Occasional Essays by Two Wise Men of the NCHC
Sam Schuman
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Innovative Teaching Strategies
William L. Vanderburgh and Martin Ratcliffe
Elizabeth Nix, Brian Etheridge, and Paul Walsh
Melissa Ladenheim
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Great Books Courses in Honors
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Sarah Harlan-Haughey
Expectations of Honors
David M. Rhea and Kristy Goodwin
Scott Carnicom
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EDITORIAL POLICY

Honors in Practice (HIP) publishes articles about innovative practices in individual honors programs and nuts-and-bolts issues of concern to the members of the National Collegiate Honors Council. HIP employs a double-blind review system. Essays should present ideas and/or practices that will be useful to other honors administrators and faculty, not just descriptions of “what we do at our institution.” Essays should advance a thesis located within a larger context such as theoretical perspectives, trends in higher education, or historical background. Essays should also demonstrate an awareness of previous honors discussions of the topic.

Submissions and inquiries should be directed to Ada Long at <adalong@uab.edu>.

DEADLINE

HIP is published annually. The deadline for submissions is January 1.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

1. We accept material by e-mail attachment in Word (not pdf). We do not accept material by fax or hard copy.

2. If documentation is used, the documentation style can be whatever is appropriate to the author’s primary discipline or approach (MLA, APA, etc.), but please avoid footnotes. Internal citation to a list of references (bibliography) is strongly preferred, and the editor will revise all internal citations in accordance with MLA guidelines.

3. There are no minimum or maximum length requirements; the length should be dictated by the topic and its most effective presentation.

4. Accepted essays are edited for grammatical and typographical errors and for infelicities of style or presentation. Authors have ample opportunity to review and approve edited manuscripts before publication.
Anyone in the NCHC who is not familiar with the name “John Zubizarreta” is no doubt new to the organization. Some of us know him well enough to have learned how to spell his name, but most people just call him “John Z.” If you haven’t met him at conferences or workshops, then you surely have seen his regular messages on the listserv. In person or in writing, in formal or casual settings, John is generous with his advice and has the expertise to give it wisely.

Professor of English and Director of Honors and Faculty Development at Columbia College in South Carolina, John has been active in honors at the local, regional, and national levels for over two decades. He held the four-year series of NCHC offices from 2008 through 2011, serving as president in 2010. He has been elected to three terms on the Board of Directors, where he currently has a seat through 2016. He has also chaired the Teaching and Learning Committee and is currently a member of the HIP editorial board as well as an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor.

John is known nationally in the field of assessment as an expert on teaching and learning portfolios, a subject on which he has published a book (*The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning*, 2004; 2009), authored many articles, and given numerous presentations at conferences and campuses nationwide. His other publications include the NCHC monograph *Teaching and Learning: Perspectives on Teaching Academically Talented College Students* (2008) and articles on topics ranging from T. S. Eliot to Facebook.

NCHC members are not alone in valuing the exceptional contributions that John has made to the field of education. In 2010, he was awarded the Carnegie Foundation/CASE U.S. Professor of the Year for Baccalaureate Colleges, and he has received recognition for his scholarship and teaching from the American Association for Higher Education, the South Atlantic Association of Departments of
of English, the South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, the National United Methodist Board of Higher Education, and the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education.

For evidence of John’s dedication to teaching, you need only chat with his students, who are almost as ubiquitous at conferences as he is. They might tell you about his prowess not only as a teacher but also as a husband, father, telemark skier, runner, and fisherman, not to mention his six gold medals in national whitewater canoe competition. They might tell you that they can’t figure out, as none of us can, how he has time to do all that he does. Above all, they would tell you, as we all know, that John Z. is a natural-born teacher—not just to his students but to his colleagues as well.
All of us need heroes. Throughout my thirty years in honors, two of my heroes have been Sam Schuman and Ted Estess, both of whom not just incorporate but embody the highest values of honors culture in the way that Gary Cooper embodied the Old West. Both are beautiful writers, accomplished scholars, dedicated teachers, generous colleagues, and—without making a fuss about it—indispensable exemplars and mentors for at least two generations of honors directors and faculty. Opening with contributions from both of them makes this a special volume of *Honors in Practice*.

Sam Schuman’s “Valediction” is a speech he gave, somewhat revised for this publication, when the University of North Carolina Asheville dedicated its new fitness center to him. Schuman is Chancellor Emeritus at UNCA and also of the University of Minnesota, Morris. He returned from Minnesota to UNCA as both a professor and dean before retiring from academia. Fortunately, he has never retired from the NCHC, where he still runs, with Ted Estess, the Beginning in Honors sessions at the national conferences. His most recent NCHC monograph is *If Honors Students Were People: Holistic Honors Higher Education*, in which he argues for spiritual and physical as well as intellectual development within honors, and these are the themes of his speech. Tying the physical to the spiritual, and calling on his distinguished background as a literary scholar, Schuman celebrates the blessing of the brief lives we are allotted, concluding, “I am the luckiest man on the face of the earth.” I speak for all of us who have the blessing of his friendship in saying that we are the luckiest ones on the face of the earth.

We are also fortunate to include in this volume an essay titled “Making Pictures” by Ted Estess, Schuman’s co-director of Beginning in Honors. This essay, like Shuman’s, was originally a speech for a special occasion—last fall’s Honors Convocation at the University of Houston Honors College, where Ted was dean for many years—and has been adapted for publication here. He counsels students that a good education teaches you what you don’t know and—more importantly—that you don’t know. By telling stories about his own life as a student as well as his students’ lives, Estess demonstrates the wisdom of “learned ignorance.” Students arrive in college with set pictures of the world that, given time and an open mind, change in unsettling ways, producing new pictures and minds that are “supple,” “capacious,” and “generous.” Estess’s and Schuman’s gentle, joyful teaching—in Beginning in Honors, in their numerous publications and conference sessions, and in their personal interactions—has shown thousands of new honors directors and faculty how to make new pictures.
The next group of essays in this volume of HIP introduces innovative teaching strategies. In “Ask Me about ISON: The Risks and Rewards of Teaching an Interdisciplinary Honors Course on a Scientific Event Unfolding in Real Time,” William L. Vanderburgh and Martin Ratcliffe describe an honors course they taught at Wichita State University on the comet ISON. Ratcliffe, a planetarium astronomer, and Vanderburgh, a philosopher of science, gambled that ISON would be a major astronomical event of the twenty-first century and designed a course for the fall of 2013 that they could make up as they went along while following the progress of the comet. When the comet fizzled toward the end of the semester, they and their students learned that failure can be as interesting as success in studying an ongoing event in astronomy or in any other field; the unfolding narrative and the kinds of resources that lead to a thorough study of an event-in-progress lend excitement and drama to a course no matter what the outcome. The authors offer many good ideas, projects, models, and resources for generating such an interdisciplinary course.

In “A Traditional Educational Practice Adapted for the Digital Age,” Elizabeth Nix, Brian Etheridge, and Paul Walsh demonstrate that a carefully planned MOOC can be valuable to honors students as well as to a much wider audience. The authors designed a traditional weekly honors seminar on the Civil Rights Movement, taught by Taylor Branch, at the University of Baltimore. In addition to the twenty-one honors students enrolled in the class for credit, hundreds of auditors participated online so that a “face-to-face seminar for enrolled honors students” became simultaneously “a massive yet interactive seminar experience for the general public.” The authors describe the technological and intellectual components of the course in a way that gives MOOCs a good name. Their course maintained the high academic standards in a small-class setting that we traditionally associate with honors while at the same time opening up and sharing the experience with a much larger audience. They have provided a model for traditional and online, closed and open, honors courses that could be valuable to many honors programs with the resources to accomplish this double mission.

Melissa Ladenheim addresses the challenge of coaxing honors students into seeing the relevance of poetry to their lives. In “Engaging Honors Students through Newspaper Blackout Poetry,” she describes a strategy she has adopted in the Honors Civilization course at the University of Maine—a strategy suggested by one of her students. Students black out portions of current newspaper articles in order to reveal a poetry hidden within. The poetry they find is in the world around them and, in chiseling it out from everyday prose, they find and create the poetry within themselves, making them better able to understand Sappho and other lyric poets. Blackout poetry generates an active learning experience within the honors classroom that shows students how poetry “can shape the way they think about the world and their place in it.”

On a larger scale, Kevin Gustafson and Zachary Cureton have incorporated active learning into the honors curriculum at a programmatic level in the University of Texas at Arlington Honors College. Their essay—“Re-Envisioning the Honors Senior Project: Experience as Research”—describes the integration of...
experiential learning into three honors capstone options: “a community service learning placement, a paid or unpaid professional internship, or a semester- or year-long study abroad program.” After a literature review on the principles of active learning and critical reflection, Gustafson acknowledges that experiential capstones are “messier and less predictable” than traditional theses and thus possibly intimidating to faculty members who are accustomed to the role of authority figure rather than facilitator. The rewards of the experiential option, however, become apparent in Cureton’s description of his capstone project on Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, which combined “intercultural theory, literary study, and personal reflection [about his year-long study abroad in Russia] in order to understand ways in which people do and do not adapt to new surroundings.” As Gustafson concludes, “experiential capstones tend to foreground the larger social, ethical, and even personal dimensions of doing research. As such, they offer not just interesting alternatives to the traditional honors thesis but an opportunity to enrich it.”

The principle of applied knowledge is central also to the next essay, “Sea Lions and Honors Students: More in Common than You May Think.” Kristy L. Lindemann-Biolsi of St. Francis College makes the broad argument that honors courses should teach the “transfer of information between contexts,” which is essential to animal training, by instilling “the skills of metacognition and self-regulation,” ensuring that students not only learn but learn how to learn. Honors teachers too often take these skills for granted without realizing that honors students, too, need to be taught how to plan, monitor, and apply the knowledge they gain in the classroom so that they are not simply learning a “specific behavior in a specific location with a specific person.” Lindemann-Biolsi offers honors faculty several specific techniques for teaching skills that students will be able to take beyond the classroom.

The next two essays address the Great Books curriculum that forms the core of some honors programs. In “There and Back Again: Learning From the History of a Freshman Seminar Sequence,” Stephanie R. deLusé describes the history of the Great Books course sequence called The Human Event at Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University. Inspired in the late 1970s by Jacob Bronowski’s BBC/PBS series *The Ascent of Man*, the course sequence was modeled on the “Columbia model” of the Great Books approach, which is more historical and context-based than the topics-centered approach of the “Chicago model.” The author summarizes the evolution of the course sequence into interdisciplinary core courses with a focus on Great Ideas as much as Great Books and taught by twenty-nine full-time Honors Faculty Fellows. She describes experiments with the program that succeeded and others that failed, arguing that such an historical examination of a program’s roots can be useful to current faculty and administrators.

Sarah Harlan-Haughey suggests that an inherent flaw in the Great Books approach is the often unexamined and faulty presumption that the progression of time marks some kind of intellectual, artistic, or moral progress. In “Against Teleology in an Honors Great Books Curriculum,” Harlan-Haughey acknowledges
the variety of problems as well as assets of a Great Books curriculum such as the one she teaches in the University of Maine Honors College, and she suggests that at least one of these problems can become an asset: a Great Books curriculum can give teachers an opportunity to “actively and consciously resist implicit buy-in to teleological narratives inherent in the curricular structure.” She provides a useful “toolkit for honors educators”—a lengthy and detailed list of “conscious interventions in the teleological assumptions inherent in any Great Books course”—to help teachers and their students question and resist the powerful cultural, religious, and political forces that reinforce a belief in progress.

This volume of HIP concludes with two essays that address the kinds of expectations that students and educators have about honors. In “High-Impact Recruiting: A Focus Group of Prospective Honors Students,” David M. Rhea and Kristy Goodwin describe the steps they took to determine and meet the expectations of incoming freshmen when the Governors State University Honors Program transitioned from an upper-level, two-year university to a four-year university. Since both the honors program and the university were recruiting freshman-level students for the first time, the honors program needed to design a program that met the expectations of high-achieving high school students from the diverse Chicago Southland area when such students had no familiarity with GSU. Their solution to this challenge was to create a focus group of prospective local high school students to find out what they expected and wanted from an honors program, then incorporating their ideas into the program design. They used High-Impact Educational Practices—learning communities, collaborative assignments/projects, and research—as strategies within the focus group as a means of getting students involved in the design of the program. Rhea and Goodwin explain the details of this process and suggest its potential use at any stage of a program’s development.

The final essay—“Navigating the Kokosing: A Comparison between Honors and Private Liberal Arts Colleges” by Scott Carnicom of Middle Tennessee State University—refutes the claim and expectation that honors will provide the same kind of experience that students would get at a liberal arts college. Until 2014, Carnicom was Associate Dean of the Honors College at Middle Tennessee State University, and he spent a year at Kenyon College as an American Council on Education Fellow, allowing him to compare the undergraduate experiences at these two contrasting institutions. The similarities—small class size, personal interaction, and emphasis on discussion and writing—are significant, but what liberal arts colleges offer that honors programs at large universities do not, according to Carnicom, are a focus on “academic breadth and synthesis” rather than specialization, on the value of teaching and interdisciplinarity across the four-year curriculum, on institution-wide commitment to undergraduates, and on the love of learning rather than preparation for graduate schools or careers. Carnicom argues, “If we say that we emulate liberal arts colleges, then we must think about where we stand on the breadth–depth continuum so that our curricula are not like a Brooklyn diner menu, going on for pages and pages offering
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all things to all people, when instead we should be striving to build a cohesive academic experience that uniquely defines our program.”
Occasional Essays by Two Wise Men of the NCHC
I first started coming to UNC Asheville in the early 1970s, when Nancy and I would visit her parents, who lived about two miles from where we stand today. I'd come to the campus, then a much more modest place, and use two facilities: the library and the outdoor track (then an unnamed cinder oval). Forty years later, I'm still here a couple of times a week to use the library and the physical education facilities. I might not be very good at things, but I do tend to be persistent. The library and the track and the Center for Health and Wellness are named for important benefactors of our university, and I am so very proud that UNCA has graciously put my name on its fine new fitness area, to which I repair so regularly that I get irritated if someone is on my elliptical machine!

I've been thinking quite a bit about the role of physical wellbeing at colleges and universities recently, so indulge me in a minute or two on this subject. I'm in the process of finishing up the publication of a monograph for the National Collegiate Honors Council on “holistic higher education,” for which my working title has been If Honors Students Were People [editor's note: published in 2014 and now available in print and online]. The premise, of course, is that they actually are people and thus have three intimately connected aspects: minds, spirits, and bodies. The primary purpose of colleges and universities is to help students cultivate their minds, but, ever since the happy demise of required gym and required chapel in the 1960s, we have drifted away from the cultivation of the body and the spirit. I was glad to see gym and chapel requirements go, and I don't want to bring them back, but when these antique programs were generally abolished, we forgot to substitute anything that would fill the very real needs they were originally meant to satisfy.

In terms of spiritual cultivation, much research has shown that students come to college seeking spiritual growth and nourishment. About eighty percent of first-year college students, according to the studies of Alexander W. Astin et al. (Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students’ Inner Lives, Jossey Bass, 2011), come to college seeking answers to the big questions of life’s meaning and purpose: Who am I? What do I wish to become? If I must die, how should I live? What is the meaning of my life? When they graduate, most
of those students express disappointment that these subjects have been scrupulously avoided in their studies for four years.

In terms of physical activity, the past decade or so has seen definitive proof in the field of neuroscience that vigorous physical activity stimulates the creation of new brain cells and significantly enhances learning. I would not require every UNCA student (and teacher and administrator and staff member and retiree) to spend an hour a day here in the fitness area . . . I think. But I do believe that having a splendid area like this and making it inviting, welcoming, and fun is a very good step in the right direction. It is a delight to me to have this connection with a facility that will help students enhance the wellbeing of their bodies and will make them even sharper and more capable learners.

In 1939, on an occasion with some resemblance to this one, one of the mythic athletic heroes of my youth declared to a packed Yankee Stadium in New York, “Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.” Me too. I share Lou Gehrig’s feeling. And much of that luck is here, now. I have spent the last fifty-three years on the campuses of colleges and universities that, for all their problems then and now, are still the best places I can imagine being, none better than this university. I’ve had interesting and worthwhile work on those campuses. I’ve had wonderful, stimulating, and supportive teachers, colleagues, and students with whom to do that work. I’ve actually gotten paid to read books and to talk to people about them. What a racket! I’ve seen far more of the world than I ever imagined I would, from England to Auckland, Beijing to Belgium, Argentina to Alaska. My greatest blessing, of course, has been my family.

My two favorite authors are Vladimir Nabokov and William Shakespeare. Nabokov said, “Life is a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness,” and Shakespeare said of life, “so quick bright things come to confusion.” Both are saying that life is short—brief and quick—but they are also reminding us that it is filled with brightness and light, with joy and lovingkindness. It is a blessing beyond measure. I’m so glad to celebrate it in a place where generations of us will enrich and deepen the delights of our lives. I am the luckiest man on the face of the earth.

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sschuman@ret.unca.edu.
During the last week of my last semester in my last year in college, I took a course in aesthetics. David Miller was the teacher, and he required all of the students to make a presentation. I decided to work up a presentation on Picasso. I didn’t know much about Picasso, but of course that did not deter me. A word of advice to students: never let the fact that you do not altogether know what you are talking about keep you from talking. After all, not knowing what they are talking about does not stop your parents from talking, does it? And how do you think professors could possibly lecture for an entire semester without occasionally talking about things that they don’t know much about? Certainly they do not know all there is to know about all the things that they talk about.

In a university, you keep on talking precisely because your knowledge is partial, incomplete, provisional. That is perhaps the best way for you to learn what you don’t know, and learning some of what you don’t know is fifty percent of the reason to go to college in the first place. Learning that you don’t know is the other fifty percent. Socrates called that “learned ignorance.”

By learning some of what we don’t know, we gain confidence and competence and the capacity to do things in the world, including the ability to perform well in our various jobs. By learning some of what we don’t know, we equip ourselves to be good accountants, good engineers, good chemists, or good teachers.

But, as I said, we need also to learn that we don’t know.

Suppose you go home this week-end and your father asks you, “What did you learn this week?” And you reply, “Dad, I learned something really important, something that’s going to make a tremendous difference in my life.” Your father asks, “What’s that?”

And you say, “I learned some ignorance.” You father may well call the dean and ask for his money back.

But then you might be able to explain to your father that, by learning that we don’t know, we acquire modesty, humility, and greater respect for, and willingness to listen to, what others have to say. Persons who lack a goodly portion of learned ignorance make terrible friends and insufferable husbands. My good wife Sybil often reminds me precisely of that.
But back to my story: For weeks I studied an etching that Picasso made in the 1930s. The etching was of a child and the Minotaur, that mythological creature with the body of a man and the head of a bull. He lived deep in the labyrinth below King Minos’s Palace on the island of Crete. In Picasso’s etching, the Minotaur’s head looks something like the huge head of a buffalo, all hairy and wild, with rather short horns. The only other figure in the etching, the child, looks to be twelve or thirteen years old.

After weeks of looking at the Minotaur and the child, I came to class in early May to make my presentation. I had a slide up on a screen so that everybody could see the picture. “Here,” I said to the class, “we see the girl and the Minotaur deep down in the labyrinth.” Everybody looked at the child and the Minotaur up on the screen.

“Notice,” I said, “that the young girl is on a ladder and the Minotaur stands below. Also notice that the girl is holding a light, something like a candle, perhaps a lamp. She is going up the ladder with her light; she is in flight from the threatening beast that lurks in the shadows of the pit.”

I went on to associate the Minotaur with sexual energy, which got everybody’s attention. I associated the young girl with innocence and vulnerability. I talked about prepubescent fright and prepubescent flight. I said that the girl was in flight from things that always lurk in the shadows deep down below, things like darkness and chaos and sexuality and terror and death—and other things that are never altogether under our control.

Finally, I shut up. Professor Miller asked his first question. “Mr. Estess,” he said, “why do you think the child is going up the ladder? Couldn’t you as easily say that the child is going down the ladder?”

I was struck dumb, mute. To hide my panic, I turned again to look at the picture on the screen.

My teacher was right. Any fool could see it. The girl could as easily be going down the ladder as up the ladder. She might not be in fright and flight at all; she could be fascinated by, even attracted to, the bull.

Why hadn’t I seen that? I had been looking at that etching for weeks. I had read everything there was to read about that etching. Not one of the experts said anything about the girl going down the ladder. They didn’t say anything about the girl going up the ladder either; they just talked about her standing on the ladder.

Who would think that a young girl would go toward a great beast? Who would think that a girl would have the courage—or be so reckless as—to go toward those uncontrollable things that lurk in the shadows of the pit? Who would think that a young girl would go toward chaos, darkness, sexuality, terror, possibly death?

But I knew that my teacher was right: Picasso’s girl could be taking light into the labyrinth in order to tame the man-bull, to humanize him, and thereby give human measure precisely to those things that lurk in the labyrinthine shadows. She could be going down in order to bring the beast up. She might even be
the agent of his transformation, which, of course, is precisely what happens in *Beauty and the Beast*.

Professor Miller asked a second question. “Mr. Estess,” he said, “what makes you think the child is a girl? It is not at all clear,” he said, “whether the child is male or female. Picasso, you know, could be dealing with androgyny.

*Androgyny?* I didn’t know what androgyny was. To hide my panic, I turned again to look at the picture on the screen. Professor Miller was right. It was not clear whether the child was male or female.

I don’t remember anything else that happened in class that day. But I did have sense enough to see that, if I had learned anything, it had little to do with Pablo Picasso. Picasso’s etching had been the occasion, not the content, of what I had learned.

On the way out of the seminar room, my teacher stopped to talk to me. He said, “Ted, you might remember that aphorism from Wittgenstein.” I wasn’t sure what an aphorism was, but I did know that Wittgenstein was a terribly complex philosopher of the first half of the twentieth century. I had read a few of his pages, but I understood not a word of what the man was saying.

“What’s that, Professor Miller?” I asked.

He replied, “Wittgenstein said, ‘A picture holds us captive—and will not let us go.’”

I walked alone out of the room and across the campus. As I walked, I kept repeating those words again and again like a mantra, repeating them while breathing in and breathing out. “A picture holds us captive—and will not let us go. A picture holds us captive—and will not let us go. A picture . . . will not let us go.”

That spring, a picture of Picasso’s picture had held me captive. Consequently, I could not see Picasso’s picture. I saw only my picture. I saw a girl going up the ladder. As a result, I couldn’t see that Picasso perhaps intended a boy going down the ladder or a sexually undifferentiated child standing on the ladder or any number of other possibilities. My picture blinded me. In service to my picture, I had reduced—diminished—that which I was seeking to know and to understand. It was only with my teacher’s prodding that I was able to break free.

Now what are we to make of this situation? And what does it have to do with education?

On the one hand, being captive to a picture seems bad, or at least not all good.

On the other, being captive to a picture can be good, or at least not all bad, if for no other reason than that it is inevitable.

Inevitably, each of us is captive to a picture or to a group of pictures—or, if you prefer, to a story or to a group of stories—with which, and in terms of which, we understand ourselves and other people. Our pictures can serve us ill or serve us well—or sometimes both.

One day a student named Anna came to see me. She said, “Dr. Estess, my parents say they are going to disown me.”
I said, “Anna, what are talking about?”

She said, “My parents say that they going to cut off all financial support from me. They say they will refuse to see me—and will forbid my brothers and sisters to see me.”

Anna went on to explain that her parents wanted her to be an engineer or a doctor but that she was determined to study psychology and become a psychotherapist. Anna told me that she didn’t know what to do. I certainly didn’t know how to advise her.

Now, Anna’s parents had one picture for how the life of their daughter ought to unfold. In service to that picture, they reduced Anna to one set of possibilities. Their picture made simple that which was complex, namely, their daughter.

Conversely, in service to her own picture, Anna sought to realize what she took to be her own particular destiny.

I didn’t fault Anna’s parents. It was perfectly understandable that they had aspirations for their daughter’s life. If they hadn’t, they probably wouldn’t have been very good parents. And it was fine for them to aspire for their daughter to be an engineer or a doctor. So there was nothing wrong with the content of their picture. The problem was in the way they held on to their picture. They could not think or talk about it. Thus they were rendered closed and brittle and altogether resistant to other possibilities for Anna.

We can, then, hold to our pictures in a closed, intolerant way, or we can hold them in an open, flexible, imaginative way. How we hold our pictures goes a long way in determining whether our pictures serve us well or ill and whether they serve, for instance, friendship and civil discourse well or ill.

Anna majored in psychology. Her parents disowned her. They refused to see her for five years, but by then she was working as a psychotherapist. One day she told me that she loved—really loved—trying to help people like her parents. I should add that Anna’s parents turned out to be very proud of her and she of them.

I come, then, to say that we can understand education—or at least a portion of education—as a process in which each of us undertakes the difficult task of becoming aware of—and then thinking about—the content of our own particular pictures. Perhaps more importantly, education—or at least a portion of education—is a process in which each of us considers how we hold onto—and how we are held by—our particular pictures.

If students are like me when I entered college, they are, at least to some extent, thoughtless captives to some pictures of how things are. Becoming educated people does not require that we give up all our pictures. Our teachers would be wrong to ask that of their students; they, after all, have their pictures, too.

But teachers do urge students to gain some critical awareness of, and thereby some distance from, the pictures by which they see and interpret themselves and the world. In the process, students may question and change some pictures. In doing so, they may disappoint their parents, shock their friends, and surprise themselves.
And when they come to graduate, they may well find that, owing to their education, three things will have happened:

First, their intelligence will not only be better informed than it was when they matriculated but will have become more supple. I like the notion of a “supple” intelligence: responsive and adaptable, not rigid or obstinate, not flimsy but firm.

And when students come to graduate, they may find their imagination to be more capacious than when they entered college. I like “capacious,” too: a large and roomy imagination, an ample space in which to play with lots of possibilities for oneself and others.

And upon graduating, students might find their spirits to be more generous than when they started out. I like “generous”: a spirit that is tolerant, magnanimous, kind, compassionate toward others—and toward oneself.

A supple intelligence, a capacious imagination, a generous spirit: we nurture such fine things in ourselves by thinking about, even by changing, some of the great variety of pictures that define us and make us who we are.

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Innovative Teaching Strategies
On September 21, 2012, two astronomers using a telescope in the International Scientific Observing Network near Kislovodsk, Russia, discovered a comet that came to be formally known as C/2012 S1 and was popularly called Comet ISON. Just a year later, two honors instructors in Wichita, Kansas, found themselves teaching a course on Comet ISON that came to be formally known as Fire in the Sky and was popularly referred to as “the comet course.”

The behavior of comets is notoriously difficult to predict. Nevertheless, even from its first detection Comet ISON showed signs of being an unusual and significant comet. Some commentators went so far as to predict that it would be “the comet of the century,” bright enough to be seen during daylight, with a tail extending as much as a quarter of the way across the sky. This possibility was enough to inspire us, a planetarium astronomer (Ratcliffe) and a philosopher of science with an interest in the history of astronomy (Vanderburgh), to propose a co-taught honors course that would look at scientific, historical, philosophical and other topics raised by this interloper from the edge of the solar system.

The success of new interdisciplinary courses is never guaranteed. Especially considering that we were deliberately planning to “make it up as we went along,” that is, to adapt what we were teaching to the weekly news about the performance of the comet, we did not dare to predict that ours would be the course of the century. The course turned out so well, though, that we believe other honors instructors could profitably borrow some of what we did in similarly styled courses even if they are not lucky enough to have sufficient advance notice of a potentially stunning comet.

Our course was about a scientific event unfolding in real time. The potential of such courses as honors-quality experiences is excellent; the degree of
excitement, the opportunities for learning, and the prospects for the course being truly memorable are all high. The risks are also high any time the outcome of a course depends on something outside of it, perhaps more so in the case of a scientific event that might or might not turn out as hoped and that might or might not conclude in a time frame that is convenient to the period in which the course is offered. With unpredictability comes the possibility of failure along with nagging questions about whether the students will like it and learn from it or whether the event under study will turn out in an interesting and productive way. In our course we attempted to mitigate these risks by being ready to adapt to any eventuality as the scientific event unfolded and by having enough supporting material that the course would be meaningful even if the event failed to live up to expectations. By designing the course to be interdisciplinary, we coupled the contemporary science of comets with coverage of comets in history and the history of astronomy as it relates to comets. Furthermore, we introduced opportunities to discuss some social, political, and philosophical dimensions of comets and comet research. Co-teaching the class helped to make this breadth of subject matter possible.

Any on-going scientific, political, economic, or sociological event could profitably be the focus of a course like this. An event that involves elements of a journey or that can be packaged as a journey of discovery would likely work best. If the timings work out with the rhythms of the semester, a journey gives a beginning-middle-end structure to the course and can create a sense of urgency and immediacy that in turn motivates student engagement with the material. Some examples might include a course on geology centered on a mountain-climbing expedition or the progress of a Mars rover, a marine biology course that tracks the progress of a sailing voyage or a submersible mission to an ocean trench, or a course on meteorology that follows a trek to the pole or storm chasers during tornado season. Any such scientific mission will have news coverage and a website; most likely these days it will also have online educational resources, blogs, Facebook pages, webcams and live-Tweeting of the event as it progresses.

SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

The title of the course, Fire in the Sky: The Comet of the Century, was borrowed from *Fire in the Sky* by Olsen and Pasachoff (1999), an elegant book about representations of comets and meteors in British art and literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ultimately we decided this book was only tangentially related to the course as we intended to teach it and that we therefore could not ask the students to purchase it. In fact, we were unable to find any existing books that suited our purposes. We relied instead on Internet resources, including webpages, news articles, blogs and even Facebook, which happened to have a well-curated and administered ISON group page. These kinds of sources added to the cutting-edge feel of the course and appealed to the millennial generation’s proclivity toward electronic media although, in the end,
students probably read somewhat less than we might have preferred in an honors course. They didn’t seem to mind. In any case, many of the students became so interested in the topics of the course that they did their own explorations on the Internet, often sharing with us good articles or websites they discovered. An additional and unexpected benefit of relying on blogs and social media for a good deal of the course material was that students got to see scientists struggling to interpret the data and arguing with each other about it, giving a truer picture of the tentative, confusing and messy process of doing science than one usually finds in the cleaned-up versions presented in textbooks.

One novel administrative move we tried was to cross-list the course under two different HNRS course numbers, one for humanities general education credit and the other for natural sciences general education credit. Given the truly interdisciplinary manner in which the course was structured and taught, this double listing was an appropriate way to attract a greater number and broader variety of students; had we offered it only for humanities credit, humanities majors might not have taken it, and had we offered it for natural sciences credit, science and engineering majors would not have been able to take it. Unfortunately, this plan resulted in some snags given some baroque details of the general education program at Wichita State University; suffice it to say that our interpretation of the catalog was different from that of the advisors in one of the academic colleges, and they refused to count the course toward the requirement that one student had thought she was fulfilling. As we support that student’s appeal to the Exceptions Committee, the honors program is exploring catalog changes in how its courses count toward general education so that this situation does not come up again.

Otherwise, the cross-listing strategy was indeed successful in attracting the number and breadth of students we were looking for. Another contributing factor to getting the enrollment we wanted was that we offered the course for upper-division rather than lower-division credit. In an era when a great many honors students enter the university with a large number of college credits, lower-division honors courses are becoming less popular.

**SAMPLE TOPICS AND APPROACH**

Our course covered a wide variety of topics, all tied in some way to comets. We discussed the development of astronomical theory from the ancient Greeks through the scientific revolution, in part to explain the interest and difficulty of doing astronomy and in part to illustrate how appearances of comets influenced crucial figures like Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler. Isaac Newton’s theory of universal gravitation was an important topic to cover because it allowed us to discuss orbital mechanics and to introduce Halley’s Comet, the periodic orbit of which Edmond Halley was first able to predict thanks to Newton’s theory. After establishing the basic motions and fundamental structure of comets, we talked about other major comet appearances from the eighteenth through the twenty-first century, including the public reactions to those events. From the 1980s until the present, quite a few interesting space missions have imaged comets and
even smashed spacecraft into them—Giotto, Deep Impact, and Stardust were just a few we discussed—and covering those space missions took us a couple of weeks. One of the guest lecturers we managed to schedule via Skype was the chief American scientist from NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory on the joint European Space Agency/NASA Rosetta mission, which will land a probe on a comet in 2014. Although we happened to have a personal contact that helped make this possible, scientists on federally funded projects are generally required to do public outreach in order to meet the “broader impacts” requirement of their grants, so it is worth asking. At least once a week we also gave an “ISON update,” reviewing the latest news about the comet, including a discussion by one of us (Ratcliffe) of locally photographed images of the comet. Sometimes the ISON update lasted ten minutes; sometimes it took the whole class period.

The class often felt like playtime; we joked with the students that we could not believe they were earning academic credit for having so much fun. In truth, though, the fun was an important part of the course, promoting both camaraderie among the students and attachment to the subject matter. It is easy to overlook this emotional component of learning, but, as we learned, including opportunities for it makes a significant difference. Along the same lines, we used the honors program’s funding to purchase t-shirts for all members of the class. The front of the shirt had the honors program logo while the back had the student-suggested slogan “Ask me about ISON” above a stylized picture of a comet. This small gesture, while not a serious expense for the honors budget, created a great deal of goodwill and excitement among the students while also providing some nice advertising for the honors program. For similar reasons, we took a break in the middle of the semester to watch the Bruce Willis movie Armageddon during class. The movie itself was even worse than we had remembered from seeing it at its release in 1998, but it gave the students an opportunity to apply what they had learned so far and give sophisticated critiques of everything the movie got wrong about comets and comet deflection.

OTHER THOUGHTS

We knew from the beginning that engaging students with the science was going to be an important aspect of the course. Fortunately, one of us (Ratcliffe) has a home observatory and therefore was able to invite the class to come view the comet for themselves. The fact that this viewing occurred very early on a very cold morning probably contributed to some class bonding. We were able to capture digital photographs of ISON and another comet (Comet Lovejoy) that happened to be in the morning sky at the same time as well as to look through a large telescope at Jupiter and its moons. A few students had sufficiently good eyesight that they were able to see a faint fuzzy patch when they pointed binoculars at Comet ISON.

Other instructors who try an interdisciplinary course like this one might not have access to a telescope of their own. However, on many campuses it should be possible to track down amateur stargazers or professors in the astronomy
program who would be willing to share their time and expertise. If the university operates an observatory, a visit should be possible. Other options for direct engagement with the science include local public observatories and planetariums. Courses not focused on astronomy could arrange laboratory tours in relevant sciences and/or trips to science centers, nature centers, or even a local Extension Office. Making this extra effort to engage the topic outside of the classroom is one way to make the course a true honors experience.

Another way we were especially fortunate was that one of us (Ratcliffe) had gone on observing trips to Kenya and Australia to photograph Halley’s Comet in 1986 when he worked as a lecturer for the Armagh Planetarium and Observatory in Northern Ireland. His personal reflections, photographs, and observing logs added immeasurably to the students’ appreciation of the excitement and difficulty in taking astronomical photographs of such faint and fleeting objects.

In an honors course built around coverage of a scientific event as it is happening, incorporating some history of science is a good idea. If the current event does not turn out as hoped, looking back to the history can provide context, suggest additional topics of discussion, and—let’s face it—help fill the time left in the semester. The failure of a scientific experiment or idea can be turned into a valuable learning opportunity, affording an occasion to work through in detail, via a real-life application, how science actually works: it shows how scientists adapt to new information, setbacks, and observations that contradict prior expectations; it shows how theories, assumptions, questions and answers can all change over rather short time scales in the face of new data and theoretical developments; and it provides a lesson in the capriciousness of the natural world and of the scientific process. Besides painting a better picture of how science works, valuable in itself and an inspiration for students to try out some undergraduate research of their own, the possibility of failure encourages students to be circumspect in expressing hopes for how research might turn out.

THE MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

One of the interesting features of comets is that they sometimes collide with other solar-system bodies, including planets. Our course included discussion of the impact of the twenty-one fragments of Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 with the planet Jupiter, including the images taken by the Hubble Space Telescope that were released to the public more or less as the impacts were happening, a scientific first that captivated the public in 1994. This discussion allowed us to raise the theme of the public communication and reception of science, which became part of a signature assignment later in the course (see below). The Chelyabinsk meteor that exploded in the skies over Russia on February 15, 2013, the impressive effects of which were recorded by many video devices and were posted widely on social media, provided a nice segue to discussion of Earth impacts. These included the Tunguska Event (an atmospheric explosion in 1908 that flattened 2,000 km² of remote Russian forest that was attributed to the impact of an asteroid or comet) and the Chicxulub crater (the remnant on
the Yucatan peninsula of the asteroid or comet impact sixty-six million years ago that likely caused the dinosaur extinction. There is also some speculation that most of Earth’s water was delivered by comet impacts in the very distant past.

These impact stories led us to current proposals that humans need to build robust “detect and deflect” schemes for so-called Near Earth Objects that could potentially impact the Earth. The proponents of such schemes talk about “city killers” and “civilization enders” and argue that, while the odds of such an impact in the immediate future might be low, it will inevitably happen again at some time in the future, and they suggest that it would be a wise investment to build such schemes now in order to be ready to prevent the end of civilization if we can. As it turned out, the United Nations held a conference to discuss potential asteroid and comet impacts on Earth in the middle of the semester in which we taught the course, a coincidence that helped turn what might have seemed a merely academic discussion into a study that had real-world relevance.

The topic of Near Earth Objects probably includes enough material by itself for an honors course. We touched on such matters as the science of impacts; ways to detect astronomical bodies that could hit the Earth; ways to deflect or destroy such potential impactors; the ethics of trying/not trying such schemes; the public funding of science; the politics related to national governments, international organizations, or private groups taking responsibility for dealing with such a global threat; and how the answer we give about dealing with Near Earth Objects should shape our responses to other kinds of global threats such as poverty, pandemics, and climate change.

Given the large number of diverse sub-topics relating to Near Earth Objects, we had an ideal opportunity to make this section of the course the students’ responsibility to research and present. They worked individually or in pairs on parts of the topic and then made a whole-class presentation during which each person or team reported on the sub-topic they had researched. In preparation, the students met together outside of class for several hours on several occasions. During these meetings they assigned sub-topics, discussed presentation strategies, compared research notes, asked each other questions, and planned the presentation itself. Each student thus became an expert on a sub-topic, became familiar with the other topics, and got practice working in teams. The next class period after the long presentation was devoted in its entirety to a free-form discussion in which the students, with some tough Socratic questioning by the instructors, tried to decide the question of whether or not the United States ought to use taxpayer funds to build a “detect and deflect” program for Near Earth Objects. This class was originally conceived as an Oxford-style formal debate, but during the preparation period the concept evolved so that instead it ultimately resembled the kind of discussion that an expert panel at the National Science Foundation might hold to decide an important strategic question about what kinds of scientific projects to prioritize for funding. In all, this assignment was very successful, one that we would repeat again in similar form in other classes. In general such an assignment would work well in any course structured
around a current scientific episode since the question of the public funding of
science can be raised in relation to any specific science.

Earlier in the course, after completing the section on the history of astronomy,
we asked each of the students to choose a unique “comet in history,” research it,
and give a five-minute presentation about it. We held several presentations at
the beginning of each of four consecutive class periods so that not just the instruc-
tors were presenting all the time, the students got comfortable with talking in
class, and we could cover material that might have seemed somewhat repetitive
had the instructors presented it all.

The other major assignment, due at the end of the semester, was an analy-
sis in essay form of popular accounts of Comet ISON. Here is the assignment
prompt we used:

This assignment challenges your analytical and critical skills as
applied to the topic of “communicating science to the educated
but non-expert public” with specific reference to the popular
news coverage of Comet ISON. Find three popular articles about
Comet ISON, from its initial discovery to now. (Completing the
assignment may be easier if you choose longer rather than shorter
target articles. In your list of sources, give full citation information
including a URL if available.) Analyze each article in turn; com-
paring and contrasting them among themselves is acceptable but
is not required. Go into detail about the strong and weak points
of each article. Consider such factors as accuracy, sensationalism,
relevance, clarity, level of explanation, ways the author gener-
ates and sustains interest, word choice, writing level, the use of
metaphors and analogies, the use of story, the use of quotations
and expert testimony, the use of images and illustrations—or any
other factor that is relevant to judging the quality of the work.

The papers we received from the students were of good quality and were genu-
iney interdisciplinary. Humanities students were able to apply their skills in
textual analysis to a topic area with which they had had limited previous experi-
ence, and natural science/engineering students had an opportunity to reflect on
effective ways of communicating technical information to non-expert audiences.
We also offered a bonus assignment in which students were asked to write their
own 500–1000 word article explaining Comet ISON to a popular audience.
Only a few students had time at the end of the semester to complete the bonus
assignment, but the ones who did so turned in nearly publishable work. If we
were to offer such a course again, we would make this a regular assignment
rather than a bonus assignment, and we would place it earlier in the semester.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the end of the semester we stopped to marvel what luck it was that Comet ISON reached perihelion on Thanksgiving Day, with just two class periods left in the semester. The comet fizzled. It was brightening wonderfully as it approached the Sun but then started fading just before it disappeared behind the occulting disk of the SOHO spacecraft that was recording its journey. It emerged from perihelion as a mere puff with no bright central nucleus. We had some moments of excitement later when it seemed to brighten again, but the online articles about a “zombie comet” back from the dead turned out to have been overstated. Still, the open discussion and disagreement between experts on the ISON Facebook page revealed the real human process of science in a way no textbook could have conveyed. After its closest approach to the Sun, ISON never became bright enough to see with the naked eye, let alone to be considered the comet of the century. We were in touch by email with our students throughout the day while all this was happening, and several of them were quite distraught by the turn of events.

What would we have done had we built the course around a comet that had fizzled a month or two earlier in the semester? The truth is that the course would have gone well anyway, with more than enough comet-related material to fill a semester. Some of the excitement of anticipation would have been lost, but the opportunities for learning would have been just as good. For example, had the comet fizzled earlier in the semester, we could have spent more time on impact threats, space mission design, and understanding the origins of the solar system as well as on literary and artistic responses to comets and the social/political stories to which they become attached. Also, since there is often more than one comet in the sky, we could have given more attention to other current or recent comets.

Before we left for Thanksgiving break, we took a class opinion survey about how ISON would perform. None of us voted that it would fizzle although we all recognized that the possibility existed. In the class period after Thanksgiving, we were able to use our survey results to talk about how biases can skew scientific predictions.

This course was a peak experience for both the instructors and the students. Part of its success can no doubt be attributed to the high degree of prior interest in the subject that the instructors and students shared. The instructors’ enthusiasm for the material surely did help motivate the students, and the uncertainty of the comet’s fate made this science story more immediate and interesting than some other topics might have been. Other contributions to the success of the course were the opportunities for fun, for students to take responsibility for teaching part of the course themselves, for assignments that required deep engagement with the content while working together with other students, and for meaningful out-of-class experiences related to the material. We recommend such opportunities for any honors course. However, the most important factor contributing to the success of our course was that it engaged a significant real-life event, while it
was happening, from an interdisciplinary perspective that made the experience richer. This approach could fruitfully be applied in fields of study that range from business and engineering to politics and sociology, not just the hard sciences.

For anyone considering a comet course of their own, Comet C/2013 A1 (Siding Spring) will make a very close approach to Mars on October 19, 2014, and the Rosetta mission will land a probe on the Comet 67P (Churyumov-Gerasimenko) in November, 2014.

REFERENCE

A Traditional Educational Practice Adapted for the Digital Age

ELIZABETH NIX, BRIAN ETHERIDGE, AND PAUL WALSH
UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE

“Did you know that you are the star of my favorite reality show?” an online auditor asked a University of Baltimore honors student at a reception in the spring semester of 2013. The student was one of twenty-one honors undergraduates who had enrolled for credit in The King Years, a weekly seminar taught by Taylor Branch, the scholar who won the Pulitzer Prize for the first volume of his trilogy on the Civil Rights era. The auditor was one of hundreds of remote learners who tuned in every week to the simultaneous webcast of the class. In UB’s alternative MOOC, Branch engaged the UB students in conversations about pivotal moments in the civil rights movement while a graduate student present in the classroom fielded online questions and comments from engaged web viewers. For days after the live broadcast, the conversation continued in cyberspace as auditors reviewed the web footage and chatted with each other and Branch about the issues that had come up in class. At the end of the semester, the online participants had a chance to meet Branch in person and rub elbows with the students at a reception, an event that encapsulated the two goals of the course: a face-to-face seminar for enrolled honors students and a massive yet interactive seminar experience for the general public. Our experiment with an alternative MOOC allowed the University of Baltimore to contribute to three conversations concerning educational innovation: (1) How can we define and deliver online education to large numbers of students in ways that support excellence? (2) How can digital advances add to an academic institution’s civic engagement? (3) How can honors shape the expectations for massive online experiences?

STRUCTURAL INNOVATION

The fall semester of 2012 was saturated with articles about the demise of higher education and the rise of the MOOC (Aoun; Azevedo; Blackenhorn; Seligson). Standing for Massive Open Online Course, the term MOOC has been used to describe courses that provide free access to content for unlimited participants. The University of Baltimore has been on the forefront of distance and online education for the past twenty-five years, so our Office of Instructional Technologies staff was immersed in the literature and curious about the direction
the trend would take. Taylor Branch, a resident of Baltimore, was not on the UB faculty, but he had expressed an interest in teaching a class on our campus, and we immediately suggested that he work with our honors students and formed a team of UB staff and faculty to help him develop the course.

Adding one honors seminar to the spring schedule would have been easy enough, but the swirling MOOC conversation led Branch and the instructional design team to a bigger vision. Branch’s willingness to experiment with new course delivery systems allowed UB to begin to see itself not as a receiver of the MOOC tidal wave but as a producer. The King Years represents a foot in the water for a campus seeking a slow yet innovative entry into the world of massive online offerings. The ultimate shape that the alternative MOOC took resulted from an organic process over the course of several months that involved the Office of Instructional Technologies, the Provost’s office, the Helen P. Denit Honors Program, and Branch.

In the months leading up to the launch of the course, Branch conducted an informal survey of college curricula and discovered that many universities did not teach courses on the civil rights era. The University of Baltimore offered “The New South and Civil Rights,” and Branch had been a guest lecturer in that course, but many colleges did not cover the movement beyond a cursory week in the second half of the American history survey. Branch recognized the importance of bringing the stories of a half-century ago to a new generation of students. The King Years team did not want simply to follow the established MOOC model by filming a series of his lectures and posting them to a web site. We wanted broad distribution of the civil rights history, but at the same time we valued the traditional practice of the seminar, which recognizes the essential importance of in-class discussion. Even as we planned to reach an audience beyond the walls of UB, the team hoped to achieve the intimacy and in-depth exchange that only a seminar offers. The team’s insistence on these two goals produced the final structure of the course: a face-to-face seminar held in a classroom studio and simultaneously available via the web in a secure online community for auditors.

The course had many moving parts. The honors students came from majors all across the campus, ranging from accounting to communications to English. Branch divided the students into three groups, asking each group to read one of his volumes in civil rights era history: *Parting the Waters, Pillar of Fire,* and *At Canaan’s Edge*. Additionally, all students would read *The King Years: Historic Moments in the Civil Rights Movement*, a new volume in which Branch identifies eighteen essential moments in the civil rights movement and excerpts passages from his larger trilogy. Each week one group of students was responsible for reading and leading discussion about a volume of the trilogy while the other two groups viewed documentaries and read additional primary sources. In class discussions Branch invited students to engage with both the historical content and his choices as an author in distilling and prioritizing that content into a single, slender view contained in the new volume. By asking students to review different materials each week, Branch set up the in-person sessions to be highly interactive.
The non-credit viewers, participating for free, engaged as well. The size of this audit group was originally intended to be fifty but quickly ballooned to two hundred as news of the opportunity spread. Auditors accessed materials via an online community site that ran in parallel to the campus learning management system rather than risk any access delays associated with university systems. The external group had the ability to view the class remotely each week (live or archived), join a live text discussion with a teaching assistant (who sat in the classroom with Branch), and delve into the same course materials as the on-campus students. In addition, because the audit community was password protected, the online participants had access to all the video offerings, available to be streamed for a week. At the end of the semester we asked auditors to provide feedback on the design and materials for future iterations of the course and invited them to attend the final class session and to meet the students and Taylor Branch.

First-night audio levels were the only technical issues in a live, sixteen-week production. Three remotely controlled cameras captured the class, two on Branch and one on the students. Ceiling mounted microphones in the classroom and a single lapel mike were used for audio. Existing lecture-capture technology was used for a live feed and for viewing recorded sessions on-demand. Auditors were not the only ones viewing online. On a few occasions, and with Branch’s permission, students also joined the viewing community. One student technician and one staff member served as the production crew. Separate from some labor costs, the course was relatively inexpensive.

While certainly not massive, The King Years was a pilot project in offering a course both locally and internationally, for-credit and noncredit, live and asynchronously. The course also used streaming video webcasting and learning management systems to enhance its reach and impact. The course was not designed to become a MOOC as we have defined it but was piloted as an alternative, a place for independent scholars and exemplary professors to expand their audience, engage a larger community, experiment with new technologies, showcase the seminar model instead of the lecture, and examine possible distribution options for a course without losing meaningful, time-honored classroom discussion and student-teacher interaction. More specifically, while open to a large online audit community, the course was a credit-based class with twenty-one students on campus. What UB was pursuing was a way to mobilize the scope of a MOOC without abandoning intellectual property and the benefit of credit-bearing course completion.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Because the course gained a life beyond the UB classroom, The King Years presented a rich opportunity for the University of Baltimore to contribute to a broader civic conversation. The seminar originated in the history department, but, from the first day, its interdisciplinary student body and Branch’s story-telling approach set it apart from other courses in the history curriculum. Perhaps
surprisingly, the students who had the most difficulty adjusting were the history majors. History students who had been trained to take a constructivist approach to the past expressed frustration with the narrative delivery. However, the subject matter of the class distinguished it from other historical topics, and Branch’s treatment of it reflected the higher purpose of the course: not simply to inform students about a particular period of history but to invite them and the wider remote audience into a discussion about what it means to be an American.

The struggle of the civil rights workers is different from traditional history-classroom topics such as troops, tariffs, and trials. In witnessing their witness, students encountered a different kind of history, one delivered with an enlarged purpose of civic engagement. Branch’s years of interviews, research, and consideration led him to write his trilogy using a narrative approach, the form he found most appropriate for this body of material. Branch used the stories of these everyday activists to proselytize to a new generation as it faces its own challenges to live up to America’s ideals. He required that all students in the face-to-face class put themselves in an uncomfortable situation during the semester through a “civil rights stretch” exercise and report to their classmates about their emotions during that experience. Christians visited mosques and synagogues; middle-class students visited a homeless encampment. An African-American woman had her hair cut in a salon that served a white clientele. An inner-city student visited an Amish community. Branch extended the challenge to the auditors, and a few of them took part. He did not ask anyone to engage in civil disobedience, but reflections on their activities prompted some of the most powerful moments of class discussion, linking the social issues of today to struggles of fifty years ago.

**HONORS AS A PLACE FOR INNOVATION**

The “civil rights stretch” activity linked to one of the four mission points of the University of Baltimore: “establish a foundation for lifelong learning, personal development and social responsibility.” The combination of stand-out faculty, focus on civic engagement, and instructional innovation made this seminar a natural fit for UB’s honors program. The UB administration recognized that The King Years would find a comfortable berth in the Helen P. Denit Honors Program in large part because the honors administration has aggressively positioned honors as an incubator for experimentation and innovation, offering our faculty, students, and resources to university initiatives. In doing so, we have sought to align our program with the aims of honors educators around the country.

One of the National Collegiate Honors Council’s Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program states:

The program serves as a laboratory within which faculty feel welcome to experiment with new subjects, approaches, and pedagogies. When proven successful, such efforts in curriculum and pedagogical development can serve as prototypes for initiatives that can become institutionalized across the campus.
With our participation in the Taylor Branch course, we saw an opportunity to add a significant new way to advance and articulate the relationship between honors and institutional innovation, a relationship that has historically been described in terms that are somewhat conservative. For example, after summarizing the rise of honors education and its emphasis on differentiated, individualized instruction in an increasingly homogenized environment, Scott Carnicom in a recent essay usefully asks: “[A]re these approaches innovative, or is the honors community advocating and preserving tried and true pedagogical models” (50)? Carnicom further elaborated, “[I]n this current environment one important value of honors is to keep alive the tradition, which now seems like innovation, of small classes and one-on-one instruction.” Framing a response to Carnicom’s essay using Richard Arum and Josipa Roska’s recent blockbuster *Academically Adrift*, Linda Frost argues more specifically that the higher expectations found in honors courses, most often translated in terms of heavier reading and writing requirements, are the most important contributions that honors can make to the larger university environment. Most honors educators would agree with these two respected scholars that the virtues of smaller classes and greater rigor remain important hallmarks of honors education, hallmarks that the rest of higher education would do well to emulate.

Nevertheless, Carnicom’s question remains: do either smaller classes or higher faculty expectations constitute innovation, especially as the twenty-first-century landscape of higher education frames it? When honors educators have discussed the digital revolution, arguably the most disruptive development in higher education in the last half-century, they have often gone in one of two directions. They have either talked about its products (such as MOOCs) as the ultimate realization of the commodified, cookie-cutter, mass-based education that they have witnessed and decried for decades in large lecture sections, or, more positively, they have discussed the ways its tools can be used to extend some honors pedagogies into a virtual format. A recent issue of *JNCHC* dedicated to “Honors in the Digital Age,” for example, included both of these perspectives (Mariz). Rarely, however, have honors educators discussed how honors programs and colleges can embrace digital initiatives that go beyond preserving small-class, individualized experiences, especially if these initiatives seem to threaten traditional honors experiences.

A major reason for the truncated exploration of honors in the digital age might be that much of the rationale for honors as a laboratory for innovation has been focused on faculty and the unleashed power of creative teachers in small classes with talented students, but, given this rationale and how it is articulated in the NCHC Basic Characteristics, a nagging question remains: how transferable or scalable are the insights gleaned from an experience if neither the class size nor the student talent level is replicated in non-honors sections? While we agree that honors can serve as an incubator of pedagogical innovation, we believe that the value an honors classroom offers, what makes it an excellent environment for exploring issues related to teaching and learning, is that the classroom has academically confident students willing to embrace the unpredictability of an
experimental course. The attitude of our honors students was in large part why we argued for honors as a place to try out such a challenging and radical course: our students had the confidence not only to handle the ambiguities going into the course, but also to provide constructive feedback on their experiences.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Among the many lessons our team learned from the experiment of The King Years are several that we will carry into the next iteration of this project:

1. **The seminar format can work in such a course.** Two and a half millennia after Socrates, students are still eager to engage in dialogue with their instructors and with each other even if they are located thousands of miles apart. Our auditors talked with Branch and one another over vast distances, both in real time and on message boards.

2. **Auditors want direct engagement.** The course design intentionally kept the auditors from direct interaction for fear that they would overwhelm the student experience. After auditors requested more interaction, we added additional auditor-only sessions throughout the semester to allow for more direct interaction.

3. **Some auditors have a low level of commitment.** Perhaps because the course was free to auditors, the total number at the end of the course was considerably smaller than it was at the beginning. Another cause might be that the course ran sixteen weeks rather than the typical five weeks of a mini-course.

4. **Courses like The King Years should augment current offerings of the academy, not displace them.** Created as an alternative MOOC, the model complements, not threatens, the traditional higher education experience. Most MOOCs replicate a lecture experience on a much larger scale. Our MOOC aimed to replicate the seminar experience. It also leveraged the expertise and connections of a unique scholar to share valuable information about a specialized topic.

5. **Experiences like The King Years can benefit institutions that don’t have the bandwidth to cover all topics.** Students can get credit at the hosting institution or a local participating institution, allowing networks of universities to have overlapping course offerings without students going to a single physical space.

6. **It is easy to underestimate how much time and effort a production like this will take.** Since we did not allocate new staffing resources for this project, it presented a challenge to existing support staff.

As the debate over online education continues to evolve, we believe that our persistent efforts to capture and replicate the best features of a face-to-face seminar in a virtual environment can play an important role in reminding ourselves
and our outside stakeholders of the virtues of traditional educational traditions that are practiced in honors education.

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The frustration in the classroom was palpable and familiar. We were reading Anne Carson’s translation of Sappho’s poetry, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, in the first semester of our Honors Civilizations sequence. The students balked at the absence of text, the lack of a story line, a missing hero, the paucity of biographical information on Sappho, the seeming waste of paper where only one word appeared on a page, and the whole idea of poetry. Poetry was not their thing, some claimed, when asked if this genre appealed to them. Even to honors educators who have the privilege of teaching bright, curious, and engaged students, this assertion is all too familiar. The challenge is to convince students otherwise: to demonstrate pedagogically that poetry can be their thing and also to show them how much it can shape the way they think about the world and their place in it.

The funny thing is that, just minutes before the students started complaining about reading Sappho’s poetry, most of them had removed ear buds and turned off any number of electronic devices streaming sound, mostly music. They did not yet see a connection between Sappho’s lyrical poetry and the lyrics of the songs they had just been listening to. Making that connection for them opened the door for critical understandings of Sappho’s work, its evocative imagery, and its ability to give voice to the same deep and confounding feelings of love and desire that the students were experiencing.

At the same time, even as students were shown Sappho’s legacy as a lyric poet—for example, the connection between Sappho’s seventh-century BCE “you burn me” (Carson 77) and Peggy Lee’s twentieth-century *Fever* (Moxley)—they retained a general sense of alienation from the text every time I taught it. In 2009, a student in one of my classes offered a solution: perhaps everyone in the class could try creating love poems themselves using a technique known as “newspaper blackout.”

Austin Kleon claims in his introduction to *Newspaper Blackout* (2010) that “petty crime, writer’s block and the Internet” gave rise to this technique of creating poetry. A stack of newspapers brimming with words, a writer’s inability to string together his own, and a permanent marker led Kleon to the discovery of poems waiting to be revealed in the columns of print ranging from headline
stories to sports pages. The technique is like a wood carving where the excess wood is removed to reveal the object hidden inside. A wood carver I knew claimed, “You have to throw away what doesn’t belong to it. And then you have the bird” (Ladenheim 19). Kleon describes the process likewise with newspaper blackout poems:

> What’s exciting about the poems is that by destroying writing you can create new writing. You can take a stranger’s random words and pick and choose from them to express your own personal vision. (xv)

At its most basic, newspaper blackout poetry involves crossing out the words you do not want. Any newspaper article will work as, in fact, will any piece of writing. The point is that you have only the words, letters, punctuation, and spaces in the chosen piece to work with.

With the selected newspaper article, a permanent marker, and a charge to create a poem on love, with no particular kind of love specified, students went to work. The results were a range of poems with a range of quality. More importantly, though, what emerged from the exercise was a pattern in the words chosen by the students: a kind of language of love that was not necessarily Sappho’s language of violets, honey, and apples but nonetheless patterned evocations of the same experiences she struggled to articulate. Students understood that the words they had chosen embodied and reflected the feelings they were trying to capture in their poems, and they consequently became more attentive to Sappho’s use of language in hers. They also became conscious of what the poems looked like on the page and to the spaces between the words and phrases, both the black ones in their poems (see Figure 1) and the blank ones in Sappho’s, seeing them less as absence and more as potential. Rather than continuing to castigate Carson’s efforts to privilege all the words Sappho spoke (as she repeatedly gives a single word or two its own page) as a waste of paper, students began to wonder what might have been there before time and fear ravaged the texts.

To say that the exercise made poets out of all the students would be an exaggeration, but I can claim, based on both their poems and their reflections on the experience, that it provided them a novel way of thinking about Sappho’s work as well as their own. The exercise was challenging, but students also described it as “intriguing”; it allowed them entry into the poet’s struggle to capture the transcendent in the mundane of language. While they still did not know much of Sappho’s biography—was she married? a mother? a lesbian?—they did come to know Sappho better as a poet. One student, herself a poet, reflected both on her experience creating the newspaper blackout poem and on Sappho: “It made me appreciate that my poetry is not decayed or burnt largely out of existence, and it made me wonder whether Sappho would have welcomed new interpretations of her work as a result of fragmenting, or if she would experience the same frustration I do.” Another student commented, “Although writing the blackout
Figure 1. Example of a Newspaper Blackout Poem Created by Elizabeth Wood in November 2012 from an article by Chris Talbott in the Bangor Daily News on October 19, 2009
poetry was difficult, I definitely learned a great deal more about the works we have read by writing them.”

Transcription of the newspaper blackout poem in Figure 1:

fascinating
requires patience
a
self-
inflicted crisis
he
doesn’t seem to know what
makes him
him,
he doesn’t seem to have
any answers.
It takes patience
to see
fabulous in and out
vivid but unexplainable hardly drawn at all
life is beautifully layered
after all
what can ‘pretty’ explain?

The lines “he doesn’t seem to have / any answers, / It takes patience” draw attention to a larger dynamic in the honors classroom in which Sappho has been taught as part of a great books curriculum. Approximately half of the incoming class in any given year is made up of students enrolled in the College of Engineering and College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture, students who are generally accustomed to and comfortable with more concrete ways of approaching knowledge and finding answers. In no way am I saying that any one discipline has a particular claim on poetry or on unpacking its mysteries, but I do see different kinds of expertise and academic comfort zones among the students gathered around the table in honors, students for whom answers are an expected outcome of their work. These kind of experiences in honors can provide them an alternative model for thinking about questions that do not necessarily have an answer, however patient they may be.
Further, what characterizes the experience of all the students in our Honors Civilizations sequence is the pace at which we move through the curriculum. In the first semester alone, we cover several thousand years of Western civilization from ancient Sumer to ancient Greece, with only two or maybe three classes allotted to each representative text. Finding creative ways to make these texts more accessible and immediate can facilitate the students’ engagement with them and enhance what they take away from the readings. In my experience, using newspaper blackout poetry as an entrée to Sappho specifically and poetry (and prose) more generally has substantially enhanced student engagement with the texts.

An honors seminar creates the space for an interdisciplinary group of students to engage in activities such as blackout poetry that challenge them to confront the unknown and give them the skills to do so. Likewise, the honors classroom fosters opportunities for students to think deeply and critically about that experience, about its implications for not only taking texts apart in search of meaning but also for creating texts in search of understanding. The activity creates a shared experience of struggle since all students find the exercise more challenging than they imagined at the outset, and it also gives them a shared experience of revelation that is at the heart of an honors education.

The newspaper blackout poetry activity clearly resonated with my honors students, and several have subsequently used this technique as a way of interpreting other works in our curriculum. Using the same technique employed in the classroom exercise, students have selected newspaper articles, blacked out the words they did not need, and created poems capturing some essence in the texts being studied. One example of their work is a blackout poem Samantha L. Paradis created titled “The Odyssey,” which is based on the article “A feast for all to enjoy” published in the Morning Sentinel:

visitors
hectic scene
good food
sit enjoy it
cup is filled
dinner was successful
the king still alive at sea
the king’s wife attending and staying
until together.

In the same paper on the next day, in an article titled “Voodoo soothes afflicted Haitians,” Samantha discovered this poem that she titled “The Acropolis and ‘From Marathon to Parthenon.’”
spirits
belief
sustenance to both the living and the dead
help cope with the disasters
the ruin and the death have left an impact
celebration in communities
pay respect for our brothers
many altars adorned
decorative

Another student used an article by Erik Brady on runner Usain Bolt featured in *USA Today* on April 6, 2011 to create her blackout poem about Jesus and the New Testament gospels:

“The Disciple”
Reach out for him,
call his name.
He belongs to His master plan.
God gives the world his greatest.
Both hands behind him,
perspiration on his back,
breathes hard for his people.
He is love.
People judge:
“That can’t be real.”
People will doubt a lot of things,
But I know within myself, in my heart,
He is God.

Nathan Lessard took a different approach in his use of blackout poetry. Instead of a newspaper, he used Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis: A Novel* and created poems “to exemplify the thematic commonalities between books.” For example, his poem “1” (Figure 2) explores the theme of unrequited or unattainable love as it is found in Sappho’s poetry as well as in other books in our curriculum such as *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*. Although told from the male perspective, for Lessard the poem easily conjures the experiences and illusions of Calypso and Dido and in the last stanza echoes of the reunion of Penelope and Odysseus.
A woman
look

knew he had to follow.

two doorways
entered one she left by the other

He went back to the
faded decades

black

She wasn’t among

old

A flight of stairs
and a woman

unmistakably the one.

It’s hunger you smell
Transcription of poem in Figure 2:

A woman,
a look,
He knew he had to follow.
Two doorways.
When he entered one,
She left by the other.
He went back to the old faded decades she wasn’t among.
Black.
A hallway,
A flight of stairs,
And a woman,
Unmistakably the one.
It’s hunger you smell.

My role as a teacher in honors is to guide my students through the seemingly distant and sometimes strange terrain of ancient texts we read in our curriculum. When the signposts are lacking, as in the remnants of Sappho’s poetry translated in Carson’s *If Not, Winter*, such guidance becomes more challenging as we try to take a text, especially one so fragmented, and not only make sense of it in its own time but also in ours. Grappling with questions like this, even when reading complete texts, drives our pedagogy as honors educators; it undergirds our efforts to engage students in the process of understanding the impulses and ideas in the work of others and, by extension, their own.

Using the technique of newspaper blackout poetry has proven to be a helpful and illuminating way of engaging the honors students I teach in the words of Sappho and in other texts as well; it has provided a different way of seeing the words on the paper and thus a different way of thinking about what those words communicate and why they matter. Like critical thinking, newspaper blackout poetry is a process of revelation, an uncovering of meaning. Pedagogically, blackout poetry makes students active participants in the construction of knowledge and understanding, one of the core objectives of honors education (Slavin 16); the honors classroom then becomes a model for “taking intellectual risks” (15) that build analytical skills and critical knowledge transferrable to other course work. This exercise will not make all students lovers of Sappho or even of poetry, but it will give them an opportunity for active encounters with texts and for discovery of meanings in an intentional and thoughtful way.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Re-Envisioning the Honors Senior Project: Experience as Research

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HONORS EXPERIENTIAL CAPSTONE PROJECT (KEVIN GUSTAFSON)

One of the NCHC Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program is that it creates opportunities for undergraduate research, opportunities that frequently culminate in a senior thesis or capstone project (Spurrier 200–201). The senior research project typically distinguishes honors students from their non-honors counterparts in a significant way. The emphasis on undergraduate research may also distinguish an honors program or college (“or college” will be understood throughout this essay) within the university, where honors often becomes a de facto center for undergraduate research. Increasing opportunities for undergraduate research thus not only benefits honors students—by giving them a greater range of educational experiences and making them stronger candidates for jobs, fellowships, and graduate or professional school—but also helps honors programs institutionally as they seek to create alliances and obtain resources in both the university and the larger community.

Promoting undergraduate research within a comprehensive university also presents a number of challenges, perhaps the most basic being how to define research. Many honors programs acknowledge this difficulty by making a distinction between a thesis and a creative activity, but research varies much more widely, as is readily apparent to any honors administrator faced with reading projects well outside her field of academic specialization. The difficulty of defining research within honors in many ways reflects challenges within universities and even individual disciplines. Some of these differences are longstanding: between qualitative and quantitative methodologies in the social sciences, for example, or between more or less overtly politically informed scholarship in the humanities. Other differences are more recent, such as the move to promote entrepreneurial research or to make universities more socially accountable by addressing “wicked problems” such as poverty, illiteracy, and climate change (Thorp and Goldstein). A second new challenge involves what might be called (to adapt a term from Alfred North Whitehead) the differing rhythms of education across a comprehensive university. The traditional thesis is no doubt better suited
to some disciplines than to others. It may work well in the liberal arts, where the primary goal of honors education may be to prepare students for similar work in graduate school, but less well in majors in which advanced undergraduates are expected to do a semester- or year-long residency or internship, either for certification or as preparation for the job market. Here the honors capstone is potentially in conflict with a senior requirement that the student be off-campus gaining professional experience while honors is requiring a sustained individual research project with a faculty mentor.

Several writers have discussed the impact of such disciplinary differences in honors enrollment (Jones and Watson; Giazzoni; Noble and Dowling). The present essay describes one attempt to address this problem at a programmatic level by tailoring the honors research project to the needs of curricula that promote or require a significant extramural capstone. This solution was developed within a specific context. The University of Texas at Arlington Honors College is a well-established, distinct unit within a large comprehensive public university that identifies itself as research-intensive and is seeking to be more so. The college follows a model of honors education in which students accrue most of their honors hours through contracted courses in their major rather than in a core sequence of interdisciplinary classes, and the college requires a substantial senior project, which the student is expected to pursue primarily under a faculty mentor in her home department but also in consultation with members of the honors staff.

Although rooted in a programmatic desire to increase participation from historically underrepresented majors, our experiment with more experiential approaches to honors senior research—the “experiential capstone”—quickly took on more philosophical dimensions and can no doubt be adapted to a variety of institutions. The potential for an experiential model is suggested by the section, later in this essay, that demonstrates a student project rooted in a year-long study abroad program. As this project reveals, incorporating experiential learning into undergraduate research requires a great deal of forethought and flexibility from students, faculty mentors, and honors administrators, but it can be a productive means of expanding conceptions of research and of building relationships both across and beyond the campus.

There is already a rich tradition of experiential learning in honors, from the pioneering monograph *Place as Text* (Braid and Long) to subsequent essays on specific courses or programs (Parker; Braid; Smith; Dunbar et al.; Bishop and Sittason; Holman et al.; Powell). The NCHC Basic Characteristics, in fact, explicitly encourage such learning (Spurrier 200), but they treat experiential learning and research separately. Our aim was to integrate experiential learning in a research-based capstone project. The possibility of doing so at our institution was suggested by the success of students in nursing, which has a high rate of participation in honors despite the fact that the program requires extensive clinical work from its undergraduate majors. These students have succeeded in part because the nursing program has a faculty liaison committed to helping honors students develop research projects rooted in their clinical placements. These
projects give nursing students in honors an important added educational experience in ways that promote the academic goals of the major. The challenges have also been instructive. In the most successful projects, the student had a clearly defined research objective and methodology before stepping into the clinical placement, which necessarily became the student's primary focus. The student also had to assess in an ongoing way the particular strengths and weaknesses of the clinical placement as a forum for conducting research. The most frequently noted advantages were the ability to work in depth with subjects and to observe situations over a period of time while the most typically cited disadvantage was the limited N (number of research subjects) for purposes of quantitative analysis: usually the student either had a limited population to study or was dependent on respondents completing a survey while they were seeking or providing medical treatment.

The overall success of these clinically based projects was the impetus to develop three experiential honors capstone options that could be used across campus: a community service learning placement, a paid or unpaid professional internship, or a semester- or year-long study abroad program. We decided from the beginning to allow each unit to decide which options might constitute honors for its students. To this end, honors administrators provided department chairs with brief descriptions of the options, including basic learning outcomes, and where possible gave presentations at department meetings. The goal was threefold: to give departments a greater sense of ownership of their honors students, to convey the desire of honors to be responsive to differences among various undergraduate programs, and to encourage units to approve more experiential options if faculty were willing and able to serve as mentors for such work. Many departments readily agreed to all of the options, others adopted some and not others, and yet others decided that their honors students should be allowed to do only a traditional thesis.

While expanding the range of options, we also wanted to maintain a degree of uniformity among them so that potentially quite different kinds of projects would share certain family resemblances. All projects had to be grounded in a recognized scholarly concern within the student's major field, and all had to lead to a substantial written product that included a formal proposal of the research topic, a literature review, a discussion of the research methodology, and an account of the results and significance of the study. To this extent, the thesis remained the model for all senior project options; the chief variable was the archive. Students pursuing an experiential capstone would have an obligation to determine the nature of that archive and a methodology appropriate to their work off-campus. The pressing—and productive—question became how and why research for this project had to be completed outside the lab or library.

The general aim of all the experiential options was to push students to work within what Kolb calls “a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior” (21). At its best, such learning can help students “develop a sense of agency” and explore intersections of their biography with that of the world (Palmer cited by Braid 41). We
expected more specific goals to differ by individual project and, in a more predictable way, by option. A capstone rooted in study abroad might focus primarily on different approaches to cultural understanding—as indeed was the case of the sample project below. By contrast, a capstone based on an internship might be more concerned with developing professional competence, and one in community service learning might foreground attitudes toward and expressions of civic responsibility, which are often seen as central to such work (Bringle and Hatcher, “Implementing,” 223).

As it turned out, community service learning offered a useful model for all of the experiential options, in part because it has a strong institutional presence on our campus that includes a resource center and faculty training in how to design transformative learning experiences (see also Eyler and Giles; Furco; Stanton, Giles, and Cruz). Community service learning also has a well-developed literature on off-campus placement as a parallel archive and on how a student must rethink traditional methodologies in order to make use of it (Howard). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it has a literature on reflective practices and how to map the cognitive trajectories of such reflection. Like many in the field, Cooper associates effective critical reflection with writing. Drawing on the educational philosophy of Dewey and Kolb’s standard work on experiential learning, he presents written reflection as a way for students to practice detailed observation, to analyze and work out the implications of those observations in light of received theories, and to entertain and evaluate alternative conceptions. A similar emphasis can be found in Eyler et al., who note that effective reflection “need not be a difficult process, but does need to be a purposeful and strategic process” (6). Bringle and Hatcher argue that reflection can help in clarifying values, but only if it is guided and occurs regularly. Similarly, Stanton warns that less structured or goal-oriented reflection can lead to service learning that is “haphazard, accidental, and superficial” (185). Ash and Clayton effectively sum up and develop these attitudes when they define critical reflection as “an evidence-based examination of the sources of and gaps in knowledge and practice, with an intent to improve both” (“Generating,” 27–28)—a process designed to lead students to develop capacities for “generating,” “deepening,” and “documenting” their learning:

> It generates learning (articulating questions, confronting bias, examining causality, contrasting theory with practice, pointing to systemic issues), deepens learning (challenging simplistic conclusions, inviting alternative perspectives, asking “why” iteratively) and documents learning (producing tangible expressions of new understandings for evaluation). (27)

Clayton and Ash are specifically concerned with the dynamics of such reflection and specific mechanisms for facilitating it. Working in the framework of Benjamin Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning Domains, they present critical reflection as a means of progressing through a hierarchy of thinking skills: knowledge,
comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (31–32). They present successful critical reflection as a way for students to develop these skills in response to specific learning goals. In the case of applied learning, that process is broken down into three main stages, which they identify with the acronym DEAL: (detailed) Description, Examination (in light of specified learning goals), and Articulation of Learning (which implies action to be taken and anticipates renewal of the process) (41–42; see also Ash and Clayton, “Articulated”).

Such work on critical reflection has been particularly useful in setting academic expectations for the experiential capstone. The focus on critical reflection as a tool rather than merely a product of learning has gone a long way in reminding the student that the activity is not the goal, which is instead to gain and articulate a clearer understanding of the way their discipline creates knowledge and of the personal and social context for such knowledge. Scholarship on critical reflection also foregrounds the importance of design: the need to develop in advance the specific disciplinary goals of the capstone while realizing that these goals will be shaped and modified in an ongoing process of critical reflection.

Presenting critical reflection as a sustained intellectual and discursive effort also makes the experiential capstone less deceptively seductive. Students who might otherwise associate reflection with merely noting opinions and feelings will realize that they are tasked with examining the cultural basis of their impressions and with exploring how their discipline gives them particular tools for analyzing and evaluating what they observe. They will also realize that critical reflection requires writing within the framework of clear, if flexible, research objectives, perhaps even more than in the case of a traditional thesis. Finally, students will become aware of the generic conventions of reflective writing, which might include the common narratives of cognitive development (e.g. enlightenment, illumination, transformation) or cultural interaction. These narratives might concern emotional and ethical development, as described in the work of Rockquemore and Schaffer, whose analysis of journals kept by community service learning students noted a tendency for these students to move through phases characterized as shock (a lack of identification with those in need), normalization (a growing capacity for identification with those in need as individuals), and finally engagement (a move from mere identification to a desire to understand and remedy the structural causes of poverty).

The process is challenging not only to students but also to faculty mentors and honors staff. Most honors programs rely on the goodwill of faculty to serve as mentors, often with little institutional incentive, and the traditional thesis has the advantage of resembling standard academic work in the discipline. An honors thesis in the humanities and social sciences may look like a shorter version of an MA thesis while one in the sciences may grow out of research conducted in the mentor’s lab. The familiarity of the traditional thesis may in part explain its popularity. An experiential capstone is likely to be messier and less predictable. Howard writes of community service learning that it is a counter-normative pedagogy for those accustomed to teacher- or content-centered learning (Howard; see also Clayton and Ash, “Shifts”), a comment that can no doubt be applied to
experiential learning more generally. As research migrates out of the library or lab, the role of the mentor typically changes from authority figure to facilitator. The faculty member and administrator may also be required to spend more time with the student, articulating and negotiating expectations for the project, and both the student and the mentor have to allow for the possibility that the original disciplinary questions may need to be radically revised or even jettisoned. Yet the process is also potentially quite invigorating as it prompts students, faculty, and honors administrators to focus in a consistent way on the nature, methodologies, and aims of discipline-based undergraduate research.

Zachary Cureton describes below one example of a challenging and invigorating experiential capstone project that drew on his honors double major in Russian and psychology and developed in conjunction with his year-long study abroad program in St. Petersburg. Like many students in modern languages, he signed up for a year abroad primarily to improve his language skills and to immerse himself in a culture that he had known only through his classroom studies of cultural artifacts in print and other media. He was also interested, because of his psychology major, in how people adapt to new environments, a question that led him to intercultural theory. He first used the theory as an interpretive lens for Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*—work that he might have completed without going abroad. In order to make his research experiential, he expanded the project by reflecting on his own process of adaptation, first to Russian society and then back to the U.S.

Cureton’s project cannot be taken as representative of all experiential capstones, but it offers a particularly good example of critical reflection that combined a personal dimension with discipline-specific analysis and evaluation. The success of his project is in part a product of its structure: he was challenged to write about interculturality from three distinct perspectives and in the different discursive modes of theoretical exposition, literary analysis, and personal memoir. The project involved considerable negotiation and numerous potential pitfalls. One danger was that Cureton might rely too heavily on personal narrative or not relate that narrative sufficiently to the research question. Another was that, by juxtaposing his account of adaptation with that of the character in Solzhenitsyn’s novella, he might seem to trivialize Solzhenitsyn’s work or produce offensive commentary on contemporary Russian society. As it turns out, working through this problem was a crucial—and unanticipated—feature of his critical reflection.

**SAMPLE PROJECT**

(ZACHARY CURETON)

I originally planned to study in Russia for a year to work on my language skills and become more cultured. (I now realize how little I understood the meaning of that term.) Then I was offered the chance to build an honors senior research project based on the trip, and I eventually developed a project that would combine intercultural theory, literary study, and personal reflection on
my time living in Russia in order to understand ways in which people do and do not adapt to new surroundings. I had traveled quite a bit and was accustomed to languages I did not understand and seeing behavior that seemed odd, but, before this project, I did not have a way of describing why that behavior felt odd or of accounting for the emotional effects of going to a foreign place or returning home from one—or even how home might seem different once I did return. Part of my goal was to learn some theory and apply it to myself, but I also wanted to bring that theory to a literary work. I eventually chose Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s 1962 novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* for several reasons. The book was on a syllabus for class, and it was short enough—and the Russian basic enough—for me to read and absorb the original. The work also defines a particular point in Soviet-era Russian history. Finally, the novella showed how someone could adapt—even adapt too much—to circumstances that most of us could not imagine enduring.

**INTERCULTURALITY**

I approached the novella through the lens of intercultural theory. The birth of intercultural studies is usually traced to Franz Boas’s interactions with an Inuit community on a trip to the Arctic in 1883 (Shaules). An accomplished man in Germany, Boas found himself helpless without his Inuit companions, and his surprise at cultural differences led him to approach their culture from a fairly neutral point of view, without feelings of superiority. A second milestone was Edward Hall’s publication in 1959 of *The Silent Language*, in which he coined the term “intercultural communication.” He argued that cultural conditioning was something deeply imbedded in each individual’s psychological makeup (Shaules 47–9). Intercultural communication involves awareness of the reactions we have during intercultural interactions because of our own cultural conditioning. Such interactions occur all the time, but some are strong enough to appear novel to a normal mind and cause a spontaneous reaction. Intercultural communication occurs when a person is moved by such interaction to question not only himself but also the part of himself, derived from culture, that he assumed to be correct and absolute (Alred, Byram, and Fleming 57; Sen Gupta 162; Ickes 54).

Intercultural theory thus uses “culture” in a very specific way to denote a set of values that inform a person from earliest childhood so that, as an adult, he comes to embody identifiable features of a particular ethnic, linguistic, or geographical group (Nørgaard 194; Lyons, Kenworthy, and Popan 1269). The intensity of one’s reaction to another culture can often be attributed to the thoroughly subconscious nature of this cultural learning. Constructivist theories of psychology suggest that a person’s behavior is less a matter of genetic programming than a function of how environment activates genetic seeds, but genetic programming and cultural learning probably work together to build an individual. The genetic ground on which to build is selected, certain genetic predispositions are dug out of the individual by society and repressed, and on this genetic base the conscious self is built. Society builds individuals through this process of
enculturation, in which they develop certain tastes and preferences alongside a sense of belonging. Culture runs deep. As Sen Gupta puts it, “Effective enculturation produces ways of being, doing and thinking that are so deeply entrenched that they are automatic and we are simply unaware that our behavior is caused by these unconscious mechanisms” (162; see also Phinney 33).

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

Intercultural theory gave me a general framework for cultural exchanges and adaptation, but, as Sen Gupta suggests, we often are not immediately aware of our own cultural assumptions. So I turned to a work of Russian fiction to gain some distance and trace a case of adaptation in a slower and more deliberate way. One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich offered a useful, if extreme, example of enculturation. The novella was also, in retrospect, a risky choice because, by using intercultural theory to examine both it and my own experience in Russia, I might seem to be trying to compare modern Russia to a Soviet-era Gulag or my experience as a U.S. study abroad student to that of a political prisoner doing hard labor. Intercultural theory ultimately could not help me avoid this problem. The theory was useful for explaining how we come to be who we are, how and why we react to others different from ourselves, and how we do and do not adapt to new circumstances, but it did not readily provide a way to think about radically different kinds of circumstances. In fact, Solzhenitsyn’s novella was ultimately valuable to this study precisely because it suggested the limitations of a purely theoretical approach to cultural adaptation.

One Day recounts the working day of a prisoner in a Gulag, a Russian prison camp for political dissidents. Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, referred to in the story simply as Shukhov or “Shcha-854,” takes the reader through his normal routine, noting a few experiences that made this day “almost a happy one” (181). He is awakened at five in the morning by a hammer-banging reveille. He lies in a little too long, however, and is punished by an angry Tartar, who initially threatens to throw him into the “hole” but instead decides to have him clean the floor in the warders’ post. Shukhov cleans the floors and then shuffles off to sickbay, where he is not admitted, and returns to his hut. His gang eats at the mess and then sets to work at a power station construction site. Shukhov is one of the most skilled of his work crew and so avoids the most gruesome labor. After the workday is over the gang returns to camp for a bowl of soup, and Shukhov begins to do some of the side jobs that keep him alive. By saving a friend a spot in line, he receives part of his parcel. He also buys some tobacco from a Latvian. Shukhov goes to sleep content with his day’s handiwork, which has consisted of hiding in his bunk a piece of bread that he couldn’t eat, hustling part of a cigarette off someone, stealing tarpaper for his work site, and sneaking a piece of metal into the camp. He survives day by day through dubious means that sometimes deprive others of comfort—a quiet fight for survival.

Shukhov’s account testifies to the power of people to adapt to even the harshest conditions. Yet the novel and its reception also witness a quite different aspect of intercultural theory: the difficulty, once transformed, of returning to
one’s original culture in any simple way. The novella was begun in 1957 and first published in the literary journal Novy Mir (New World) in 1962, when Khrushchev’s regime was seeking to repudiate Stalin’s rule. One of the first targets for reform was the Gulag system. Millions of prisoners were released, and many Soviet leaders found Solzhenitsyn’s book a powerful tool for revealing and discrediting Stalin’s brutal system. Publication also prompted those still in prison to flood literary magazines with memoirs of their experiences. Yet as Khrushchev started a program to free long-time prisoners, many of them could no longer survive in the highly ordered Soviet culture of the time. The program was canceled. The implication, from the standpoint of intercultural theory, is that one can adapt in such a severe way as to lose one’s previous self. Such adaptation typically occurs when one is confronted with a new cultural imperative. In this case, the prisoners had to surrender all of themselves to the culture of the Gulag in order to survive. Yet that adaptation was so extreme as to be difficult or even impossible in many cases to reverse. As Dobson writes, whereas the inmates had been imprisoned within the Gulag by dogs, guns, and men, outside of it they were imprisoned by the culture that they had so thoroughly absorbed (586). Solzhenitsyn may have realized the problem. Although One Day was published well into the Krushchev thaw, the novella does not end with, or even hint at, Shukhov’s release—perhaps because the novella is the account of one day back in the Stalinist era and also possibly because Solzhenitsyn may have recognized that physical liberation would be only be a starting point and that those who had by necessity adapted to the culture of the Gulag would in some ways always remain imprisoned. The matter-of-fact narration of prison life in One Day underscores the power of adaptation as for Shukhov the daily battle for survival has become normal. Prison culture runs deep.

One Day also seems to preclude the possibility that one can become effectively bicultural, or able to move from one culture to another and have a double vision of both. This problem was quite likely outside the aim of the novella, which was written primarily to make the rest of Russia (and the world) aware of the inhuman treatment of millions of political prisoners in forced labor camps and to give witness to the resilience of Shukhov and others in surviving in such circumstances. Yet Solzhenitsyn was himself bicultural: he spent time in the Gulag, was eventually released, and lived for decades in exile in the U.S. before returning late in life to Russia. Adaptation, in his case, was only one part of a larger, tri-partite narrative that began with a more or less unconscious existence in one culture, interaction with an alien culture, and then a more conscious awareness of the conventional nature of his own assumptions.

The third part of my project was to trace this trajectory by applying intercultural theory to my own intercultural experience as a U.S. student in contemporary Russia. Once again, my purpose was not to compare myself to Shukhov, or Solzhenitsyn, and I recognize the dangers of a theory that would allow me to do so, yet, as I studied intercultural theory, I became increasingly aware of the deeply emotional ways I was responding to the journey from Texas to Russia and then back again to Texas.
I Woke Up

Intercultural theory emphasizes the little things that make us who we are. Finding out what my daily routine in Russia would be and how it would vary from my routine in the U.S. forced me to wake up and accept my new life. Initially I was not sure how to act or what my routine was supposed to be. How would I dress, what I would eat, and how would I adjust to the weather? I awoke to hoarfrost at times. My host family and I lived in a seventeen-story apartment complex that curled like a lazy U. Because my flat was in the cup of the U, it was sheltered from the worst of the winds, yet during winter and spring I would invariably put on two coats, two shirts, a fur hat, a scarf, a pair of gloves, two pairs of socks, thermal underpants, jeans, and tall boots before I walked to school in the morning. The earflaps of my hat were always tied behind my neck, half up and half down, so that I looked like some warrior riding into battle.

Some intercultural awakening is dramatic, as when one witnesses, or is the object of, an act of violence or discrimination. Mine was more gradual. On my daily commute, I did not have a sense that others singled me out as a foreigner. I was instead aware of how people barely acknowledged me (or others) on the metro, how they shoved and pushed on the tramway, and how they threatened me if I spilled my tea. These were new forms of communication to me, and I might have dismissed one or two such incidents if I had been simply a tourist, but, because I was there for months and because commuting became part of my daily routine, I came to see the brusque functionalism of these interactions as part of the culture, as the means by which Russians—and perhaps others who rely on high-volume forms of public transportation—protect their personal space. I also recognized early on that this cultural difference was deeply ingrained in Russian commuters and that I was the one who was going to have to change. This realization was a moment of intercultural awakening. I had to wait for my ticket home, push my way with the rest of the crowd, keep my head down, and guard my space.

I Walked

In the U.S. I drove, often too quickly, between school and work and home. Like so many others in my culture, I was used to traveling in my own pod and, except during traffic jams, on my own schedule. We call it a freeway for a reason. In Russia I learned to walk, and to walk deliberately, as part of a large group. I came to associate walking with resistance to the elements—the cold air, the snow crunching under my feet—and a quiet determination to persist. My walking self was perhaps the most mundane expression of the new Russian identity I was forming, a solitary figure even when surrounded by other people. In my daily commute to school, there was one line-switch that always had the same feeling about it: Dostoevskaya, at the junction between the orange line where my home was and the red line that led to my school. Only two escalators took
the crowds from the first to the second level, where we could walk a little further and board a train along the red line. Upon exiting the metro car, everyone headed toward the escalators. There was never a break in the line, and each of us huddles with the person in front and behind in a procession that combined unity and anonymity. Most of all, however, walking gave me time to slow down and simply think. I began to see why people use the phrase “Russian soul” to describe both the dark view of life and the strength to face darkness. I began to see such a soul in myself.

I Went Home

By the end of the second semester it was time to leave Russia and return to the U.S. Intercultural theory posits and even praises the idea of the bicultural individual, mostly based on the assumption that people with two cultural selves can more readily accept, and peaceably co-exist with, those different from them. I found the transition frustrating, at least at first. By the time I left Russia I was in some sense bicultural, and I had been there long enough to develop a Russian personality. My Russian family, friends, and colleagues required me to be only Russian, and when I returned to the U.S. it was difficult to be American again. Research on interculturality was not very helpful at this point. It explained how I developed my Russian self but offered little other than “culture shock” to describe what coming home would be like.

The difficulty of my return inspired me to do further research into studies of assimilation and repatriation—of how an individual can change back or at least reach a point of balance and a new conception of home. Living in another culture was a life-changing experience, but not in any simple way. For me at least, it was both freeing and terrifying because the strangeness of another culture challenged me to confront the strangeness of my own. It was also a chance to shape a new version of myself through adaptation as the Russian cultural and even physical environment drew on or accentuated aspects of my character that were largely dormant in my home culture. Not all of these aspects were positive. In Russia I was quieter and less eager to please; even tougher for me was that Russia asked me to stand up and walk in ways that I had not had to in suburban Texas.

As I gradually adjusted to life back in the U.S., I changed yet again—and again not in a completely positive way. One of the greatest challenges in adjusting to life back home was how to interact with my family and friends. Even more frustrating than trying to navigate between my new Russian and old American identities was my inability to explain the process of doing so. I found that the only people who could understand were others who had experienced deep intercultural change. Others, even those close to me, acknowledged how much I had changed but seemed threatened by it, even to the point of hostility, perhaps because the malleability of my identity made them feel less certain about the fixity of their own.

The emotional dimensions of study abroad were the most important and also most difficult to track and translate in theoretical terms. Put it another way,
part of the point of intercultural theory—and perhaps the limitation of it as a theory—is that experiences can be compared but not completely shared. This was one of the lessons of Solzhenitsyn’s novella: I could read One Day and feel sympathy and outrage, but I ultimately could not fully relate to Shukhov’s struggle because I had never lived in a prison camp. I believe that Solzhenitsyn described an emotionally detached prisoner in part to suggest the limited ability of those outside the Gulag system to empathize.

**CONCLUSION**
(KEVIN GUSTAFSON)

The project described above met many of the goals we had set out for an experiential capstone: it defined a disciplinary problem, presented a survey of scholarship on the topic, and then explored the problem in methodologically innovative ways. The project also revealed several difficulties, most of which turned on the role of personal narrative. One problem was specific to the project: the attempt to apply intercultural theory first to Solzhenitsyn’s classic exposé of life in a Stalin-era Gulag and then to the student’s own experience as a U.S. undergraduate in contemporary Russia. Cureton was asked at every stage to think about the implications of such juxtaposition, and the lesson was ethical as well as methodological. The student was also challenged by how to use memoir within an academic context. He was encouraged to keep, and did keep, a detailed journal of his time in St. Petersburg. Such writing came very easily to him, as it does to many students, and he embraced the freedom to be creative in this way. It took time and practice for him to develop the habit of going back to the theory to enrich his understanding and account of his experience. It was no doubt fortunate that he had an entire year in Russia, giving him time to rethink the project and look more deeply into his reactions while he was still there. Students who do not have this luxury will be more pressed to make sure that their journals or blogs are submitted regularly and that such writing includes not only detailed description but also analysis of the experience and its significance to disciplinary research questions or problems. In this way the journal can, in the words of Ash and Clayton (“Generating”), be a tool for generating, deepening, and documenting learning.

Experiential capstones are by nature individualistic, even idiosyncratic, and for this reason they are not for every student. They may seem deceptively easy because of the opportunity for personal reflection, but, in fact, they are probably most likely to succeed for students who are self-motivated, highly organized, and patient. Experiential capstones are also likely to be more labor-intensive for faculty mentors and honors administrators, particularly at the front end, yet there are ways to avoid reinventing the wheel with each project, one of which is to put greater emphasis on active learning in the honors curriculum. Honors administrators can encourage students to do contracts in courses that have an active learning component, and the honors program can offer workshops or a credit-bearing course on experiential learning. Such a course might combine
foundational readings in the philosophical and institutional bases for experiential education, recent work on experiential pedagogy in practice, published case studies of experiential research, and practice in designing a discipline-based project. Our experience is that students are more likely to understand and embrace sophisticated modes of critical reflection if they have a sound working definition of experiential learning as well as a sense of the philosophy underlying it.

For all its challenges, the development of experiential capstones has a number of potential benefits. Experiential research is a good way for the college to help students develop their résumés, engage in outreach, and build partnerships in the local community. Experiential options are also a good way for honors administrators to engage in academic reflection of their own. The work of designing the experiential options has already had a positive programmatic effect at UT Arlington, prompting us to revisit our more traditional capstones. The standard thesis option stands to benefit from the option of experiential capstones since, although the thesis can be an excellent means of developing a number of skills, its status as traditional or venerable can suggest a focus on the mastery of technique, perhaps to the exclusion of other kinds of critical reflection.

The benefits of experiential capstones have been most obvious in the creative activity option that had traditionally been reserved for students in fine arts: the previous tendency had been to see this option as simply an alternative to research, but our work with experiential options has helped us underscore more fully the ways in which creative activities can be a form of research. For example, in one recent creative project—an original screenplay—the student was required to outline her research into the formal and technical dimensions of the screenplay genre, to describe and evaluate the various archives (personal and published) used to develop the content of her screenplay, and then to write critically about that work in light of generic expectations and potential marketability.

As Dewey would remind us, a thesis is an educational experience, and thus in his view it is important for us to understand the purpose of that experience and how best to shape it. The experiential capstones tend to foreground the larger social, ethical, and even personal dimensions of doing research. As such, they offer not just interesting alternatives to the traditional honors thesis but an opportunity to enrich it.

REFERENCES


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Sea Lions and Honors Students: More in Common than You May Think

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The ability to transfer knowledge across contexts, as from course to course or from school to the "real-world," is important to both students and educators. Without this transfer, students cannot apply information learned in the classroom. Even though we all know the importance of transfer of knowledge, we can do more to ensure that it takes place. While transfer of information between contexts is a requirement in animal training, we do not always hold ourselves and our students to this same standard. We tend to assume that students, especially honors students, come into our classroom with the metacognitive skills that are critical for transfer, but research does not support this assumption. We must teach our students the skills of metacognition and self-regulation to ensure that they receive a well-rounded education, not only learning the course material but also learning how to learn.

Although historical arguments have posited only a modest intellectual connection between "man and beast" (Kant; Müller), more recently the field of comparative cognition has explored the similarities and differences among the various species of our planet ranging from the simple sea slug to the highly complex human. Researchers within the field have continually demonstrated a common thread binding animal species and linking together both our biological and psychological components. Despite many differences in the cognitive abilities among animal species, Darwin put it best when he stated, "There can be no doubt that the difference between the mind of the lowest man and that of the highest animal is immense. Nevertheless the difference, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind" (445).

That being said, one can easily find a link between the general principles of learning in relation to both nonhuman and human animals. What may be a more difficult but equally important parallel is how these learning principles are applied to the training of animals and the teaching of honors students. I am not suggesting that honors students should simply be trained; however, in comparison to the process by which an animal such as a sea lion is trained for aquarium and/or behavioral research purposes, we do not always hold ourselves, an arguably more complex and intelligent species, to the same quality of learning. When one is teaching a sea lion a new behavior, such as vocalizing on
cue, the animal first works with one specific trainer in one specific area of the habitat in order to keep the environmental context consistent. This procedure has been shown to facilitate learning of novel behaviors (Pryor; Ramirez). Once the sea lions consistently perform this behavior correctly, the training does not stop whereas for many students the training does stop—after an experience in the same classroom with the same professor—on the day of the final exam. We teach our students information in the context of a course and a classroom, and then we typically ask them to demonstrate their grasp of that knowledge in exactly the same context.

For the sea lion, knowing to perform a specific behavior in a specific location with a specific person is not very useful. The same can be said for our students. Being able to discuss the material that a professor teaches in the context of the classroom is an important accomplishment, one that should not be discounted, but the teaching and learning process should not be considered complete at this stage; it is often just the beginning. The sea lion is not considered to have completed learning a behavior until it can be performed in any context, e.g., required by any trainer, in any location, with a verbal or gestural cue, alone or with other animals. Then, even when the behavior has been solidly established, the trainer understands that the animal must continue to work on the skill, at least occasionally, in order to maintain its ability to perform at a high level. If sea lions are held to this high standard of learning, we should consider ways of consistently using the same rigor in an academic setting with our students.

Knowledge gained, whether through formal academic study or general life experience, is not useful if one cannot apply it across various contexts. “Very often, in instructional settings (and in everyday life) we do not get the transfer we want. Learners acquire skills and knowledge in one situation and fail to make connections to other situations where those skills and knowledge would prove valuable” (Perkins & Salomon 1). In academia, we typically teach students in a specific classroom context, and we then test them on the retention of that knowledge in a similar fashion to that in which they were originally taught. In some ways this consistency is good as it can increase a student’s comfort level during testing and can increase performance on exams. In fact, research has shown that simply changing the room that an individual studies in from that in which they are tested decreases test scores (Aslan, Samenieh, Staudigl, & Bäuml; Bilodeau, & Schlosberg; Greenspoon & Ranyard). This fact implies problems in the students’ knowledge base and ability to use information outside the classroom.

Research on memory has repeatedly provided support for context-dependent, or state-dependent, memory in which one has significantly higher recall for information when tested under the same environmental circumstances in which the information was acquired (Kelemen, & Creeley; Lang, Craske, Brown, & Ghaneian; Peters, & McGee; Smith, “Environmental”). This kind of memory research has been a growing field since Carr, in 1925, studied context cues in mice running a maze. How we remember is influenced not only by the focus of attention on a specific topic but also by the details of the environment in which we are learning, e.g., room color, room temperature, time of day, and
by the emotional or physiological state of the individual (Smith, “Mood”). The higher the match between information in a retrieval cue and information stored in the memory that was there during encoding, the higher the chance of successful recall (Aslan et al.; Godden & Baddeley; Greenspoon & Ranyard; Isarida & Isarida).

Based on these types of investigations, students are often instructed to study in the same context in which they will be tested, especially for high-stakes exams such as the SAT and GRE. Studying in one’s pajamas on a bed with papers spread all around and music playing in the background is not the context in which the exam will take place, and the above research has demonstrated that simply matching the study context to the testing context will statistically improve test scores for many students. While maintaining a similar context is both important and helpful in test-taking, we should be going further to ensure that the knowledge we have and teach is strong enough to endure a context change. As Smith and Vela suggest, “If environmental changes lead to poorer test scores, it is not only of concern to the student, but it should also worry educators, who would likely prefer classroom learning to be independent of learning or training environments” (204).

A common experience of students and professors alike is that a student learns information, and perhaps excels, in one course but at the next level is unable to make connections between the material taught in the first and second courses. We should be challenging ourselves and our students to use information across situations and in a variety of ways. Being able to transfer knowledge from class to class throughout one’s academic career is critical since courses typically build upon each other. Ultimately students need to make a larger contextual change and transfer knowledge completely out of the academic environment to their professional lives. If students have not been successful within the course-to-course transfer, we should not be surprised to see them struggle to apply this academic knowledge beyond their degree. Some evidence indicates that GPA is not strongly correlated with professional success (Scager et al.). Researchers are currently investigating the best predictors of success, but perhaps transfer of knowledge from the classroom to the boardroom may be what is lacking for those students who excel academically but falter in the workforce. Understanding the information in a meaningful way should allow students to break free of context and succeed under a variety of circumstances.

Luckily, just as psychological research has shown us the important relationship between study environments (memory encoding) and testing environments (memory retrieval), it can also show us how to reduce environmental effects and improve transfer of knowledge across contexts. Metacognition (the awareness of one’s own thought process) and self-regulation (strategic learning guided by metacognition) have been correlated with increased test scores and better overall understanding of learned material across contexts (Schunk & Zimmerman; Zimmerman, “Investigating”). Even though humans naturally possess metacognition, we often do not fully understand how to use it to self-regulate during learning (de Bruin & van Gog). As educators, we owe it to our students to ensure
Metacognitive abilities enable successful transfer of knowledge from one context to another, and a student who is struggling academically may need help in improving these skills. Since honors students by definition are not supposed to be struggling academically, their instructors may erroneously assume that these skills are already in place when students enter the classroom. Researchers have found that students who succeed in high school honors programs can often struggle in college (Barber) and that early grades are not a strong predictor of long-term academic success (Scager et al.). One reason might be that college professors take these students’ self-regulatory skills for granted rather than teaching them explicitly in college-level honors courses. Honors students may also provide special challenges to professors in teaching the skills necessary for metacognition: like all students, they have many academic and non-academic distractions, but they also may resist being instructed about how to learn since their study habits and skills have worked well thus far. The change from high school to college-level course material and assignments, however, often requires a change in study habits and cognitive skills.

Research indicates that one of the best methods for educating students about how to best educate themselves is formal instruction on the three main phases of metacognition and self-regulation. The first phase, planning, has been shown to promote learning (Pintrick; Scheid). Students must use forethought to determine, for instance, how much time to spend on a given task, which learning strategies to use, and what material to focus on the most. Students need to spend time thinking about their current knowledge base and their goals for expanding on it (what they want to learn). In the second phase, monitoring, learners must be aware of their attention/focus as well as the effectiveness of strategies they are actively employing (Shunck & Swartz; Zimmerman, “Self-Efficacy”). For example, thinking about what to cook for dinner while reading your biology textbook is not going to help the learning process, but being aware of not focusing on the task does help. This awareness allows students to refocus and take in information properly. Also, students need to monitor the effectiveness of their learning techniques, such as using flash cards; otherwise, they will not be aware of potential strategic problems and may waste their time. Awareness that a strategy is not working leads to adopting more effective strategies (Shunck & Swartz; Zimmerman, “Self-Efficacy”). Evaluation is the third phase and encompasses assessment of learning strategies and making judgments about the outcomes of the thinking and learning process (Shunck & Swartz; Zimmerman, “Self-Efficacy”). This third phase cycles back to the first, planning, as it informs decisions about which techniques to use for similar tasks in the future.

While studies have shown the effectiveness of self-regulation (for a review, see Zumbrunn, Tadlock, & Roberts), the application of this research has not generally crossed into the curriculum, especially at the college level, perhaps
because we assume that students, especially in an honors program, have already mastered this skill. Professors should consider explicitly teaching self-regulation skills to students at all levels, thus enabling them to transfer their knowledge from one context to another and use it appropriately throughout their lives, both in and out of the classroom. Consider a student trying to learn the material in a chapter of a biology textbook: the chapter is most likely already set up to aid students in self-regulatory learning by including bold-typed vocabulary words, bold-typed headings, and end-of-chapter review questions, but the student must know how to use these aids effectively. Students can benefit by being taught the three phases of self-regulation and how to apply them. First, planning will allow the student to think about how much time to dedicate to a particular learning task and to prioritize the topics to be covered during the study period. Also, prior to reading a chapter, the student should explicitly consider such questions as “What do I already know about this topic?” and “What do I want to know about this topic?” The student should also look over the chapter headings and vocabulary words prior to reading each section. The next phase, monitoring, should be carried out while the study session is in progress. The student should mentally check his or her understanding of the material and decide whether to read it again or seek another way to clarify the topic. Finally, the student needs to evaluate what he or she has learned after reading the chapter by, for instance, completing review questions.

A professor’s use of direct instruction and modeling of these metacognitive skills (Boekaerts & Corno; Levy) as well as instructor-guided, independent practice (Lee, McInerney, Liem, & Ortiga; Schunk & Zimmerman) has proven useful within the classroom (see Zumbrunn et al.). Four specific techniques have proven especially effective in aiding students in self-monitoring.

One technique that is both helpful and simple is for students to summarize text material (Thiede & Anderson, 2003). As the first part of this process, students should rate their confidence in their understanding after reading the material. After that level is sufficiently high, students should attempt to summarize what was read without looking at the text. If they correctly summarize the information, they can be confident in their knowledge level.

Research has shown that a second technique—general review of key terms—is helpful, especially if students are aware of their confidence level and accuracy while studying (Dunlosky & Rawson). For example, students should be instructed not only to look over the keywords of a chapter or lecture material but to define the terms on their own, without looking at the book or notes, until they are confident in the correct answer. This process is time-consuming but can lead to higher vocabulary attainment and better overall retention of information, which should be a goal for us all.

A third technique, creation of concept maps, has repeatedly proven to be a highly effective self-monitoring strategy (Jo; Redford, Thiede, Wiley, & Griffin). Creating a concept map requires students to diagram the interconnections between information learned and their already existing knowledge base.
Drawing a diagram of information to be learned requires organization of the material and helps in visualization of what needs further study in order to completely understand it.

The final technique is a quick but effective activity that a teacher can use in the classroom. The instructor should follow four steps:

1. discuss the importance of paying attention to key terms during a lecture;
2. at the end of class, ask the students to write down three main points they felt were conveyed in the lecture;
3. state the three main points that the instructor hoped the students would take away from that class; and
4. ask students to compare their points to the instructor's and check for accuracy.

Researchers have shown that students improved from 48% to 75% accuracy after only three classes that included this exercise (Lovett).

Given the research on learning strategies, the assumption that college students, and in particular honors students, understand and therefore employ self-regulation may be a fatal flaw on the part of educators. We need to ensure that we explicitly instruct our students and teach them not only our course material but also to learn how to learn. Thinking back to the humble sea lion that has learned to produce its new behavior in a variety of contexts, we need to ensure that we hold ourselves and our students to these same standards. While our first goal is to have our students grasp the basic material of a course, our second goal should be to provide them with the tools to use this knowledge beyond our classroom.

REFERENCES


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Great Books Courses in Honors
There and Back Again: Learning From the History of a Freshman Seminar Sequence

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Teaching does not happen in a vacuum just as good courses do not fall from the sky in whole cloth. How and what we teach is woven from any number of past or present influences that include, for instance, tradition, conversation with colleagues, student requests, job market demands, curriculum committees, popular culture, academic advances in a field, or how an academic unit has developed over time. Many honors programs or colleges, however, teach a course sequence that is anchored in the classics and has core texts that one might think are somewhat immune to change. While all such course sequences had a beginning and a developmental trajectory, I would wager that often their genesis is forgotten even if the success of the honors program or college rests on them. Remembering the roots, however, serves as a touchstone when pedagogical or developmental crossroads arise. Knowing why a course was originated and how it developed can facilitate decision-making, clarify the program’s mission, and allow experimentation without losing the program’s focus. Historical consideration of the genesis and development of a course sequence teaches us how to gain institutional support, develop a foundation, achieve collaboration inside and outside the program, and enhance faculty development.

The evolution of The Human Event, a course sequence at Barrett, The Honors College at Arizona State University provides a case study of using a program’s history to understand its present and improve its future. While Barrett is situated at a public university with 76,000 students and is now a large college in itself with 4,803 honors students, it grew out of a much smaller program. From the beginning, The Human Event sequence has been a part of it and has contributed to its health and growth. Thus, the experience and insights drawn from considering its history might be of interest to honors programs and colleges of any size and at any institution as an example of what can be gained from studying the origin and development of signature classes.
INCEPTION, INITIAL ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORKS, AND INITIAL OBJECTIVES

The idea for The Human Event originated in the late 1970s when physicist Richard Jacob saw Jacob Bronowski’s BBC series on PBS titled The Ascent of Man, an interesting and entertaining look at the development of Western culture. Richard Jacob, then Director of the Honors Program in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at ASU, was in a position to act on his perception that ASU needed to offer a similar series to its honors students. Although The Ascent of Man inspired the conversation and the title of the seminar sequence, Jacob desired something different from a Western Civilization course and certainly not a lecture course. He approached the chair of philosophy, Ted Humphrey, to help develop a two-semester freshman seminar to anchor his honors program’s core curriculum. Humphrey had experience in teaching a replica of the University of Chicago’s Great Books of the Western World year-long course as well as experience implementing a required six-quarter, two-year sequence modeled after Columbia University’s great ideas course. When I arrived at Barrett, the terms “Chicago model” and “Columbia model” were occasionally bandied about, so I was curious about the difference, which I learned was rooted in the ways that courses are organized and the consequent impact on contexts and learning objectives.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO MODEL

At the start of Great Books of the Western World, as compiled by philosopher Mortimer Adler and then-president of the University of Chicago Robert Hutchins, is a two-volume Syntopicon that is essentially a synthesis of topics, listing the concepts and the occurrences of each concept in the numerically ordered books to come. Thus, the University of Chicago’s model, at least in the 1970s, was topic-based with a top-down “here’s what we are going to teach you” approach. Humphrey reports that those who adopted the University of Chicago model followed one of two routes: (1) they took the students through the works serially, starting with the Greeks and studying the rest of Western culture as an increasingly detailed critique and development of the Greek foundation, or (2) they developed a more topical emphasis focusing on, say justice, starting with Plato and then Aristotle and other writers on justice, in or out of sequence. The second approach puts the Syntopicon to more use by taking any one of the big ideas and skipping around in the numbered books to examine it, not caring so much about the sequence of ideas as about the topic under discussion.

THE COLUMBIA MODEL

Columbia University professor Paul Oskar Kristeller, a scholar of Renaissance Humanism, was a student of renowned philologist and classicist Werner Jaeger, who was a professor of Greek and Ancient Philosophy at the University of Chicago. Kristeller and his colleague John Herman Randall, Jr., a historian
of philosophy and signer of the “Humanist Manifesto,” thought differently from either Jaeger or Hutchins. Resonating more with the sequential approach, Kristeller and Randall strove to emphasize the strict historical development of ideas to the diminishment of the analytical and conceptual content. They stressed contextual influences and currents of thought at a given time and highlighted progress in the historical development of ideas. From this perspective, students had to understand the material conditions in which people lived and under which ideas arose and developed. The assumption was that understanding the great ideas depends entirely on understanding the material circumstances of their development and promulgation. Humphrey reports that, in thinking and teaching this way, Kristeller and Randall anticipated some of the more profound developments in historiography at the time.

INITIAL MODEL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE HUMAN EVENT

With those two models in mind, we return to the development of The Human Event. Ted Humphrey conceived of this freshman honors sequence as a historically oriented course of ideas with a concern for context rather than as a topics-focused course. He privileged the history of ideas in the structure, focus, and methodology of the course because he was, at least at the start, far more influenced by the Columbia model than the Chicago model. Despite his extensive experience, he chose to include others who would ultimately be the first teachers of the course, and inevitably the disciplines of the earliest teachers influenced the content and organization. One of the first teachers, from 1977 to 1998, was a specialist in modern European history. Humphrey also recruited an expert in the history and philosophy of science to help develop and teach the sequence for a few years, starting in 1978, with an eye to integrating the sciences and the humanities. Humphrey himself did occasionally teach the sequence after becoming Director of the CLAS Honors Program in 1983, but he largely midwifed the course from a distance until then. Competitive searches for core faculty specifically to teach The Human Event began after the University Honors College was officially formed in 1988 with Humphrey as the founding dean. At that time all other college honors programs at ASU were dropped or absorbed—most were fallow anyway—into the University Honors College. Clearly the move from a program to a college allowed for additional institutional support that rippled through to The Human Event and its faculty.

INITIAL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Remembering and documenting why a course was created is helpful in explaining its existence and benefits to stakeholders like faculty, administrators, parents, and students. As Humphrey conceived of the honors college and its core curriculum, he had several educational and developmental objectives in mind. First, he saw The Human Event sequence as an introduction to an honors education, i.e., to becoming an educated person who seeks to encounter, absorb,
and work with ideas. He intended for the course to establish an attitude and a community, providing an intellectual foundation for life, citizenship, and career, in that order. Second, he wanted the students to have a shared vocabulary and set of references as both would allow students to have a sense of connection with the past and one another, the latter helping to anchor the honors residential experience. To facilitate this community among students pursuing diverse majors, he secured multiple certifications for general studies requirements for each semester of the course. Third, he insisted on offering the course in seminar style so the faculty could assess student development in media res. Finally, limits on the size of class sections allowed faculty to monitor student affect and attendance with an eye to intervention should it seem warranted.

**THE HUMAN EVENT TODAY**

Given the thoughtful work of the early founders, many features of The Human Event remain the same, yet it continues to develop with each generation of faculty and with the expansion of the college. The Human Event is still a two-semester honors freshman seminar that uses primary texts to explore great ideas from the earliest recorded history until approximately 1600 C.E. in the first semester and from about 1600 to modern texts in the second semester. The sequence comprises six of the thirty-six honors credits that students are required to take. The remaining thirty credits come from a combination of honors-students-only sections, “honors enrichment contracts” added to non-honors courses, and thesis credits. Slightly different versions of The Human Event course description have been used, but what the faculty most recently agreed on is:

The Human Event is an intensive, interdisciplinary seminar focusing on key social and intellectual currents in the development of humanity in its diversity. Students examine human thought and imagination from various perspectives including philosophy, history, literature, religion, science, and art. Coursework emphasizes critical thinking, discussion, and argumentative writing.

**GREAT BOOKS OR GREAT IDEAS?**

While the sequence certainly includes many great books and demonstrates respect for the Western canon, The Human Event focuses more on great ideas than on great books. As intended from the start, it is more than a Western Civilization course, and many of the faculty spend a great deal of time sorting through historical texts that allow for the inclusion of under-represented voices in various categories that include gender, culture, social class, or perspective. Faculty also spend time considering translations. One could argue that a problem, at this juncture at least, with the Great Books approach—assuming one uses the *Great Books of the Western World* translations—is that it is largely assembled from public domain translations in order to make a collection affordable to the public. While many of these translations remain valuable and viable, they often
derive from a nineteenth-century British tradition of translation with the incumbent British-isms and partially antiquated English vocabulary. These translations are typically not the best for a contemporary college audience to whom post-1960 translations would be more accessible. Barrett faculty members enjoy many friendly arguments about the best translation of a particular text, and, fortunately, we are not forced to agree.

In fact, we value unity without uniformity. We do not use a common syllabus, but we do share course objectives that include close reading, critical thinking, emphasis on participatory class discussion, and argumentative writing. Some version of these objectives is found on all syllabi for The Human Event:

- Improve the student’s ability to reason critically and communicate clearly.
- Cultivate the student’s ability to engage in intellectual discourse through reading, writing, and discussion.
- Broaden the student’s historical and cultural awareness and understanding.
- Deepen awareness of the diversity of human societies and cultures.
- Instill intellectual breadth and academic discipline in preparation for more advanced study.
- Improve the student’s skill in expressing ideas, both orally and in writing, emphasizing use of textual evidence.

The fall-semester course extends from ancient times to approximately the Renaissance, and faculty might, for instance, include texts like *Gilgamesh, Code of Hammurabi, Theogeny, The Iliad, The Odyssey, The Republic, the Apology of Socrates, Antigone, Tao Te Ching, The Analects, The Bhagavad-Gita, The Qur’an, Hebrew Bible, Popol Vuh, The Divine Comedy, Beowulf, Don Quixote, The Prince*, and material from authors like Sappho, Lucretius, Augustine, Aquinas, Chaucer, Christine de Pizan, Montaigne, Shakespeare, and Milton. Many of us struggle with depth (fewer texts) versus breadth (more texts), but we appreciate that we get to engage in that struggle and experiment. Faculty members choose what to assign in keeping with general guidelines, often with overlap between subsets of us but rarely between all of us. A beauty of the class is that it can work well with many different configurations of core texts, and faculty members continually grow and explore as they substitute different texts. The faculty members learn from each other about new texts, and, despite the absence of a fixed reading list, the students have a sense of a shared vocabulary. Many report being inspired to read new texts that their peers recommend.

**SIZE AND FORMAT**

The courses were capped at nineteen until recently when the cap was increased to twenty-one, partly to accommodate growth until more faculty members could be hired and partly for curricular reasons. Keeping the course small helps maintain the seminar/discussion style. When I joined Barrett, I was
told that the goal is for faculty members to speak less than 30% of class time and to require student engagement with the texts in evidence-based discussion that improves their critical analysis, on-their-feet thinking, and public discourse skills. In league with the original vision, we care about improving the students’ habits of mind and consequently enhancing the success and quality of their lives through modeling and practicing these habits in the context of intellectual traditions that span a wide variety of disciplines, eras, and cultures. We consider our methods Socratic but also open to differences in style. For example, some faculty aim to control the discussion of texts by asking the questions that students answer so that students discuss more with the professor than with each other. Others aim to honor the 30% guideline but admit struggling at times because they are the experts on the material and feel the students would benefit more from extended faculty exposition. The guideline was put in place, though, so that students can in a more organic way discover at least a handful of the same key points their professor could simply provide them.

From observing faculty teach and from numerous individual and group discussions, I think that many of us aim for class-wide discussions in which students do much of the heavy lifting, with the professor acting more as a facilitator or rudder when needed. The professor might offer some initial focus questions, jump into the discussion in order to correct mistaken details or assumptions, provide context when the students do not, or wrap up the day’s discussion. For instance, Humphrey aims to speak fewer than ten minutes per class and grades himself on how much time he takes up. While students typically need to build up their confidence and skills in explicating a text, most honors students can quickly rise to meet a teacher’s high expectations and shed their generation’s fresh light on classic texts.

In terms of writing, most of us require either reading responses or reading journals as ways to assess preparation and comprehension or to help foster discussion—although some prefer the occasional quiz to keep students on their toes. The semester is also punctuated with argumentative writing that requires analysis of the readings, good use of evidence and logic, and counterargument. These assigned papers are not opinion pieces, nor are they research papers as no secondary texts are allowed. Our faculty have agreed that, while participation must count for no less than 20% of the final grade, argumentative writing must count for at least 50%.

**REVISITING ORGANIZATION**

While Humphrey’s original vision for the sequence at ASU was based on the Columbia model, he had new ideas after returning to a faculty role teaching The Human Event. He now advocates a Columbia-heavy approach with a touch of Chicago—a combination of both strategies that has over time evolved into our own “Barrett” approach. While a few faculty members experiment with pre-setting themes for their courses, the approach of gently developing conceptual archetypes or allowing them to develop organically is not as top-down as a
theme- or topic-driven course would be. This approach invites, if not requires, student inquiries and epiphanies rather than overly front-loading themes or topics from each text in the mode of the Syntopicon. Topics and themes sometimes arise organically and are revisited as the course develops, or the professor might loosely organize conceptual archetypes more than themes but retain the mostly chronological structure. An example of a conceptual archetype would be the human tendency to create in-groups and out-groups for sometimes flimsy reasons, noting what it is to be the “other” (noun) or to “other” (verb). A professor’s choice to revisit this concept throughout the course might help make the material more relevant to students because “othering” is part of their lives from the personal and family level to the political and international levels. While one might read *The Iliad* as an epic and read it in literary or historical terms, reading it as a foundational work in which a culture is “othered” changes the nature of discussion. Humphrey quotes Herodotus as saying “They do strange things over there,” and *The Iliad* shows Trojans doing strange things that no proper Greek would do, like violating laws of hospitality and, under the protection of a sojourner, going into a man’s house and seducing his wife.

The inclusion of more than Western texts in The Human Event sometimes influences how faculty organize their courses, enhancing the connective processes for our growing number of students from other cultures and allowing for important cultural comparisons in an increasingly global society. When students consider the ideas and questions that continue to perplex and engage us across time in both Western and non-Western traditions, they build an understanding of different family, cultural, regional, and/or national mythoi.

THE “KNOWLEDGE DOMAINS” EXPERIMENT

Barrett faculty have experimented with a three-domain knowledge split in the spring-semester course. Starting in 2007, what used to be a single course (HON 172) from the Renaissance to modern times was split into focus areas:

HON 272: The Human Event (Humanities)
HON 273: The Human Event (Natural Sciences)
HON 274: The Human Event (Social Sciences)

The split helped address the explosion of texts during this period and the growing diversity of majors taking the course while still maintaining integration of the sciences and the humanities. The Table in the Appendix shows the substantial overlap between texts that faculty have chosen for these classes. This overlap reflects a general agreement that the disciplinary or interdisciplinary approach to a text, rather than just the text itself, helps shape the discussion. A psychologist and a biologist and a religious studies scholar could each include Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* but facilitate discussion quite differently.

In general, the split worked fairly well but not as well as hoped because in some instances it introduced more problems than it solved, including added
bureaucracy and scheduling challenges. Additionally, students often mistakenly thought—despite verbal and printed information to the contrary—that they had to take the natural science focus if they were a natural science major even if they preferred to broaden their horizons. Some students wanted to take the same teacher they had in the fall but were afraid to take whatever domain that person offered in the spring, mistakenly thinking that, say, the natural science section would automatically be harder. Finally, some students thought that the natural science or social science sections would include no literary works when, in reality, each of the courses has a mix of the three domains of knowledge, which can include architecture, design, art, film, and music.

The faculty, too, faced challenges, sometimes feeling pigeon-holed into teaching a particular section when their constellation of degrees prepared them equally well to teach a different section. Some felt compelled to over-sample texts from their assigned domain of knowledge to deliver on the course title and not disappoint the students. Similarly, the split made it easy to slip into the comfort zone of one’s disciplinary training and teach the section as an advanced course from that one domain of knowledge.

The experiment was worthwhile, and we may engage in others, but the faculty voted and the deans supported a return to the previous course structure, with the benefit of having learned from the effort. Barrett completed the last year of teaching the three-course split in the spring of 2013. Our intent now is to point students more consistently to faculty profiles and syllabi, and we share more about our particular perspectives so that students can get a sense of which professors might be a good fit for them in the second semester. The students can and often do switch teachers at semester break if they have a schedule conflict or want to experience a different professor’s approach.

**THE FACULTY**

One good consequence of our experiment with splitting domains of knowledge was that we gained a larger and more diversified faculty. In the early years of the CLAS Honors Program, the teachers were philosophers or historians, and a heavy leaning toward the humanities continued into the early and middle years of the college. Over time, especially in the thick of the knowledge domain experiment, Barrett conducted national searches for faculty to teach these types of classes who had PhDs, training, and/or background in the natural or social sciences, so we now have roughly a third of the faculty in each of the three major domains of knowledge. This diversity of disciplines represented along our faculty hallway is a benefit to both students and the faculty. The students benefit from access to career advice, to networking on and off-campus, and to more avenues into the larger faculty body at ASU, allowing for more thoughtful guidance on whom to approach as a thesis director or additional reader. The faculty members now have others nearby who might know more about certain topics and be able to guide them as they are considering new texts or encountering student questions.
Few faculty members have just the perfect intellectual or pedagogical background to teach *The Human Event*, but faculty members learn from each other in important ways through informal conversations and also faculty meetings. We have also had since 2005 a formal mentoring program for new faculty. We have experimented with different formats in the Barrett Faculty Mentoring Program for Teaching Excellence from assigning each mentee a specific mentor to having a range of faculty guide a mentee, but the program always includes two years of teaching support. For instance, mentees observe and are observed by experienced Barrett Honors Faculty Fellows multiple times each semester for at least the first three semesters, and the observations are discussed. Additionally, mentees and more senior faculty meet monthly to discuss teaching matters. Sometimes the agenda is open, but it is generally based on what mentees will need or want to know in the flow of the semester or on recent requests or concerns of mentees. Mentees often have questions about the quantity or diversity of texts to be assigned or about approaches to grading or classroom management. Faculty, whether new or experienced, benefit from the interchanges that occur in the mentoring program.

At this point, we have twenty-nine full-time Honors Faculty Fellows serving as the core faculty for Barrett. These faculty members are not part of a short-term Fellows program who stay for a semester or a year and then leave but rather are hired with the intent that they will stay as one would in any academic position. The Honors Faculty Fellows are not borrowed from other units but are hired after competitive national searches into Barrett, where they are housed, reviewed, and promoted by the faculty and leadership of the college, subject to review by the provost. Retention and promotion are based on teaching and service alone. While their teaching load is officially honors courses only, primarily *The Human Event* sequence, they can teach a senior seminar or an honors-only section of a disciplinary course in their field once per academic year, thus enriching the curricular variety for faculty and students alike. The current teaching load is generally four courses per semester, but most hope that, once our growth plateaus, the load will decrease a course per year, if not per semester. The key point here, though, is that the faculty members’ primary dedication is to the honors students and that much of their time is spent with tasks related to *The Human Event* sequence. Our national searches, subsequent to the three-way knowledge domain split, are designed to attract the best teachers and maintain a diversity of disciplines.

A committed core faculty from multiple disciplines is central to the stability and growth of the college and to the positive feedback loop of *The Human Event* sequence. Beyond the disciplinary diversification of our faculty, we realize the benefits of institutional support and see that having core faculty, small classes, and a seminar format have led to the success of honors at ASU. Lessons of the past have taught us that thoughtful progenitors have anchored the content and organization of the course as well as a collaborative faculty development model. The positive impact of a dedicated core faculty is possibly the most enduring lesson from a historical consideration of the honors course sequence.
development at ASU. Other honors programs and colleges might similarly benefit from delving into their roots and recognizing the roles of key players and innovations, of visions and revisions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Bill Weidemaier and Richard Creath, the first teachers of The Human Event, for digging up the deep past, and special thanks to Dick Jacob and Ted Humphrey for taking the time to share their memories and insights at length.

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# A Selection of Authors and Overlap Between HON 272, 273, and 274 during the Domain Split Experiment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HUMANITIES (HON 272)</th>
<th>NATURAL SCIENCES (HON 273)</th>
<th>SOCIAL SCIENCES (HON 274)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pope, Swift, Blake, <em>Voltaire</em></td>
<td><em>Galileo</em>, Newton</td>
<td><em>Kant, Hume, Sartre</em>, Diderot</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jefferson, Truth, Cady Stanton</td>
<td>Vermeer</td>
<td>Douglass, Jacobs, Appiah</td>
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<td>Douglass, Jacobs</td>
<td><em>Kant, Hume, Smith</em></td>
<td><em>Shelley</em>, Chekhov, Kafka, Achebe</td>
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<td><em>Descartes, Galileo, Darwin, Snow, Heisenberg</em></td>
<td>Goethe, <em>Voltaire</em></td>
<td><em>Bulgakov</em>, Fanon</td>
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<td><em>Smith, Marx, Sumner</em></td>
<td><em>Shelley, Huxley, Stevenson, Dostoevsky, Bulgakov</em></td>
<td><em>Nietzsche</em>, deBeauvior, Hegel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dostoevsky</em>, Tolstoy, <em>Stevenson</em>, Curie, <em>Freud</em>, Orwell, Huxley</td>
<td><em>Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, Arendt</em></td>
<td><em>Camus</em>, Foucault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herrick, Wordsworth, Hughes, Walker, Browning, <em>Dickinson</em></td>
<td><em>Snow</em>, Nagel, Watson, Dawkins</td>
<td>Goifman, Mead, <em>Arendt</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Shelley, Kafka</em>, Woolf, McCourt, Achebe</td>
<td>Lightman, Stoppard</td>
<td><em>Galileo, Darwin, Snow, Heisenberg</em></td>
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* Bold = double overlap; Bold Italics = triple overlap
INTRODUCTION

Chronologically presented courses that span centuries often catalyze unwitting buy-in to unexamined narratives of progress. While useful for helping students make connections between the human past, present, and future, Great Books honors curricula like the one used at the University of Maine have a few inherent problems that require careful navigation. Both students and faculty tend to discard—or misinterpret—the values, cultural products, and successes of older cultures in favor of newer ones. Instead of valuing the uniqueness of a foreign place and time, we often emphasize transformation for the sake of narrative coherence in a program that needs focus to bring heterogeneous elements together. At times, such a curriculum seems to imply that previous civilizations came into being only to create modern culture as we know it, a fallacy that can have a negative impact on students’ learning and the general tenor of cultural and historical sensitivity in an honors college. As an honors faculty member trained as a medievalist, I have developed strategies for avoiding a teleological approach to the Great Books curriculum, offering several exercises and resources to help teachers and students avoid the pitfalls of an unexamined teleological approach. These curricular supplements and exercises call out implicit teleological narratives at important junctures, staging interventions in our linear process of thinking, learning, and teaching.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN GREAT BOOKS HONORS CURRICULA

The University of Maine Honors College has been using a Great Books curriculum for many years. Our curriculum focuses on the Western tradition and spans millennia. Our decisions about readings are a result of conscious choice and yearly deliberation, taking into account the charges leveled against Great Books curricula in the academic battles of the 80s and 90s (see Dooley and Altman). While we do include some subaltern voices, the bulk of our curriculum consists of famous, dead, named, white males. I am not going to tackle the problematic nature of such a course; that concern has been hashed and rehashed in the academy, and we do it every year in our faculty meeting about our Great Books curriculum. My sense of unease is not generated simply by the
representative texts we have (carefully) chosen; my deeper concern is the less explored and thus more insidious danger that such a curriculum may lead students to see the past as a series of graded steps leading to the present.

Great Books curricula are suspect for many different reasons, and we could choose instead to teach thematic units or create some other curricular structure that explores classic texts in an interdisciplinary format, but the arguments in favor of Great Books are as many and as persuasive as those against them. First, they give us a useful “long view.” During a time when departments are experiencing cutbacks and institutions are cutting survey courses in the humanities, students can still get a sense of historical continuity. Second, honors curricula replace many general education requirements in the humanities, so we may feel a moral obligation to retain a historical component in our interdisciplinary study. Great Books courses allow students to read fundamental texts in political science, ethics, philosophy, art, music, literature, and psychology, to name a few disciplines; taught well, they open up the world to students (Black). Third, and perhaps most significantly, a Great Books curriculum helps students make connections across cultures and across time. Unfortunately, students often note superficial correspondences between the present and the past only to valorize the superiority of their own lived experience in the twenty-first century. This reaction is described best by Scott Huelin: “[T]he well-meaning student, eager to overcome the estrangement of an encounter with a foreign text, can inadvertently rob the text of its alterity by too quickly making it too familiar (22). An example of this eagerness to familiarize another culture’s text is my students’ frequent response to Vitruvius’ Ten Books on Architecture. They register mild surprise at the methodical and nuanced way in which Vitruvius describes the careful topographical situation of successful architecture, and they then almost invariably remark that modern architecture has luckily moved beyond the need to consider the potability of the local water or the marshiness of the ground.

Such present-favoring (and often erroneous) connections are a consequence of the intense time constraints imposed by a curriculum that requires a new major reading every week; students are pressured to make sense of difficult texts very quickly. A sense of gratitude for having the privilege to live in our present is not necessarily an inappropriate reaction to elicit from students, but schools that teach Great Books as part of their honors curriculum might do well to consider whether this is the best student outcome or whether we are missing an opportunity to teach multiculturalism in a nuanced way.

As a medievalist primed by my discipline to feel troubled by the academic privileging of the present over a dimly understood and “othered” past, I value the opportunity that honors gives me to think through these problems with a thoughtful group of students affiliated with many disciplines. I can proselytize—if thoughtful discussion can be described as such—to talented students who may never become familiar with the sophistication of Medieval French poetry or the narrative brilliance and originality of the Norse sagas but who, by participating in a Great Books curriculum, are exposed to philosophically dense writings from the dawn of history to the present.
THE ATTRACTIONS OF TELEOLOGY

We tend to teach and learn in a way that privileges teleological thinking because we are products of dominant socio-economic patterns established after the Enlightenment. Narratives of development and progress are ingrained in our national conversation. Capitalist systems require “the constant revolutionizing of production” (Marx 79); buy-in to technological innovation is catalyzed by a belief that things will get better and that the newest thing will make it so. We are biologically anthropocentric and tend to deemphasize alternative narratives such as those telling the story of the environment or of non-human life (see Davis). In an unfortunate parallel to this anthropocentrism, we can also be unintentionally Eurocentric when we privilege canonical narratives of progress over the experience and cultural products of non-Western peoples. We have a tendency to read non-Western narratives as foils to our central narrative of Western progress.

Monotheism (the most common religious system in America) is also emphatically teleological and makes us resist cyclical or non-linear narratives of time. Apocalypses, Judgment Days, and New Jerusalem-style utopias loom large in the national imagination, making it all too easy to apply this teleological framework to the workings of terrestrial history. In a striking parallel, biological evolution, when misunderstood by laypeople as a narrative of development toward an ultimate goal, offers a model for teleology.

Finally, we continue to pump out popular books that reinforce our notions of the superiority of the present to the past. A good example is the recent Pulitzer-winning book by Stephen Greenblatt entitled The Swerve. This book, on a history-changing moment when Poggio Bracciolini rediscovered Lucretius’ On the Nature of Things, argues that the renaissance was in part a direct result of this rediscovery of an ancient text. Without it, Greenblatt suggests, we might still be mired in the superstition and lack of innovation that he argues characterized the Middle Ages. While thousands of scholars of the Premodern gritted their teeth, the book was a bestseller. The best rebuttal of the Greenblatt phenomenon, by Jim Hinch, is worth reading in its entirety for its defense of the Premodern world and includes this particularly salient quip:

Greenblatt’s caricatured Middle Ages might have passed muster with Enlightenment-era historians. Present-day scholarship, especially the findings of archeologists and specialists in church and social history, tells a vastly more complicated, interesting and indeterminate story. . . . The Swerve’s primary achievement is to flatter like-minded readers with a tall tale of enlightened modern values triumphing over a benighted pre-modern past.

With such formidable forces continually produced in the cultural and academic industries, the Great Books curriculum cannot help but structurally lend itself to progressive readings of history. These forces act upon teachers and students alike, programming them to think teleologically.
One great irony of students’ unquestioning belief in the goodness of progress is the repeated data suggesting that students of this current generation believe that the world is less full of possibility for them than it was for their parents (Lowery; Thompson; Smith; Brooks; “Just 15%”). My own students cite factors like climate change, globalization, overpopulation, the impossibility of true newness, the increasing rate of production in conjunction with the planned obsolescence of those products, the deterioration of American cultural standards, and the general sense of “things falling apart” as evidence for their belief that they can offer the world less, and vice versa, than previous generations. That such a paradox—a sense of hopelessness coexisting with a belief in progress—can exist so prominently in our students’ minds is perhaps a reflection of their struggle to take a long view. Helping students identify this paradox not only in themselves but in modern thought—a sense of decline and alienation being one of the most marked crises of the postmodern age and existing hand in hand in with a deep belief in progress—is another way to bring forth a nuanced habit of thinking about time and civilization. (See Appendix for a discussion of some of the most challenging critics of the notion of progress, including Amin, Wessells, and Adorno.)

**REASONS FOR CHANGE**

A holistic approach to a Great Books curriculum does not necessarily require scrapping or rewriting the curriculum; instead, it can actively and consciously resist implicit buy-in to teleological narratives inherent in the curricular structure. Such resistance not only does more justice to the past but helps students think beyond their own time and place. If we think about the past encountered in old texts as a kind of open-minded study abroad, where we can learn to change our personal perspectives, the entire endeavor becomes more meaningful. Not every student can afford the life-changing experience of study abroad, so we can try to produce some of the revelations of a study abroad at home (Levy).

Honors students need to learn to think critically about chronology and narratives of progress, and, if honors programs can claim to be the last bastions of the liberal arts in the American academy, then we must have an open attitude towards artifacts from the past. After all, many of the classic disciplines—music, art, history, classics, grammar—must look to the past as the foundation of the present state of their field. If one of the purposes of a liberal education is to create citizens who can think critically about what they encounter—as well as act ethically toward people and situations foreign to them—then we owe it to our students now, more than ever, to teach them to use the past to think about the present and plan for the future.

Furthermore, the past is necessarily and directly relevant to students’ lives in the twenty-first century. One of the most commonly aired complaints from students (and sometimes faculty) about the first year of the honors curriculum at UMaine, which spans from ancient Sumerian texts to Machiavelli, is that some of the readings do not seem relevant to modern experience. For example, at
UMaine, the most commonly debated texts are the *Presocratics Reader*, *Inanna*, and *the Odyssey*, among others. Students often say they find the texts out of date for modern problems and ways of life and that they have a hard time gleaning meaning from them that can apply to their lived experience. The Old Testament is relevant, such logic goes, because its impact on the present is clear. Obscure scientific texts by ancient philosophers seem, to the average observer, beyond irrelevant, since the science they contain has been disproven or surpassed for centuries. These texts tend to arouse either a patronizing admiration that people could be so advanced in such a dark age or active anger for having to read something so useless.

Obviously the answer to this sense of disconnect is not to search for examples of ancient texts that seem to predict cell phones. The first lesson we need to stress for all students—including STEM and professional students who have been inculcated with the desire to get an education that counts in the real world—is that we can always learn from these texts. In fact, the stranger or more irrelevant our readings may seem, the more likely they are to help us think about the rest of our experience in new or fuller ways. Just as learning about cultures different from our own classically broadens the mind, so too does learning about the past, which, as we know, is a foreign country (Hartley 1). Moreover, students of every discipline can find texts relevant to them: Gilgamesh’s forays into the cedar wood of Humbaba inspires wonder about humans’ innate need to destroy nature as a means of asserting mastery over it, and Anaximander’s theories that all life originated in the sea inspires awe at the human capacity for logic and critical thinking.

**EXERCISES IN ESCAPING TELEOLOGIES**

Honors programs and colleges that use Great Books curricula need to make explicit the embedded teleologies in their courses of study, and so I provide a toolkit for honors educators to engage in a conversation about the question of teleology. I have developed a series of questions that can be explored in small groups or as a class and that I believe can catalyze more nuanced thinking about the issue. I designed the different class discussion questions, exercises, and assignments to be explored in small sections of class time set aside throughout the semester as conscious moments of intervention in implicit teleologies. These class materials have worked in my classroom and may be useful to other honors faculty.

- Ask: Are there certain junctures in your Great Book curriculum when attention is paid to a cultural turning point? What is that turning point, and are the underlying assumptions about why it is important made transparent? In our curriculum, such turning points occur with the Presocratic philosophers, Sappho, the New Testament, Vitruvius, the Italian Renaissance, and “The Rise of Rationality,” which introduces a series of readings in the Enlightenment. In these moments, lecturers outline a paradigm shift—such as from mythos to logos or from irrational to rational thought. A conversation can be started to
decide whether these turning points are legitimate and useful for understanding the period, and, if so, why. Another strategy would be to examine exactly what was left behind in favor of a new technology or philosophy and whether the innovation was truly new at all. The class may discover that certain lines of thought or activities are not new and that they have long lineages.

- Ask: Are the texts in your Great Books curriculum too culturally codified to challenge inherent teleologies? For example, are Greco-Roman texts favored over texts from cultural borderlands? Are they read for themselves or for what we know they will tell us about some understood narrative of cultural development?

- Discuss how the world may be improving, staying the same, or declining. See if the class can reach consensus.

- Add a new paracurricular focus bringing out extrahuman concerns like environmental impact. In my class, we consciously read assigned texts for what they tell us about the way people think about the environment, their lived landscape, and the animals that inhabit it, thus complicating the rhetoric of human progress at any cost.

- Brainstorm events and practices we tend to associate with the past (like plague, war, bad medicine, oppression, or ignorance) to foreground assumptions and projections. Ask if these negatives are nonexistent now, and, if not, where they are located.

- Have students identify their personal choice of the finest human innovation and then identify the detrimental aspects of that same innovation. Ask if innovations have no drawbacks and if any innovation comes without a price. This question affords a foray into discussion of mythological examples, i.e., Faustian bargains, Trees of Knowledge, or Pandora’s boxes.

- Discuss whether our modern narrative of progress has been influenced by historical theories about human evolution. Explicitly acknowledging students’ inherent belief in human evolution and then using scientific knowledge as well as the history of social science to debunk it is a powerful way to highlight the assumptions that most first-world moderns make about the course of history. I frame this conversation in this way:

1. We begin by discussing teleology: “Telos: a Greek word denoting end, purpose, or goal. We humans are accustomed to thinking teleologically, or towards an end.

2. We ask this question: Do our most famous narratives (scientific, religious, artistic, philosophical etc.) have a beginning, middle, and end? Are we capable of thinking in any other way? Are there other ways of thinking about the universe?

3. After discussion I argue: So, in a way, we are accustomed to thinking evolutionarily. We like to frame linear narratives to make sense of things that
may not be so linear after all. In reality, most things—the solar system, the earth, politics—just change.

4. We come to a conclusion: Let us think critically about the way we frame our narratives within an evolutionary context. Think of all the dangerous/unethical ideas that people have brought forth under pseudoscientific banners. Inspired by the idea of evolution misunderstood as a process with a goal, we have promulgated dangerous ideas like social Darwinism, the notion that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, phrenology, linguistic evolution, anthropological evolution, and the evolution of civilization.

• As a class, create an x/y graph with multiple data points conveying major human experiences over time and discuss whether all the data points show positive growth. In my classes, simply agreeing on the most important human experiences and values can yield productive discussion. Graphing them is also an exercise in negotiation, communication, and persuasion.

• Compare linguistic and anthropological arguments regarding the relative complexity of human syntactical or social systems. Both fields have been at the forefront of arguments that evolutionary models for modern human civilization are not only flawed but fundamentally inaccurate. Studies in comparative linguistics, for example, have repeatedly shown that no language is more complex than any other; if that is the case for language, we should have difficulty arguing that one culture, a complex system, is better than another.

• Ask: Is calling the past savage and “othering” it any better than calling current non-Western cultures “savage,” and is there a double standard here?

• Try historical roleplaying. Following an exercise developed by my colleague Eliza Buhler-Kapit, I develop historically possible personal profiles that students then play out. For Rome, students can perform the roles of matron, slave girl, centurion, bricklayer, or senator, for instance; they then interact with one another in character, discussing both their own lives and the texts of their era. This exercise gives the past a face and a name, humanizing it.

• Discuss Hegelian versus Adornan views of history, i.e., the notion of dialectical development in opposition to a sense of accelerating chaos. Compare these classic Western interpretations of time to other cultures’ or civilizations’ notions of time. Read non-Western creation myths and discuss whether their notion of time involves endless cycles, regression, or teleology.

• As a class, identify key words that are used often in classroom discussion; they will likely be words like “civilization,” “author,” “artist,” “music,” “culture,” and “hero.” Many of these words might be inherently Eurocentric. Other people living today may not use such terms or have a need for them in their own cultures and perspectives or understand their worth or validity; if they do use these terms, they have had to adapt them often by neglecting core elements of their own culture. Discuss the general notions of discoveries and creations: who is discovering whom and what constitutes a creation.
• Discuss the terms we use to denote historical periods and epochs: “Prehistoric,” “Ancient,” “Classical,” “Dark Ages,” “Middle Ages,” “Renaissance,” “Early Modern,” “Enlightenment,” “Industrial,” “Modern,” “Postmodern.” Each of these terms makes implicit claims about the value or relevance of the period. The terms are often framed relative to preceding or following periods, leading to questions about how the terminology influences our assumptions about and understandings of these periods.

CONCLUSION

Adding a series of conscious interventions in the teleological assumptions inherent in any Great Books course not only improves the tone of the conversation in class; it also helps train students to be more culturally sensitive to “others” they may encounter in their lives, making them better travelers and perhaps better citizens. Performing these intersections produces other positive results. For instance, a non-teleological approach to time may yield a deepened personal philosophy with rewards that include the ability to face bleak personal moments or the prospect of aging philosophically; without a belief in golden ages and dark times, one can find moments of brightness in every phase of life, as we have learned to do with human civilization. Another result may seem like a relatively small benefit, but I think it is a great achievement: in writing, a person trained to avoid teleological thinking may be more prone to avoid erroneous overstatement—“firsts” and “mosts” disappear unless they are backed by informed conviction, not inherent and unexamined teleologies. As any reader of stacks and stacks of critical essays may attest, a break from such inaccurate hyperbole is a great boon indeed.

REFERENCES


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The following bibliography does not provide an exhaustive list of resources that challenge a teleological approach to the study of history or Great Books. I have begun an online forum where other educators and students are encouraged to share resources that could do similar work. Please feel to visit my personal blog, <http://sarahharlanhaughey.blogspot.com>, to join in the conversation. Below, I have shared resources that have worked in my own interactions with faculty and students. These are mostly well-known and accessible books that offer an overview of some aspect of the debate about teleology. In some honors classes, we have read and discussed excerpts from some of these books. In other cases, I have shared these books with interested students. Finally, I have used these books as means of opening up a dialogue with other faculty who might otherwise be reluctant to have a discussion about inherent teleologies in our honors curriculum.


The foundational text for readings of Eurocentric attitudes not only in canonical cultural texts, political policy, and economic development, but also in daily life. Amin’s model of capitalist development, which reflects a core-peripheral structure, is enlightening and sparks lively discussion.


The original discussion of Klee’s angel of history (Thesis IX), Benjamin’s allusive and elusive short theses can have a profound impact on student thought, as I can testify. When I encountered Benjamin’s essay as an undergraduate, my thinking about time and history radically shifted. These are very short; it is easy to read one out loud at the start of a class and have a brief framing discussion before plunging into analysis of a specific text. See also II on the privileging of the present over the past or future, VIII on constant oppression as the rule of civilization, XVIII on organic life v. human time.


This was a highly influential book for many good reasons, not least because it challenged a popular audience to reexamine deeply held views about the reasons why some civilizations seem ‘better’ or ‘more advanced’ than others. See also the National Geographic special on this book.


This book picks up where Guns, Germs, and Steel left off, with a sensitive and engaged exploration of the positive aspects of traditional societies all
over the globe, using Diamond’s field experience in Papua New Guinea as a jumping-off point.


Hegelian history has defined the way we think about time in the western world. In the debatable triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, we find a very provocative idea about the way human culture develops. Hegelian scholars have debated exactly what Hegel meant by his dialectic, but its popular results are a sort of evolutionary model for human thought.


This is a passionately argued defense of traditional art and ways of life as a means of becoming sustainable in the 21st century. Prince Charles has a unique holistic way of looking at world food systems, architecture, and the natural world from a comparative historical perspective. Particularly interesting chapters include: “The Golden Thread”, an exploration of images of harmony in nature and in the artefacts of traditional cultures, and “The Age of Disconnection”, a rereading of modernism.


A really interesting book about daily life in England at the turn of the last millennium. One of my favorite aspects of this quick and enjoyable read is that each chapter is organized by month, giving students a strong sense of seasonal time as a different way of organizing human experience. Another benefit is students’ realization that the ‘Dark Ages’ weren’t so terrible after all—they’re just another moment in human history.


Lasch can be a bit reactionary, taking direct aim at the dearly held tenets of the liberal left, especially the utopian belief in progress, the rights of the individual, and the notion that the world can be made fundamentally better through the right to material goods. He rejects the rhetoric of the right, as well, focusing instead on the limitations of growth and our moral responsibility to settle for ‘good enough’ in the form of hard work, moral values, and community. A problematic but discussion-engendering book that caters to no one’s preconceptions or politics.


This book had a big impact on me as an undergraduate, because it explores medieval Spain as a culture of *convicencia*, a place where adherents of
all three of the major monotheistic religions were able to live together in relative harmony. Menocal explodes the assumption that Spain was constantly a place of intolerance and inquisition, and makes a strong argument that 1492, the year of Columbus’ discovery and the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the peninsula—and arguably the year that ushered in the modern era—was a tragic event for even more reasons than we usually acknowledge.


Challenges the ‘Lynn White thesis’ that monotheistic religion imposes a nature-destroying philosophy on its adherents with disastrous results, among other things. Ponting argues that really, any human civilization will strip and exploit nature, no matter the religious foundation of their culture. A really good history of the world from an environmental perspective, this book can help shift the way we think about human ‘good,’ especially when that same good is fundamentally detrimental to the world. The short first chapter, “The Lessons of Easter Island,” makes an excellent stand-alone introduction to an ecocentric reading of human history.


A passionately argued—and very French—defense of the European Middle Ages as a time of great cultural beauty and innovation, diversity, and intellectual rigor. Particularly enlightening chapters are six, on the (extensive) rights of women in the Middle Ages, and 2, on the art and engineering accomplishments of medieval people. Don’t miss Pernoud’s hilarious affirmation that “Middle Ages is privileged material: one can say what one wants about it with the quasi-certitude of never being contradicted” (142).


An approachable text on the mechanisms of language. It’s great for challenging ingrained attitudes about prestige dialects and ‘proper English’. For the purposes of this bibliography, see Pinker’s lucid explanations of the relative complexity of the every human language. These can be read and thought about interdisciplinarily as parables of a sort. Pinker’s powerful linguistic work reinforces the broader theory that no truly complex closed system can improve—it simply changes.


A powerful exploration of the mechanisms of the Western othering of other societies. Said’s analysis applies equally effectively to the othering of the past.

One of my favorite ‘big picture’ books, Wessels attacks the notion of progress—a process dependent on constant economic growth—from many different angles, in particular his three laws of sustainability: the law of limits to growth; the second law of thermodynamics, which exposes the limits to energy usage; and the law of self-organization, which has caused the incredible diversity of life not only in ecosystems but in the human body and culture.
Expectations of Honors
In 2013–2014, the Governors State University (GSU) Honors Program was faced with a need to evolve from a two-year honors program serving juniors and seniors only to a four-year honors program. This need was born out of the university’s transition to a four-year university in 2014–2015. This mandate led to some concerns that I, the newly installed director of the program, needed to address. First, I needed to recruit traditional high-achieving freshman students to a university honors program that, as of fall 2013, did not exist. Second, because GSU has never had freshmen, the university and its honors program were little-known among local high school populations. Third, the typical GSU undergraduate student in 2013–14—average age 31.5, Generation X, non-traditional (University Fast Facts)—was a stark contrast to the type of student I was recruiting—average age 17–18, Millennial, traditional—and was not a good fit to provide guidance on the needs and interests of the forthcoming traditional freshman population. Fourth, past scholarship suggests that minorities are an underrepresented population in honors programs (McKay) while GSU serves the ethnically diverse Chicago Southland with a population of 2.5 million (Chicago Southland News). This diversity is evident in GSU’s undergraduate population, which is 49% minority (University Fast Facts) and enrolls hundreds of first-generation college students. In the context of all these factors, I needed to find a way to gather data on the needs, interests, and expectations of our forthcoming new honors program population.

To address these concerns, I worked with our director of recruitment and outreach. We used high-impact educational practices (Kuh) as a tool for recruitment, information gathering, university and honors program exposure, community development, and leadership development among prospective GSU honors students. Creation of a prospective honors student focus group allowed the GSU Honors Program to engage in multiple high-impact educational practices (HIPS) to give students a role in developing the honors program and to give them exposure to the faculty, staff, and university they would encounter as a cohort at GSU. The success of this focus group at GSU might serve as a model for other institutions whether they are expanding into a four-year institution or not.
HIGH-IMPACT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

High-impact educational practices have benefitted the educational and learning experiences of students from a variety of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds (Kuh 1). The effectiveness of these practices, identified by the American Association of Colleges & Universities in their Greater Expectations initiative, is supported by additional data collected in the National Survey of Student Engagement. The practices include (a) first-year seminars, (b) common intellectual experiences, (c) learning communities, (d) writing-intensive courses, (e) collaborative assignments and projects, (f) undergraduate research, (g) diversity and global learning, (h) service learning and community-based learning, (i) internships, and (j) capstone courses and projects.

Kuh has shown that some of these benefits for first-year students include higher grade point averages in their first academic year and improved retention rates. While all of the HIPS can benefit the first-year learning experience, the HIPS that were shown to have the greatest impact on learning and on personal and practical gains for first-year students were learning communities and service learning. These benefits existed when controlled for ethnicity and precollege standardized testing scores such as the SAT and ACT.

INCORPORATING MULTIPLE HIGH-IMPACT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

A focus group can help honors program directors infuse multiple HIPS into the learning experience for prospective students:

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Learning communities encourage attention to “big questions” (Kuh 10) across multiple learning experiences and courses. In this context, prospective students can address questions relevant to a learning community that they are already part of. As students get more time to meet, they get to know and interact with the other focus group participants and visualize what it will be like to be an honors student at the institution. Kuh’s evidence suggests that this kind of interaction has some of the most positive learning and personal impacts among newer students.

COLLABORATIVE ASSIGNMENTS AND PROJECTS

An advisory focus group allows students and faculty to engage in a collaborative learning experience that will benefit both the honors program and the student. An important part of this experience, Kuh argues, is collaborative assignments that help students learn to work together, develop problem-solving skills, and enhance their understanding of concepts, the honors program itself being the primary concept in our case.
An advisory focus group also gives students experience with a systematic investigation of knowledge. The level of involvement with the research can be determined by both the students and those involved carrying out the focus group. In addition to introducing students to basic research, the director of a focus group can add ethics and IRB approvals to the experience and can expose prospective students and parents to consent and assent forms. Once data are collected, participants might be given the option to further their research experience by participating in the data transcription, data analysis, and writing portions of a paper for which they could receive authorship credit. Throughout such a process, the focus group project director continues to work with the prospective students, thus furthering the personal and learning gains they can get from the experience.

THE RATIONALE FOR A FOCUS GROUP WITH HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES

Evidence about HIPS suggested to us that a tactic like an advisory focus group could have numerous benefits for a university like GSU in terms of honors program recruitment. First, by spending time interacting with the students, we could learn their interests and needs as well as their expectations of a university honors program. Second, the participating students would get the opportunity to learn about our campus and our new four-year program, to interact with our faculty, staff, and administration, and to share the experience with their peers in high school. Prospective students could visualize what it would be like to be at college, interacting with professors and peers, engaging in a learning community, and grappling with leadership challenges in a collaborative project. Participants could become spokespersons for our institution so that more students would learn of our new four-year program through their friends’ experiences in the focus group. Third, the focus group would allow us to focus on the specific population we are recruiting from schools around our region and help members of this ethnically diverse community learn for themselves that they have a lot to contribute to and gain from participating in a university honors program.

With no first-year freshman students to whom we could expose prospective students, we hoped to use HIPS to excite prospective students about the idea of helping to build an honors program. The honors advisory focus group, which was a joint venture between the GSU Honors Program and the GSU recruitment office, started in the fall of 2013 in order to benefit GSU, its honors program, and students involved in the group. We wanted to take high-achieving high school seniors who were already in leadership roles on their respective campuses and ask them to apply their expertise in a university context.
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS AND PROTOCOL

In our first experience, we recruited eleven participants (two men, nine women) from three different kinds of institutions within twenty miles of GSU: seven students from a public high school, three from a public charter high school, and one from a homeschool cohort. Our group was ethnically diverse with one Caucasian, two Hispanics, and eight African-Americans. All eleven students met the GSU Honors Program’s admissions criteria. We recruited the seven public high school participants by reaching out to their assistant principal and college guidance counselor; the high school officials then identified the students best suited for our initiative. Our director of recruitment and outreach contacted the other four participants directly.

In the six weeks prior to our institution’s early-action application deadline, the participants attended three on-campus focus group meetings. Each meeting focused on a different theme related to the honors program experience, e.g., honors program expectations, proposed curriculum ideas, co-curricular interests, and honors program integration. We used a digital audio device to record each meeting. Participants were asked some questions for substantive discussion, some round-robin questions where each participant provided a quick response to the question, and some brief survey questions about the level of importance of various honors program activities such as the speaker series or study abroad.

The meetings were held in the early evening to minimize the potential for conflict extracurricular activities. Each meeting ended promptly after seventy-five minutes to be respectful of the student’s homework and family time. All students received food at each meeting and, at the first meeting, a few thank-you items such as T-shirts and folders; we hoped that they would wear and use these items so that their high school classmates would see the university name and logo. Senior-level administrators, including our president and provost, made brief appearances to greet the students and share their excitement for the upcoming academic year. The focus group also maintained a virtual meeting site at wiggio.com to facilitate interaction among the students beyond the on-campus meetings. Participation in the focus groups entailed no obligation to attend the university, but students were welcome to stay involved in the focus group and participate in any research efforts that resulted from the experience.

FOCUS GROUP EXPERIENCE

Our experience with the focus group was successful one. We found targeted students and institutions eager to be involved in an activity like this, and the targeted students participated regularly in the focus groups with over ninety percent attendance at each of the three meetings. Over the course of these meetings, a cultural lifecycle developed among the prospective students in their learning community. The beginning of the first meeting had a formal tone born out of the necessity to do introductions, have assent forms signed, and reiterate the purpose of the focus group. Students were nicely dressed, likely to speak and sit next to students they knew, and concerned about saying the right thing.
However, as the first meeting progressed and people began participating, the formalities in the interaction began to subside. The prospective students got more comfortable interacting with one another, allowing for the collaborative project to take off, and responses to questions got longer and more open. By the second meeting, the students were more at ease with each other; many students wore T-shirts and jeans, and they spoke openly and freely from the start. A similar ease appeared during the third meeting along with the desire of a number of students to maintain involvement with the learning community and the research project after the final on-campus meeting.

**BENEFITS OF FOCUS GROUP FOR RECRUITMENT**

We are already experiencing recruitment benefits from the focus group. Our partnering high school institutions and homeschool cohort were enthusiastic about having their high-achieving students participate in the focus group, especially because of the opportunity for their students to apply their leadership skills outside of their high school, the opportunity for their students to get exposure to a collegiate campus and feel the reality of a college experience, and the fact that the ideas their students contributed would help shape the honors program.

This experience also allowed the GSU recruitment team, with the collaboration of the high school principals and their executive teams, to solidify a partnership that enabled GSU to become more visible among local high school students, parents, and teachers while at the same time creating new initiatives to help high school students achieve their goals.

**BENEFITS OF FOCUS GROUP FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

Responses from the participants are having an important influence on the honors program's development in three primary ways: de-emphasizing scholarships, adopting a points system, and adding experiential components to the curriculum.

**DE-EMPHASIZING SCHOLARSHIPS**

One finding we learned in our first meeting is that our participants valued an enriched learning experience more than a potential scholarship as a reason to join an honors program. In a round-robin question, we asked the students, “Between scholarships, hands-on/immersive learning, and mentoring/close faculty relationships, which one would most positively influence your decision to join an honors program?” None of the ten participants at the meeting mentioned scholarships as the most positive influence, seven mentioned immersive learning, and the other three mentioned mentoring/close faculty relationships. This finding is not to suggest that honor students are against earning scholarships, but it did tell us that we need to be more concerned about the student learning experience than the scholarship dollars awarded.
ADOPTING A POINTS SYSTEM

Curriculum was an important focus of our second meeting. We asked the participants several questions about two models the honors program was strongly considering: a points system, where students earn points for approved curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular endeavors, or an upper-division/lower-division honors model that focuses on general education in the lower division and allows academic programs to set their own upper-division requirements. Participants had a strong preference for the points system, emphasizing two themes: (1) the positive value of earning honors program points for co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, e.g., earning a double major or authorship of a paper presented at a regional conference, and (2) the potential for elitism and cliques in an lower-division/upper-division honors model, in which students completing both levels might feel superior to those completing only one. These comments were influential in our decision to move forward with a points-based curriculum.

ADDING EXPERIENTIAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The third meeting was focused on co-curricular activities. We gave the students ten potential co-curricular programming activities—including a speaker series, volunteerism, mentoring, leadership, study abroad, and cultural engagement—and asked them to rate the importance of each on a 6-point Likert scale (6 = essentially important, 1 = not very important). While all the activities attained some level of importance, when we asked students to identify their top two choices, three stood out: eight of ten respondents listed international study abroad in their top two, and four of ten listed leadership and volunteerism in the top two. Of the other seven items listed, none received more than one top rating. This finding is influencing several programmatic decisions. First, we are looking at ways to include an honors study abroad opportunity for students in their second or third year of the program. Second, we have decided that, in addition to using the points system toward completion of the honors program, some experiential requirements should be added to ensure a volunteerism and leadership experience. Not only will volunteerism opportunities be offered throughout the year, but we will build volunteerism into a service learning course that students will complete in their second year of study. In the fourth year of study, students will need to complete a leadership experience that might occur within the university by serving as, for instance, a student senator, club president, or mentor for honors freshmen. The leadership experience can also be in the community at large like directing a fundraiser or implementing a public relations campaign for a local nonprofit. We will partner with the office of our dean of students, which facilitates various leadership institutes at GSU so that our honors program students will have the mentoring and training necessary to be the leaders we hope they will become.
FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Our initial experience highlighted some ideas for improving future focus group. First, having meetings on campus was invaluable in getting students to engage with the campus, faculty, and one another face-to-face. While the virtual site was helpful at getting information to the students, the primary student-to-student interaction occurred in the on-campus meetings where prospective students can visualize what it would be like to be a student at GSU, can connect with our faculty, and can imagine the kind of friendships they would make as honors students here. Second, we saw the value of having the same students meet more than once. Because students must devote so much effort to introductions and to getting comfortable with faculty and each other in an unfamiliar environment, most need the time that two or three meetings afford to start expressing their feelings and ideas.

CONCLUSION

Although this prospective honors student focus group was developed with an evolving honors program in mind, many of the benefits for the GSU Honors Program can be realized in an honors program at any stage of development. Bringing prospective students to campus for focus group meetings gets them involved with the university’s current students and faculty, thus improving the likelihood that they will apply and matriculate (Nichols & Chang). The students can visualize the bonds they will build at the institution with faculty and peers. In addition, the information gleaned from the meetings can help honors programs maintain relevance and meet the needs of student populations as they change over the years. Focus groups are also an excellent way to develop and strengthen partnerships with regional high schools and homeschool cohorts, thus enhancing the reputation of both the university and honors program. Finally, the meetings can serve as evaluation tools for honors program directors to help determine which prospective students are best suited to participate in their program and to serve in leadership positions if they decide to matriculate.

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Navigating the Kokosing: A Comparison between Honors and Private Liberal Arts Colleges

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The Kokosing is a small river, barely a stream after a storm, which meanders its way through the gently undulating hills and farmland of central Ohio. The Kokosing takes its name from a Native American word meaning “place of owls.” Like an owl, Kenyon College is nestled among the trees atop a hill near the Kokosing. Kenyon is a private, selective, liberal arts college of about 1600 undergraduate students founded by an Episcopal bishop named Philander (yes, Philander) Chase in 1824. During the 2011–12 academic year, I had the good fortune to complete an American Council on Education Fellowship at Kenyon under the guidance of S. Georgia Nugent, president of the institution.

During my year at Kenyon, I served in an anthropological role, observing the culture of the community and the leadership of Kenyon’s senior staff. From this vantage point, I immersed myself in the life of the college and became a participant observer able to compare Kenyon with my home institution, Middle Tennessee State University, where I served as associate dean of the Honors College from 2006 to 2014. One reason I chose Kenyon was that in honors we often say that we provide a liberal arts education but with the resources and price tag of a public institution. I wanted to test the veracity of this truism by living “abroad” for a year, examining not only Kenyon but also the bevy of other liberal arts institutions in Ohio.

Consequently, I have been able to posit a few key similarities and differences between small select liberal arts colleges and honors programs or colleges at larger public universities. The differences are important because they reveal subtle but very important flaws in the claim that honors provides the same experience for less money, and they shine a light on areas of improvement for those dedicated to honors. Although I am drawing conclusions from a small sample size, my year abroad coupled with a dozen years of involvement in honors provides what I hope is an informed platform from which to observe and report.

As at most liberal arts colleges, the hallmark of most honors programs is small class size, which is one of the greatest strengths of honors education and culture. The current efforts within higher education to devise pedagogies that train more and more students with less and less public support strike me as sad and futile. While the forces of evolution never cease, the human brain and inseparable
mind have not changed significantly in the last few millennia. During this time, humankind has recurrently figured out that learning occurs optimally in small groups, where students and teachers intensely discuss, defend, and revise ideas. In other words, we got this approach right thousands of years ago, and we rightly preserve it at as a tried and true educational model that consistently engages and challenges students, raises the intellectual bar, pushes students to improve their thinking, and encourages the tempered, civil, convincing expression of these thoughts.

In addition to this personal and speaking-intensive approach, classes at liberal arts colleges and honors programs stress writing. Small classes afford faculty the opportunity not only to assign major writing projects but, more importantly, to provide extensive, systematic feedback on multiple iterations of student work. Furthermore, writing projects at both types of institutions typically get successively more challenging across four years of study, usually culminating in an undergraduate thesis or major independent project.

We should be proud in honors of championing and maintaining this traditional approach and of providing what we all know is the best education—even if it does not lend itself perfectly to quantitative assessment—to a diverse swath of highly motivated and talented students. This educational approach is what defines honors and what drives many of us professionally. Even if we stop here and merely maintain current practices, we are providing a valuable service to a society that sorely needs it but usually fails to recognize the importance of labor-intensive education focused on the power of great ideas, wisdom, and service rather than transient knowledge, skills, and monetary gain.

During my year at Kenyon, however, I began to understand some of the more tacit qualities of liberal arts colleges, qualities that perhaps honors programs possess to a lesser extent, qualities to which we can aspire. Academically, most liberal arts colleges are a remnant of the agrarian nineteenth century. They stand in contrast to the university, a largely twentieth-century invention dedicated to the ideals of research and specialization. American universities are admirable for driving innovation and creativity, but at many liberal arts colleges, academic breadth and synthesis are valued the same as, if not more than, depth of specialization. While faculty at liberal arts colleges often serve as public intellectuals, contributing to new knowledge and insight, liberal arts colleges on the whole stress undergraduate teaching and the links between different areas and ideas.

A key strength of colleges like Kenyon, a strength that we in honors should further explore, is an understanding of the essential academic experience, e.g., of what uniquely defines a Kenyon education. Rather than retreating to only the narrow end of the microscope, students at many liberal arts colleges wrestle with the big and enduring questions that transcend the fuzzy lines separating our disciplinary silos. At universities, our loyalties are bought and reinforced by our departments; we are granted tenure and promotion by vetting ourselves both internally and, more importantly, externally within our fields. The same can be true at colleges, but higher value is placed on teaching and interdisciplinarity.
Additionally, some colleges have a greater sense of the whole, of how the individual pieces of the core curriculum fit together to create an education larger than the sum of the parts. This approach is possible at smaller institutions with limited numbers of liberal arts majors, where teachers and students from disparate fields live and work together in close proximity and continue a dialogue about what defines the institution across centuries.

This focus on the big picture is, I think, a crucial next step for honors. Each program needs to engage in self-reflection, understanding the big picture of who we are and who we want to be. If we say that we emulate liberal arts colleges, then we must think about where we stand on the breadth–depth continuum so that our curricula are not like a Brooklyn diner menu, going on for pages and pages offering all things to all people, when instead we should be striving to build a cohesive academic experience that uniquely defines our program. In creating such curricula, we need to avoid various political pitfalls, such as an exclusive focus on the Western canon that was common in the past. Learning from the diverse array of perspectives introduced in recent decades, we have the opportunity to create exciting new curricula that define each of our programs as unique.

Honors programs and colleges should at the same time reexamine their goals in relation to specialization. Many programs, mine included, explicitly state that we strive to place students into the graduate field and program of their choice. However, this focus begs the question whether we are only training future professionals highly specialized in a single sub-discipline or, like liberal arts colleges, providing a common core curriculum that cuts across fields and attempts to tackle big questions and thorny global issues from many different angles. I think that most of us in honors would proudly and rightly claim that we are firmly grounded in the liberal arts, eschewing education limited to vocational preparation. In order to incorporate the broader focus on liberal arts into the entirety of an honors students’ undergraduate experience, we need to model ourselves more fully on liberal arts colleges. If we are going to call ourselves colleges, we should model ourselves on them throughout the four-year experience of our students.

In addition to academic differences, liberal arts colleges differ from some honors programs when it comes to community. In honors, we attempt to create a scholarly community supportive of our highest educational ideals, principles, and practices. At MTSU, we are fortunate to have an entire building dedicated to honors, indicating to students and the community the value the institution seems to place on undergraduate excellence. Across campus, we also have a wing in a dormitory reserved for approximately a hundred honors students. As fortunate as we are, though, we still exist in a larger ecosystem that is overwhelmingly focused on non-honors students and that does not promulgate this sense of community. At places like Kenyon, on the other hand, the entire institution, from the board chair to the person who cleans the whiteboards at night, is dedicated to a small group of highly talented students twenty-four hours a day.
Unlike most honors programs, liberal arts colleges have a complete infrastructure that is solely dedicated to excellence in undergraduate education from admission to graduation and beyond.

At many liberal arts colleges, the mission, the raison d’etre, is specific; everyone understands the primary purpose of the place is to educate undergraduates. Imagine that every single person and office on your campus shared similar educational values and was dedicated to your honors program alone. Imagine that the admissions office truly understood the type of diverse, curious, and intellectually offbeat students you sought, students who would thrive in a rigorous, perspective-altering academic environment and likely graduate with distinction four years later. Imagine an athletic department that touched the lives of almost half the students while understanding that their own primary responsibility as teachers and mentors was to promote excellence off the field first and foremost. Similarly, imagine a division of student affairs that also sought to support the academic mission of the institution, that often worked with students more hours per week than the faculty, and that took responsibility for undergirding and complementing lessons learned in the classroom.

These examples illustrate a few of the strengths of small liberal arts colleges. In honors at a large public institution, we often have very little influence or control over these operations, and, until we can fully address these issues, we have miles to travel before honestly claiming that we provide the same experience as a liberal arts college. While not every honors program uses the same approach, many, including MTSU, claim to provide a liberal arts college experience for less money. Honors provides an excellent education for the price and is a major strength of the American university system, but not every program provides the kind of interconnected curriculum or community that a small liberal arts college can provide.

My year at Kenyon made me take a fresh look at my own honors program, and my hope in this essay is to encourage others to examine their programs carefully, honestly, and critically in the broader context of higher education in order to clarify the program’s goals, improve the student experience, and define what makes the program unique. Despite our many admirable qualities in honors, my experience in another educational context has shown me that we have room for growth and improvement. A thorough soul searching might instead lead some of us to realize that we offer something different from a liberal arts education and to highlight our unique strengths rather than claiming to be something we are not.

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About the Authors

Scott Carnicom worked at Middle Tennessee State University for seven years, during which time he completed an ACE Fellowship in residence at Kenyon College in Ohio. In 2014, he became the founding Dean of the College of Natural, Behavioral, and Health Sciences at Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania.

Zachary Cureton recently completed an Honors BA in Russian and a BA in psychology at the University of Texas at Arlington. He spent a year at Saint Petersburg State Polytechnic University and the Moscow Institute of Higher Economics in Russia, where he studied Russian language and culture while completing an honors thesis on the effects of cultural immersion on individual development. His research on intergroup relations under Jared Kenworthy contributes to a continued interest in interculturality and globalization.

Stephanie R. deLusé is a Principal Honors Faculty Fellow in Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University. An interdisciplinarian, she publishes in literary journals that include The MacGuffin, Emrys, Rougarou, The Griffin, and TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism as well as in academic journals such as Family Court Review, Issues in Integrative Studies, and Family Process. She has essays in popular books like The Psychology of Survivor, The Psychology of Joss Whedon, and The Psychology of Superheroes, and she co-authored the book Arizona State University, with another in progress.

Ted Estess served first as Director and then Dean of Honors at the University of Houston. Currently, he is Professor of English in the Honors College, where he also holds the Jane Morin Cizik Chair. In addition to scholarly publications, including a monograph on Elie Wiesel, he has published a collection of stories entitled The Cream Pitcher and a collection of honors talks entitled Be Well: Reflections on Graduating from College. In a considerably different version and under a different title, “Making Pictures” appears in Be Well.

Brian Etheridge is Associate Provost for Academic Innovation at the University of Baltimore, a position he assumed in 2013 after six years of honors administration at two universities. Incorporating the university honors program, the teaching center, and a new experiential learning program, his office coordinates and supports innovation across the university.

Kristy Goodwin is Director of Recruitment and Outreach at Governors State University and Guest Lecturer at the University of Illinois Chicago for the College of Education–Urban Education Program. She has been in higher education for approximately twenty years working in many administrative capacities. She has published work in the College and University Journal for
Kevin Gustafson is Associate Professor of English and Associate Dean of the Honors College at the University of Texas at Arlington. He has published broadly on medieval and early modern literature and rhetoric, most recently an edition and translation of the Middle English alliterative poem *Cleanness* for Broadview Press.

Sarah Harlan-Haughey is CLAS-Honors Preceptor of English at the University of Maine. As a medievalist she aims to situate the literature of the past in the context of today’s concerns. Her research interests include interdisciplinary medieval studies, honors education, literature and the environment, and studies in oral traditions.

Melissa Ladenheim is a preceptor in the University of Maine Honors College, where she also holds the position Coordinator of Advancement. She is a frequent presenter at NCHC on both honors pedagogy and civic engagement. She holds a MES from Yale University and a PhD in folklore from Memorial University of Newfoundland.

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Elizabeth Nix is Assistant Professor of History and Associate Director of the Denit Honors Program at the University of Baltimore. The co-editor of *Baltimore ’68: Riots and Rebirth in an American City*, Nix conducts oral history projects and writes about the intersection of history and the arts.

Martin Ratcliffe is Adjunct Lecturer in the Emory Lindquist Honors Program at Wichita State University and Director of Professional Development at Sky-Skan, a planetarium company. He is a columnist for *Astronomy Magazine* and co-author of *Cosmology and the Evolution of the Universe*. When not traveling the world training planetarium staff, he teaches the honors courses “Big Bangs to Black Holes” and “Dynamic Astronomy.”

David M. Rhea is Director of the University Honors Program and Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at Governors State University. His research interests include election campaign advertisements, debates, and humor. He is overseeing Governors State University’s transition from a two-year to a four-year honors program in 2013–2014.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sam Schuman is a Past President of the NCHC and has served as Chancellor at the University of North Carolina Asheville and the University of Minnesota, Morris. He is the author of the recent monograph *If Honors Students Were People: Holistic Honors Education* and *The Beginning in Honors Handbook*.

William L. Vanderburgh is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Wichita State University and Executive Director of the Office for Faculty Development and Student Success, the unit to which the Emory Lindquist Honors Program reports for now; in July 2014, it will become an honors college with its own dean. His main research area is the history and philosophy of science.

Paul Walsh is Director of Instructional Technologies and Co-Director of the Center for Excellence in Learning, Teaching, and Technology at the University of Baltimore. Walsh supports faculty engaged in new approaches and promising practices both online and on campus.
Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook by Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurrier (2005, 98pp). This monograph includes an overview of assessment and evaluation practices and strategies. It explores the process for conducting self-studies and discusses the differences between using consultants and external reviewers. It provides a guide to conducting external reviews along with information about how to become an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor. A dozen appendices provide examples of “best practices.”


A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges by Theresa James (2006, 136pp). A useful handbook for two-year schools contemplating beginning or redesigning their honors program and for four-year schools doing likewise or wanting to increase awareness about two-year programs and articulation agreements. Contains extensive appendices about honors contracts and a comprehensive bibliography on honors education.

The Honors College Phenomenon edited by Peter C. Sederberg (2008, 172pp). This monograph examines the growth of honors colleges since 1990: historical and descriptive characterizations of the trend, alternative models that include determining whether becoming a college is appropriate, and stories of creation and recreation. Leaders whose institutions are contemplating or taking this step as well as those directing established colleges should find these essays valuable.

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

Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges by Samuel Schuman (Third Edition, 2011, 80pp). Practical and comprehensive advice on creating and managing honors programs with particular emphasis on colleges with fewer than 4,000 students.

If Honors Students Were People: Holistic Honors Higher Education by Samuel Schuman (2013, 256pp). What if Honors students were people? What if they were not disembodied intellects but whole persons with physical bodies and questing spirits. Of course . . . they are. This monograph examines the spiritual yearnings of college students and the relationship between exercise and learning.

Inspiring Exemplary Teaching and Learning: Perspectives on Teaching Academically Talented College Students edited by Larry Clark and John Zubizarreta (2008, 216pp). This rich collection of essays offers valuable insights into innovative teaching and significant learning in the context of academically challenging classrooms and programs. The volume provides theoretical, descriptive, and practical resources, including models of effective instructional practices, examples of successful courses designed for enhanced learning, and a list of online links to teaching and learning centers and educational databases worldwide.

The Other Culture: Science and Mathematics Education in Honors edited by Ellen B. Buckner and Keith Garbutt (2012, 296pp). A collection of essays about teaching science and math in an honors context: topics include science in society, strategies for science and non-science majors, the threat of pseudoscience, chemistry, interdisciplinary science, scientific literacy, philosophy of science, thesis development, calculus, and statistics.
**NCHC Monographs & Journals**

**Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks** by Joan Digby with reflective essays on theory and practice by student and faculty participants and National Park Service personnel (2010, 272pp). This monograph explores an experiential-learning program that fosters immersion in and stewardship of the national parks. The topics include program designs, group dynamics, philosophical and political issues, photography, wilderness exploration, and assessment.

**Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning** edited by Bernice Braid and Ada Long (Second Edition, 2010, 128pp). Updated theory, information, and advice on experiential pedagogies developed within NCHC during the past 35 years, including Honors Semesters and City as Text™, along with suggested adaptations to multiple educational contexts.

**Preparing Tomorrow's Global Leaders: Honors International Education** edited by Mary Kay Mulvaney and Kim Klein (2013, 400pp). A valuable resource for initiating or expanding honors study abroad programs, these essays examine theoretical issues, curricular and faculty development, assessment, funding, and security. The monograph also provides models of successful programs that incorporate high-impact educational practices, including City as Text™ pedagogy, service learning, and undergraduate research.

**Setting the Table for Diversity** edited by Lisa L. Coleman and Jonathan D. Kotinek (2010, 288pp). This collection of essays provides definitions of diversity in honors, explores the challenges and opportunities diversity brings to honors education, and depicts the transformative nature of diversity when coupled with equity and inclusion. These essays discuss African American, Latina/o, international, and first-generation students as well as students with disabilities. Other issues include experiential and service learning, the politics of diversity, and the psychological resistance to it. Appendices relating to NCHC member institutions contain diversity statements and a structural diversity survey.

**Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education** edited by Peter A. Machonis (2008, 160pp). A companion piece to Place as Text, focusing on recent, innovative applications of City as Text™ teaching strategies. Chapters on campus as text, local neighborhoods, study abroad, science courses, writing exercises, and philosophical considerations, with practical materials for instituting this pedagogy.

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

**Writing on Your Feet: Reflective Practices in City as Text™** edited by Ada Long (2014, 160pp). A sequel to the NCHC monographs Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning and Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education, this volume explores the role of reflective writing in the process of active learning while also paying homage to the City as Text™ approach to experiential education that has been pioneered by Bernice Braid and sponsored by NCHC during the past four decades.

**Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)** is a semi-annual periodical featuring scholarly articles on honors education. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology, articles on interdisciplinary efforts, discussions of problems common to honors programs, items on the national higher education agenda, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education.

**Honors in Practice (HIP)** is an annual journal that accommodates the need and desire for articles about nuts-and-bolts practices by featuring practical and descriptive essays on topics such as successful honors courses, suggestions for out-of-class experiences, administrative issues, and other topics of interest to honors administrators, faculty, and students.
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