

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

National Collegiate Honors Council
Monographs Series: Chapters

National Collegiate Honors Council

2023

The Role of the Honors College Dean in the Future of Honors Education

Peter Parolin

University of Wyoming, Parolin@uwyo.edu

Timothy J. Nichols

University of Montana, timothy.nichols@umontana.edu

Donal C. Skinner

University of Texas at Dallas, Donal.Skinner@UTDallas.edu

Rebecca C. Bott-Knutson

South Dakota State University, Rebecca.Bott@sdsstate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchcmonochap>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), [Liberal Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#)

Parolin, Peter; Nichols, Timothy J.; Skinner, Donal C.; and Bott-Knutson, Rebecca C., "The Role of the Honors College Dean in the Future of Honors Education" (2023). *National Collegiate Honors Council Monographs Series: Chapters*. 119.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nchcmonochap/119>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the National Collegiate Honors Council at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in National Collegiate Honors Council Monographs Series: Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

CHAPTER SIX

The Role of the Honors College Dean in the Future of Honors Education

PETER PAROLIN

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

TIMOTHY J. NICHOLS

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

DONAL C. SKINNER

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

REBECCA C. BOTT-KNUTSON

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Leading an honors college is one of the most rewarding and complex endeavors available anywhere on today's higher education landscape. Working with colleagues and students in institutional settings that encourage creativity and innovation, honors leaders have enormous potential to make an impact. Collaboration is

essential, and this chapter emerges from the collaboration among four honors deans as well as over twenty honors leaders from across the country who joined our session, “Re-Imagining Honors Leadership: A Dialogue with Deans about the Future of Honors Education,” at the NCHC’s 2021 conference in Orlando, Florida (Nichols et al.). Rich discussions with colleagues inform both our ideas about the opportunities and challenges facing honors leaders and our strategies for addressing them.

While we celebrate the opportunities that leading an honors college affords, we recognize that this position is one of the most variable and perhaps least understood on college campuses. Other academic deans are attached to colleges that at least have a general subject matter in their names (i.e., education, business, medicine, law), so people intuitively understand what they are and what they do. By contrast, many colleagues, even on campuses with robust honors programs and colleges, are unsure precisely what honors is or how and why to engage with it. This chapter tells the story of honors by focusing on leadership. We chart the many aspects of the honors dean’s job, identifying the foundational values of honors, its aspirations, and its ways of turning vision into reality. We also identify many impediments honors leaders face, and we suggest ideas, backed by examples, for overcoming them.

First and foremost, the honors dean has a multifaceted job that demands connecting to stakeholders in every corner of campus. The sheer variety of responsibilities makes honors leadership a perfect fit for those who seek a wide impact, enjoy assembling complex structures, and value collaboration across the entire institution. Not only is the spirit of honors collaborative, but the scope of honors makes collaboration essential. The rewards are enormous, including the satisfaction of supporting the professional development of colleagues and providing transformative educational experiences for students. To reap the rewards, however, honors deans must respond to diverse, evolving challenges, many of which we lay out below. Doing so successfully enables honors to embody its highest values of meaningful relationships, innovative pedagogy, rich interdisciplinarity, and transformative co-curricular engagement. Our

method here is to identify sequentially key issues facing honors leadership and to link each to a series of challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities. The significant term here may ultimately be *responsibilities*: we argue that by accepting the responsibility to serve others well, honors deans show the way for students, faculty, and staff to live and learn with honor.

THE ISSUE:

MYTHS AND PROBLEMS AROUND HONORS EDUCATION

The Challenge

Unhelpful myths about honors abound: honors is elitist and exclusivist, narrowly focused on conventional markers of academic success like scores on the ACT and SAT. The myths limit honors education to classroom academics; further, by portraying honors students as already academically and personally successful, they underemphasize the ways in which honors students may stumble and need special support. Some see honors as homogenous, inhospitable to diversity and to students from underrepresented groups. Campus colleagues can see honors as a silo, having little connection with, or impact on, other programs and therefore as a competitor in resource-stressed environments. These myths can understandably diminish the appeal of honors to students as well as its ability to collaborate with important partners. Even more problematic is when the myths about honors carry degrees of truth: for example, honors programs have historically been exclusionary in admissions practices and insufficiently attentive to the role of diversity in how we understand excellence. Where our own practices counter the values of honors, we must commit to change.

The Opportunity

We must assess the myths honestly and commit to building a better reality so that they do not impede our potential if left unaddressed. High school experiences lead many students to think that honors at the post-secondary level means harder classroom

experiences, more difficult content, and more numerous assignments, that honors is about students clearing higher hurdles in order to define themselves as superior. In this model of honors, John Zubizarreta and James Ford note: “What the instructor teaches in terms of countable amounts of information and what the student produces in terms of quantitatively measurable outcomes rule the day” (xi).

The myth of honors as the uber-difficult academic experience profoundly obscures the radical potential inherent in honors education to help students enrich the questions they ask, answers they formulate, and goals they set for themselves. This is the transformative dimension of honors education that “depends equally on *what* we teach, complemented by *how* and *why* we teach in a way that challenges students to learn in deep, meaningful, connected, and lasting ways” (Zubizarreta and Ford xi). Honors encourages students not just to master content but to think *differently*, to consider new points of view, and to bring diverse approaches to bear on important questions. This is the story honors needs to tell.

Confronting myths that bear traces of past realities enables the honors dean to assert all the more powerfully the potential of contemporary honors as a holistic form of education. Far from putting students through an academic gauntlet, honors encourages them to learn on multiple levels and in multiple spaces. Further, through service, leadership, and engagement activities, honors enables students to enact classroom knowledge and aptitudes in the real world in pursuit of the greater good.

The Responsibility

If we believe that honors offers students value, then we must make it as available as possible. The myth defines honors as an *exclusivist* bastion, the part of the college or university that doubles down on the principle, excoriated by Michael M. Crow and William B. Dabars, that American institutions of higher learning earn their status not by how many students they *include* but by how many they *exclude* (241–42, 305). Students accustomed to seeing themselves on the outside, as part of the non-elite, can easily assume they do

not fit a certain profile and dismiss the possibility of joining honors. One first-generation student at a 2021 honors lunch at the University of Wyoming said, “I thought honors was for rich white kids,” her comment confirming the persistence of this stereotype. Yet the nationwide statistics on admissions to honors tell a different story. According to a 2021 census of U.S. honors colleges, 75% of honors colleges nationwide accept over 50% of first-year cohort applicants (Cognard-Black and Smith 39). Although significant progress has been made on the issue of access to honors, much work remains to be done in the area of diversifying student populations.

Numbers, of course, do not tell the whole story. Even as we rebut the myths about honors, we must acknowledge that the myths respond to aspects of our practice that fall short of our ideals. They pinpoint structural features of honors that we need to keep working to improve. Our central priority has to be aligning honors practices with our fundamental values of excellence informed by diversity, equity, and inclusion and by the engagement that strives to improve the world. Thus, honors must continue to work to increase accessibility and recognize more diverse forms of excellence. The dean’s responsibility is to cultivate an honors community that puts these values into practice.

THE ISSUE:

JUSTICE IN THE HONORS ADMISSIONS PROCESS

The Challenge

Rew A. Godow, Jr., lists “Admissions Officer” (21) as one of the crucial roles of honors administrators. Honors deans across the U.S. are currently rethinking appropriate admissions criteria and processes. Standardized test scores, a common metric used for honors admissions, have long been known to be biased against students of color and students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged (Dixon-Román et al.). High school grade point averages are also commonly inflated for those with access to advanced placement and international baccalaureate coursework. Further complicating the admissions process, value-added high school experiences have

the potential to discriminate along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. For example, in all our states, students at many rural and reservation schools lack access to accelerated or diversified curricular opportunities or programs that may give them a leg up in the admissions process and help them succeed in college. They may also have to work after school or care for younger siblings, thus precluding participation in the extracurricular and service experiences that strengthen college applications. Many honors colleges now de-emphasize test scores in favor of more holistic admissions processes, but these processes are labor intensive and require resources.

The Opportunity

Honors is built upon the premise that students are more than test scores. Honors students are leaders and intellectual risk takers who serve their campuses and communities. Honors deans should rely on diverse data points to identify student potential to thrive and establish admissions practices that focus on potential. In recent years high school GPA has been validated as five times more effective at predicting potential collegiate success than standardized tests (Allensworth and Clark). Recent advances in admissions practices have increased the accessibility of honors by privileging holistic approaches, which may include reflective essays, interviews, letters of recommendation, video submissions, and a portfolio of work, over standardized scores.

The Responsibility

In increasing accessibility, we must be mindful of setting up students to succeed in honors. Honors deans must ensure that admissions criteria and processes align with the unique values and vision of honors. Admissions criteria shape the student body and determine who has access to the benefits of honors. Studies of current successful students can help determine where leadership can cultivate more inclusive student populations and nurture environments in which more students can succeed. As admissions directors, honors leaders must partner with institutional admissions offices to ensure that these offices understand what honors values. Delivering

on the promise that honors students are more than a numeric score starts by emphasizing honors' holistic approach throughout the recruitment and admissions process, an approach discussed at length in NCHC's position paper, *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion*.

THE ISSUE:

RECRUITING AND SERVING DIVERSE POPULATIONS IN HONORS

The Challenge

One of the most salient concerns for honors deans is diversity. While data remain elusive, honors programs and colleges are typically less diverse than non-honors units, an especially acute situation at Research 1 universities. In a related finding, Andrew J. Cognard-Black and Art L. Spisak show that the number of students in honors who received Pell Grants or other forms of need-based aid is significantly lower than for non-honors students. In many institutions, honors has not sufficiently broadened access to transformative educational experiences for the most marginalized and underrepresented student populations. Interestingly, Cognard-Black and Spisak found more individuals identifying as LGBTQ+ in honors than in broader university contexts.

Full disciplinary participation in honors is also a challenge. Some disciplines, particularly those focusing on agriculture, engineering, or education, are less represented (Kutzke et al.). When honors is embedded within siloed programs, then only a select few students and faculty benefit from the experience. Arguably, these benefits are limited in comparison to programs offering the more synergistic educational experience of exposure to processes and knowledge from across all disciplines.

The Opportunity

Honors institutions have a distinct opportunity to broaden the appeal of honors to a wider, more representative swath of students and colleagues than ever. Early exposure to honors through

a first-year honors orientation, a pre-first-year summer experience, or an honors section of an introductory course within the student's field of study increases retention and provides a clear opportunity to recruit students from across disciplines, particularly underrepresented ones (Hansen et al.; Spisak et al.).

Honors can also combat underrepresentation across campus in various ways. Although women dominate in honors, in other colleges, such as business and engineering, women are a significant minority. By creating a welcoming environment for women in these fields, honors can mitigate against the consequences of underrepresentation. For example, in 2021–2022, women made up only 19% of engineering students overall at the University of Wyoming, but 40% of the engineering students enrolled in honors. In a resource-restricted environment, honors can also support requests for faculty lines in other departments, with honors perhaps providing a second home for the faculty, thus increasing disciplinary reach.

The world's foremost challenges require collaboration between diverse individuals with myriad life experiences and disciplinary knowledge. Ensuring diversity in honors enables our entire student population to practice the kind of collaboration that will contribute to their future success.

The Responsibility

As honors expands access beyond those who have already achieved the conventional measures of academic success, we must provide our evolving student population with an evolving set of robust services. Beyond merely avoiding the practice of tokenism, we must actively provide support structures for all forms of diversity. All students must see themselves as valued.

Because diversity issues extend beyond the student mix, honors deans must also attend to issues of diversity in faculty and staff, in curricular and programmatic offerings, and even in facilities. Once again, a holistic approach will guide leaders, informed by the lens of inclusive excellence and the context, demographics, and academic and programmatic landscape of their institutions, to

build relationships with appropriate partners on campus and in the community.

THE ISSUE:

TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION

The Challenge

For the honors leader, whom Godow calls “Curriculum Reformer” (19), curriculum development and management are key challenges. With curriculum at the heart of higher education, deans need to set intentional learning outcomes for their programs and support them with the appropriate curricular and co-curricular experiences. Some leaders struggle with inherited curriculum and onerous institutional processes for change. Even so, it is important to find ways to integrate the high-impact practices associated with honors, practices such as independent research, service learning, field experiences, study abroad, creative scholarship, and internships.

Honors curricula need to respond nimbly to changing student needs as well as institutional contexts. For example, honors must respond creatively to the fact that while general education coursework once commonly comprised a significant portion of honors curricular requirements, many honors students enter university today having completed many of their gen-ed requirements through a myriad of “early college” programs and standardized exams. Honors must offer these students something more than simple gen-ed credits.

The Opportunity

Honors can become more attractive to such students by offering upper-division courses that satisfy honors and major-specific outcomes simultaneously. Faculty may be drawn to honors by the opportunity to develop innovative interdisciplinary and experiential offerings tied to themes such as global grand challenges (Nichols et al., “Collaborative”; Bott-Knutson et al., “Community

Partnerships”). Honors students’ openness to challenge allows faculty to adopt exciting new pedagogical approaches. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many honors faculty made their curricula more accessible to students by embracing new instructional technologies. And honors students reported greater ability to adapt to the rapidly changing curricular approaches than their non-honors counterparts (Wiltse et al.).

The Responsibility

While novel pedagogical approaches remain a vital part of honors, we must also ensure that these approaches maintain the intellectual rigor that challenges and inspires students. Innovative pedagogies must help students progress on programmatic learning outcomes. New activities must be accompanied by carefully crafted and clearly articulated assessments. Honors education is purposeful. Students and faculty should be encouraged to take intellectual risks within the space of honors, but these risks should be measured and not haphazard.

THE ISSUE:

PROMOTING INTERDISCIPLINARITY

The Challenge

While honors education has long transcended the confines of single disciplinary perspectives, finding space for interdisciplinary honors courses in students’ schedules can be a challenge. Some narrower or vocationally focused majors actively advise students against, or prohibit them from, enrolling in honors. Additionally, colleges or majors with stringent GPA requirements for program continuation or scholarship eligibility disincentivize students from taking some of the risks that honors encourages.

Further, as the cost of higher education escalates, many degree programs attempt to provide the most time-effective path toward graduation, a goal that state legislatures typically support. The goal may be well-intentioned, but the result is that considerable numbers

of students no longer explore the world through the wider lens of the liberal arts or pursue the kinds of interdisciplinary connections that will equip them to thrive in a complex world.

The Opportunity

With its ability to innovate, honors can collapse academic silos and promote interdisciplinarity. For example, honors can offer team-taught courses that break the artificial barriers among disciplines, allowing faculty and students to connect content areas in new and invigorating ways. One Wyoming honors course, *The History of Diseases*, pairs a social historian and a professor of veterinary medicine; another, *Medicine's Moving Images*, pairs a biologist and an English professor. In Montana, interdisciplinary themes challenge students to connect the dots across subject matters such as democracy, water, sound, and love. In each of our institutions, honors leads the way in pedagogical approaches to contemporary grand challenges. Through these approaches, honors introduces students to subjects they might not otherwise have considered; thus, honors can also become a powerful ally in recruitment for other programs.

Similarly, linking honors courses with community resources can enhance student learning. At Wyoming, honors collaborates with a local theater company by covering production costs in return for the company's connecting one of its plays to a relevant honors course. In Ohio, honors works with a local historical society to ground students in community history. In Montana, honors partners with the Mayor of Missoula's office, the Montana Museum of Art and Culture, the YWCA, and the Clarkfork Watershed Coalition. To extend such expansive opportunities to students whose majors discourage adding honors, honors programs and colleges could provide one-credit hour options to lower some of the barriers. Additionally, honors might remove GPA pressures by providing honors courses that are grade neutral, appearing on the transcript only if completed satisfactorily.

The Responsibility

The problems facing society today and into the future are so complex and multi-faceted that they require both a focused and an interdisciplinary approach. Honors programs and colleges ask students to embrace interdisciplinarity not as a luxury but as a necessity. Indeed, the institutional autonomy enjoyed by honors colleges allows them to refine curricular approaches nimbly to achieve these objectives. While many degree programs requiring accreditation are beholden to heavily prescriptive curricula, honors permits greater freedom in curating the educational experience.

THE ISSUE:

SERVING THE WHOLE STUDENT

The Challenge

According to NCHC's "Definition of Honors Education":

Honors education is characterized by in-class and extra-curricular activities that are measurably broader, deeper, or more complex than comparable learning experiences typically found at institutions of higher education. Honors experiences include a distinctive learner-directed environment and philosophy, provide opportunities that are appropriately tailored to fit the institution's culture and mission, and frequently occur within a close community of students and faculty. ("Definition")

Honors education aims to see each student as an individual with intellectual, emotional, relational, physical, and experiential needs.

The Opportunity

The call for a multidimensional, people-centered honors education surely makes the honors dean responsible for offering transformative educational experiences. Because honors cuts across both academic and student affairs, it can cultivate students holistically within and beyond the classroom walls. Through the collective

wisdom of faculty, students, staff, alumni, and community partners, honors encourages students to explore the intangibles of life in settings such as living and learning communities, student organizations, and service learning experiences (Grassel et al.; Bott-Knutson et al., “First-Year Fellowship”). To serve the whole student, honors also needs mechanisms for checking in regularly to see how students are doing. Ongoing opportunities for conversation and connection may include traditions such as hikes, tea times, recognition programs, and book clubs. With support from honors, students can more manageably embrace new adventures as varied as study abroad (Arens et al.), peer mentorship (Grassel et al.), and explorations of identity (Bott-Knutson et al., “First-year Fellowship”). In addition to serving students well, these kinds of experiences have the benefit of building enduring relationships between honors colleges and their students (Kadlecek et al.).

The Responsibility

Failing to equip students with skills beyond technical disciplinary knowledge is akin to training accomplished athletes on technical performance while omitting teamwork, nutrition, conditioning, rest, and mental fitness. In both cases, the narrower scope of tutelage prevents subjects from achieving their full potential. Honors asks us to engage those we serve holistically. Angela Salas therefore asks honors to understand students in terms of “full brains, open minds, the ability to read, write, think, and speak clearly,” and to nurture in them “the optimism and service ethic to believe that they can change the world for the better, and the initiative and *savoir faire* to figure out how to do that” (153). To support students in their full dimensionality, honors leaders must institute systems that make students feel comfortable asking for help or exploring areas where they think they need improvement, especially through the practice of culturally responsive advising discussed by Elizabeth Raisanen in this volume. Honors students often perceive that because they are “honors” they should not need external support, but they share many of the same needs as non-honors students. For example, they experience anxiety and depression as or more

frequently than their non-honors peers. Honors practitioners must understand the nature of this student population and develop optimal approaches to serving them.

THE ISSUE:

BUILDING THE PLANE IN FLIGHT

The Challenge

Honors, by definition, is multifaceted, innovative, and nimble; that identity encourages in deans and their teams a spirit of intellectual adventurism and a willingness to take off in a plane that has not been fully designed and then figure out the rest of the design and construction while in flight. Adopting a different metaphor, Bonnie Irwin argues that honors deans practice “a form of civil engineering because, in order to make our programs integral to our colleges and universities, we are road and bridge builders. We not only build connections, but often have to design them” (30). Because of its innovative habits, honors can address high stakes and urgent needs as they emerge on our campuses perhaps more effectively than other units.

The Opportunity

Engaging regularly with both academic and student affairs while also being relatively free from the disciplinary constraints of other campus leaders, honors deans recognize institutional needs or conflicts before they become widely apparent. The dean is therefore indispensable to the success of the university above and beyond honors, which is one of many good reasons the honors college dean should sit on the deans’ council and report to the provost.

The Responsibility

The compelling creative opportunities of honors are enticing, and the dean should seize them. But the dean must also avoid the temptation to pursue myriad possibilities at the cost of quality in any one. A seed may set roots in sparse conditions, but to flourish,

it needs sunlight, rich soil, and water. Such is also true for the honors college: excellence stems from a strong foundation, industrious fortification, and the fruits of forward thinking more than a scattered approach seeking to be comprehensive but lacking clear vision (Kelleher; Hecker et al.).

THE ISSUE:

RESOURCING THE WORK OF HONORS

The Challenge

Godow calls the honors dean a “General Administrator” and “Entrepreneur” (19, 20). One of the dean’s key roles is securing and strategically managing resources, which requires navigating different fiscal realities and a range of budget models, including historical budgeting, RCM (responsibility centered management), or some combination of both. The unique institutional positionality of honors sometimes means that honors colleges do not fit into the typical budgetary models of the university, and limited institutional resources commonly make entrepreneurial efforts necessary. Many honors leaders spend significant time working with university foundation staff to raise dollars from external sources while others secure grants from state, federal, and private agencies to supplement resources from their home institutions.

The Opportunity

Resourcing honors gives deans the opportunity to promote the people and mission of honors across a wide network. While many deans step into their role lacking substantial experience with fundraising (Carnicom and Mathis), deans excel at telling the story of honors. When deans shift the frame of reference from raising *funds* to raising *honors* (Bott-Knutson et al., “(Fund)raising”), fundraising becomes both achievable and enjoyable. In this model, deans first identify what is necessary to *raise the bar*—that is, how can a donor help honors do something for students that is currently not possible. They next *raise awareness*—sharing honors’ compelling

need, vision, and successful track record. When the dean raises awareness, prospective donors emerge. At this point, the dean needs to *raise relationships*, collaborating with prospective donors to promote and fund the work of honors. Alumni and community partners further raise awareness through their personal stories of the impact of honors (Andrews). Foundations and community leaders can connect honors to donors eager to make a positive difference. At Wyoming, the connection to a major libraries donor resulted in the endowment of a library position specifically affiliated with the honors college.

Another way to resource the work of honors is to implement an NCHC program review. Through the NCHC, deans may request an external review of their college, which typically consists of two NCHC-trained reviewers evaluating the college according to NCHC criteria. As leaders within their own honors colleges, these reviewers understand common challenges and opportunities. The NCHC review offers the opportunity to raise the bar, raise awareness, raise relationships, and raise honors. For example, during an NCHC review at South Dakota State University (SDSU), the dean involved two key donors in the process and engaged them in frank conversations about the findings. The review identified significant potential to enhance the college's existing strengths through further staffing, instructional dollars, and operational resources. As a direct result, the donors committed a new gift, the largest challenge match in the history of SDSU, to fortify college operations. When deans invest in relationships to support their honors college, significant opportunities to *raise honors* will arise.

The Responsibility

Honors deans may have to cobble together numerous sources of funding to support their colleges. Because different entities, such as foundations or university accounting systems, apply specific rules to each type of fund, leaders must be diligent in learning how funds function. When funds are insufficient, leaders must raise new funds for targeted needs through development work or grants. Leaders with strategic priorities but no specific funds to realize them can

reallocate resources to show proof of concept to donors and university administrators. In any case, in fundraising for honors, deans should rely on the value of relationships and the desire to make a difference that inform honors education as a whole.

THE ISSUE:

ARTICULATING THE VALUE OF HONORS

The Challenge

Honors leaders must articulate the value of honors to a wide range of constituents—students, parents, employers, faculty, staff, senior administrators, donors—not all of whom intuitively understand the value of honors. These values are clear to those who work and study in honors, and they persist after graduation in the personal and professional lives of alumni (Kotschevar et al.). Honors has demonstrably strengthened educational institutions and individual lives alike. The challenge is to prevent honors from being the best-kept secret on campus and in the community.

The Opportunity

When deans actively articulate the value of honors, opportunities arise. Articulating how honors enriches the university, deans may open doors for new collaborations with colleagues and programs. To tell the story of honors as powerfully as possible, deans could simply survey honors students about their honors experience. Surveys yield powerful data about why honors attracts and retains top students. In turn, the data may make conversations about the sometimes additional expense of honors more persuasive.

Honors leadership should also be prepared to shift the larger administrative dialogue from the economic *cost* of honors to the economic *value* of honors. Deans should discuss the financial impact of students choosing to enroll in the university at least partly because of the honors college. Honors deans know that the value of honors extends far beyond dollars and cents, but we must also assert the economic value of honors to the institution, state,

and region. Retaining, persisting, and graduating at significantly higher rates than the general student population, honors students are a good investment and less expensive than they might seem, especially since it costs more to recruit a new student than to retain an existing one. When deans show that honors has fiscal value, in addition to intrinsic personal value, they will impress prospective students and parents, inspire future donors, and establish honors as crucial to the success of the university.

The Responsibility

Having the relevant data and personal stories about the impact of honors and being able to articulate the impact, energetically and authentically, to a wide range of constituents are essential skills for honors deans. Leaders unfamiliar with data-driven analysis should seek help in gathering and interpreting data and should collaborate with experts in web-design, publication design, and social media marketing to tell the honors story. (See *The Demonstrable Value of Honors Education: New Research Evidence*.) They must communicate effectively about honors and they should empower others—students, faculty, development officers—to do the same.

THE ISSUE:

LEADING HONORABLY

The Challenge

A final challenge for the honors dean is recruiting, retaining, and empowering a team of honors professionals equipped with the wide-ranging skill set needed to realize the college's mission. The dean may be “captain” of the team, but the challenges, roles, and lofty aspirations of honors require a team of colleagues committed to the vision and mission of honors. The dean needs to nurture the members of this team with the emotional and material support that will enable their long-term success.

The Opportunity

Leading honorably means empowering people to achieve their greatest potential. The quality, accessibility, and impact of honors all increase when the right people are working effectively toward a common vision. In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins describes this concept as “First Who, Then What.” Good institutions find specific good people to constitute the team, a process Collins calls getting the right people onto the bus. He then postulates that great institutions match good people with the right roles, what he calls getting the right people into the right seats. In other words, deans should not only hire people committed to honors, they must also assign tasks that match the interests and skills of each team member. Honors professionals commonly display what Carol Dweck famously calls the growth mindset; therefore, deans should empower team members to grow. The ability to grow within honors produces long-term professional satisfaction. Even when exceptional team members are recruited away, honors can find solace in having played a role in their success and know that former colleagues will continue to promote the vision of honors in other settings.

The Responsibility

Responsible for the well-being of colleagues, honors deans should coach colleagues on developing goals and mitigating shortcomings, so that no one is surprised or alarmed by the details of an annual performance review. Deans can show leadership by welcoming feedback on their own performance as well. One of our co-authors regularly gives her team copies of Michael Useem’s *Leading Up: How to Lead Your Boss So You Both Win*, which stresses the importance of employees leading their supervisors and lines of communication that allow advice to flow in both directions. Returning to the story of honors, deans can serve teams well by continually communicating the collective “why,” or the significance of our shared work. Patrick M. Lencioni argues that healthy teams rely on more communication than might seem necessary and suggests that strategically employing ideal types of communication improves team performance.

Because honors deans rely on extraordinary efforts from team members, they should celebrate achievements regularly. They must also recognize the benefits of grace and incentives. Grace may take the form of encouraging someone to come late to work the day after participating in an all-hands-on-deck evening program. Incentives may include the opportunity to lead an honors study abroad or funding for faculty and staff to attend honors conferences. Recognizing colleagues' contributions involves nominating them for awards and occasionally simply treating the team to lunch. Honoring people helps honors thrive.

Deans send a clear message about honors being more than a line item on a résumé when they align their own actions with the core values of honors. Honors deans are fortunate in many ways. They breathe life into education through innovative curricula. They invest in the future through the development of new leaders. They inspire communities through service initiatives. They nurture authentic relationships among the students, faculty, and staff who meet each other through honors. In every interaction, they can help others fulfill their greatest goals.

CONCLUSION:

REWARDS OF THE HONORS DEANSHIP

The honors deanship is one of the best administrative positions on campus. Not only is it rewarding to direct a program whose students are consistently talented, motivated, and engaged, but it is a privilege to work with colleagues inspired and energized by this exceptional student population. One satisfying reward is hearing from honors students about the transformative impact honors has had on their undergraduate years, whether this came from faculty-student collaboration on research, which the professor and student may have presented at conferences or published; capstone experiences; or apprenticeship and internship opportunities. Another reward is the satisfaction of seeing honors contribute to the university's strategic goals. For example, at the University of Wyoming, honors offered international courses that enabled the institution

to meet its target of doubling the number of students studying abroad. Further, these honors courses targeted academic disciplines in which few students typically travel internationally, such as engineering and science, thus engaging students who would not otherwise have studied abroad.

In these ways, honors elevates the campus experience for everyone. Honors students bring insights, perspectives, and energy to every academic and co-curricular unit they are part of, with widespread, tangible benefits. University presidents maintain that a vibrant honors college brings enormous value to the entire campus community. For example, Paul W. Ferguson and James S. Ruebel note that a major “value of honors comprises the institutional benefits gained by having such a program on campus,” and point to “the catalytic impact such a learning experience has on honors students and in turn on their peers, their faculty, and even their administrators” (13–14). E. Gordon Gee and Kenneth P. Blemings similarly write that “the increased value placed on an honors education is enriching entire universities and how they operate. . . . Honors students on campus make our entire university better, and having them in our community and in our state is an investment not just in these students but in ourselves” (177, 180).

A final, immeasurable reward of honors leadership is that it provides an opportunity to transcend local boundaries and embrace the national and international exchange of ideas. Participation in national honors events, especially through the NCHC, is a highlight of the calendar year and becomes a place where friendships flourish and where ideas, such as this paper, originate.

WORKS CITED

- Allensworth, Elaine M., and Kallie Clark. “High School GPAs and ACT Scores as Predictors of College Completion: Examining Assumptions about Consistency across High Schools.” *Educational Researcher*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2020, pp. 198–211.
- Andrews, Larry R. *Fundraising for Honor\$: A Handbook*. National Collegiate Honors Council, 2009.

- Arens, Nicholas R., et al. "Student Preferences for Faculty-Led Honors Study Abroad Experiences." *Honors in Practice*, vol. 14, 2018, pp. 27–41.
- Bott-Knutson, Rebecca C., et al. "Community Partnerships Help Undergraduate Students to Meet the 'Grand Challenges' of Today." *Collaborations: A Journal of Community-Based Research and Practice*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1–7.
- Bott-Knutson, Rebecca C., et al. "First-Year Fellowship: Fostering an Inclusive Community within Honors." *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2020, pp. 121–25.
- Bott-Knutson, Rebecca, et al. "(Fund)raising Honors: Blending Conventional and Technological Approaches to Development." *Journal of the European Honors Council*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1–5.
- Carnicom, Scott, and Philip M. Mathis. "Building an Honors Development Board." *Honors in Practice*, vol. 5, 2009, pp. 41–46.
- Cognard-Black, Andrew J., and Patricia J. Smith. "Characteristics of the 21st-Century Honors College." *Honors Colleges in the 21st Century*, edited by Richard Badenhausen, National Collegiate Honors Council, 2023, pp. 23–79.
- Cognard-Black, Andrew J., and Art L. Spisak. "Forging a More Equitable Path for Honors Education: Advancing Racial, Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Diversity." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2021, pp. 81–114.
- Collins, Jim. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap And Others Don't*. Harper Business, 2011.
- Crow, Michael M., and William B. Dabars. *Designing the New American University*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2015.
- The Demonstrable Value of Honors Education: New Research Evidence*. Edited by Andrew J. Cognard-Black et al., National Collegiate Honors Council, 2019.

- Dixon-Román, Ezekiel J., et al. "Race, Poverty and SAT Scores: Modeling the Influences of Family Income on Black and White High School Students' SAT Performance." *Teachers College Record*, vol. 115, 2013, pp. 1–33.
- Dweck, Carol. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Ballantine Books, 2006.
- Ferguson, Paul W., and James S. Ruebel. "The Catalytic Impact of Honors." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2015, pp. 11–14.
- Gee, E. Gordon, and Kenneth P. Blemings. "Access, not Exclusion: Honors at a Public Institution." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2015, pp. 177–80.
- Godow, Rew A., Jr. "Honors Program Leadership: The Right Stuff." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2006, pp. 17–23.
- Grassel, Meghan, et al. "The Role of Honors Teaching Assistants as Community Builders." *Journal of the European Honors Council*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2019, pp. 1–5.
- Hansen, Alecia, et al. "Early Exposure to an Honors Course Yields Retention of Agricultural Majors in Honors." *NACTA Journal*, vol. 65, 2021, pp. 459–63.
- Hecker, Jeffrey E., et al. "Disordered Eating, Perfectionism, Stress, and Satisfaction in Honors: A Research Collaborative Investigating a Community Concern." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2022, pp. 67–86.
- Irwin, Bonnie. "Riding a Unicycle Across a Bridge While Juggling: The Musings of an Honors Administrator." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2006, pp. 29–31.
- Kadlecek Cadi, et al. "Checking-in to Create Instructor-Student Immediacy in Honors." *Honors in Practice*, vol. 17, 2021, pp. 248–51.

- Kelleher, Maureen. "Mental Health Needs in the Honors Community: Beyond Good Intentions." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2017, pp. 29–37.
- Kotschevar Christopher M., et al. "The Value of Honors: A Study of Alumni Perspectives on Skills Gained Through Honors Education." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2018, pp. 137–55.
- Kutzke, Kayla L., et al. "Student Perception and Affinity: Establishment of an Institutional Framework for the Examination of Underrepresented Programs Such as Agriculture in Honors." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2020, pp. 95–116.
- Lencioni, Patrick M. *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else In Business*. Jossey-Bass, 2012.
- National Collegiate Honors Council. "Definition of Honors Education." <<https://www.nchchonors.org/directors-faculty/definition-of-honors-education>>.
- . *Honors Enrollment Management: Toward a Theory and Practice of Inclusion*. National Collegiate Honors Council, 2020, <https://uwm.edu/honors/wp-content/uploads/sites/46/2021/01/NCHC-paper-Inclusive-Enrollment-Practices_compressed.pdf>.
- Nichols, Timothy J., et al. "Collaborative, Holistic, Honors Approach to Meeting Agriculture's Grand Challenges." *NACTA Journal*, vol. 63, 2019, pp. 282–87.
- Nichols, Timothy J., et al. "Re-Imagining Honors Leadership: A Dialogue with Deans about the Future of Honors Education." National Collegiate Honors Council Annual Conference, 21 Oct. 2021, Orlando, FL. Conference Presentation.
- Raisanen, Elizabeth. "Who Belongs in Honors? Culturally Responsive Advising and Transformative Diversity." *Honors Colleges in the 21st Century*, edited by Richard Badenhausen, National Collegiate Honors Council, 2023, pp. 347–83.

- Salas, Angela M. "An Honors Director's Credo." *Honors in Practice*, vol. 5, 2009, pp. 153–58.
- Spisak, Art L., et al. "Adding Value through Honors at the University of Iowa: Effects of a Pre-Semester Honors Class and Honors Residence on First-Year Students." *The Demonstrable Value of Honors Education: New Research Evidence*, edited by Andrew J. Cognard-Black et al., National Collegiate Honors Council, 2019, pp. 151–77.
- Useem, Michael. *Leading Up: How to Lead Your Boss So You Both Win*. Three Rivers Press, 2001.
- Wiltse, Evren Celik, et al. "Assessment of the Impact of COVID-19 on Honors Student Learning, Institutional Connections, and Intent to Return to Campus." *Journal of the European Honors Council*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1–22.
- Zubizarreta, John, and James Ford. Introduction. *Breaking Barriers in Teaching and Learning*, edited by James Ford and John Zubizarreta, National Collegiate Honors Council, 2018, pp. xi–xv.