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### Editor's introduction, vol. 17, no. 1

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Ada Long

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During the sixteen years since *JNCHC* came into being, research in honors has steadily shifted its focus and approach. In the early days, essays represented a wide variety of disciplines and, in order to qualify as research, needed only to root themselves in previous literature on a topic. As honors, along with the culture in which it is practiced, moved into the era of accountability and assessment, “research in honors” has increasingly come to mean quantitative studies rooted in the formats, methods, and terminology of the social sciences. The purpose of research in honors has also shifted, more subtly, from advancing an internal discourse that took the value of honors for granted to proving the value of honors through quantitative analysis. In the current climate, previous research in honors often ceases to seem like research at all as essays in this issue call for real or serious research on topics that have long been discussed in the honors literature.

A look at the previous issue of *JNCHC* devoted to “Research in Honors” in the spring/summer of 2004 reveals a stark contrast with common assumptions about today’s scholarship in honors but also contains clear signs of the emerging change. The first three essays in that issue were republished from the *Forum for Honors*, the predecessor of *JNCHC*, and were written twenty years earlier, in 1984, by Sam Schuman, Ted Estess, and Robert Roemer. All three write from the perspective of the humanities and argue for quality of thought and writing as essential to honors scholarship along with a theoretical context that extends beyond an individual program. Schuman argues for what he calls “abstraction”: “the necessity that the content be ‘generalized and generalizable’ beyond a specific time and place.” Estess argues that an “other-connecting” intellectual appeal is the ideal for any publication in an honors journal. Roemer summarizes these ideas in the importance of what he calls “the theoretical moment.”

This two-decades-old perspective from the humanities already showed signs in 2004 of being on its way out. While roughly half of the other authors in the issue echoed the ideas of Schuman, Estess, and Roemer, the other half either argued for or demonstrated a social-sciences approach. In the “Introduction,” I wrote back then,

[T]he majority of contributors to *JNCHC* during my four years as editor probably hail from the social sciences rather than the humanities.

Or perhaps Honors administrators, whatever their disciplinary background, have moved into a culture where data, statistics, objectivity, and impersonality are hegemonic values. . . . Reading the twenty-year-old essays in conjunction with the brand new [2004] ones may alert readers to a significant change in the discourse of Honors.

That change—in short, an evolution from anecdotes to ideas to measurements—has clearly come to fruition, as revealed in this issue of *JNCHC* sixteen years on down the road.

George Mariz leads off the Forum on “Research in Honors” with his essay “An Agenda for the Future of Research in Honors.” A Call for Papers went out on the NCHC website and listserv and in the NCHC E-Newsletter, inviting members to contribute to the Forum. The Call included a list of questions that Forum contributors might consider:

What are the major research questions that need to be addressed in future studies of honors? As NCHC publications have moved away from local and anecdotal accounts of success in honors, has the evolution been entirely salutary, or has anything been lost? While the research that seems increasingly to dominate in honors has become primarily data-driven, what do the humanities have to offer? Is honors a real discipline, like history or chemistry or engineering, or is it special in a way that requires a different concept of a field of research? Does research and publication in honors count toward tenure and promotion, and should it? What specific changes should be made in NCHC journals to accommodate the future needs of honors administrators and faculty for relevant research?

The Forum includes three responses to the Call in addition to Mariz’s lead essay.

Mariz calls for a scholarly and professional approach to honors research. In advocating a scope beyond individual institutions, he echoes the humanities-oriented arguments of Schuman, Estess, and Roemer twelve years ago, but he takes a social-sciences approach in arguing for measurably verifiable claims about the success of honors at the national and international level. He calls for a body of scholarship analogous to that of the academic disciplines and credible as criteria for tenure and promotion. Above all, he calls for a clear agenda of topics and methodologies that are most relevant to honors research, arguing the particular need for comparative and longitudinal studies.

Answering Mariz's call to create a substantive body of scholarship in honors, Annmarie Guzy of the University of South Alabama offers a compendium of quantitative and qualitative publications on programmatic issues in her essay "Research on Honors Composition, 2004–2015." Guzy, who published two essays in the 2004 issue of *JNCHC* on "Research in Honors" and has been a prolific contributor to NCHC scholarship ever since, provides a bibliography, with discussion, of articles in *JNCHC*, *Honors in Practice (HIP)*, and *The Journal of First-Year Honors Composition (FYHC)*; chapters in the NCHC Monograph Series; and conference sessions at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Guzy argues that honors composition needs "interdisciplinary exploration and development by an increasing number of scholars in multiple venues," especially in the face of challenges from AP and dual enrollment credits, a topic on which she has written the lead essay for the next *JNCHC* Forum (see the Call for Papers on page v).

While Guzy encourages research about honors composition, H. Kay Banks makes a special case for research on the honors thesis in "A Tradition unlike Any Other: Research on the Value of an Honors Senior Thesis." She writes, "Data about the thesis should be informative about more than best practices, also correlating with data on honors completion, retention, and student persistence as well as identifying the distinction and meaning of 'graduating with honors' at member institutions." She speculates "how further research, quantitative or mixed-methods, might offer insight into a tradition that many of us have on our campuses," and she offers the mixed-method approach at the University of South Carolina as a model for other honors programs and colleges. She also proposes research questions and methodologies to guide future research on the honors thesis. Meanwhile, research essays in this issue provide answers to some of Banks's questions.

In "Research In, On, or About Honors," Marygold Walsh-Dilley takes issue with the pronoun "in," suggesting that Mariz's criticism of inadequate research in honors is really a complaint about research on honors. She argues that "Research in Honors"—the work we do as practitioners of honors in our home programs and colleges—is "full of power and potential" and should not get overshadowed by research on or about honors. She points to "something unique about the interdisciplinary research of the type we expect from our students that requires its own methodological training." Drawing on her experience at the University of New Mexico, she suggests the "following special characteristics of honors research: our scholarship is inclusive of students; we

integrate research and teaching; we are often highly engaged in and with the broader communities where we are housed; and our work is both interdisciplinary and able to address non-specialist audiences.”

A fine example of the “power and potential” of the research practiced in honors programs and colleges is an essay that won a 2015 Portz Prize, awarded to highlight excellence in undergraduate honors research. In “Flee from the Worship of Idols’: Becoming Christian in Roman Corinth,” Dorvan Byler of Kent State University at Stark presents a shortened version of his honors thesis, an analysis of “the population in one location during a specific time frame [that] allows clear comparisons among Christians, Jews, and worshipers of Roman, Greek, and Egyptian cults instead of general statements about how most Christians related to most Jews or polytheists throughout the Empire.” Based on architectural evidence as well as numerous works by such authors as Plutarch, Strabo, and the Apostle Paul, Dorvan describes “one model for how Christianity might have developed throughout the Roman Empire and what it meant for Jews or Gentiles to become a part of early Christian communities.” Providing a theoretical context that is “generalizable’ beyond a specific time and place,” Dorvan exemplifies the intellectual substance and appeal that Schuman, Estess, and Roemer called for in research about as well as in honors.

Many authors in this issue of *JNCHC* call, as Mariz does, for “archives, bodies of scientific knowledge, established procedures, or information-rich data sets” in a national context, and the first four research essays in this issue provide exactly that. In “Demography of Honors: The National Landscape of Honors Education,” Richard I. Scott and Patricia J. Smith of the University of Central Arkansas “analyze the population of institutions delivering traditional undergraduate education in the United States to determine the size, structure, and distribution of honors education across institutional types.” After first documenting the growth of honors in the United States from 1957 to 2012, the authors report on their examination of 4,664 institutions, among which they identified 2,550 institutions delivering traditional undergraduate education, with 1,503 offering university-wide honors programs or colleges. From there, the authors break down the data in numerous ways to determine the honors presence and availability at all types of institutions—i.e., public and private; two- and four-year (baccalaureate, masters, doctoral)—and examine the nature of the honors presence. They focus especially on the distribution of honors colleges and honors programs, considered separately, across institutional types and among NCHC members and non-members. Among

their interesting findings is that a “far higher percentage of public-doctoral institutions offer honors education than private-doctoral institutions, with honors colleges almost universally available in public-doctoral institutions.” They also found that NCHC membership is much higher among four-year than two-year institutions. Conclusions such as these could help guide the NCHC’s future self-analysis and decision making.

Another research study drew on a survey of NCHC members conducted on the listserv. Anton Vander Zee, Trisha Folds-Bennett, Elizabeth Meyer-Bernstein, and Brendan Reardon of the College of Charleston report on this study in “From Orientation Needs to Developmental Realities: The Honors First-Year Seminar in a National Context.” Based on 313 survey responses from the 831 institutions contacted, the authors constructed a comparative overview of honors and institution-wide first-year seminars, examining numerous factors that include resource sharing, class size, curricular structure, staffing, and objectives. Among their many findings is that honors first-year seminars, in comparison to their institution-wide counterparts, are likely to be smaller, to be staffed by fewer adjunct faculty, and to “have a more substantive emphasis on encouraging students to be fully networked and to assume control of their own academic and extracurricular trajectory.” In general, the authors conclude from the survey results that a first-year seminar in honors differs from an equivalent institution-wide seminar in that it “does not simply enhance but fundamentally directs and grounds the academic and social transition processes faced by first-year honors students.”

In what is likely to be the beginning of a sequence of essays derived from survey information collected by the NCHC in 2012–13, “Variability and Similarity in Honors Curricula across Institution Size and Type” examines specific curricular features of honors programs and honors colleges across institutional types. Andrew J. Cognard-Black (St. Mary’s College, the Maryland Public Honors College) and Hallie Savage (Executive Director of the NCHC) examine enrollment size and institutional type in relation to curricular and co-curricular offerings in honors programs and colleges. Their study focuses on a thesis and/or capstone requirement, a service requirement, service learning courses, study abroad courses, experiential courses, research-intensive courses, and internships. The authors are particularly interested in determining the extent of variability in honors. Their interesting findings include the similarity across institutional types in thesis and capstone requirements as well as research-intensive courses but greater variability in experiential and service offerings, internships, and study abroad, suggesting

that the NCHC might need to be more active in encouraging service and experiential learning among all its member institutions.

Based on a list of 841 NCHC member institutions and using a snowball sample approach, Rocky Dailey of South Dakota University received 269 survey responses that became the basis for his study described in "Honors Teachers and Academic Identity: What to Look For When Recruiting Honors Faculty." With the goal of helping honors administrators "create an identity for their honors faculty," the survey addressed "the broad areas of individual self-understanding, professional role and expectations, and the influence of situational factors, both internal and external, within these areas, coordinating descriptive statistical information and qualitative and quantitative (years of experience) variables." Analysis of the data includes "summary statistics of the overall results as well as contingency tables for evaluating the relationship between data on rank, role, and experience, on the one hand, and individual self-understanding, role expectations, and the influence of external factors on the other." Among his findings, Dailey identifies common attributes of teaching in honors: job satisfaction, ability to implement change, confidence and self-efficacy, and meaningful work. Common concerns are faculty governance, inclusion of lower ranks, and compensation. The two most common traits of honors faculty that Dailey found are high motivation and outstanding teaching ability.

The next two essays are institutional studies of student engagement. The essay "Honors and Non-Honors Student Engagement: A Model of Student, Curricular, and Institutional Characteristics" describes a comparative and longitudinal study conducted by seven researchers: Ellen Buckner of the University of South Alabama; Melanie Shores, Michael Sloane, and John Dantzler of the University of Alabama at Birmingham; Catherine Shields of the Jefferson County Board of Education; Karen Shader of the University of Tennessee Health Science Center; and Bradley Newcomer of James Madison University. Although the authors represent several institutions, they describe research conducted at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). They offer a complex comparative study, conducted over a nine-month period, of numerous characteristics in honors and non-honors students; included in the study's focus are goal orientation, student engagement, and self-handicapping. Among its multiplicity of results, the study revealed higher engagement among honors students and higher self-handicapping among non-honors students. While many of the results might have been predictable, others were more provocative: for instance, "honors students described more

challenging experiences, but non-honors students described more collaborative experiences.”

While the research by Buckner et al. focused on student engagement by comparing upper-division honors and non-honors students at UAB, Jessica A. Kampfe, Christine L. Chasek, and John Falconer report on a comparative study of upper- and lower-division honors students at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK). In “An Examination of Student Engagement and Retention in an Honors Program,” the authors present the results of a survey designed to show “how student engagement in an honors program evolves as students progress from freshmen to seniors” and to understand “the differences between lower- and upper-division students in order to design programming specifically targeted for each group to enhance satisfaction and retention of students in the honors program.” They distributed the survey to all 538 honors students at UNK and received 62 complete responses. The researchers found that students enrolled in the program to gain “a competitive edge”; lower-division students identified class size, quality of faculty, and community as the most important attractions of honors; and upper-division students remained in the program for priority registration and prestige. The results of the study demonstrated that the honors program needed to “generate new initiatives in order to increase the involvement of upper-division honors students in the honors community.”

In “Assessing Growth of Student Reasoning Skills in Honors,” Jeanneane Wood-Nartker, Shelly Hinck, and Ren Hullender adapt Wolcott and Lynch’s model from *Steps for Better Thinking Skills* to assess “growth in critical thinking skills and areas of intellectual risk” among honors students at Central Michigan University. In their qualitative study, the authors used four graduated goals of complex thinking—each with its own attributes of success and attendant markers for weakness—to assess progress toward complex thinking of sixteen honors students in an honors service learning course. The study focused not on content but on how students arrived at conclusions in their reflective writing as the course progressed. The authors give examples of their ranking process in samples of student writing, and they conclude that “the complex thinking assessment instrument was able to identify gradual assimilation of understanding or shifts in thinking or changes in perspective.” The authors argue for the benefits of this assessment model for students and faculty as well as for an honors program’s self-analysis and improvement.

Also focusing on progress in critical thinking, Edward J. Caropreso of the University of North Carolina Wilmington and Mark Haggerty and Melissa



Ladenheim of the University of Maine Orono (UMaine) set out to measure what they call “critical-thinking writing” in “Writing Instruction and Assignments in an Honors Curriculum: Perceptions of Effectiveness.” The authors surveyed 368 students, with a 47% completion rate, about their “perceptions of writing competencies before and after taking a writing-intensive, four-course honors curriculum sequence” at UMaine, and they also surveyed 28 faculty, with a 71% completion rate, about their before-and-after perceptions of the same competencies. The results indicated, for instance, that the students had a higher opinion of their own abilities at the beginning of the course than faculty did and that faculty had a higher opinion of their own impact on improvement in student thinking and writing. Although students had a higher opinion of their critical thinking abilities than faculty did both before and after the course, the two groups agreed that the course had a positive impact and that the most effective teaching strategies were “written feedback, the act of writing, oral feedback, and revising papers[. . .] strategies that can be described as active, extended, and elaborated.”

Another teaching strategy at UMaine is blogging. Sarah Harlan-Haughey, Taylor Cunningham, Katherine Lees, and Andrew Estrup describe the benefits and challenges of blogging as an integral part of an honors course in “Blogging to Develop Honors Students’ Writing.” The benefits include peer interaction, collaboration, inherent student interest, a “launching pad for bigger projects,” and “a means for amplifying, developing, and complicating in-class conversation.” The challenge is motivating students to be conscientious, substantive, and reflective in their blog posts, so the authors provide pedagogical advice about how to accomplish these goals. They also provide technical advice and practical guidance, including suggestions for scoring rubrics, to help newcomers get started and to help cynics feel motivated to give blogging a try or to try it again. They conclude by writing, “The creativity and enthusiasm of a well-engineered blog has no limit. One need only establish a logical blog structure, create a repeating evaluative mechanism, and stay out of the way.”

In “How Gender Differences Shape Student Success in Honors,” Susan E. Dinan of Pace University describes the gender inequity that favors men in college admission and then, despite poorer performance and lower graduation rates in college, continues to favor men in earning potential. To remedy this inequity, which is harmful to both men and women, “Honors programs and colleges can implement best practices that include advisement, mentoring, curriculum structure, and housing that bolster the success of both men

and women students.” Dinan points out that NCHC’s 2012–2013 survey of 890 member institutions (referenced earlier in “Variability and Similarity”) “found that the percentage of undergraduate females in institutions as a whole averaged 56.6 compared to 64.7 for honors programs and colleges,” so honors administrators need especially to be aware, for instance, of “how young women interpret the feedback they receive at their universities.” Through the personal advice and encouragement that are the hallmark of honors education, Dinan writes, “Honors programs can instill in young women the confidence possessed by their male peers.” Honors administrators also need to “expect more of young men in our programs, providing the academic support and nurturing environment that they need to improve their academic skills but also making sure that they understand the consequences of their choices about studying and playing,” and Dinan describes a “clustering” strategy that has worked well in helping male students stay focused on their studies. By working to counteract boredom in men and stress in women, honors educators can best serve all their students.

The final essay in this volume—“Toward a Science of Honors Education” by Beata M. Jones of Texas Christian University—provides a bibliographical framework for the future of honors research. Responding to Mariz’s call for an agenda of topics and methodologies relevant to future research in honors, Jones writes, “Constructing a comprehensive research framework to guide our pursuits and taking stock of what we already know about teaching academically talented students can allow us to prioritize items on the vast horizon left to explore and to develop a more systematic study of honors.” Jones offers an archival overview of what has been published in *JNCHC* and the monographs, with some inclusion of works published in *Honors in Practice* and non-NCHC publications. She identifies four levels of honors for analysis—stakeholders, courses, programs/colleges, and external environments—along with the attributes related to them and the publications relevant to these attributes. She concludes: “With the help of NCHC publications, NCHC conferences, and orchestrated honors community work, we might be able to write a comprehensive, evidence-based *Field Guide to Honors Education* in the next five years.”

