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Positioning Honors Colleges to Lead Diversity and Inclusion Efforts at Predominantly White Institutions

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Positioning Honors Colleges to Lead Diversity and Inclusion Efforts at Predominantly White Institutions

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Our nation is in the midst of a racial reckoning, and higher education has an opportunity to play an important and powerful role in bringing about sustainable, positive change to long-standing systems of oppression. In the past, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts within predominantly White institutions (PWIs) have often existed on the periphery (e.g., diversity committees and offices) rather than at the core of the PWI mission. Now, this is finally starting to change. Honors is well-positioned to lead

transformative efforts at PWIs by reimagining honors as a broadly diverse and inclusive space while reorientating honors programming toward equipping students to become effective agents for social change. These changes allow honors colleges, in particular, to contribute to broadening the diversity of the student body at PWIs while dispelling institutional legacies that situate diversity as counter to quality.

To transform honors colleges into an attractive and meaningful space and program for students from minoritized backgrounds within a PWI, significant changes are needed. Honors must turn away from serving the privileged elite and toward programs and practices that engage those most motivated to bring about change and social justice. Eligibility for honors must reach beyond common criteria that replicate normative and systemic prejudice against those from minoritized backgrounds. The mission of honors must stretch beyond academic excellence, which has typically been defined in honors along narrow lines, to include inspiring meaningful social change. The walls of historically siloed honors programs and colleges must be torn down and replaced by connections to student affairs offices and student organizations that appeal to and support students across a range of backgrounds and aspirations. Finally, avenues for students to work together to effect change must be cultivated, and efforts by students to make those changes must be adequately supported.

These changes require awareness, time, and determination but are possible for any honors college at a PWI. This chapter brings together a rich history of scholarship directed toward these types of changes and includes two case studies of honors colleges at PWIs that made research-informed changes, thus becoming DEI leaders on their campuses. Because of these changes, the honors community in each setting has been significantly broadened without negative impacts on student quality or student outcomes. Diversity and quality clearly can go hand in hand.

The key to demonstrating the commitment of honors colleges to DEI is to engage in a broad and robust process of evaluation related to achieving diverse and inclusive programming oriented toward social change. Important markers for success, as well as

quantitative and qualitative assessment techniques, are provided to ensure that once honors colleges embark upon a mission to lead diversity and inclusion efforts, they can accurately determine and communicate to others results and future directions. By combining program changes in honors to support DEI along with a meaningful assessment of student experiences and outcomes, honors colleges can position themselves to lead DEI efforts at predominantly White institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Honors as Historically for Privileged Students

Many honors programs and colleges struggle to be accessible and inclusive of students from historically minoritized racial and ethnic backgrounds. In a survey of 408 NCHC members in its 2016 Census of U.S. Honors Programs, 90.3% of honors students were classified as White, non-Hispanic (Scott et al.). The more recent 2021 Survey of U.S. Honors Colleges shows that about 69% of students in honors colleges at research or master's universities are White (Cognard-Black and Smith 46). While honors education was originally conceived as a way to separate intellectually curious students from others in order to provide a more enriching academic experience, a consequence is that honors programs and colleges often also separate students by class, race, and ethnicity, thus perpetuating the structural inequities that begin in public K–12 education (Bastedo and Gumpert; Pittman). When included only in small minorities, honors students from diverse backgrounds may feel tokenized, leading to less confidence and a sense of illegitimacy (Ashton). In these cases, while diverse students are successfully recruited into honors, an environment that is fully inclusive of them is not created, which also means that retaining diverse students becomes problematic. When asked about the lack of diversity in honors, students from majority backgrounds tend to cite poorer academic performance by minority students; minority students, on the other hand, describe a lack of diversity, sense of elitism, and unnecessary additions to their academic programs as barriers to joining honors (Pittman).

Holistic Admissions

Often honors colleges are defined by the students they recruit. When such institutions focus solely on standardized test scores and high school GPA, they replicate the systemic biases against historically minoritized students that are widespread in U.S. K–12 education (Hilton and Jordan). Standardized test scores, which are often the most systemically biased, are also one of the worst predictors of future success within honors (McKay; Smith and Zagurski). Admission criteria should be broadened to draw from a wider range of potential honors students, and recruitment practices should be designed with an eye toward equity: both changes will result in a more diverse honors student body (Longo and Falconer).

When honors programs and colleges engage in holistic admissions, they will move beyond attracting just students with a history of academic success (narrowly defined along the lines of traditional metrics) to students who may also possess other skill sets and rich life experience while frequently demonstrating high levels of growth, grit, and motivation. Holistic criteria for admissions may include letters of recommendation, peer-to-peer recommendations, school and/or community involvement, student portfolios, interviews, and pathways for transfer students into honors (Badenhausen; Bahls; Mead; Yarrison). In honors admissions, when test scores are either optional or ignored altogether, the result is a more ethnically diverse honors student body (Jones; Radasanu and Barker). Engaging in holistic admissions and broadening entry criteria will increase the number of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and those who are first-generation students (Mead; Yarrison).

Academic Excellence to Empowerment

Students often decide if honors is right for them by determining if honors will add value to their higher education experience. Traditional approaches that position honors as the program for the “smartest” students have a limited appeal outside of those who are already advantaged in a systemically biased education system (Ash-ton) and who understand “smarts” in an extremely narrow way. For

majority students, the desirable outcomes of engaging in honors relate to the gathering of credentials that may grant them an advantage in a future graduate school or job application (Kimball). While many students hope to attend graduate school or secure an excellent job, students from minoritized backgrounds often have loftier goals for their education.

Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and from minority racial/ethnic backgrounds often desire to be prepared to lead future social change (Coleman; Riek and Sheridan). They tend to want to be successful and give back to their communities (Coleman; Hilton and Jordan). When honors is positioned as a traditional space for the academically elite, the value-add of honors participation for students whose goals are more socially oriented is less obvious (Ashton). Conversely, when honors is oriented toward positive social change, a broader community of potential students can see the benefits of joining the honors community (Dziesinski et al.). This approach allows students who view themselves as “academically elite” to be credentialed while also exposing them to diverse thinking and experiences.

Social Justice

One approach to social change that appeals to students across all ranges of diversity is honors college programming directed toward social justice (Dziesinski et al.; Stoller). For students who come from backgrounds and communities that are historically marginalized, the desire to positively impact others through social justice is often strongly motivating when they connect these issues to injustices they have experienced (DeLeon). Honors programs and colleges that acknowledge these experiences and equip students to successfully advocate for social justice are more successful in recruiting, retaining, and graduating students from diverse backgrounds (Coleman). Centering honors programming on leadership, multiculturalism, innovation, and civic engagement-related skills and dispositions ensures that students are being appropriately prepared to advocate for and enact social justice reform in their future.

Community Connections

An important step in creating honors college programming that prepares students to become effective advocates for social justice is to create opportunities for students to connect with and positively influence their communities. Honors students live on campus and within local surrounding communities, and many remain active in their home communities. Breaking down the historically siloed nature of honors by collaborating with student affairs offices or other units focused on leadership, multiculturalism, and community-engaged learning will create more opportunities for students (Materón-Arum; Yavneh Klos; Hilton and Jordan). Stepping beyond centering honors programming on honors classes to create a more broadly envisioned curriculum in which community-engaged learning also earns a student honors credit is important in emphasizing a social justice orientation that can be more attractive to and meaningful for diverse students. That honors colleges often have scale and financial advantages over honors programs, as well as more institutional autonomy, suggests they are particularly well-positioned to do this work.

“Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education”

Richard Badenhauen, James Buss, and Carrie Pritchett co-chaired an ad hoc committee charged with re-envisioning NCHC’s “Basic Characteristics,” which for thirty years did not address issues of DEI or belonging. In their summer 2021 report to the Board of Directors, the co-chairs asked, “How can we address dated language that might be understood as coded language connected to antiquated, discriminatory, or outmoded ideas?” The committee recommended replacing the checklist of characteristics with a set of “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education,” a proposal subsequently adopted by the NCHC Board of Directors on 16 February 2022 (National). Central to this philosophy is a commitment to DEI work. The shared principles highlight the importance of a transparent and permeable admissions process while asking honors leaders to invite or hire faculty who have been historically

underrepresented in higher education. The principles assert that the pedagogies of honors faculty should be inclusive and understanding of different cultures and their contributions. Finally, honors programs and colleges should aim to organize co-curricular or extracurricular opportunities with student affinity groups and other organizations on campus. In many cases, the higher degree of autonomy and greater resources afforded to honors colleges permits them to make progress in multiple areas at once within these shared principles and practices.

CASE STUDIES

Slippery Rock University

Slippery Rock University (SRU) is a PWI (84.6% white, fall 2021) rural public university located one hour north of Pittsburgh, PA. As a result of strategic planning, the honors college at SRU had been tasked in 2014 with increasing its overall enrollment. The subsequent growth of the honors college relied on attracting students who demonstrated academic excellence in high school and excelled on standardized assessments for college entrance. Although the honors college achieved growth, the resulting student body was disproportionately (even for a PWI) represented by middle-class White students from non-first-generation families.

In the 2019–2020 academic year, with new leadership and a new focus on transforming honors into an inclusive space with a social justice orientation, some key changes took place. The first shift occurred in the structure of honors programming. Honors outcomes were revised to include areas meant to empower students with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to successfully advocate for future change. The new outcomes include leadership; inquiry, analysis, and research; civic engagement and responsibility; innovation; multiculturalism; and well-being. Aligned with these outcomes, requirements to graduate moved from completion of a certain number of honors classes to engagement in curricular and co-curricular experiences aligned with the honors college outcomes. By elevating the value of co-curricular experiences to equal

that of experiences within the classroom, honors transformed its programming from a transactional, credential-based system to one that values and promotes student autonomy in engagement and achievements centered on their goals and interests. Finally, the overall programming of honors at SRU turned to a gamified system for earning credit in which point values were given to all curricular and co-curricular honors opportunities, and students were encouraged to collect points and ascribe them to the outcomes in a manner that allows students to create their own pathways to graduation.

With the new program in place, the honors college turned toward ensuring the community within honors was inclusive and welcoming to all students. This effort began with the creation of a student-led Honors Diversity Council with the explicit purpose of offering feedback related to inclusivity efforts, generating ideas for change within honors, and creating programming that exposes students to culturally relevant learning and engagement opportunities. Additionally, both the honors executive board and Honors Diversity Council prioritized outreach and connection to other offices and student organizations on campuses to connect and work toward common issues in social justice. As a result, honors students have gained access to a larger set of co-curricular opportunities, allowing them to engage in community-engaged learning, service learning, leadership development, and work with advocacy groups on campus. Simultaneously, non-honors students found that they had similar interests and motivations as their honors peers and began applying to join the honors college in the middle of their degree programs.

As students from more diverse backgrounds began to see honors as a place of belonging, eligibility for entry into the honors college needed to broaden as well. Historically, eligibility required a 3.8 high school GPA and a 1220 SAT or 25 ACT score. In the 2020–2021 academic year, a holistic admissions process was implemented in which students were required to meet any two of the following six criteria: 3.8 high school GPA; 3.25 college GPA; 1220 SAT or 25 ACT; active or veteran military status; a letter of recommendation from a teacher, professor, school administrator, or work

supervisor; and/or a recommendation from one of the following campus offices: inclusive excellence, community-engaged learning, global engagement, or student engagement and leadership. Broadening to these six criteria while requiring only two made many more students eligible to join honors. College GPA benefits students who transferred to SRU and current students who had not previously participated in honors. Letters of recommendation benefit students who are heavily engaged in service or from lower socioeconomic backgrounds where employment takes the place of extracurricular activities. Recommendations from offices on campus create a pathway for recruitment and support between those offices that most often serve students from diverse backgrounds.

To support a broader student body within the SRU Honors College, initiatives in wellness and well-being have been prioritized with the goal of increasing resilience and coping skills, stress management, and a sense of belonging. At SRU, honors students have opportunities to participate in honors-specific wellness programming centered on developing growth mindsets, grit, and resilience; self-care and life-design workshops; mentoring; and programs that focus on reflection and connection to others. As one student reports, “Working on my wellness is a new goal of mine and I think this really helped me be honest with myself about where I’m at. I feel empowered to use the things I learned!” Another explained, “I feel like I have learned more about myself in how I interact with the world and in how I perceive myself. . . . I found it reinforcing to jot down what I am grateful for, identifying what drains or energizes me, or making a list on how to reset myself if I am feeling out of it.” Ultimately, the relationship between wellness and DEI efforts is bidirectional. When students are treated as valuable to the honors community, experience a sense of belonging, and recognize and feel empowered to address their unique talents, strengths, and needs, they become equipped to extend these opportunities to others in the honors community and beyond.

The development and implementation of global learning initiatives provide another avenue to support DEI initiatives among SRU honors students by providing opportunities to engage with diversity

and social awareness. Honors prioritizes global learning as a DEI initiative because it helps students explore cultures and worldviews that are different from their own, including racial, ethnic, gender, and sexuality differences. The SRU Honors College strategic global learning program provides students with the confidence, experiences, and critical thinking skills needed to understand complex challenges related to freedom, human rights, and systems of power. The ability to travel, however, is a privilege. Thus, the SRU Honors College seeks ways to build equity and address the major challenges of global learning for students, including expense, lack of confidence, increased anxiety about safety, language barriers, and their ability to navigate new cultures.

The goal of the SRU Honors College global learning program is to offer students scaffolded travel experiences. First- and second-year students are provided an opportunity to travel with other honors students to a major U.S. city and to a Canadian city. During the third year, students may participate in a global seminar course in honors and a faculty-led, short-term study abroad experience. These scaffolded travel experiences lead to the self-confidence needed to explore the option of a long-term study abroad experience some will engage in during their final year. Throughout their college experience, honors students have access to travel support to defray the costs of long-term study abroad or travel to present/perform their scholarly work. Because of these experiences and resources, students who have not had opportunities to travel are able to build skills, increase self-awareness, and develop cultural competence.

The foundation of the SRU honors global learning program is City as Text™. Students simultaneously enjoy a sense of belonging and security in small exploratory groups while also learning to appreciate the perspectives of others and to think about their own assumptions and biases. City as Text experiences provide students a chance to develop a sense of themselves in the context of global issues, helping them develop a sense of responsibility to give back to their local and global communities.

Taken together, these changes in the honors college have led to success in recruiting and retaining students from all backgrounds.

This success includes a 183.33% increase in our URM student body (18 to 51), a 33.02% increase in our Pell-eligible student body (106 to 141), and a 53.01% increase in our first-generation student body from the 2018–2019 academic year to the 2021–2022 academic year. Both our retention into second year (95.1%, fall to spring 2020–2021) and our four-year graduation rate (77.4%, spring 2021) have risen slightly from the 2018 levels (retention 93.3%, four-year graduation 74.4%), the year prior to the described changes, further demonstrating that quality and diversity are positively connected.

Adelphi University

Adelphi University is a suburban campus near New York City that has traditionally been a PWI but is close to being recognized as an Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). A change in leadership in the honors college in 2019 brought with it a new commitment to the ideals of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through changes to the admissions process, the honors college is now interviewing, admitting, and yielding higher rates of underrepresented minorities, students from different regions of the country, and international students. Parallel efforts are being made to retain these students by reimagining the curriculum and cultivating a strong community, so students graduate from the institution in a timely fashion.

The honors college changed admissions practices in 2019–2020 to expand the pool of admitted students both in volume and background, resulting in 223% more admissions files than the previous year. Admissions changes included considering students with SAT reported verbal scores below 670 (the previous threshold) and reviewing students recommended by admissions staff regardless of their test scores. Eliminating the required standardized testing is important: the National Education Association has asserted standardized tests are “instruments of racism and a biased system” (Rosales and Walker). The file review is holistic and consists of reading the student’s essays, letters of recommendation, and the high school transcript, and it includes an analysis of standardized test scores if a student chooses to submit them. As a result, the honors college offered admission to a more diverse range of applicants:

39% were White, compared to 44% in 2019, and 50% in 2018; however, 53% of the students were White, compared to 48% in 2019, and 58% in 2018. In fall 2021, the college admitted students from nineteen states, a considerable increase from eleven the year before, suggesting additional impact on the regional diversity of the entering class.

In 2020 the university adopted a test-optional admissions policy, further emphasizing the need for interviews for admission into the honors college. In 2021–2022, the honors college invited some alumni to join the staff and faculty in interviewing students, with the hope of diversifying the pool of interviewers. Honors college staff drafted suggested questions for interviewers that give students the space to tell their stories. For instance, asking students about an activity they pursued that had an impact on them or their community yields a different response than inquiring about leadership in a school-sanctioned extracurricular activity. Additionally, interviews are now conducted on Zoom rather than in person. While visiting campus and the honors college space is beneficial for prospective students, it is a hardship for some local families as well as those who live a considerable distance from campus to make the trip. The honors staff wants prospective students to feel welcomed and to understand that they have been granted an interview because we believe they can be successful in the honors college. As Giovanna E. Walters et al. explain, many students do not consider themselves “honors material,” so we address this head-on in our introductory portion of the interview experience by showing a video made by a student that includes the voices of many students who reflect upon their place in the community of learners.

The honors college curriculum differs considerably from the university general education core; this component is important for honors colleges as they seek to distinguish themselves from other academic pathways on campus. It centers on two year-long courses examining great ideas and great books. All honors students must also produce a thesis based upon research or a creative project. The liberal arts focus of much of the honors coursework does not appeal to all students, and the interview provides students the opportunity

to learn more about the expectations of the honors college and to determine if they feel they can thrive there.

While most students enter the honors college in the first year, the honors college also admits current Adelphi students and external transfer students. Evaluations are made by reading an essay provided by the students and a reference letter from a faculty member and verifying a GPA of at least 3.5. This process creates a pathway for entry for those who might not have excelled in high school but have had more achievements at the university level or for students who were unaware of the honors college opportunity as first-year applicants, which is more likely the case for students from less privileged backgrounds.

All first-year students enroll in a year-long course grounded in texts that have influenced the world in which we live. This Great Ideas course has been reimaged over the past two years and now contains a lecture series on multidisciplinary thinking, an example of which includes a recent semester in which a sociologist shared her research on contemporary immigration issues with our students along with a historian whose research focuses on war and trauma. Readings have been enhanced to include a broader range of thinkers. On the advice of student members of the Honors College Diversity Council, two students were hired to work as assistants in the first-year class and charged with helping current students develop the skills they need to excel in the courses. The learning curve is steep for most students in their first year. While honors admits students it is convinced can succeed, it also offers them support so they are more likely to do well and gain the self-confidence needed to achieve their potential as honors students.

The honors college has the authority to design its courses and select its instructors, and it has expanded its teaching faculty to include more disciplines, areas of studies, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) faculty. This move helps students see themselves better reflected in the faculty and find seminar topics that are germane to their experiences and interests. The outcome has been a more multicultural curriculum. Each semester different faculty from various departments offer seminars to upper-division

honors college students. According to one student who was admitted to her first-choice medical school,

I have taken an Honors seminar about ritualistic practices and their social purposes in the Eastern hemisphere, and another on the ethics and brutality of war, with a particular focus on the Pacific Theatre during World War II. A question that comes up a lot in discussion with STEM and other pre-med/pre-dental students is “Why do I need this?” As someone whose career is centered around problem-solving, why limit yourself to one frame of thinking? The level of analysis and depth of discussion that was required for the seminars that I took prepared me immensely for the Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills (CARS) portion of the MCAT, which is notoriously difficult to study for.

Yielding a class of students with a broader range of backgrounds is just the first step. Students need to be nurtured and challenged so they persist and graduate from the institution. The honors college contains many students who study biology with the intention of attending medical school, and many are in our college of nursing. These programs are extremely competitive, but the honors college does not emphasize a culture of competition. Students collaborate and support one another when they are in the same classes, and upper-division students help those in classes they have already taken. A current senior reflected:

I did not want to be in an environment that was extremely cutthroat, pitting pre-med students against each other for the sake of ‘competition.’ That is not my learning style, nor is it how I envision healthcare to be. I wanted to be somewhere where there was existing collaboration, and that is what I found . . . within the Honors College.

The honors college synthesizes curricular and co-curricular learning experiences so learning takes place within and beyond the classroom. Honors students are required to attend three cultural events each semester with the goal of exploring the region, where a quick train ride from campus takes students to Penn Station or

downtown Brooklyn. Each semester the honors college offers tickets to cultural events such as theater, opera, dance, and musical performances in New York City and at the campus performing arts center. Tickets cost the students \$10 unless this fee is a hardship; in such cases, they are free. As a result, many students who have not seen a play or opera or visited a major museum have been able to do so and can begin to recognize that they belong in these spaces. In recent years students have attended Broadway shows such as *The Inheritance*; *Lehman Brothers Trilogy*; *Caroline, or Change*; and *Hadestown*, along with *Porgy and Bess* at the Metropolitan Opera, dance concerts, and museum exhibits. The goal is to allow students to see a broad range of performers exploring topics of critical interest today. Cultural events also forge connections with other groups on campus; for instance, in fall 2021 students saw *Pass Over* on Broadway with peers from the theater department and with alumni, and in spring 2022 students attended *Dear Evan Hansen* with the Psychology Club and *Take Me Out* with the Gender and Sexuality Alliance. Along with making students more comfortable exploring New York City and Long Island, the honors college encourages them to study abroad. Many students belong to immigrant families, and they tend to travel internationally with some regularity. Honors encourages study abroad so students recognize differences in learning in the disciplines in different regions of the world and how other cultures make sense of different programs of study.

Moreover, all incoming students are assigned an upper-division student mentor in honors. The goal is for new students to feel connected to the community and supported by staff, faculty, and their fellow students. Regular social programming coordinated by the Honors Student Council and/or the dean provide students with a multitude of opportunities to connect with one another in low-stakes gatherings like a weekly cookies and conversation hour or the once-a-semester pancake breakfast.

The college has also forged connections between students and alumni. Numerous alums have attended Ivy League law schools, and a cohort formed a mentoring program for current students interested in legal careers. Last year they helped two students gain

entrance to Cornell University and the University of Pennsylvania. One of the students claimed that being able to

 speak to Honors College Alumni who had attended such prestigious law schools was invaluable to me both during the application process and even now as a 1L. Being a low-income first-generation student the concept of applying to and attending law school can be very intimidating and overwhelming. It is quite easy to feel disadvantaged and disheartened by not having the type of support so many law students have with parents/aunts/uncles etc. who are attorneys and are familiar with the process and material. . . . I was able to enter a top law school with a preexisting network of alumni who were not only willing but eager to help me succeed.

KEY MARKERS FOR ASSESSMENT

Assessment is a critical tool that honors colleges like those at Adelphi and Slippery Rock can use to demonstrate awareness and commitment to DEI initiatives. By engaging in such assessment, honors can participate in objective, systematic, process-oriented monitoring of and reflection on effectiveness; the results can be used to guide planning, solve problems, and make decisions. At the institutional level, assessment data can be used to garner support and drive funding decisions.

Through assessment, we gain perspectives and insight that guide DEI initiatives that allow for all stakeholders to feel respected, valued, and engaged in their honors community. Furthermore, our ability to use evidence to build programming allows for honors to involve students in DEI efforts in meaningful and purposeful ways. Because of their autonomy and ability to gather larger, comparative samples, honors colleges possess the capability to determine the impact of DEI initiatives using assessment tools. As honors colleges work to enrich diversity content through courses and co-curricular activities, meaningful assessment is key to our ability to understand where we are, determine strengths and weaknesses,

prioritize initiatives, gauge our progress, and redirect our efforts along the way.

Qualitative Assessment

Qualitative assessment is an important tool for making sure that all voices are heard, and it serves as the basis for critical conversations about DEI. Two valuable resources for honors DEI qualitative assessment are student feedback and peer review.

Cultivating DEI requires that honors colleges build a culture whereby students can feel comfortable using their voices to provide critical perspectives about their experiences with DEI, express their needs, and provide input and ideas for DEI initiatives. Student feedback can be facilitated through reflective survey questions. Examples of questions include the following:

- In what ways does honors celebrate the diversity of ideas and people?
- How do you think honors can improve to become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive in the future?
- In what ways can we work to build an inclusive honors community, one where all students feel a sense of support and belonging?
- What are some ways that you have advocated for DEI? What successes and challenges have you faced?

Another strategy for gathering qualitative assessment data is by facilitating critical conversations. Honors programs and colleges often strive to inspire critical conversations that provide opportunities for integrative and critical thinking for students. While the current social climate has raised awareness about DEI, facilitating communication that is maximally inclusive can be difficult. In order to gather qualitative information through open dialogue, we must address a number of barriers, including the reluctance of marginalized, underrepresented students to share their thoughts and ideas as well as the defensive behaviors of honors students in

dominant social groups, such as arguing and blaming or withdrawing and shutting down.

When educators and students come together to talk, various strategies can facilitate perspective sharing and engagement to increase the overall quality of DEI conversations. Facilitators must leverage their role by mediating the conversation to ensure that all participants have an opportunity for input: they should establish an expectation that all voices are empowered, validate individual experiences, and invite others to speak. Examples of questions that have the potential to spark conversation about DEI include the following:

- What changes do we want to see in the diversity of honors in the next two or three years?
- What positive or negative experiences related to DEI have you had as a part of honors?
- What is the biggest challenge that honors faces in addressing DEI?
- What are some common misunderstandings about DEI, and how might we address them?
- What are some resources we can draw upon to grow and develop DEI in honors?

Peer review offers another opportunity to collect meaningful qualitative information. Peer reviewers can be drawn from within an institution, other comparable institutions, or the local community. For example, every university has resources that can offer objective feedback about DEI initiatives, such as campus diversity committees or the office of inclusive excellence. Inviting outsiders into honors DEI planning and assessment provides opportunities for fresh perspectives and can reveal assumptions, biases, and blind spots. Peer reviewers with expertise in DEI can be tasked with assessing the validity and impact of DEI initiatives.

Quantitative Assessment

Quantitative assessment is critical to achieving long-term DEI goals because it provides objective, data-driven information about current efforts and opportunities for growth and action planning. Effective use of quantitative assessment is dependent upon the ability to link program and learning outcomes to specific assessment measures. The outcomes of these assessments then provide a shared definition and understanding of purpose, measures of success, and areas for growth. Specific DEI dimensions that can be quantitatively assessed in honors include strategic planning, recruitment, admissions, retention, learning outcome achievement, and student experiences. Several quantitative assessment tools can be employed to investigate DEI initiatives:

- The *Self-Assessment Rubric for Institutionalization of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Education* examines six dimensions: the philosophy and mission of diversity, equity, and inclusion; faculty support and involvement; curriculum, pedagogy, and research; staff engagement and involvement; student support and involvement; and administrative leadership and institutional support (New England Resource Center for Higher Education).
- The *Inclusive Excellence Scorecard* assesses change related to access and equity, campus climate, diversity in formal and informal curricular activities, and learning and development (Williams et al. 19–29).
- The *Intercultural Knowledge and Competence VALUE Rubric* examines the capacity to identify individual cultural patterns, compare and contrast them with others, and adapt with empathy and flexibility to unfamiliar ways of being (Association of American Colleges and Universities).
- *General Belongingness Scale* measures student experiences related to acceptance/inclusion and rejection/exclusion (Malone et al.).

- *Sense of Belonging Scale—Revised* examines student experiences related to perceptions of peer support, comfort in the classroom, isolation, and faculty support (Hoffman and Morrow).

Effective DEI initiatives require a strong commitment by honors college leadership and must be guided by a conceptual framework developed in the context of strategic planning and honors college learning outcomes. Honors must demonstrate a strong commitment and desire to foster DEI through enhancing the institutional climate, creating communities of belonging, and thinking creatively about recruitment practices and admissions policies to diversify the honors student body. Ultimately, assessments provide accountability and validation to support the work aimed at achieving DEI goals and learning outcomes.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Honors programs and colleges are recognizing the need to enroll a broader range of students who bring different experiences and expectations to the classroom and enrich the experience for all members of the community. The assessments referenced above help institutions think about how to go about diversifying and tracking the changes that result from new initiatives. The “Shared Principles and Practices of Honors Education” will allow every honors program and college to determine how to improve and enhance the experiences of its students. Honors differs significantly among institutions, but these metrics and goals allow them to craft strategies and programming that best meet the needs of their students and faculty.

Embracing holistic admissions, including less emphasis on standardized testing, is an important step in making honors colleges more equitable and inclusive. The PreK–12 education system in the United States, out of which the vast majority of future honors students will hail, however, is profoundly unequal, with poorer children inhabiting underresourced schools often in neighborhoods that do not provide quality supplemental support. If honors colleges want to expand admissions and embrace inclusivity, they need

to address the systemic inequalities in the American educational system. Removing systemic barriers, while creating supportive and inclusive honors experiences that prepare students to engage in future social justice initiatives, allows honors, even in predominantly White institutions, to lead the effort to create a more diverse and inclusive future.

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