at a premium for just a few days each academic term at many institutions,

## Beginning in Honors

alas, this is a much appreciated and not-too-demanding service. The only cost will probably be a few extra hours of student worker time for monitoring the facility.

Many honors suites or honors centers have some sort of instructional space. Usually this is a seminar room. If such a space does exist, it is important to work hard to make it an attractive area. Perhaps more than any other honors facility, an honors classroom should be first class. Offices and lounges can be comfortably shabby if need be, but students and teachers should not find an honors classroom depressing or second-rate. If the budget for furniture and electronic equipment is limited, spending money on the seminar room before the lounge or office is usually wise.

The honors program office that has a good copying machine or multi-function printer will discover, to nobody's surprise, that it will be used. Providing honors students a machine in familiar surroundings to copy theses or term papers at cost will generate enormous good will. It will bring students into the honors area, and it will offer some nice chances for informal discussion and contact at what might frequently be crucial times in the academic schedule when students tend to disappear. Naturally, a copy machine will also be helpful for registration instructions, course descriptions, newsletters, exam schedules, and all the other documents that seem to be spawned by the academic enterprise. A fax machine or a fax function on another machine is increasingly useful.

Occasionally the honors program is able to claim some space in the college or university library. Sometimes the library houses an honors seminar room or special study areas or carrels reserved for honors students. Since the library is a kind of spiritual center for the scholarly activity of a higher education enterprise, this should be considered especially desirable space for the honors program. The affiliation between honors and the library is very positive for both. Alert honors directors should be prepared to make a pitch for such an affiliation if their institution is building a new library or adding to or renovating the old facility.

That there be some recognizable campus locale, luxurious or basic, spacious or tiny, for the honors program is important. Having a location gives an academic department credibility to students and faculty alike. In this context, it is more important that the honors program have some facility, than what the specific nature of that space actually is. As with budgets, even a small allocation of space makes a program seem real and permanent within the consciousness of the university or college community.



## Honors Residence Halls

Honors residence halls arouse strong feelings, both pro and con. Supporters of honors residences argue that the experience of living and learning in an integrated environment with a group of compatible, serious students is a valuable educational opportunity. Certainly on many campuses the atmosphere of some residence halls does little to encourage intellectual engagement. When honors students live together, they develop an identity and self-image as honors students, which aids retention and gives the program a certain momentum otherwise difficult to build. When honors students live together, gathering them for meetings or special events may be simplified, and transportation and communication are greatly facilitated. Of course, if most but not all honors students live together, those residing elsewhere may feel excluded. Honors residences, obviously, are not for the non-traditional student, certainly not for those with families of their own. On the other hand, most honors residence halls have a lounge and other facilities, which can accommodate all the students from the program, and with a bit of careful programming, the honors residence can become a home on campus, even for students who live elsewhere. Of course, an honors residence on campus can be a fine home for the honors office, lounge, or classroom.

An argument against honors residence halls, especially at smaller institutions, is that they segregate honors students excessively from the campus at large. Moreover, some people conclude that such residences remove from other dorms quieting, scholarly, and mature influences and thus worsen the quality of residential life elsewhere on campus. Some also believe that honors residences can give to the program an unwanted aura of elitism.

Some institutions try to have the best of both worlds by creating honors floors or areas in regular dorms, or designating honors suites on mixed floors, or assigning honors students to room with each other as entering first-year students.

The issue of honors residence halls should be approached carefully, with the advantages and disadvantages weighed with a sharp eye to the particularities of each specific institutional setting. An honors dorm may be just the thing at one school and a catastrophic mistake at another institution that seems quite similar. Honors residences are perhaps the ultimate illustration of the importance of the principle of designing an honors program customized to the specific needs of particular institutions.

## Beginning in Honors

## ADMINISTRIVIA

The range of administrative structures found in honors is impressively wide. Sometimes it seems that the only feature they have in common is that all are operating on a shoestring. Some major university honors colleges have Deans, Associate Deans/Directors, graduate assistants, clerical staff, and undergraduate work-study student help. Comparatively, a quite common pattern in small colleges is part-time course relief for one faculty member, possibly with some fractional allocation of shared secretarial assistance. Some small college honors programs are overseen by an honors committee, in which case the chair of that committee can be the de facto honors director (such an arrangement was, in fact, my own first managerial post in honors). In other institutions an administrator with a wide portfolio of academic responsibilities – a dean or an associate dean perhaps – heads up the program. It is uncommon for small college honors programs or those at small two-year institutions to be directed by a full-time honors administrator, one with few or no additional assignments in the classroom or administration.

A classic article by Dr. Rew Godow in a journal of the NCHC describes the characteristics of an archetypical honors director (Rew A. Godow, Jr. "Honors Program Leadership: The Right Stuff," *Forum for Honors* 16.3 (Spring 1986) 3-9; this article is also reprinted in *JNCHC* 7.2 as part of a forum discussion on honors administration). The author served in that position at the College of Charleston in South Carolina and in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota. He created a very impressive model: an honors director should be a person of unambiguous academic integrity, whose conceptual grasp of her or his own discipline is well respected by the members of the faculty at large. Frequently, Dr. Godow asserts, the honors director is the college administrator most trusted and valued by the faculty. The director needs to be an accomplished diplomat. She or he must exhibit lively curiosity and understand the discourse among academic disciplines. This model is, perhaps, unrealistically Olympian, but it does offer a kind of Grail to keep in mind while sloggng through the daily round of administrative busywork.

I have already discussed many of the nuts and bolts of administering an honors program, but some additional points deserve consideration under this heading.

### Honors Administrators

A first point is implied above. While it is unrealistic, perhaps even undesirable, for small colleges – or larger universities with small honors programs – to have an entire position dedicated to directing the honors program, it is equally unrealistic and even more undesirable to oversee such a program as an add-on to a full-time teaching load. Unless the honors program is of the most rudimentary sort and intends to remain that way, directing a decent honors program will take up some serious time and energy. Students need to be recruited and counseled; faculty also need careful attention; department chairs have to be seen and negotiated with; budgets prepared; oral examination committees formed and brought together; rooms scheduled; movies ordered.... These small but vital tasks that make any academic program work smoothly require reasonable time to be done carefully, thoughtfully, and with focus. Institutions beginning new honors programs should weigh carefully the collegiate commitment to honors. If they are sufficiently serious to launch a program, they must recognize that such a level of seriousness argues for creating time for the individual directing the program to organize and manage it thoroughly. Usually reassigned time will involve at least one course release per term, or as an absolute minimum, one course per year. Likewise, individuals contemplating accepting an assignment as an honors director should recognize that they will be involved in time-consuming tasks and negotiate a realistic accord with their employer. Obviously standards and possibilities will vary from individual to individual and institution to institution. One guideline that some honors directors have shared among themselves is that of approximately one-fourth released time per fifty honors students in a full and functional program.

The complexity of the task of the honors director strongly correlates to two factors, at least. Most obviously, the relative ambition of the program plans is a major determinant of the volume of work demanded of the administrator. If an honors program consists merely of one honors seminar per year, and a senior thesis, for a student population across all class years of twenty, the demands on a director are going to be less than a program with a first-year seminar, sophomore honors sections, junior/senior honors projects, a senior colloquium, and many extracurricular events. Similarly, the amount of advising of honors students that is expected will have a discernable impact on the load of the honors director.

Noting the institutional context of the projected program is also important. Even a simple and small program set within a complex and large institutional foil is going to make demands that the same honors model would not make in a more modest institution. Large universities have many layers of personnel to work with in areas such as academic administration, budget, facilities, and admissions. Establishing contact and rapport with faculty will involve additional strategic planning and thinking and additional time. Injecting the honors program into the consciousness of the institution will also require a large effort and an organized, rational plan of attack.

In other words, it is not just the size of the honors program itself that determines the size of the director's job, but also the dimensions of the academic community within which the program is housed.

The individual or institution starting or revamping an honors program or converting a program into a college should take careful note of the volume of paper (or increasingly, paper and/or electronic) work generated by a thriving operation of this sort and pay serious attention to the need for skilled secretarial help. At the very least, some designated part-time aid will make a big difference. If the honors director is expected to do much recruiting, then the honors office will find itself generating scores of letters annually; if there is to be a newsletter, someone will have to enter it into a word processor, format it, print it, and distribute it. Scheduling large meetings with busy academics can be a major headache, and honors programs need many such gatherings; these and similar concerns argue strongly for an honors secretary, or at least a clear agreement about honors program use of institutional secretarial resources. Given the choice, the honors program is better served by having a single individual with these responsibilities rather than the use of a clerical pool. A single individual, even a part-time one, can learn the routine, understand the processes, and become a valued ally over time. Similarly, there is considerable agreement that, while it may be difficult in terms of institutional personnel practices, it is usually a better arrangement to have a half- or even third-time clerical support person devoted wholly to the honors program than to have half or one-third of the time of an individual with other responsibilities elsewhere. To have all of a fractional employee is usually going to work better than having a fraction of a whole employee.

Honors directors and deans, like all administrators, should work under reasonably clear contractual conditions, but often they do not. I would affirm that the position of honors director is particularly likely to be somewhat improvised and often disconcertingly murky. How long is

## Beginning in Honors

the term of service to be? Is it renewable? What is the mechanism and who is the individual responsible for evaluation? How will honors leadership affect such career steps as promotions, sabbaticals and salary increases? What goals are being set for the program, for its administration, and for its administrator? Who sets them? How is it decided if they are being met? While no single model leads to answers to all these questions, each institution should grapple with them in an overt manner as early as possible.

A major quasi-administrative function of the honors program is public relations. I have already noted that an honors brochure is often developed as part of the recruitment process. Thriving honors programs are visible to their own members and to those on the outside. Having visibility means that someone, usually the honors administrator, has generated regular internal communications, often a newsletter, but frequently letters or memos. The director should be on the lookout for opportunities to publicize the honors program in college publications and with the local media. Regional and national honors newsletters should receive regular news of program activities, special accomplishments, and unusual features.

Honors administrators concerned with public relations should expect to do at least a modest amount of public speaking, also. The broadcast media are frequently on the lookout for expert commentators on educational subjects, and honors directors or honors deans can bring an impressive title and credentials to that task. Honors persons are also in some demand as speakers for high school honors awards banquets, assemblies, graduation ceremonies, and similar occasions. Honors directors should not be modest about accepting such invitations and even soliciting them.

An important administrative task is orientation. New honors students and new honors faculty will probably not understand the program, its nature, history, requirements, expectations, opportunities, goals, and functioning. New students should be gathered as part of the institutional orientation process, or as soon thereafter as feasible, and have these workings of the honors program explained to them in an inviting and clear manner. Follow-up meetings are probably a good idea. Re-orienting students sometime in the second half of the second year is particularly important if they are about to make the transition from honors courses to honors projects: this moment is often somewhat daunting for honors students and consequently a time of increased attrition.

## Samuel Schuman

Honors faculty probably also need to be introduced to the program individually: a short friendly conference with each new faculty member is an investment of time and energy that will be amply repaid. Finally, new collegiate administrators should be briefed early in their tenure about the honors program: honors directors should not be shy about introducing themselves and their programs to new deans, presidents, vice presidents, directors of public relations, directors of development, and admissions personnel. Indeed, sometimes the best time to impress upon such individuals the centrality and vitality of honors is before they are hired: honors directors should be assertive about getting themselves placed on key institutional search committees.

### **Administrative Relations**

The Honors director should establish and maintain a positive and supportive relationship with the upper echelons of the university's or college's administration. Honors programs flourish when they are noticed and valued by college presidents, vice presidents, and deans. If, for example, faculty, students, and community members frequently hear a president bragging about the achievements of the honors program and honors students, they will more easily recognize the importance of the program to the institution. If, conversely, they never hear an upper-level administrator speak of honors, they might rightly wonder just how high on the collegiate priority list honors really is placed. Since presidents, vice presidents, and deans are constantly looking for positive and optimistic grist for their rhetorical mills, the wise honors administrator makes sure her or his program provides ample material of this sort: where have honors program graduates gone on to post-graduate schools? what prestigious fellowships have they won? into what careers have they been recruited? what academic awards have they received elsewhere in the school? what awards and recognition has the program itself received? Administrators will be sincerely glad to receive such information, and they will use it.

For similar political reasons, the honors director should make a point of injecting work in the honors program into the institution's faculty reappointment, promotion, and tenure review mechanism. The honors director can certainly send the faculty personnel committee or appropriate department or administrative office timely letters commending honors teaching. Honors work can become a factor in promotion and tenure deliberations simply through the agency of the honors director who acts on the assumption that such is indeed the case.

Periodic assessment of the honors program as part of the overall ongoing institutional enterprise is frequently also valuable; it is increasingly mandated by regional accrediting bodies. This exercise can range from a casual internal process to an elaborate overview involving external consultants, reports, and the like. At the very least, some sort of annual report should chronicle the honors program's work of the past academic season, assessing as accurately as possible its successes and failures in meeting goals. An external consultant, while hardly an annual rite, is often useful in at least two ways. First, such a guest, if she or he is alert and knowledgeable, can provide valuable suggestions for further development of the program. It is often easier for an outsider to pinpoint a program's strengths and needed improvements than for an



## Samuel Schuman

internal evaluator. Second, the visiting consultant can give to the honors program a force and visibility often hard to generate internally: if a visitor proclaims the need for a budget supplement, for example, it is often taken more seriously than a similar request for the same money for the same purposes coming from within. Further, an outside consultant can perform an important validation function for the honors program. By affirming that the program is on the right track and is doing a good job, such a visitor can reassure those involved in the program as well as those outside it that the program is legitimate and performing an important function. The NCHC, as well as state and regional honors organizations, offers a network that can provide appropriate and helpful consultants for such work. The national office of NCHC can provide a current list of NCHC-recommended Site Visitors; these people are prepared to work with honors programs as consultants or as external evaluators.

### Honors Councils

An additional support mechanism for new honors administrators is the honors council or committee. Most schools will have some such group, usually with a policy advisory function, although sometimes with operational duties also. If such a group does not exist, it is worth considering forming one. If it can be arranged, having the council appointed by a dean, provost, or vice president, albeit with careful advice from the honors director, is probably wise. Often the administrative supervisor of the honors director serves on the honors council, frequently chairing it.

The honors council can and should include faculty, students, and administrators among its membership. Student input is especially important in honors programs, and student membership on an honors council or committee is one excellent means of cultivating it. The ideal relationship between an honors council and an honors director seems similar to that between a college president and a board of trustees: the group is well informed, independent, and helpful; it does not intrude upon day-to-day decisions and actions of the responsible administrator and seeks more to provide aid than to sit in constant judgment. (If such is indeed the model chosen, it is probably not a good idea to reverse the role and ask the honors council to play a leadership role in periodic evaluation of the honors administrator.) Such a council should be large enough to be fairly representative but small enough to be workable—perhaps from six to twelve members.

It should meet sufficiently often so that its sessions are genuine working meetings, not merely ceremonial occasions, but not so often as to be a burden to members or director, perhaps once each month or two. Membership on the honors council/committee should probably rotate, so that the same cadre of faculty members is not seen as involved centrally with the program year after year.

Many honors programs also have a separate student honors organization, one that may offer advice, comment, suggestions, and input into both academic and extracurricular options. Such a student organization is a useful and frequently important resource. Like most student organizations, it is likely to have periods of relative vigor and other times of inactivity and lethargy. An important question for the honors director to resolve involves the degree of assertiveness with which the administrator will shape such a student organization, direct its activities, and make sure that at its weak moments it continues to function.

## Samuel Schuman

Some honors directors are actively involved in honors student organizations; others adopt a more hands-off approach.

A good honors student organization can help plan and run social and co-curricular events, ranging from picnics to trips to cultural events, discussions, travel to honors meetings, and the like. It can also provide suggestions for such things as desired honors courses, new faculty to recruit, and feedback on existing honors options. Clearly, such an organization is a valuable asset for the honors program and the honors director, and at the very least it should be encouraged and provided the resources necessary to succeed.

### **Organizations – National, Regional, State**

Affiliations with appropriate honors organizations are highly useful for the honors program. The National Collegiate Honors Council is an important and helpful resource for the neophyte and the experienced honors professional alike. The NCHC meets annually, usually near the end of October, for several days of worthwhile and varied sessions. NCHC offers several focused pre-conference workshops, such as Beginning in Honors® and Developing in Honors, held in conjunction with the annual meeting. NCHC has several constituent subgroups, including small colleges, large universities, and two-year institutions. These groups usually sponsor and recommend a strand of sessions within the larger conference program that are of special interest to their constituents. In recent years, the number of honors enthusiasts—students, faculty, and administrators—at the national conference typically ranges from 1,600-1,900.

The regional honors associations are somewhat less expensive to join and hold their meetings, usually in the spring, in their respective geographic areas. Of course, students are welcome at both national and regional meetings, where they often make presentations, but taking them to a regional gathering is often much less expensive than journeying across the continent to the national meeting.

Many of the states, such as North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Florida, also have vibrant state honors groups, and they usually serve as a convenient, friendly, and helpful network of information and support. Many of these state organizations also hold an annual meeting as well, providing an important venue for faculty collegiality and for students to get to know each other and to present research done in their honors courses.

NCHC publishes three periodicals. *Honors in Practice (HIP)* is a refereed journal that focuses on practical nuts-and-bolts issues of concern primarily to honors administrators, but also to some faculty and students. A more formal scholarly publication is the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)*. *JNCHC*, which is also a refereed publication, takes as its content articles of research and opinion dealing less with daily practice and more with the overarching issues and theories involved in honors education. The *National Honors Report (NHR)* communicates the official correspondence and reports of the organization, and along with the electronic honors newsletter, which is also generated by the national headquarters, performs the newsletter functions of the organization. Some of the regional honors groups also publish a

## Samuel Schuman

newsletter as well. Additionally, NCHC has a monograph series, of which this publication is one, dealing with a wide and helpful variety of topics, such as the assessment of honors programs. (See Appendix C for additional details about the resources and publications of NCHC.)

### **Advising Honors Students**

The advising of honors students is a task that either directly, or in terms of oversight, often falls to the honors director. Here, two models and their variants prevail.

Frequently, when the honors program is a rather complete one, with multiple course offerings and substantial requirements, it becomes the primary venue for academic advising for its students. An advisor from the program, often the director, actually guides course selection each term, approves schedule changes, and discusses post-graduate plans and possibilities. Advising can be a big job: in a program with twenty or more students, it can be a major drain on the resources of a solitary director.

The other type of honors advising presupposes that each student is receiving regular academic advice within the usual advising framework of the institution – usually, for upper-class students, within the major department – and special guidance concerning the honors program from within the program, often from the director. Thus, the physics major might be helped to select a logical progression of courses to meet that department's requirements by a member of the physics faculty and simultaneously be advised by the honors program regarding selection and timing of, say, honors seminars and independent projects. Sometimes each school or college of a university houses an honors advisor who is loosely affiliated with the honors program, but more essentially linked to a home department, school or college (e.g., the College of Engineering honors advisor).

Clearly, this second approach to honors advising is less time-consuming than the total advising responsibilities of the first method. Equally clearly, though, it requires considerable diplomacy, communication, and coordination. A common problem in honors work is that of the student receiving incompatible advice from an academic advisor within the major and from the honors program. One compromise solution that has worked at some schools is to select and train an honors advisor within the academic departments. Thus, the physics student has a physicist as academic advisor, the sociology major, a sociologist, and that advisor helps students with both major and honors requirements, options, and opportunities. With this arrangement, the major responsibility of the honors administrator shifts to making sure that departments do stay on top of the task of bringing the right students and faculty members together and that those faculty members selected as honors advisors know and can communicate effectively the opportunities

and requirements of the honors program. This means, of course, careful briefing of the honors advisors and keeping in touch with them on a regular basis.

Honors students, like all students, usually benefit from sharp, timely, and realistic advice about graduate and professional school possibilities, fellowships, graduate assistantships, and similar counsel about postgraduate educational options. Many are also keenly interested in career opportunities, and the honors director should be prepared to respond to questions regarding vocational placement. At the very least, being well informed about the specific referral network within one's institution is necessary, so that students can be promptly and efficiently sent in the right direction. Gaining some expertise in advising students about graduate options can be a challenge: the physicist who becomes an honors director is unlikely to begin that assignment with a keen understanding of the post-baccalaureate tracks available to the sociology honors student.

An important point to keep in mind as regards honors advising is that honors students can be expected to have at least as many, and as complicated, problems as other students. It is sometimes tempting to envision all honors students as especially well rounded, balanced, thoughtful, mature, and self-possessed. This vision does not seem particularly accurate or helpful despite its attractiveness and allure. Honors students, just like their non-honors peers, are sometimes plagued with doubts about their academic careers and their futures; they are going to have problems with their love lives, fights with roommates (sometimes these last two are the same), scheduling conflicts, health problems, or intrusive parents. In fact, because their academic expectations and goals are oftentimes higher than those of their non-honors peers, honors students will sometimes have more academic and personal counseling needs than other students. The honors director, like any good advisor, strives to be sensitive, patient, informed, and helpful. Of course, the honors advisor must also have a clear sense of which problems are within and which beyond an academic advisor's legitimate realm of expertise and helpfulness.

The title of this section suggests that many of the daily tasks of managing an honors program might be trivial, and, indeed, taken one-by-one, they often are. It does not take a Ph.D. to make sure that the honors seminar room has enough chalk or to send a blurb to the college president about the honors student who was a Truman Scholarship finalist. Academic administrators succeed, however, by doing the little, necessary, tasks thoughtfully and well. The thriving academic

## Beginning in Honors

administrator is like the happy mountain hiker: attention moves back and forth between the grandeur of the peaks ahead and the beauty of the tiny mountain wildflowers below. Finding a balance and giving to tasks the attention they need and deserve are far from trivial. In fact, that skill is not only important, it can approach the magical.



## APPENDIX A

### Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program

No one model of an honors program can be superimposed on all types of institutions. However, there are characteristics that are common to successful, fully developed honors programs. Listed below are those characteristics, although not all characteristics are necessary for an honors program to be considered a successful and/or fully developed honors program.

- A fully developed honors program should be carefully set up to accommodate the special needs and abilities of the undergraduate students it is designed to serve. This entails identifying the targeted student population by some clearly articulated set of criteria (e.g., GPA, SAT score, a written essay). A program with open admission needs to spell out expectations for retention in the program and for satisfactory completion of program requirements.
- The program should have a clear mandate from the institutional administration ideally in the form of a mission statement stating the objectives and responsibilities of the program and defining its place in both the administrative and academic structure of the institution. This mandate or mission statement should be such as to assure the permanence and stability of the program by guaranteeing an adequate budget and by avoiding any tendency to force the program to depend on temporary or spasmodic dedication of particular faculty members or administrators. In other words, the program should be fully institutionalized so as to build thereby a genuine tradition of excellence.
- The honors director should report to the chief academic officer of the institution.
- There should be an honors curriculum featuring special courses, seminars, colloquia, and independent study established in harmony with the mission statement and in response to the needs of the program.
- The program requirements themselves should include a substantial portion of the participants' undergraduate work, usually in the vicinity of 20% or 25% of their total course work and certainly no less

## Beginning in Honors

than 15%. Students who successfully complete Honors Programs requirements should receive suitable institutional recognition. This can be accomplished by such measures as an appropriate notation on the student's academic transcript, separate listing of Honors Graduates in commencement programs, and the granting of an Honors degree.

- The program should be so formulated that it relates effectively both to all the college work for the degree (e.g., by satisfying general education requirements) and to the area of concentration, departmental specialization, or pre-professional or professional training.
- The program should be both visible and highly reputed throughout the institution so that it is perceived as providing standards and models of excellence for students and faculty across the campus.
- Faculty participating in the program should be fully identified with the aims of the program. They should be carefully selected on the basis of exceptional teaching skills and the ability to provide intellectual leadership to able students.
- The program should occupy suitable quarters constituting an honors center with such facilities as an honors library, lounge, reading rooms, personal computers, and other appropriate decor.
- The director or other administrative officer charged with administering the program should work in close collaboration with a committee or council of faculty members representing the colleges and/or departments served by the program.
- The program should have in place a committee of honors students to serve as liaison with the honors faculty committee or council who must keep the student group fully informed on the program and elicit their cooperation in evaluation and development. This student group should enjoy as much autonomy as possible conducting the business of the committee in representing the needs and concerns of all honors students to the administration, and it should also be included in governance, serving on the advisory/policy committee as well as constituting the group that governs the student association.
- There should be provisions for special academic counseling of honors students by uniquely qualified faculty and/or staff personnel.
- The honors program, in distinguishing itself from the rest of the institution, serves as a kind of laboratory within which faculty can try

## Samuel Schuman

things they have always wanted to try but for which they could find no suitable outlet. When such efforts are demonstrated to be successful, they may well become institutionalized, thereby raising the general level of education within the college or university for all students. In this connection, the honors curriculum should serve as a prototype for educational practices that can work campus-wide in the future.

- The fully developed honors program must be open to continuous and critical review and be prepared to change in order to maintain its distinctive position of offering distinguished education to the best students in the institution.
- A fully developed program will emphasize the participatory nature of the honors educational process by adopting such measures as offering opportunities for students to participate in regional and national conferences, Honors Semesters, international programs, community service, and other forms of experiential education.
- Fully developed two-year and four-year honors programs will have articulation agreements by which honors graduates from two-year colleges are accepted into four-year honors programs when they meet previously agreed-upon requirements.

Approved by the NCHC Executive Committee March 1994

## Beginning in Honors

## APPENDIX B

### Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors College

An honors educational experience can occur in a wide variety of institutional settings. When institutions establish an honors college or embark upon a transition from an honors program to an honors college, they face a transformational moment. No one model defines this transformation. Although not all of the following characteristics are necessary to be considered a successful or fully developed honors college, the National Collegiate Honors Council recognizes these as representative:

- A fully developed honors college should incorporate the relevant characteristics of a fully developed honors program.
- A fully developed honors college should exist as an equal collegiate unit within a multi-collegiate university structure.
- The head of a fully developed honors college should be a dean reporting directly to the chief academic officer of the institution and serving as a full member of the Council of Deans, if one exists. The dean should be a full-time, 12-month appointment.
- The operational and staff budgets of fully developed honors colleges should provide resources at least comparable to other collegiate units of equivalent size.
- A fully developed honors college should exercise increased coordination and control of departmental honors where the college has emerged out of such a decentralized system.
- A fully developed honors college should exercise considerable control over honors recruitment and admissions, including the appropriate size of the incoming class. Admission to the honors college should be by separate application.
- An honors college should exercise considerable control over its policies, curriculum, and selection of faculty.
- The curriculum of a fully developed honors college should offer significant course opportunities across all four years of study.

## Beginning in Honors

- The curriculum of the fully developed honors college should constitute at least 20% of a student's degree program. An honors thesis or project should be required.
- Where the home university has a significant residential component, the fully developed honors college should offer substantial honors residential opportunities.
- The distinction awarded by a fully developed honors college should be announced at commencement, noted on the diploma, and featured on the student's final transcript.
- Like other colleges within the university, a fully developed honors college should be involved in alumni affairs and development and should have an external advisory board.

Approved by the NCHC Executive Committee June 2005

Samuel Schuman

## APPENDIX C

### NCHC Publications, Monographs, and Resources

The National Office of the NCHC      Phone: (402) 472-9150  
1100 Neihardt Residence Center      Fax: (402) 472-9152  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln      Email: [nchc@unlserve.unl.edu](mailto:nchc@unlserve.unl.edu)  
540 N. 16th St.      Website: [www.nchchonors.org](http://www.nchchonors.org)  
Lincoln, NE 68588-0627

Executive Director: Patti Speelman

View the NCHC website, “Available Materials,” to investigate or order any of the following materials.

Of particular value to readers of *Beginning in Honors: A Handbook* is the full and objective overview of specific honors programs and colleges in America in *Peterson’s* guide.

*Peterson’s Smart Choices: Honors Programs & Colleges*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Edited by Joan Digby, 2005.

The official guide to the National Collegiate Honors Council; includes both two-year and four-year programs and colleges; institutional profiles include a program description, participation requirements, instructions for admission, availability of scholarships, a description of the institution, and contact information.

#### **Periodicals:**

*Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)*

A double-blind peer-reviewed journal for scholarly articles; two issues published annually.

Send inquiries to Ada Long, *JNCHC*, 316 Cook St., St George Island, FL 32328. Email: [adalong@uab.edu](mailto:adalong@uab.edu); phone: (850) 927-3776.

*Honors in Practice (HIP)*

Double-blind peer-reviewed journal for articles describing practical suggestions and successful honors practices; one issue annually.

Send inquiries to Ada Long, *HIP*, 316 Cook St., St. George Island, FL 32328. Email: [adalong@uab.edu](mailto:adalong@uab.edu); phone: (850) 927-3776.

*National Honors Report (NHR)*

The journal of record of the National Collegiate Honors Council; produced by the National Office and officers of the organization.

Send inquiries to [nchc@unlserve.unl.edu](mailto:nchc@unlserve.unl.edu).

## Beginning in Honors

### *Electronic Newsletter*

Up-to-date news and information from the National Office of the NCHC.

Send inquiries to [nhc@unlserve.unl.edu](mailto:nhc@unlserve.unl.edu).

### **Listserv**

Up-to-date news, information, and conversation; issues can be raised to the whole constituency of the NCHC who read the listserv; questions can be asked and answered.

Send inquiries to [nhc@unlserve.unl.edu](mailto:nhc@unlserve.unl.edu).

### **Monographs:**

Each institution receives a copy of each monograph when it first joins NCHC and a copy of each new monograph as it is published.

Send inquiries about monograph topics to Jeffrey Portnoy, Georgia Perimeter College, Lawrenceville Campus, 1000 University Lane, Lawrenceville, GA 30043. Email: [jportnoy@gpc.edu](mailto:jportnoy@gpc.edu); phone: (678) 407-5324.

*A Handbook for Honors Administrators.* Ada Long, 1995.

*Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges.* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Samuel Schuman, 1999.

*Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning.* Edited by Bernice Braid and Ada Long, 2000.

*Teaching and Learning in Honors.* Edited by Cheryl L. Fuiks and Larry Clark, 2000.

*Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices.* Annmarie Guzy, 2003.

*Innovations in Undergraduate Research and Honors Education: Proceedings of the Second Schreyer National Conference.* Edited by Josephine M. Carubia and Renata S. Engel, 2004.

*Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook.* Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurrier, 2005.

*A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges.* Theresa James, 2006.

*Beginning in Honors: A Handbook.* 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Samuel Schuman, 2006.

### *NCHC Handbook*

This reservoir of information about NCHC and its membership is updated annually by the National Office and distributed to all members.

All the publications mentioned above may be purchased through the NCHC office or website.



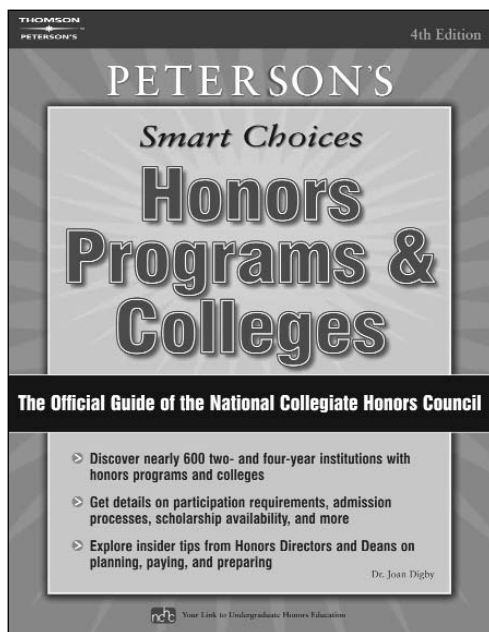
## Notes

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The official guide to NCHC member institutions has a new name, a new look, and expanded information!

- Peter Sederberg's essay on honors colleges brings readers up to date on how they differ from honors programs.
- Lydia Lyons' new essay shows how two-year honors experiences can benefit students and lead them to great choices in completing the bachelor's degree and going beyond.
- Kate Bruce adds an enriched view of travels with honors students.

These and all the other helpful essays on scholarships, community, Honors Semesters, parenting, and partnerships make the 4th edition a must in your collection of current honors reference works. *This book is STILL the only honors guide on the market*, and it is your best tool for networking with local high schools and community colleges as well as for keeping your administration up to date on what your program offers.

*Peterson's Smart Choices* retails for \$29.95.

**NCHC members may order copies for only \$20 each  
(a 33% savings) and get free shipping!**

Send check or money order payable to NCHC to:  
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A Handbook for Honors Administrators	\$10.00	\$12.50		
A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges	\$10.00	\$12.50		
Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices	\$10.00	\$12.50		
Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges (2nd Ed.)	\$10.00	\$12.50		
Innovations in Undergraduate Research and Honors Education: Proceedings of the Second Schreyer National Conference	\$10.00	\$12.50		
Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning	\$10.00	\$12.50		
Teaching and Learning in Honors	\$10.00	\$12.50		
<b>Journals:</b>				
Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC) Specify Volume/Issue ____/____	\$10.00	\$12.50		
Honors in Practice (HIP) Specify Volume _____	\$10.00	\$12.50		
<b>Other Publications:</b>				
Peterson's Smart Choices (The official NCHC guide to Honors Programs & Colleges)	\$20.00	\$29.95		
NCHC Handbook	\$15.00	\$20.00		
<b>Total Copies Ordered and Total Amount Paid:</b> _____ \$ _____ <i>Apply a 20% discount if 10+ copies are purchased.</i>				

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# NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL MONOGRAPHS & JOURNALS

*Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook* by Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurrier (2005, 98pp). This monograph includes an overview of assessment and evaluation practices and strategies. It explores the process for conducting self-studies and discusses the differences between using consultants and external reviewers. It provides a guide to conducting external reviews along with information about how to become an NCHC-recommended Site Visitor. A dozen appendices provide examples of "best practices."

*Beginning in Honors: A Handbook* by Samuel Schuman (Fourth Edition, 2006, 80pp). Advice on starting a new honors program. Covers budgets, recruiting students and faculty, physical plant, administrative concerns, curriculum design, and descriptions of some model programs.

*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 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.

*Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices* by Annmarie Guzy (2003 182 pp). Parallel historical developments in honors and composition studies; contemporary honors writing projects ranging from admission essays to theses as reported by over 300 NCHC members.

*Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges* by Samuel Schuman (Second Edition, 1999, 53pp). How to implement an honors program, with particular emphasis on colleges with fewer than 3000 students.

*Innovations in Undergraduate Research and Honors Education: Proceedings of the Second Schreyer National Conference* Edited by Josephine M. Carubia and Renata S. Engel (2004 145pp). Essays on the importance of undergraduate research, course models, connections to service learning, and learning strategies that support undergraduate research.

*Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning* edited by Bernice Braid and Ada Long (2000, 104pp). Information and practical advice on the experiential pedagogies developed within NCHC during the past 25 years, using Honors Semesters and City as Text<sup>®</sup> as models, along with suggestions for how to adapt these models to a variety of educational contexts.

*Teaching and Learning in Honors* edited by Cheryl L. Fuijs and Larry Clark (2000, 128 pp). Presents a variety of perspectives on teaching and learning useful to anyone developing new or renovating established honors curricula.

*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 that accomodates the need and desire for articles about nuts and bolts practices by featuring practical and descriptive essays on topics such as successful honors courses, suggestions for out-of-class experiences, administrative issues, and other topics of interest to honors administrators, faculty and students.

*NCHC Handbook*. Included are lists of all NCHC members, NCHC Constitution and Bylaws, committees and committee charges, and other useful information.