

From research...

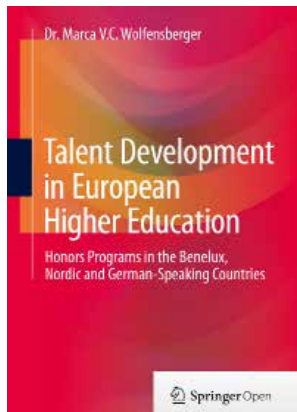
How can talented students in European higher education be stimulated?

This is the main question in *Talent Development in European Higher Education – Honors programs in the Benelux, Nordic and German-speaking countries*. In this book, Marca Wolfensberger describes the culture towards excellence and existing talent development programs in eleven European countries. Wolfensberger heads the Research Centre *Talent Development in Higher Education and Society* at Hanze University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands.

...to practice

What do the results from this research mean for the day-to-day practice of educating talented students?

In this brochure, research results from the book are 'translated' into practical tips for successful and inspiring honors education. The demand for this kind of information is high. The book *Talent Development in European Higher Education* has already been downloaded well over 30,000 times. With this brochure, the sharing and spreading of knowledge about honors education is further stimulated.



The book was published in open access, with support of the Dutch Sirius Program. It can be freely downloaded through the website www.honorsineurope.com.

The eleven countries included are The Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.



Definition of honors programs

This brochure is focused on 'honors' education. The following definition is used: *Honors programs are selective study programs linked to higher education institutions. They are designed for motivated and gifted students who want to do more than the regular program offers. These programs have clear admission criteria and clear goals and offer educational opportunities that are more challenging and demanding than regular programs.*

Pioneers *in the picture*

How does honors education start? Someone needs to take the initiative. Pioneers take this role upon themselves.

Pioneers have special characteristics:

- They see new opportunities
- They take initiatives
- They inspire with enthusiasm
- They spread their ideas.

But pioneers also meet problems:

- Their ideas do not have the right timing
- They do not use the right 'language' towards policy makers
- They are too far ahead of others.

In short, they do not always receive praise from their own organization. In many cases, it turned out that pioneers used an extra 'outside' incentive to start a program. This can for example be the availability of subsidies, an experience abroad, changes in government policies or the desire to improve position on rankings. Do you also have plans to start a program? Be alert and use such incentives to your advantage!

A teacher's story:

Nynne Afzelius



How can I challenge my talented students more and prepare them for university? Nynne Afzelius, teacher in maths and science at a Copenhagen gymnasium asked herself these questions. In 2005 the government made small grants for talent development initiatives available. She then helped to design a program in which pupils do extra activities, in cooperation with universities and companies: the Academy for Talented Youth. In 2008 the first 50 students started, at the time of writing there are over 1200. In 2011 Nynne Afzelius was named 'Danish talent developer of the year'. She now heads the ScienceTaler program (see page 10).

TIPS *Recognizing and valuing pioneers*

- **How can you successfully start projects and be a pioneer?** Use the professional space you have. Search for like-minded colleagues and stand for your ideas, even if you meet initial problems and have to postpone activities. Do not give up!
- **How can an organisation value pioneers?** Try to recognize innovators. These can for example be critical employees. Value them and ask them to use their energy in a positive way. Make room for experiments. This is motivating for both pioneering teachers and students.
- **What is important for organisations and pioneers?** Recognize the possibility of failure. Pioneering means taking risks. Much can be learned from a failed project.

Starting a program...



Photo: tableatry

How do you start a successful honors program? On the basis of the experiences we encountered in Europe, we give you six practical tips.

1. Get inspired and make a plan. The best ideas often come from an experience abroad or something missing in your own area.

2. Set program goals. Make them as precise as possible. Who is the program for and what should it achieve?

3. Gather a group of enthusiastic people. Write a one-page summary of your idea and use this to convince others to help you.

4. Do not re-invent the wheel. Check if a similar program already exists elsewhere. Learn from other people's experiences, both successes and failures.

5. Find the relevant organizational level. Is the program best placed at the level of study program, department or institution? Or in a new form of cooperation?

6. Relate your program to existing structures and make use of what is already there. Often other talent development initiatives already exist.

What's in it for me?

Programs can have many goals, at different levels. In the design of a program, it is important to make clear to participants which skills they can develop. Is it focused on academic skills, more general skills such as leadership or entrepreneurialism, or does the program specifically prepare for a research career?

Rewards can be a great incentive to join. Students who successfully complete the program can for example be offered an extra certificate or a letter of recommendation, signed by a Dean or Director. And what does the program offer participating teachers, who often invest a lot of extra time and effort in tutoring the students? They might for example be offered new opportunities to develop themselves.

...and making it structural

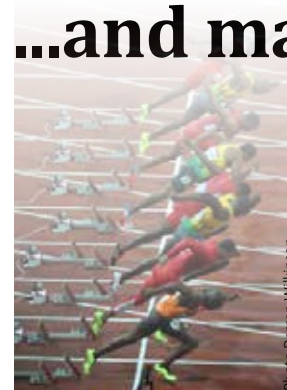


Photo: Darren Wilkinson

'I think talent development is all about making it on your own. In the old days we pointed at students and they got it all served. I believe that was completely wrong. They have to create their own careers and fight for it.'

Lene Krøl Andersen, head of talent development systems biology, DTU, Denmark

Honors programs often start as an experiment or pilot program. After some time, the question comes up: will we continue this? And if yes, how?

The 'anchoring' of honors programs, providing them with a place in institutional structures, is a difficult process. On the one hand, there is a need for certainties about program structure and financing. On the other hand, freedom and innovation are important characteristics of successful honors education. Some structure is needed, but there also needs to be space for change: bounded freedom.

Regular

An important tip is to maintain a good relationship with the regular study program. On the one hand, the honors program should never put the quality of

the regular program into question. The honors program must offer something extra, on top of an education program which is already good in itself. On the other hand, positive experiences from the honors program can ultimately also be used in the regular program. This function of an honors program as a 'laboratory of innovation' has often been described. An example of a successful application of an honors experience in regular education helps to secure support for the program. This is useful when decisions about structural continuation of the program are made.



Photo: WU Wien / Sebastian Prager

TIPS 1. **Anchor** the program within the institution, for example by connecting it to strategic goals and/or main research themes. Involve policy makers at different levels in the design of program content.

2. Make the coordinator **replacable**. Think through: what will happen to the program if the coordinator is suddenly unable to work? Does this lead to a distressing answer? Quickly adjust the organization accordingly.

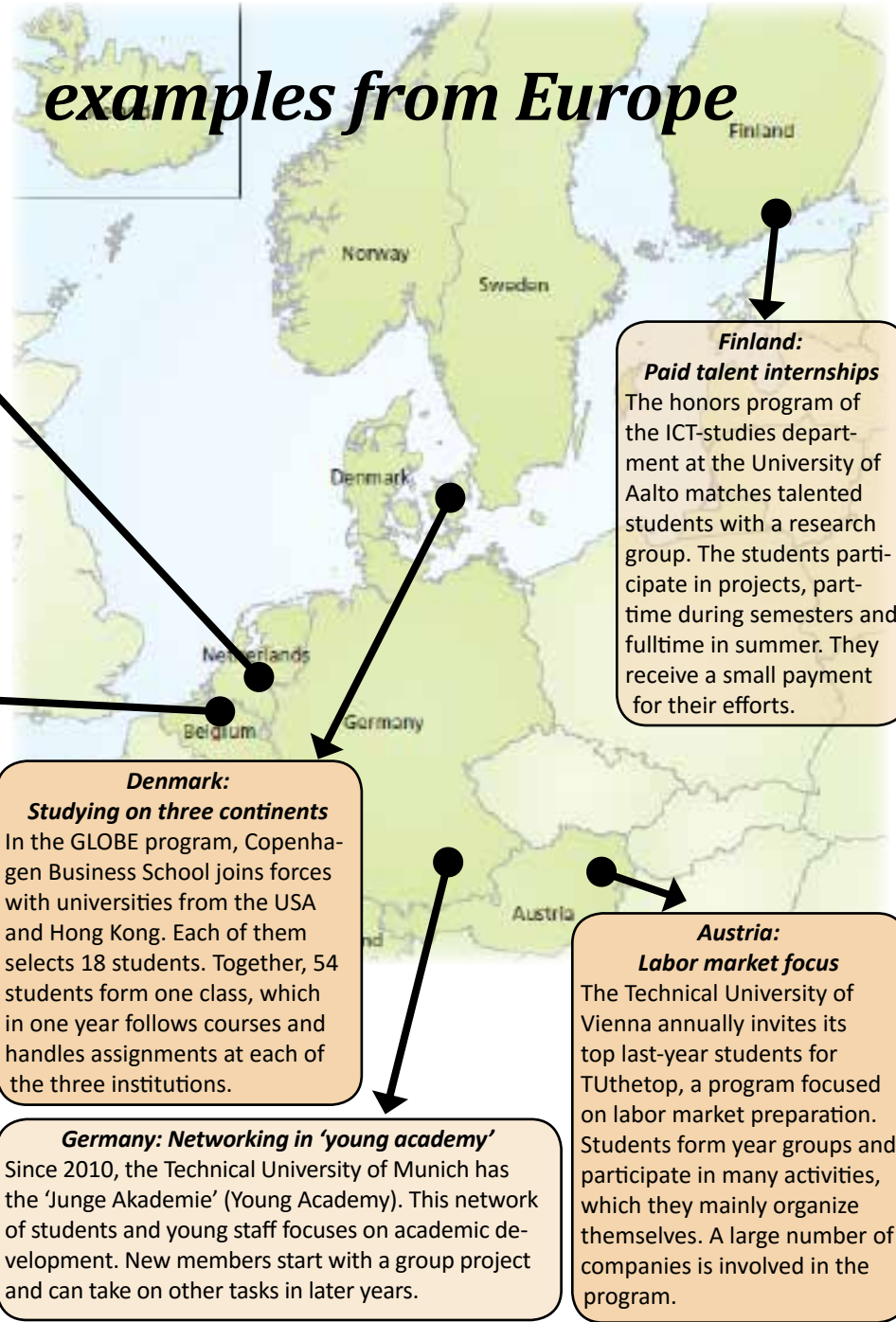
Honors in practice challenging and inspiring



Photo: WU Wien / Stephen Hüger

The Netherlands:
International thinktank
In the master honors program at RU Nijmegen international and interdisciplinary thinktanks are formed to solve a societal problem. RU students join up with students from foreign universities to answer a research question commissioned by an external institution.

Belgium:
Practical lessons from leaders
The Faculty of Law at the KU Leuven invites its best students to join a series of honors classes and excursions. They are taught by renowned lawyers. In the honors program for bachelor students focus is placed on Belgian lawyers and jurists, while in the master program mainly international lawyers are invited.



Not a nine-to-five mentality

Honors education often takes place outside of regular education 'time slots'. Many programs in which students from different disciplines take part, can only be organized on evenings. The summer is a good time for an intensive period, and many programs will then schedule summer schools, internships or research projects.

Experienced educators stress the importance of regular meetings. At the start, the structure of the program needs to be clearly set. From then on, participants can take their own responsibilities within the 'bounded freedom' they are offered.



Photo: rosnokcollege

Cultural differences and confusion of tongues

'The egalitarian tradition in Denmark is maybe not in our DNA, but it is extremely strong. It is a tacit assumption of everything. But it is being challenged nowadays.'
Stefan Hermann, former head of Danish government's working group on talent

Culture
 National traditions and culture determine views towards the term 'excellence'. And also the way in which excellence in education is viewed.

Language
 Culture towards excellence is also expressed in language. In some countries, it is best to avoid words like elite or talent. In others, it is fine to use them.

'In Sweden, the terms giftedness or talent are almost never used. In connection with programs for talents, pupils are not even referred to as high achieving. They are referred to as "Pupils who like to be challenged" – this is a very political and intentional choice of word.'
Professor Roland Persson on terminology in Sweden

Cultural differences

In Europe, large differences exist in the culture towards excellence. For example, in Scandinavia the culture is strongly egalitarian. It is highly unusual to differentiate between students. In the German-speaking countries it is more common to differentiate, especially in recent years. In Southern Europe there is a long tradition of elite institutes, such as France's *grandes écoles*. Strict selection of students is considered normal there. Terms like elite or excellence must therefore be understood in their historical and cultural context.



In Denmark, Norway and Sweden the Law of Jante is a well-known cultural phenomenon. Coming from a 1930s novel, it is a list of ten sayings, all referring to egalitarianism, for example 'You are not to think you are any better than us!' People working with concepts like excellence and talent often complain that their possibilities are limited due to this cultural 'law'.

TIPS

1. If you want to cooperate with another country, try to understand its **culture** and **education system**.
2. Find out how **access** to higher education is handled and if programs focusing on honors or excellence exist.
3. Familiarise yourself with the **commonly used terms** around excellence, to avoid painful misunderstandings.

Terminology
 The word honors, as used in continental Europe, follows an American tradition. Here, honors programs for talented students have existed for almost a century. Hence also the spelling, without 'u'. On the British Isles the term 'honours' (with u) is used in a different meaning, referring to a grading system. The Netherlands have adopted the term honors in the American meaning, but elsewhere in Europe many other words are in use. It can be hard to find the right words, because there can also be a strong political dimension to the terminology used. This can also create difficulties for cooperation at the international level.

Would you like to know which term is used where? A complete list can be found in the book or at www.honorsineurope.com/term

Public private?

Talent development and the business community: three examples of cooperation

Denmark: Videncenter Sorø

Talent development in Denmark has been supported by both government and the Danish business community in recent years. One of the best-known business families in the country decided to finance the building of a center for talent development. In 2009 the Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller Videncenter in Sorø was finished. The state-of-the-art building houses the ScienceTalenter program for talented secondary school students and provides room for other talent development initiatives. Facilities include large meeting rooms and well-equipped laboratories. Visitors can stay at the 'talent hotel'. This is very useful when participants in ScienceTalenter programs come for ScienceCamps, often lasting several days.



Photo Niels E. Larsen

Netherlands: sponsored master

The Erasmus School of Economics in Rotterdam is the first Dutch institution to start a sponsored master program. They describe this as follows: 'An "Honours Master" is a regular master, which is open only for the very best students, and is sponsored by the business community. Two subjects that are selected and taught by the sponsor supplement the regular curriculum. In addition, it is also possible to organise an international business case.' Participating students take the regular program in a special group and do additional subjects in the honors master. The

first master running to these principles is the Honours Master Accounting, Auditing and Control, 'powered by PwC'.



Austria: participants from companies

The program Centre of Excellence at Vienna University of Economics and Business has existed since 1989. It runs in year groups, involving a 'triangle' of participants: students, teachers and businesses. Annually, around forty students can enrol. After an introduction weekend they form small groups. In these groups they are then responsible for designing their own program content. They organize activities, such as seminars, excursions, training or company visits. Each group has its own sponsor: a company or institute. Employees from the sponsor actively participate in the program activities.



Companies as partner?

TIPS



Photo: Hamnehogeschool

Should the business community be involved in education? Opinions on this matter differ. However, it is a fact that companies are involved in some honors programs. What role can they play?

their master. For students it can be useful to meet prospective employers in honors projects. At the same time, the institution offering the program can expand its regional business network.

The strongest involvement of businesses in honors education is now found in the master phase. This seems logical, as most graduates will enter the labor market once they finish

Of course, there can also be financial reasons for cooperation. In some cases, institutions require honors programs to find 'outside' funding to be set up or continued.

In doubt about business involvement? Ask yourself 3 questions:

1. Does business involvement fit the program aims? In programs with mainly academic aims this is less obvious than in programs with labor market aims.
2. How can a company add to program content? True cooperation needs to involve more than just handing over money.
3. Why does a company want to be involved? Intentions are for example shown in personal commitment of employees.

To pay or to be paid?

Should honors students pay an extra fee to enrol in a program, or should they receive extra financial support? Opinions in Europe differ. In the Netherlands, at least two honors programs at master level require participating students to pay a fee. These are the Leiden Leadership Programme (€250) and the Young Innovators program at Utrecht University (€750, students can receive a maximum of €500 back as reimbursement of expenses). On the other hand, in German-speaking countries it is common to provide extra financial support to students with high grades. In the German program Stipendium-Plus thirteen organisations work together, all offering grants to talented students.



Student involvement

Honors programs offer extra challenges to students. But how can students be involved in the program set-up? Three tips to involve students before, during and after programs.

1. Designing together

Honors programs are designed for students. But only few program designers involve students and ask them for ideas. What is 'honors', in their mind? Why do they join a program? And what do they want from it? It is wise to use answers to these questions in program design.

2. Student as participant or co-creator?

The next question is: what



Photo: Hanzhoheschool

do students do in the program? Do they follow a set curriculum? Or do they help in designing program elements, co-creating the program? Or do they completely run the program, like in Biotech Academy (next page)?

3. Involving graduates

After their graduation,

many honors students go on to good labor market positions. They can serve as role models for new students. In addition, they can also be program ambassadors, for example facilitating internships or research projects. In many programs graduates also play a role in the selection of new participants.

United for content and cosiness

Honors students in the Netherlands are forming new student associations around honors. Some of these associations are mainly meant for social affairs, but often they also have clear goals with respect to educational content. Members add valuable experience to their cv, for example by being active in the board, a commission or by organizing events. Some associations work at national or international level. Socrates is trying to establish a network of local associations, starting in the Netherlands and Belgium. The National Honours Community organizes an annual congress.



More info? Links to honors student associations can be found at www.honorsineurope.com/students

Danish success project: Biotech Academy

They think out their own projects, recruit new members and find their own funding. Students are running the successful program Biotech Academy themselves.



In 2007, a systems biology student at the Danish Technical University (DTU) wanted to bring together talented students. He wanted to use study content in challenging new forms. On the basis of new insights in science, students started to develop educational materials for secondary schools. To finance the idea, he approached commercial partners. It was an immediate success. The first project, a virtual laboratory, received government support and is now freely available to all secondary schools.

The virtual laboratory, version 2.0

secure funding and recruit new members (in cooperation with DTU staff). Through Biotech Academy, students are trained in negotiating, expressing themselves and selling their ideas. This makes them very popular with future employers.

At the institute, the students can get help when necessary. The department sees the Biotech Academy students as its best ambassadors. Not only do they inspire possible future students, they also show entrepreneurial and innovative spirit.

More info at biotechacademy.dk

'A student-driven program has to have a back-up at all times. Therefore it needs to be prioritized by the institute. Students are ambitious, but they are also very fragile sometimes. That is where we come in, checking and making sure everything is ok.'
Lene Krøl Andersen, head of talent development, systems biology DTU

Ambassadors

Biotech Academy is completely run by students. They form the board,

Experience *'In 2001 three students from the city of Graz met by chance and concluded that although they were all top achievers with experience abroad, there was no network allowing them to meet each other. They were so surprised about the lack of a network for talents, that they decided to take this initiative themselves. In 2002 the Circle of Excellence (CoE) started. The CoE is formed by outstanding students, companies and university professors. Every year, these three elements create a unique group, united by the values of the CoE.'*
Student-chairman Circle of Excellence, Austria

TOGETHER

you can reach further

What keeps participants enthusiastic and involved? The formation of a *community* around your honors program is crucial, experts stress. Seven practical tips to foster a sense of community.

1. A community is formed together. Organize **social events** where all involved meet. Not only students, but also teachers, other staff and for example business partners. This is inspiring for everyone.
2. Provide a **common space (room)** where participants can meet and work. Try to make sure this room is open as often as possible and pay attention to its design. In this way, such a room is not only a working space, but it can also grow out to be a natural meeting place.
3. Start with a **collective experience**, for example an introduction weekend. This stimulates the development of a sense of community. Later in the program, it is also good to have an intensive period together, for example a summer school or a joint excursion.
4. Let students work together in relatively **small groups**. This will enhance



Photo Sharon & Nikki McCutcheon

5. Consider **'mixing'** students from different year groups. Within the total group, students learn from each other while working on personal goals.
6. Make room for **intensive contact** between students and staff. The honors community is formed together.
7. **Present** your program annually to a broad audience. Such an event serves many goals. Participants can share experiences and handle organisational matters. Potential new participants get an idea of program content and atmosphere. Colleagues in the regular program, policy makers, partners and alumni can give feedback and stay involved.

Thinking regionally



Regional cooperation in talent development can have many advantages. A program which is designed in cooperation with different institutions and regional partners, is closely connected to the regional society. In addition, students in such a network have many opportunities, for example to find internships at companies in the region.

This improves chances they will remain in the region after graduation.

Bavaria

Fostering the attractiveness of the region is an explicit goal of the Elite Network of Bavaria. With this program, the German state of Bavaria supports initiatives for talented students, from the start of their studies up to the first

steps of a scientific career. Bachelor students in the Max Weber-Program receive a small grant and take common workshops. At master level, eight universities jointly offer around twenty different elite study programs, for which they select participants.

More information?
www.elitenetzwerk.bayern.de

Flexibility Creativity



ImageFlicks / moskito7

Honors education needs freedom to thrive.

Therefore, maybe the most important tip for honors educators is: make space for flexibility and creativity. Allow for changes in the program on the basis of recent events or new insights.

In addition, stimulate participating students and teachers to bring in their own ideas. In the end, they make a program together.

'It should not be forgotten that one of the purposes of democracy is to provide each individual with the opportunity that is best for him (...). The ideal for democratic education good enough to meet the needs of the post-war world must not be security but excellence.'
Frank Aydelotte, American pioneer in honors education, 1944

New steps in research and networking

To further develop honors education, more research is necessary. In the project 'Honors in Europe' we extend our research to more countries. At the same time, international cooperation is promoted in the European Honors Council (see page 16). Some interesting questions for new research are:

1. What are the goals of honors education and are they met?
2. What do students want from honors education, and why?
3. How are experiences from honors applied in regular education?
4. What is the added value of honors education?

European Honors Council: *networking in practice*

Where can I find an honors program similar to mine, or like the one I want to develop? What are possible partners for student exchange at honors level? And where can I find partners for research around talent development in higher education? In the research for the book *Talent Development in European Higher Education*, it turned out that there is a great demand for exchange of knowledge about these subjects at a European level. Therefore the European Honors Council (EHC) was formed. In the EHC, people gather who are involved in or interested in offering special programs for talented students in higher education. Sharing and exchanging

knowledge in education and research are key elements for the EHC. See www.honorscouncil.eu for more details and how to become a member.

In the USA, a similar network in honors education has existed for over fifty years: the NCHC (see nchchonors.org).



About this brochure

This brochure is one of the results of the research project *Honors in Europe* at the Research Centre for Talent Development in Higher Education and Society at Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen in the Netherlands. It is based on the book *Talent Development in European Higher Education – Honors programs in the Benelux, Nordic and German-speaking countries* by Marca Wolfensberger, published in open access in 2015 at Springer Open. The book can be downloaded freely through www.honorsineurope.com. The brochure was prepared in cooperation with the European Honors Council (www.honorscouncil.eu).

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